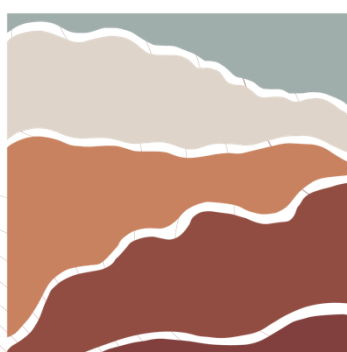


SUMMARY REPORT FOR CO-DESIGN SESSIONS WITH HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS

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EMPATHS

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EMPATHS - EMpowering landscapes with Participatory
Approaches To Heritage interpretation Skills

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1. Background

The co-design sessions held with heritage professionals bring to a close the research phase of the Empaths project to set the Empaths framework. This phase **began with a global perspective** comprising:

- a baseline analysis of current practices related to participatory heritage interpretation (HI)
- a series of interviews with heritage professionals worldwide and those from other relevant sectors (urban planning, community development, local government, etc.) to appraise personal experiences of community engagement and stakeholder participation, competencies, strengths and weaknesses for participatory HI

The **focus was then narrowed down** to the piloting partner territories to conclude with the following research tasks:

- a mapping exercise of community engagement case studies in the piloting territories describing, amongst others, activities, issues, roles and levels of involvement
- co-design sessions with heritage professionals in the piloting partner territories to share their experiences and levels of participatory practices, needs preferences, and level of interest in the content and format of the future Empaths training programme

2. Co-design session objectives

Co-design sessions or “speed dates” were held by the 3 training and technical partners with their corresponding piloting and associated partners to gather the latter’s views as professionals working on heritage-related projects with local communities and other stakeholders and the challenges or skills gaps they face to work effectively.



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Empaths supports the shift towards greater community and stakeholder participation to develop and promote heritage assets. Therefore, the purpose of the co-design sessions with local heritage professionals was to ensure that the future training programme:

- reflects reality on the ground in the piloting partner territories
- help heritage professionals do their job even better
- encourage interviewees and their colleagues to take part in the future pilot training programme.

Most importantly, the co-design sessions marked the first chance for focused dialogue with staff from the piloting partners and from the associated partners.

3. Methodology

Each training/technical partner held a minimum of two co-design sessions in their national languages with their piloting partner colleagues and selected associated partners:

Training/Technical partner	Piloting partner	Associated partners
Interpret Europe (DE)	Geopark Karawanken Karavanke (AT/SLO)	· Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation (SLO) · Podzemlje Pece Caves (SLO)
The Story Behind (IT)	PAFLEG (IT)	· Archaeological Park of Sibari (IT) · Gaiola Onlus centre for interdisciplinary studies (IT) · School of Specialization in Architectural and Landscape Heritage of Naples (IT)
Initiative for Heritage Conservation (GR)	Ethnological museum of Thrace (GR)	· Dromeas Thrakis outdoor activity centre (GR) · Educational and Cultural Association of Rizíá (GR)



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The stated target for this task was to hold a minimum of 6 co-design sessions involving 18 participants represented by the project partners and associated partners.

Upon completion of the activity 7 co-design sessions were conducted involving 24 participants.

The sessions were designed as semi-structured online discussions mediated by the technical/training partners to produce, where possible, free-flowing conversations with opportunities for qualitative insights.

There was no set duration as the quality of the exchange was the priority, however most interviews lasted 60-90 minutes.

At each co-design session there was a minimum of 3 participants:

- 1 representative of the training partner
- 1 member of staff from the piloting partner you are paired with
- 1 member of staff from an associated partner in your country

The role of the training partner:

- Share a short slide presentation prepared by Interpret Europe to introduce the Empaths project, explain heritage interpretation, and the shift to a more participatory approach based on meanings and values
- Explain how Empaths is co-designed to support heritage professionals who can gain participatory HI skills and apply them to sites and community projects
- Ask questions to identify the overall interest for the training and how best the format and content can meet local practitioners' needs and challenges

The role of piloting and associated partners:

- Potential beneficiaries of the finalised training programme and as possible participants in the pilot course
- Offer advice on level of interest in heritage/environment sector for participatory HI training offer, format and content to meet current skills gaps and challenges

Suggested questions to facilitate exchanges to meet the objectives

Technical/Training partners want to know:

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- (i) where skills gaps and challenges lie in current participatory activities
- (ii) how Empaths can help piloting and associated partners improve on their current efforts to facilitate effective community participation projects to develop and promote natural and cultural heritage.

Suggested questions included:

- What are your areas of expertise in community and stakeholder participation?
- What challenges do you or your colleagues face when working with communities to develop and promote natural and cultural heritage?
- Are there any gaps in competencies needed for your role now or in the near future? If so, what are these?
- What level of community participation would your organisation ultimately like to reach in your projects?
- What is your assessment of communities today? At what level of community building must we start when using heritage to foster participation?
- How much control could your organisation give to community groups to develop interpretation of their own (as an activator and facilitator)?
- From experience, what is your preferred format for an accessible, vocational training course?
- What are the mistakes to avoid and what are the 'must-haves' to include in a course to best attract participants?

4. Description of findings

4.1 Concerning participation: Expertise, challenges and needs



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Participation is integral to the functions of most heritage organisations

Most heritage organisations among piloting partners or associated partners interviewed state participation is written into their creation and governance. It is not a subsequent add-on to their development but part of their culture from the start.

Dual-level community/stakeholder engagement

1. Local municipalities as members of park/site boards to produce management and conservation plans as part of statutory processes
2. Non-statutory, project-driven initiatives to create interpretive media (brochures, panels, exhibitions, etc.) either jointly with the site managers or with independent responsibility.

Ambition for participation is not matched by capacity...

New job profiles (e.g. heritage educators) are playing catch-up to fill skills gaps. Existing training systems, particularly in the public sector are ill-equipped to respond while external competent heritage professional trainers are not always available.

... while participation often depends on the will of one person, not an institution.

Typically, if participation is part of a local cultural initiative, it tends to be on an ad-hoc basis reliant on the personal motivation of individuals, not institutional capacity empowering local stakeholders.

Participatory practices should shape the outcome

While a framework or skeleton may initially come from the core team, it is essential that community members shape the outcome, rather than simply carry out pre-set tasks

Emotional understanding - communicating deeper meanings is a priority

The Empaths training programme should address a recurring need for communication at all levels – social media, promo campaigns, videos - to shift from (factual) generalities to more meaningful narratives for use in the aforementioned media channels. Site manager staff would also benefit from a better emotional understanding of their place to better communicate with visitors and local stakeholders.

Some communities and stakeholders expect to be involved...

In some cases, often in rural areas, there is a culture of volunteering, in which individuals expect to be involved in natural or cultural heritage initiatives led

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by local heritage organisations, either jointly with the site managers or independently to propose how heritage is experienced.

...while others require help to feel a connection to their heritage

In urban areas, such as the Naples basin or in rural areas such as the Karawaken Geopark, some population groups – people living newer residential areas, newcomers from foreign countries, vulnerable or disadvantaged groups - do not relate strongly to the territorial identity and local heritage. The heritage does not feel truly theirs. Some even feel it as a place of restrictions (coastal archaeological sites). Building awareness and relating to heritage stories is key to forging a connection.

Participation should promote “memory and innovation”

To foster intergenerational participation and involve disconnected communities (newcomers, see above), it is important that the training allows for digital tools to capture memories and represent them in contemporary society and communication trends. Without them, participation (young) and knowledge transfer is hindered.

Training is for site managers just as much as local communities

The focus for the training programme should be equally centered on site managers as local community and local stakeholders. A lack of capacity, low budgets, training or established culture can dissuade site managers from taking up this opportunity.

Heritage can be a catalyst for development not just care

While fostering stewardship is important for both heritage organisations and communities, heritage should not just be seen as something to preserve but to develop sensitively to reflect contemporary social and economic connections, such as new temporary or permanent uses to avoid degradation or illegal occupation.

Participation can foster champions and guardians of territorial identity

In almost all cases, the Empaths piloting territories are changing, either through demographic decline, recent immigration (e.g. foreign workers in the mining industry) or urban development such as in the Naples basin. It seems important that Empaths supports cohesive, tolerant and democratic societies anchored by a sense of belonging to their tangible or intangible heritage through their own narratives that reflect this evolution.

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Participation needs a structured process to avoid the risk of chaos

Local heritage stakeholders need a clear, structured participatory methodology for team management, giving responsibilities and assigning roles, coordination, moderation, ordered co-design tools. Heritage stakeholders are happy to relinquish control but are more confident with a structured method.

Through participation, collaboration, not duplication

The fragmentation of local associations often leads to duplication of efforts rather than collaboration and the lack of a structured methodology for developing sustainable, collaborative projects. Empaths, training methodology has a unifying role play here.

4.2 Concerning the Empaths training programme format and content

Consider ‘marginal sites’ that can act as case studies for community lab module

Picture postcard sites for the on-site training part of the programme are to be avoided as more interest and value would be gained from a less developed site with local community ties that could be used as a case study to demonstrate and experiment with. However, Empaths should build on what local communities already know and do regarding an eventual site for the training.

Favour “cultural injections”

Contributions from local experts, such as historians, botanists, and community leaders are important. They keep interest high and build a sense of shared identity and discovery.

Keep online training and theory to a minimum. No abstract concepts!

Although attending online training is easier, most interviewees questioned its effectiveness, especially when juggling other pressures of work. Online content should also be as interactive as possible.

Prior knowledge of heritage interpretation cannot be counted on

While the training/technical partners and their piloting partners are familiar with the principles and practices of heritage interpretation, this is less certain

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with associated partners and other potential participants from their piloting partner networks. Also, while some interviewees have taken part in IE training courses (CIG, CIW, CIP), most have not experienced newly updated content on value-based heritage interpretation.

Keep the online and onsite training modules brief and intense

Interviewees felt that extended periods for the online training module and for the onsite module would dilute the effectiveness of the training course regardless of efforts to make it interactive and attractive. The online part was viewed by some to be best suited to skills validation while the onsite part would be most useful for in-person exchange.

Online less demanding, onsite more engaging

While most felt that it would be easier to devote time to the online module, all recognised that the real value of the training lies in demonstrating, experimenting and exchanging concerning participatory heritage interpretation techniques with the other participants. Getting time off normal work duties would be a challenge so a few long, intense days was the preferred format.

Consider role-play

Too much passive learning will weaken participation and commitment. Non-formal learning methods such as role-play are more likely to register with local community participants.

Empathetic trainers

Course trainers should be competent, empathetic and ideally familiar with the local area in which they will oversee the pilot community labs. This will be an added motivational factor for participants.

