

2.2 Heritage Interpretation as a Tool for Preserving Intangible Values

Over the previous decades sophisticated techniques for fabric conservation and preservation have been developed, whereas preservation of intangible elements is still a new terrain. Scholars and heritage practitioners work hard in developing methods and instruments that can ensure the best possible safeguarding of intangible heritage (cp. Human Science Research Council [7]). Here heritage interpretation can become one of the most important tools for the preservation and transmission of intangible elements.

Heritage interpretation itself is not a new field, and it has already achieved great importance in English speaking countries and is slowly winning its place in other countries of the world. There is no unique definition of it which is accepted by all. The most popular and frequently quoted is the definition offered by Freeman Tilden, who is considered to be “the father” of heritage interpretation:

Interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information [15, 8].

Years after this definition was offered for the first time, interpretation has gone above its pure educational function. It has been realized that interpretation can be used as a powerful tool for managing visitors and reducing negative impacts on the site; what Uzzel [18] called “soft” and “hard” visitor management. Interpretation as a “soft” management tool provides understanding of a site and helps to create emotional connections with it and induces a more thoughtful and careful behavior. As a “hard” tool interpretation is able to orient visitors at a site and to encourage them to go to some parts of a site and not to others. Moscardo [12] points out that heritage interpretation is able to relieve the pressure at a site by distributing visitors or by informing them of other sites in the vicinity; it can control access to the site by, for example, only allowing visits accompanied by a guide; and it can offer an alternative experience to especially sensitive sites, which can not accept great numbers of tourists [12, 379]. Over the years interpretation has been developed into an instrument to be used not only for the education of visitors,

but also as a tool for sustainable management and preservation of heritage sites. Nevertheless the educational role of heritage interpretation remains decisive in its application.

In recent years, the value of heritage interpretation as a preservation tool has been recognized by ICOMOS and demonstrated in its conservation documents. For example, ICOMOS New Zealand's Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value has recognized in its 2010 revision that interpretation can be beneficial in a site's preservation: "Where appropriate, interpretation should assist the understanding of tangible and intangible values of a place which may not be readily perceived, such as the sequence of construction and change, and the meanings and associations of the place for connected people" [10, Par. 23].

In its 1995 revision the same charter was referring to interpretation as an optional and not quite necessary component: "Interpretation of a place may be appropriate if enhancement of public understanding is required" [9, Par. 21].

This example only proves that over the past years heritage interpretation has proved to be useful for sustainable preservation of heritage sites. Furthermore, Australia ICOMOS's Burra Charter [4], the main reference document for the preservation of built heritage, in defining conservation processes points out that: "The cultural significance of many places is not readily apparent, and should be explained by interpretation. Interpretation should enhance understanding and enjoyment, and be culturally appropriate" [4, Article 25].

It also identifies interpretation as a part of the conservation policy, which "should identify appropriate ways of making the significance of the place understood consistent with the retention of that significance" [4, Article 2.4].

The important role of heritage interpretation in heritage preservation is well described by the formula offered by English Heritage, which for years has been using interpretation as a tool for safeguarding historic environments [5, 8]:

- by **understanding** the historic environment people value it;
- by **valuing** it they will want to care for it;
- by **caring** for it they will help people enjoy it; and
- from **enjoying** the historic environment comes a thirst to understand more.

Interpretation is able to show the complicated connections of a site with its environment and people. It makes things that are not immediately obvious available for the visitors to experience. Through the combination of various senses and with advances of modern technology, interpretation is able to combine multiple elements of the site (both tangible and intangible) into a single presentation.

Nevertheless, even in developing the best possible interpretive activities there is always a threat of exclusion of some stories about a site. The processes of selection and re-interpretation are inevitable in preserving and presenting heritage. In conservation one is always confronted with the question of what layers of the monument's history have to be restored and conserved. Should only one specific period be chosen, or should samples of every layer of the monument's history be disclosed? The same dilemmas arise when it comes to the interpretation of a site. What does one want to interpret? How? And for whom? Selections that are made for preservation and interpretation are guided by various reasons: resources might be short to preserve everything, or dominant ideas might reject histories from particular historic periods or alternative stories of minority groups, among other similar reasons.

In order to assist heritage professionals in the development of quality heritage interpretation, ICOMOS has worked out interpretation and preservation principles. These principles have been consolidated in the Charter on the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites adopted in 2008. Among many important issues, the principles underline the importance of presenting intangible elements, which should be incorporated into the interpretation of a heritage site. Thus, Principle Three explicitly states that “intangible elements of a site's heritage such as cultural and spiritual traditions, stories, music, dance, theater, literature, visual arts, local customs and culinary heritage should be considered in its interpretation” [8, 5]. In other sections the charter also underlines that local traditions and oral histories should be a part of interpretation.

The idea that heritage sites are self-explanatory and need no interpretation will probably never disappear, but fortunately many heritage professionals have already realized the advantages that quality interpretation can bring to a heritage site and its visitors. Heritage interpretation is not a tool for entertaining visitors at a heritage site, even though an entertaining component is an integral part of it, but

primarily it is a tool for creating awareness and understanding of a heritage site and its components, both tangible and intangible. Where preservation of a site values is not possible through traditional conservation and restoration techniques, heritage interpretation becomes indispensable.

Religious sites are probably the most vivid examples of the close interactions between material and immaterial values. Nevertheless, especially at religious sites in a European context the presentation of intangible values to the audience is often neglected. Spectacular monumental architecture is of course on its own a great visitor magnet. But can one assume that visitors really understand a heritage site, when they only see a facet of it? Can one really explain the importance of such places for communities, when the traditions and practices behind them are not explained? Here heritage interpretation can become a useful instrument in creating a better awareness about the site and transmitting the values it contains to further generations.

2.3 A Case Study: Speyer Cathedral World Heritage Site, Germany

The Speyer Cathedral World Heritage Site in Germany was inscribed in 1981 under criteria ii, as one of the most important Romanesque monuments founded at the beginning of the eleventh century. It was the burial place of German emperors for over 300 years and played a significant role in the history of Germany. It is not surprising that the nomination documents of the site concentrate mainly on architectural characteristics of the monument, which is also reflected in the site's statement of significance. Even though such description might have been sufficient for the nomination of the monument in 1981, it does not fully express the real significance of the site. A cathedral, even though it played or still plays a significant role in the political life of a region, still remains a cathedral and a place for religious practices. Therefore, it is not only advisable but it is essential for the holistic preservation of the site to safeguard the intangible elements of it as well, such as its religious practices and the meaning and symbolism of religious objects and values, which are mirrored and represented by the architecture of the cathedral.

In a religious site one may identify several dimensions that need to be preserved: (1) its architectural composition, which is often the most spectacular aspect and, hence, usually receives most of the attention; (2) its role in the history of the region/ nation; (3) craftsmanship – skills in erecting and decorating those marvelous places, which have been still partially preserved in order to restore the buildings; (4) its religious practices; (5) the spirituality of the place itself.



Figure 2.1: The Speyer Cathedral. Source: Iryna Shalaginova.

The preservation of the first three aspects is usually less complicated as it is often done with the help of conservation and restoration practices. When it comes to such elements as religious practices and spirituality of a place, one cannot always rely on documentation or conservation guidelines, since the human factor is essential for the survival of such practices. One cannot expect religious practices to be preserved for future generations by simply including a detailed description of them in a document. Practices have to be seen, explained and exercised. And one can only secure their preservation if they are shown and explained to the audience (not just visitors, but also communities employing these religious practices) and this can be to a certain extent achieved with the help of heritage interpretation.

The Speyer Cathedral illustrates a wonderful example of combining tangible with intangible in explaining the construction of the site. An existing leaflet on the cathedral available in multiple languages (*The Imperial Cathedral of Speyer: A Spiritual Guide*) explains the architectural construction of the monument through religious practices and dogmas that influenced it. For example, in the description of the porch a visitor reads the following:

If you are going through one of the portals, you will reach the large porch of the west end. The west end protects the cathedral like a battlement from the west side. In medieval times, the west has been the side of the sunset, the darkness and therewith the evil. The visitor reaches the cathedral from the west and walks through the cathedral to the east. On his way through the cathedral, the visitor shall leave all illness and darkness behind him, to reach Christ, the light (Rm 13,12).

When explaining the construction of the nave, the flyer gives the following information: “Walking through the nave, you will notice that the nave is built on each 12 pillars on both sides. The Church has been founded on the teachings of the 12 apostles (Ep 2,20).”

A leaflet to the site, even though not perfect in its execution or presentation (having too much information and not being particularly appealing visually), very skilfully combines the explanation of built heritage with the religious beliefs that determined it. Such an approach can be recommended to many other religious sites. Here heritage interpretation is able to explain some religious values based

on the example of a building that visitors can see and touch. That makes the cathedral itself more understandable to people.

Other interpretation at the site is represented by a leaflet to the crypt and guided tours that must be booked in advance. Unfortunately, this is basically all the information a day visitor can receive at the site. At the same time the Historic Museum Pfalz in Speyer, which is situated right across the site, provides additional exhibitions on the site, including multimedia programs and activities for children. The only problem is that most visitors do not know about these as the exhibitions are not extensively advertised. Moreover, many day visitors go to the cathedral because it is a World Heritage Site and they are not willing, or simply do not have time, to go to the museum afterwards.

In the above situation, the first three aspects of the site (its architecture, history and craftsmanship) are predominant topics in the interpretation and presentation of the site. The last two aspects of the site, namely its religious practices and its spirituality, are barely represented to the visitors even though they constitute an integral part of the cathedral. With a number of heritage interpretation programs, which are described below, one can considerably enrich the experience of the site for visitors and ensure that some intangible elements are not forgotten.

With the current interpretation, there are dozens of people coming into the cathedral and staying six minutes on average. The building is filled with loud comments of tourists and children playing hide and seek while their parents take photos. Such an atmosphere does not transfer the real spirit of a site that is meant to be a place of placidity for people seeking to find peace and solitude. An unexpected change happens at noon, when organ music starts playing in the preparation of an afternoon pray for visitors. This makes people lower their voices and slow down their pace.

By simply playing organ music not just at noon but throughout the whole day, in the background, it could be possible to achieve several aims:

- One may show a different side of the cathedral – its spirituality transferred through the music. It leaves a better impression of the site as well as provides additional information. One would definitely agree that the music played in a Catholic church is different from that played in an Orthodox