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Heritage Interpretation: Framework for a New Understanding of Cities

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ABSTRACT

Cities are complex structures embodying a series of site specific conflicts. Problems like overtourism, gentrification, pollution, perceptions of multiculturalism and diversity are issues that require architects and urban planners to become agents of change. From within the profession, we are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of community participation in our work, along with stewardship for all heritage. At the same time, UNESCO (2020) is acknowledging the role of heritage interpretation: a field that turns heritage into a present-day meaningful experience. An interpretive perspective supports cooperation between stakeholders through an analysis of the interplay of physical spaces, societal constructs, and human actions. To this respect, a collaboration started between UNESCO and the European Association for Heritage Interpretation - Interpret Europe (IE) for offering training programmes at World Heritage Sites (WHS) in Europe. Endorsing universally shared values and in alignment to the UN sustainable development goals, value-based heritage interpretation facilitates not only communication to the people around a site (visitors as well as locals), but more importantly understanding and active participation. This paper introduces basic principles of heritage interpretation (HI) and research findings in the field, in order to explore how interpretive planning (IP) can become a tool for understanding and mediating a city's dynamics while influencing the reception of space and policies in the urban environment. It will make use of recent examples in changing frames at heritage sites and connect them to a developing case study for the city of Sinaia (Romania) that underscores the complexity of urban settlements and the need for a transdisciplinary approach.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In his political claim, originally published in 1968, Henri Lefebvre imagines reconverting a city different from what capitalism produces, "a projection of society on the ground" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 109), not bound to the social hierarchy, but intertwined with the subjective nature of the urban experience. Moreover, he presents the city as a continuous system of differences, formed by the succession of gaps, axes and connections that we perceive during its crossing. In his *rhythmanalysis* he explores three main dimensions engaged in the process that the city represents: temporal, spatial and social. In order to keep the process going we need time to make "use of practical facts" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 178) and a continuation of the lived space. This involves the active participation and actions of the residents, along with a political force to put the facts into action. A recent study addressing urban challenges through the right-to-the-city approach, conducted for the city of Bandar Abbas, Iran, highlights the importance the framework still has nowadays and the urgent need for tools in empowering citizens in the self-management process of the city space (Ebrahimi *et al.*, 2023).

Drawing from Lefabvre, Rachel Carson, Jane Jacobs and other influential thinkers for the development of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) (United Nations, 2017), UIA World Congress of Architects Copenhagen 2023 contributed to the ever growing recognition of the interconnectedness between environmental sustainability, urban design, social justice, and cultural heritage preservation, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). Despite an early start of environmental advocacy and a peak of movements and critiques of urban planning in the 1960s and 1970s, concerns about sustainable tourism practices, community-based development, embracing diversity, or the threat of gentrification only started to gain traction in the early 2000s and are still late in being included in urban policies. Questioning what the *right to the city* would be today, the panel Design for Resilient Communities brought together design professionals, researchers, and educators, outlining the urgent need for architectural and urban planning practices to address the pressing challenges of our time (Rubbo & Du, 2023).

In a different key, in 1957, along with Freeman Tilden's book, *Interpreting our Heritage*, the notion of *heritage interpretation* (HI) emerged, as a continuation of the practices of the natural parks guides in the USA. In 1965, the first nonprofit natural HI organization was established in Illinois under the Association of Interpretive Naturalists (AIN), today the National Association for Interpretation (NAI). The Journal of Interpretive Research, published by NAI since 1996, pioneers the HI field in the academic environment. Nevertheless, studies on this subject can be traced in various domains, from geography, geology and ecotourism to archaeology and cultural heritage, without a unitary theoretical and methodological framework for all the aspects a good interpretation focuses on. At European level, the methodology of interpretation was officially certified in 2010, within the European Association for Heritage Interpretation / Interpret Europe (IE), a member organization of the working groups on cultural and heritage policies, within the European Commission.

Following the development of HI in relation to urban studies, this paper addresses a gap in researching the benefits an interpretive framework may have at a city scale. The study was guided by the question *Can interpretive planning (IP) become a tool for understanding and mediating a city's dynamics?* and will propose a methodology for a case in practice, in Sinaia (Romania). The location is known for its rich cultural landscape, including Peleș Castle, where the intersection of tourism, cultural heritage, and environmental conservation raises significant concerns.

Finally, the paper opens a discussion about the applicability of *value-based* HI and IP in the *Learning Landscapes* initiative resulting from the collaboration started in 2020 between UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe and Interpret Europe (IE).

1.2 Literature Review
1.2.1 Definition and basic principles of HI

The word *interpret* was first used by environmental philosopher and "Father of the National Parks in the US", Jon Muir, in 1871: "I'll interpret […] and get as near the heart of the world as I can" (Wolfe, 1978, p. 144), a context that suggests an effort more toward understanding than communication (Ludwig, 2023). Muir is cited as the first precedent for the word's later adoption by the National Park Service (NPS) in Freeman Tilden's work. *Interpreting our Heritage* still provides the basis for the HI field, along with the statement: "Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection." (Tilden, 1977, p. 38)
Tilden's principles encourage us to relate to the visitor, by offering a personal experience, provoque, rather than just giving information, and to always have a broader and inclusive view of what is to be interpreted (focus on the bigger picture, the context), while interpretation is defined, "For dictionary purposes, to fill a hiatus that urgently needs to be remedied", as "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" (1977, p. 8). Alternative definitions have been introduced following Tilden's attempt, as summarized by Abrahams & Bama (2023) (Fig. 1), but only in the second decade of the 21st century the HI field became more dynamic. A first official definition for HI was given by ICOMOS in 2008 as "the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of cultural heritage sites". Following the foundation of interpretation organizations around the world and the increased interest for new research, different keywords were emphasized and thematic areas in the literature can be identified. Most scholars use the term *communication*, which is lacking in the definition given by ICOMOS. In the past year, NAI redefined interpretation as "a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us" (NAI, 2024).

Following a critical approach to HI and its impact on public benefit, Nicole Deufel (2016) reviews academic publications in the field of interpretation, according to a survey conducted at 129 North American universities in 2008. The author's conclusion was that all the listed publications are derived from Tilden's book and only bring variations and small additions to his principles. Moreover, Deufel argues that the interpretive study is based on an approach framed by L. J. Smith (2006) as Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD): a material understanding of heritage; an emphasis on the values of experts, despite the community's values and involvement, excluding the narrative of the place in favor of officially approved opinions; the purpose of educating an audience that is supposed to be less knowledgeable. According to the author, this interpretive discourse may be the cause of a practice that fails to inspire trust and sustain the public's necessary commitment to heritage (Deufel, 2016).

Established as a UNESCO category 2 center in the Republic of Korea in 2022, the International Centre for World Heritage Interpretation and Presentation (WHIPIC) formed a working group for redefining the concepts of *heritage interpretation* and *heritage presentation*. Their draft report acknowledges AHD as one of the approaches a new definition must avoid and, at the moment, concluded HI is "a meaning-making process through communication, participation and experience" (Kang, 2023). Thus, a shift from the aims of educating visitors and explaining natural or cultural values to communicating ideas and fostering mindfulness towards shared values can be observed.

	Connection	Definition of interpretation
Heritage Authors	Beck and Cable (2002)	Interpretation is an educational activity that aims to reveal meanings about our cultural and natural resources. Through various media—including talks, guided tours, and exhibits—interpretation enhances our understanding, appreciation, and, therefore, protection of historic sites and natural wonders.
	Rabotic (2011)	Interpretation is a means of tourism management aimed at explaining visitors and tourists the importance of various natural and cultural attractions at a destination so as to spur comprehension, positive impression, admiration, i.e. to raise consciousness on responsible behaviour in the function of local heritage preservation. Interpretation serves to enhance enjoyment of tourists by transferring to them symbolic meanings and facilitating changes in their attitudes and behaviour: this is why it represents the key for establishing intellectual and emotional connections between the visitor and particular destinations.
	Silberman (2012)	The public discussion in the public sphere as a deliberative discourse of collective identities, social norms, and of the possibility of individual freedom from the weight of heritage—rather than following a guided tour—offers itself as a new interpretive paradigm. "Process, not product; collaboration, not 'expert-only presentation; memory community, not heritage audience."
	Moscardo (2014)	Heritage interpretation is defined as persuasive communication activities, such as guided tours, brochures and information provided on signs and in exhibitions, aimed at presenting and explaining aspects of the natural and cultural heritage of a tourist destination to visitors.
Interpretation Authorities	The Association for Heritage Interpretation [AHI], UK (2019)	Interpretation is the process of communicating messages and stories about our cultural and natural heritage, providing the audience with inspiration and a wider understanding of our environment. Or quite simply, interpretation is about telling stories.
	Interpretation Australia Association (1992)	Interpretation communicates ideas, information and knowledge about locations, the natural world or historic places in a way which helps visitors to make sense of their environment. Good interpretation will create engaging, unique and meaningful experiences for visitors.
	National Association for Interpretation [NAI], USA (2023)	Interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.
	International Council on Monuments and Sites' Ename Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites ICOMOS Ename Charter (2008)	Interpretation refers to the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of cultural heritage site. These can include print and electronic publications, public lectures, on-site and directly related off-site installations, educational programs, community activities, and ongoing research, training, and evaluation of the interpretation process itself.
	Interpret Europe — European Association for Heritage Interpretation (2010)	At its best, learning happens where people experience 'the real thing', in venues such as historic sites, nature parks, zoos or museums. Heritage interpretation facilitates such experiences using a broad range of approaches from guided walks to sophisticated exhibitions. It has the power to make heritage more meaningful to people, and people more mindful towards our shared values.

Fig. 1. Contemporary definitions of HI (©Abrahams & Bama, 2023)

1.2.2 IP in changing urban frames

Building on these foundational ideas, Brian Goodey's work has been particularly influential in shaping contemporary approaches to urban heritage interpretation. Goodey (1978) developed the concept of *urban interpretation*, which focuses on the use of interpretive techniques to enhance the understanding of urban spaces and their historical and cultural significance. His case study for Porto Seguro (2003), Bahia, Brazil, demonstrated how urban interpretation could be used to engage both

residents and visitors in the appreciation of a city's heritage, thereby fostering a sense of place and community identity. His inclusive approach is critical in addressing the complex challenges faced by cities like Sinaia, where economic pressures from tourism can threaten cultural identity and environmental sustainability.

Considering the case of Porto Seguro as a pilot in researching the applicability of IP in an urban setting, this paper further analyzes post 2002 literature reviews in the field of HI (Hunter, 2012; Cheng *et al.*, 2017; Stern & Powell, 2020; Nowacki, 2021; Abrahams & Bama, 2023). Resulting in a total of 34 articles with a possible focus on IP, common findings in the reviews are: the need for more qualitative research in assessing outcomes for interpretive programs; little is known about long(er) term outcomes, given that, in most cases, the evaluation process takes place immediately after the program's implementation; only few studies are focused on cultural HI (Cheng *et al.*, 2017). Title and abstract analysis concluded that only six of the suggested articles are directly related to IP, while covering aspects from the interpretive practice that are not applied at a city scale, as follows.

The Community-Focused Heritage IP framework (CHI) in northwestern Ontario, Canada, exemplifies an approach that aims to enhance ecological literacy through community involvement in creating interpretive experiences. This framework recognizes the interconnectedness of cultural and natural systems within landscapes, taking a bioregional perspective. Through activities such as community mapping, storytelling, festivals, and art projects, CHI encourages intergenerational engagement and deepens people's connection to their home-place. (Curthoys *et al.*, 2007, rephrased using ChatGPT).

Kohl & Eubanks (2008) show NAI's resources and trainings with conservation aims are very few, for both natural and cultural heritage. As a new interpretive program, connecting conservation efforts to meanings places have for different people (associated with memes) is required, they provide a systems-based model that can facilitate using interpretive methods for increasing management's accountability towards conservation. While stewardship is evaluated mainly in visitor satisfaction and interpretation appreciated mainly for donations increase, the proposed model has the potential to contribute to broader societal shifts and environmental actions.

A survey conducted among professionals at 174 public gardens in the US shows a high level of satisfaction for interpretive plans, even if not all recommendations or methods are fully applied or understood. Therefore, adopting best practices such as the staff's participation in creating IP documents, conducting periodic evaluations, forming interpretation development teams, and providing staff training, along with further research, are suggested for refining the IP processes in public gardens (Tschaenn *et al.*, 2014).

Danwandee *et al.* (2015) present the IP process for the Ban Watchan Royal Project, Thailand. The research methodology, following Veverka's (1994) model, involved surveys to gather tourist data and assess current facilities, along with an analysis of resource potential and negative impacts. People participation was considered in three phases: presenting the plan's objectives, brainstorming resource potential and reviewing the plan's first draft. Data synthesis led to the establishment of interpretive themes, calling for design patterns aligned with the area's carrying capacity and natural harmony.

The Cliffs of Moher (CoM) case, Ireland, presented by Healy *et al.* (2016) contributes to a wider discussion concerning the use of new technologies. Along with the building of a new visitor center, state-of-the-art facilities, including high-tech interpretive displays and virtual reality experiences were featured. The study found a preference among visitors for low-intensity interpretation, concluding the objectives of the investment have not been planned in the IP framework.

Analyzing the visitor management frameworks for eleven touristified archaeological sites worldwide, Enseñat-Soberanis *et al.* (2019) propose a Visitor Flow Management Process (VFMP) comprising three stages: restriction, redistribution, and interpretation. After careful consideration of the positive and negative impacts of tourism on local communities, economies, and cultural heritage, the study highlights the need for a holistic approach that considers the unique characteristics of each site and involves collaboration between stakeholders.

Although this is a brief overview of the last 20+ years of IP research, a common struggle for developing holistic strategies can be traced. Given the studies come from different fields, namely tourism, HI, landscape and horticulture, architecture, geography and archaeology, leveraging IP's transdisciplinary dimension can fill the research gap all the above authors concluded on. For further development on this study, a systematic literature review of publications connecting IP and urban studies is required.

1.2.3 Value-based HI

In 2015, Interpret Europe (IE) adopted the interpretive triangle model (Fig. 2) as part of its training framework. Focused on the four key qualities fostered by IE since its founding, the triangle is a valuable tool for communication. Its simplicity makes it accessible to a wide range of audiences, from frontline staff to decision-makers. Moreover, it aids in identifying and emphasizing specific skills in training courses, ensuring their relevance. Notably, its arrangement of four key qualities enables the consideration of contemporary ideas without losing sight of the overall interpretive framework. Nevertheless, in an evolving socio-political context, where economic concerns take precedence, its parameters' influence and relationship may be perceived differently. This raised questions about the role and prominence of HI, the importance of learning objectives, and whether interpretation should address these challenges (Ludwig, 2017, rephrased using ChatGPT). While populist discourses worldwide and preferences for a business oriented approach in HI overshadow even the primary duty of preservation, the vision of the European Year of Cultural Heritage (2018) provided answers to the search for mission and objectives in HI (Lehnes, 2017). Thorsten Ludwig, former managing director of IE, was then awarded the European Union's Altiero Spinelli Prize for the initiative "Engaging citizens with Europe's cultural heritage" (IE, 2017). Value-based HI emerged as a natural progression within UNESCO's ongoing efforts to adapt to "the change of values in contemporary society" (Zeayter & Mansour, 2018), a process initiated with the World Heritage Convention (WHC) in 1972. The integration of the interpretive triangle with UNESCO's value levels (Fig. 3) has expanded the scope of HI, opening new avenues for collaboration and deeper meaning.
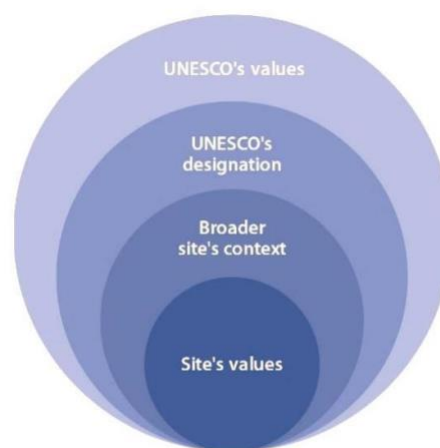

Fig. 2. Interpretive triangle (©IE, 2017)   **Fig. 3.** Value levels in UNESCO designated sites (UNESCO, 2019, p. 22) (©Ludwig, 2023)

A recognition of the role of HI thus followed in 2020, when UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe published its second report on visitor centers in UNESCO-designated sites, concluding the 2019 workshop in Bamberg, Germany. The shift towards emphasizing values in HI recognizes non-formal settings as platforms for reflecting on fundamental values like the rule of law, freedom of speech, and sustainability. UNESCO-designated sites serve as key venues to protect and

promote these values through educational initiatives like Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCE). IE's training provides a link to achieving these goals by empowering individuals to interpret heritage themselves and involving communities in defining values and interpretation. As Thorsten Ludwig showed in his speech, framing experiences at heritage sites involves a nuanced consideration of both universal and human values, which can either strengthen or weaken specific values. Mental frames, as elucidated by Lakoff (2008, as cited in IE, 2017), significantly influence interpretations and perceptions of heritage. In order to monitor interpretive services' implications, in alignment with shared European values and the SDGs, IE is using the value circle based on the ten universal values defined by Schwartz (1992, as cited in IE, 2017). His study on human values underscores their universality and interconnectedness, as depicted in Figure 4. Interpretation can trigger either the spillover effect, where practicing one value fosters the adoption of neighboring values, or the seesaw effect, where emphasis on certain values weakens opposing ones. Cultural heritage offers opportunities to meet in the Tradition field. By tracing the wanted values in the circle, interpretation can be kept in the appropriate frame for a given context. Avoiding conflict and making the best use for the spillover effect can be means to develop resilience and capitalize the outstanding opportunities cultural heritage may offer. Nevertheless, it's important to be aware that shared values cannot offer simple solutions. Therefore, professional interpretation at UNESCO sites must navigate challenges such as balancing narratives of power to attract tourists, while promoting universal values and fostering dialogue to understand diverse perspectives. UNESCO sites have the potential to lead by example in promoting inclusive interpretation practices, but they require specific training and capacity-building efforts. Recognizing UNESCO's human values as the overarching framework for all UNESCO-designated sites was deemed critical during the workshop's group exercises. Participants reached key agreements on joining a global cause, prioritizing education and awareness, transitioning to interpretation, community engagement, utilization of educational tools, integration into management strategy, targeted approach, setting standards, and narrative focus, as outlined in the recommendations from the Regional Workshop. Visitor Centers are advised to focus on multiple value layers, adopt integrated approaches, engage for exchanging, facilitate and mediate for transformation, invest in capacity building, utilize digital tools wisely, and plan for sustainability (UNESCO, 2020, rephrased using ChatGPT).
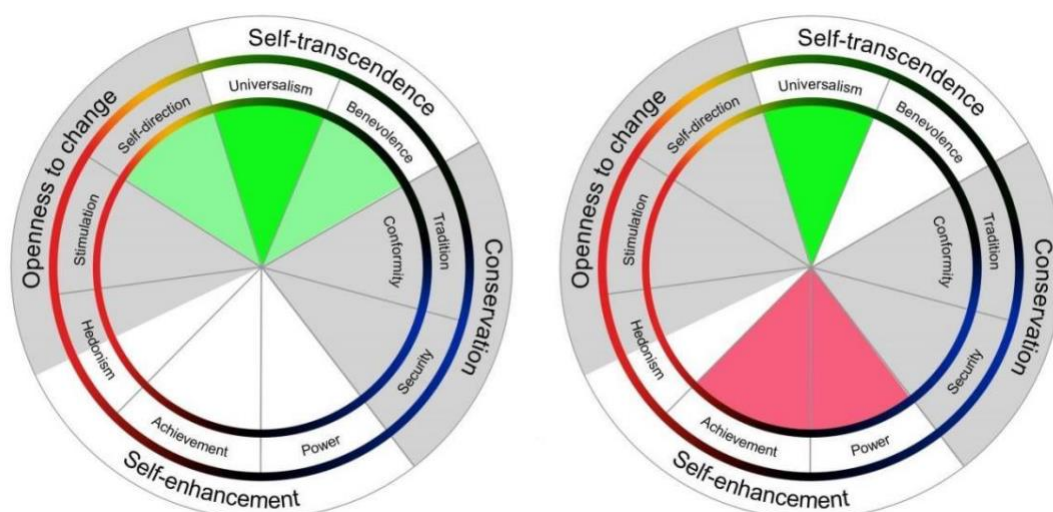

Fig. 4. Spillover effect (left) and seesaw effect (right) (based on Holmes et al. 2011 following Schwartz 1992) (©IE, 2017)

In 2021, the Pilot WH-Interp Training Course on advancing IP at WHS in Europe took place in Kotor, Montenegro. The course involved 28 professionals from World Heritage properties across

South-Eastern Europe. Drawing on IE's CIP course and expert advice, the initiative aimed to enhance participants' understanding of IP principles, broaden their vision of WHS interpretation, and develop their skills in integrating IP into site management. The course balanced theory and practice across three phases, including online lectures, in-person workshops, and individualized guidance for developing interpretive plans. Positive feedback from participants affirmed the initiative's novelty, relevance, and effectiveness, leading to the continuation of the WH-Interp initiative (UNESCO, 2022, rephrased using ChatGPT). To this date trainings involved over 40 WHS in Europe, calling for strategic approaches in extensive areas (IE, 2023). IE's 2023 conference in Sighișora, Romania, showcased how HI can transform landscapes into learning environments, benefiting both locals and visitors, and how such a strategy could help communities address challenges and transition towards a more sustainable future. Contributions from Patrick Lehnes and Thorsten Ludwig went even deeper, into philosophically understanding the multiple levels in which a value-based approach can facilitate capacity-building and reflective thinking. Drawing on IE's network findings, along with US National Park Service's (USNPS) work on 21st century interpretation (USNPS, 2017, 2019), completed a new milestone for IE launching the *Learning Landscapes* initiative earlier this year. The initiative aims to turn regions around UNESCO-designated sites into hubs for value-based HI by the end of 2025. Through a structured process of training for interpretive agents and planners, ideally permanent actors within the areas, the initiative seeks to empower stakeholders and facilitate cross-regional cooperation. However, potential pitfalls such as bias, institutional dislikes, and limited autonomy must be addressed, while flexibility and adaptability are crucial. Ultimately, ongoing exchange and integration of value-based heritage interpretation into regular management and budget plans are essential for long-term sustainability and success (IE, 2023).

Outside Europe, at the end of 2022, WHIPIC's 50 years anniversary report brought together insights from heritage scholars worldwide, reflecting on the achievements, limitations, and future potential of the WHC. The volume explores diverse perspectives on HI, touching on themes such as peacemaking, community engagement, digital technologies, education, and reconciliation of conflicting historical narratives. Although *value-based* HI is not a common term in the authors' contributions, the tendency and need for a broader consideration of HI's role is unanimously acknowledged, as a crucial step forward in promoting effective and inclusive cultural communication at WHS (WHIPIC, 2022). At the same time, HI is increasingly recognized for its role in fostering effective and inclusive heritage management, aligning with SDGs and introducing participatory approaches. In 2024, WHIPIC's interest in the Learning Landscapes initiative underscored its potential impact on shaping principles and guidelines for contemporary HI (IE Management), addressing the urgent challenges facing human civilization.

2. Methodology
2.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach, integrating case study analysis with heritage interpretation (HI) frameworks, focusing on the cultural landscape of Sinaia, Romania. The research is structured into three primary phases: data collection, stakeholder engagement, and interpretive analysis (Fig. 5).
Data collection includes comprehensive field observations and analysis of existing documentation, such as urban planning records, cultural heritage reports, and architectural assessments of historical monuments. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted over a six-month period to gain insights into Sinaia's spatial and social dynamics.
Utilizing the Interpret Europe (IE) Certified Interpretive Planner (CIP) framework, the subsequent interpretive analysis involves mapping the cultural landscape and stakeholders, assessing tourism

impacts, and evaluating current heritage protection measures. A review of literary references and official strategic plans provides context for the site's cultural significance.

Looking forward, stakeholder engagement is planned as a critical next step. Workshops and focus group discussions will be organized to gather community insights into heritage values, identify potential conflicts between nature conservation and cultural preservation, and explore solutions. This engagement is essential to ensuring that the research outcomes are aligned with the experiences and aspirations of the local community.
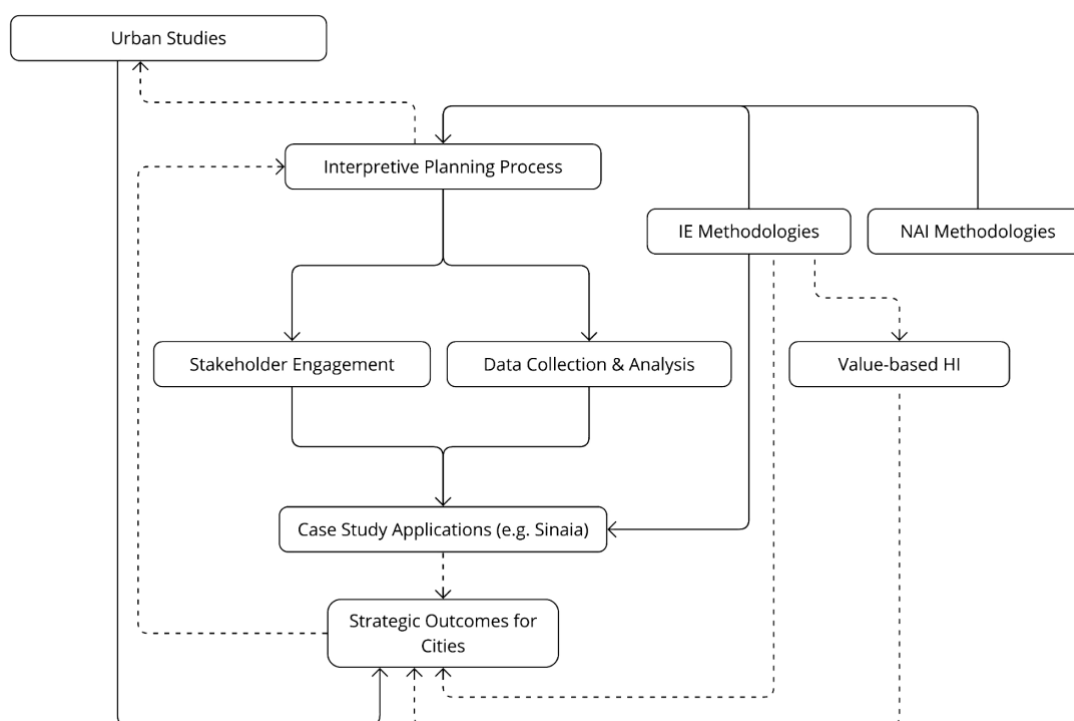

Fig. 5. Diagram of the research design and potential outcomes (generated using ChatGPT)

2.2 Overview of the NAI - Process of Interpretive Planning (PIP) and Interpret Europe (IE) - Certified Interpretive Planner (CIP) Frameworks

The NAI Basic Interpretation Planning Model is very effective in shifting interest for target audiences, as it relies on communicative theories and logic models. At the same time, its starting points are the Management or Strategic Goals defined in the beneficiary's status (if any), which favor a top-down process. This, of course, gives the interpreter the opportunity to redefine and improve the role that the organization holds in the bigger picture. Also, targeting audiences will broaden the perspective in the use of heritage, as the outcomes are measured in terms of behavioral, attitudinal and knowledge impacts on the visitor. The planning includes three main phases: establishing direction, assessing background information and developing the plan. Research done by content specialists (geologists, architects, historians, etc.) is enclosed in the second phase, after having established goals and objectives, the core planning team, target audiences and having identified the parameters (constraints/opportunities). The interpretation is focused on creating experiences and fostering stewardship, in respect of "our most valuable personal resources – time and attention" (Bucy, 2015, Tab 3, p. 1), and in accordance with Tilden's principles.

A different IP framework is used by IE. There are two main phases – reviewing and developing, structured along IE's four key qualities for HI: turning phenomena into experiences, provoking resonance and participation, offering paths to deeper meaning and fostering stewardship for all

heritage. The review phase includes both quantitative and qualitative analysis for the heritage, existing interpretive services and all identified stakeholders. Special attention is required for the ownership matter. After gathering all information, results are confronted with site management's goals, and constraints and opportunities are assessed. This approach leaves more room for an inductive research, followed by the development phase in which community engagement, sustainability and resilience are end goals.

2.2.1 Targeting audiences / Stakeholder mapping

HI deals in all cases with messages, receptors and ways to broaden perspectives for all parties involved, even though both terms are derived from marketing/management strategies. As previously shown, policies established in interpretive associations and current interpretive textbooks are still based on provoking the audience and offering complete experiences in order to help people reach deeper meaning when related to heritage.

2.2.2 Theme hierarchy / Creating interpretive themes

Both NAI and IE place themes as the starting point of the development phase. The main theme is one complete sentence to which all actions included in the plan should always go back, in order to keep focus on the established priorities. A theme is not a slogan, as coined by AHD, but the result of all the reviewing efforts and the essence of the outstanding universal value (OUV) that the plan will stress on. When formulating themes, the context tends to broaden. As NAI defines it, the theme is the key statement that answers the *So what?* question and connects tangibles to intangibles. The theme is meant to provoke other interpretations, appeal to the receptivity of all types of audience and activate prejudices when faced with the phenomena. A very important aspect in creating a theme, in IE's recommendations, is not to force themes on phenomena.

2.2.3 Visitor experiences and information networks / Interpretive services

In developing the interpretive plan, NAI suggests mapping a dream experience at the site, which is to be considered in the context of an information network that facilitates, consistent with the chosen theme, all stages of a typical trip to that place. This will then be adjusted according to the identified parameters. The visitor experience includes: pre-trip (marketing, trip planning), travel (orientation and wayfinding), arrival (site specific orientation), the actual experience (interpretive meaningful information), departure/exit experience (return trip planning and orientation) and post-trip/return travel (orientation and wayfinding) (Bucy, 2015).

IE is using a similar system of phases for assessing the site from a tourist's perspective. A more specific set of guiding questions is IE's base for reviewing and developing stages, interpretive services being the focus of both. The supporting media/medium for interpretation can be chosen, in both cases, from an array of potential facilitators: interpretive publications, interpretive signs (panels), exhibits, live interpretation (re-enactments), personal or self-guided interpretive tours, digital technologies, visitor centers, etc. Pros and cons need to be considered when choosing any of the above.

2.2.4 Stewardship / Resilience

David Bucy (NAI) stresses on a Benefit to Cost Analysis in IP, considering Schramm's Model of communication (1954) and his Fraction of Selection:

Probability of involvement = Promise of reward ÷ Potential effort

This is to emphasize the positive and to understand that the benefit must be high enough to offset the cost. Another reference for keeping people involved, after having benefited their time and attention, is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo's, 1986, as cited in Bucy, 2015), according to which information presented lasts longer if one elaborates on it. Also, as we tend to care only for what secures our quality of life, HI should complement experiences and instate cultural heritage as a factor for well-being that's worth protecting (stewardship). Even though evaluation indicators used in NAI's framework are mainly visitors' feedback, donations and/or future partnerships, the "end state" interpretive goals are meant to last generations, thus endorsing sustainability.

IE, on the other hand, is placing resilience as the final set of questions in the development phase. Moreover, the interpretive plan must comply with the ecology, equity, economy concept: protect natural assets, equally share and wisely use them, for now and for the future. Human values, active involvement and universal access are as well part of the value-based interpretation fostered by IE and UNESCO. Monitoring and evaluation processes start alongside development stages, in order to continually keep services updated, relevant and resilient. A thorough evaluation is recommended front-end, when the plan is early in development, formative, during the design phase, and summative, when interpretive services have been implemented (IE, 2022).

2.3 Case Study: Porto Seguro

Porto Seguro, a coastal resort town in Bahia, Brazil, represents a unique blend of "indigenous, former slave, and white cultures" (Goodey, 2003, p. 1), interacting within a tourist-driven environment. The 500th anniversary celebration of Brazil's discovery in 2000 raised tensions and debates, particularly concerning the indigenous population's representation and interests in the commemorative events. Brian Goodey, Professor Emeritus in Urban Design at Oxford Brookes University, an influential figure in the field of HI, assesses how the town's historic significance, commercial pressures, and cultural aspirations were highlighted in its IP process.

As a town already confronted with overtourism, gentrification and professional conservation interests, suffocated by a commercial driven development, in 1996 Porto Seguro accepted an interpretive approach in the light of the future celebrations. The project was initiated with the support of the British Council, which facilitated workshops for professional and community groups in historic centers, led by the only Brazilian company specializing in HI at the time. A brief SWOT analysis revealed that the site has recognized historical significance, evident through clearly identifiable historic buildings and its authentic atmosphere. Yet, a lack of interpretive information detract from its appeal and threats persist from exploitative practices, ongoing neglect and lack of vision from authorities. Opportunities include leveraging local crafts and the town's story, introducing routes to expand the social and economic touristic areas, while enhancing the visitor experience.

The focus of the IP was a shared design process for presenting the site, that allowed a negotiation around its values and narrative. Upgrading the locations important for the community eased the acceptance for signage or even dislocation of some activities. Curatorial staff associated with public buildings on the site, some of them locals, served as effective intermediaries between conservation professionals and the community, fostering as well a productive collaboration with the authorities. This resulted in more tourist attractions put in a broader context.

When evaluating the product, Goodey admitted to the fortunate 2000 deadline and available funds to have made the plan's implementation possible. Concerning conflicting feelings about the upheaval of the Discovery Coast concept, he concludes that some acts of vandalism are a far lesser damage compared to hard acts of resentment in an area that is still hot. Mitigating multicultural tensions and having put stakeholders together while getting the plan into action, even though time consuming for all sides (3 years), will ultimately be in the benefit of future generations. At the same time, having IP

included in urban policies puts Brazilian experience in participatory planning ahead of that of Europe or the US (Goodey, 2003).

Although colliding authority vs. community driven proposals shadowed the press coverage of the events in the end, the interpretation plan had successfully expanded the town's dynamics, *liveliness*, considered by some urban designers and planners, such as Kevin Lynch (1996), the main criterion of urban planning.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1 A Case in Practice: Sinaia
3.1.1 Context

Sinaia is a small town in Romania, a former royal residence, territorially constrained by the proximity of a protected area (Nature 2000) and hosting 96 listed historical monuments. The landscape, the unique architecture, the urban development from the beginning of the last century, gave Sinaia its identity. The carefully planned concession of the plots started in 1870, when much of the land was taken over by the non-profit organization Eforia Civil Hospitals. From 1872, King Carol I made an estate exchange with Eforia, and on August 10, 1875 he started the construction of the Peleș Castle. Its completion in 1883 was the pivotal moment ensuring Sinaia a lasting place in people's collective memory. Over time, the Peleș domain generated a unitary and particular cultural landscape for the town. Until 1900 the first villas of the Bucharest elites were built, together with hotels, factories, hydrotherapy establishment, two schools, a hospital, a bank, etc. In 1901 a Construction Regulation was elaborated, with strict norms for the alignment and opening of the streets, the materials allowed for construction, specifications for roofs and fences. The town's development continued harmoniously in the interwar period, amplifying its resort character. The systematization plan from 1929 shows the intention to create generous plots, with large gardens, in which the houses have views oriented towards the mountains. During communism most of the planned constructions from the interwar period were finished, with the end-goal to motivate the working class to spend their vacations in the resort. After 1989, historic buildings, particularly those lacking protection status, have suffered irreversible interventions, altering the city's aesthetics. "Sinaia will soon lose its identity and urban expressiveness. This will affect its force of seduction, both as a spa resort and as a museum city." (Hoinărescu, 1996, p. 26)

A 2019 study from the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, reveals that, in recent decades, Sinaia has undergone significant transformations without always considering principles of sustainable and balanced development. Mass tourism has exerted immense pressure on the infrastructure of the Prahova Valley, leading to a shift in the workforce towards the service sector. The heightened demand for accommodation and non-residential services has led to the abandonment of old buildings in favor of new units, leading to structural issues, CO_2 emissions, flood risks, and environmental degradation. Despite a decline in the local population from 2002, tourist arrivals have been steadily increasing. Even so, the study argues that the unique architecture of Sinaia remains underappreciated, with tourist flows primarily directed towards Peleș Castle and outdoor activities. Cultural events in the town are not widely perceived as tourist attractions. To address these challenges, interdisciplinary strategies and collaboration among stakeholders are essential. Properly planned and managed tourism can have positive impacts on both natural spaces and local communities, potentially leading to economic, social, and cultural revival. However, this requires careful assessment of impacts and implementation of mitigation measures to ensure long-term sustainability (Bogdan *et al.*, 2019).

3.1.2 Application of IP

The framework involves two main phases, following IE's approach to IP: reviewing and developing. The research is grounded in a transdisciplinary theoretical perspective and aims to develop an enriched practical approach for strategic urban policies, with a focus on understanding the processes necessary for a bottom-up interpretation of a cultural landscape. The research highlights the critical role that value-based HI plays in shaping the interpretation. The work is based on a perspective on cultural heritage and the field of its interpretation accepted in the European context. The results are to be tested in a Romanian context, where the notion of HI is little known even among heritage professionals.

An architectural analysis of the already existing bibliography on the city's historical monuments, as well as researching literary references, artistic products, and monographs related to Sinaia are the starting points for a general inventory of the current situation. Analyzing official documents and strategic plans presented by local authorities, along with briefly reviewing the legal situation of the Peleş domain are sought to provide further valuable context. Quantitative data includes demographics, landscape transformation, tourist tendencies, and cultural behaviors. An important source of information is the assessment of visitors' conduct at Peleş Castle.

Additionally, a thematic analysis of the city is carried out through field research. Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and surveys are conducted to gather additional insights, such as mental frames and expectations. The interview guide starts from three essential points for operationalization: the perception of the city, the standard of living and the feeling of belonging. In order to trace what are the contemporary values Sinaia holds for all interested parties, guiding questions refer to: the interviewee's relationship with Sinaia, whether resident, visitor, or other; recall of their initial experiences in Sinaia, highlighting both positive and negative aspects; preferred season and leisure activities; local stories or legends; attractions and unique aspects of the city, so as to determine what the interviewee believes is indispensable for preserving Sinaia's identity and what draws them back to it; opinion on the quality and accessibility of public facilities, security and amenities the interviewee feels are lacking in Sinaia; opinions on the neighboring cities. For decreasing the biases that come from any single method, a longer questionnaire with the same concerns on a Likert scale is to be sent out. In order to evaluate constraints, issues and opportunities, stakeholders with high interest and high influence will be further analyzed in mini focus groups (maximum five subjects), at location. Existing interpretive services will be reviewed by transversal methods of analysis – unobtrusive personal observation and investigation. At most popular locations multiple-choice questionnaires can be applied. This will show how/if different media is currently promoting the phenomena, facilitating experiences, involving people with the site and fostering stewardship. Milestones for the reviewing phase are concluding on data analysis and observation, completing interviews and focus groups and receiving expert evaluation before the beginning of the development phase. While it might appear that establishing the spatial limits of the phenomenon – Sinaia's cultural landscape – is an easy task, a closer look reveals that this will actually be one of the main results of the research.

The development phase focuses on redefining Sinaia's image construct for reconciliation of conflicting historical narratives and better community involvement. A participatory design of interpretive experiences, tailored to all stakeholders' needs, will create value and resilience for the city. A formative evaluation will be done for mock-ups of interpretive services, while summative evaluation methods will be decided, so as to determine how the interpretation should sustain and evolve long-term. A recent study conducted for the Peleş domain (KXL, 2023) suggests diminishing the touristic pressure on the castle, while leveraging its terraced gardens for redirecting the tourist flow, may offer a good opportunity to expand the interest area. An extensive inventory of historical buildings can be grouped in four routes of exploration, all originating from the city center and accessible by various modes of transportation (Manea, 2016), which can be identified as phenomena and aligned with

subthemes. Additionally, the administrative territory of Sinaia encompasses phenomena related to flora, fauna, geological formations, and recreational activities, further adding to its allure and uniqueness. However, navigating the intricate web of stakeholders involved in Sinaia's heritage is crucial, property rights needing to be considered as well. The significance of heritage varies among actors, reflecting diverse perspectives and interpretations. For some, the town's historic monuments and natural landscapes evoke a sense of pride and identity, while others may prioritize economic interests or environmental conservation. Unraveling these narratives and understanding the underlying values the community has in the present are the key for the next steps. Moreover, understanding the specificities of Sinaia's situation in comparison to other resorts in the region, such as Predeal, Azuga, and Bușteni, is essential for devising effective strategies for sustainable development. Currently the four resorts are placed in a competition rather than a cooperative approach, hindering the potential for services to complement each other effectively (Bogdan et al., 2019).

As shown so far, the theme and subthemes will be the result of an intensive, mainly qualitative enquiry, which will build on public opinion, socio-economic aspects and cultural heritage as a source of well-being. In order to develop a bottom-up approach that will create value and resilience for the city of Sinaia, for each identified phenomenon/group of phenomena first-hand experiences need to be designed. New insights should be continuously integrated in the design process. Considering pros and cons for all media involved, experiences will be created taking into account all stakeholders' needs, limitations (accessibility) and perspectives. Thus, proposed interpretive services will care for physical (external and internal stimuli), intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social aspects, "integrating site, people and ourselves" (IE, 2017). The fewer transmitters are used and people are given the chance to interpret themselves, the better the potential of a site is augmented. In a sustainable urban development, all activities taking place in the area are accountable and all stakeholders are responsible for implementing mitigation measures.

3.1.3 Lessons from Porto Seguro

The Porto Seguro case study provides valuable lessons for applying HI in Sinaia. The success of the interpretive planning process in Porto Seguro underscores the importance of community involvement, integrating local narratives, and adapting to the specific context of the heritage site. These insights are directly applicable to Sinaia, where similar dynamics of tourism and cultural preservation are present.

3.1.4 Limitations and future recommendations

One limitation of this research is the focus on a single case study, which may not be fully generalizable to other contexts. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative data means that the findings are interpretive and may be influenced by the subjective perspectives of the researcher and participants.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the continued application of value-based HI in the ongoing interpretive planning process in Sinaia. Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impact of these approaches on both the local community and the heritage site. Additionally, the study suggests that similar methodologies could be applied to other heritage sites facing analogous challenges, with the potential to establish a network of value-based heritage interpretation across different cultural contexts.

4. Conclusions

In light of today's complex realities, Lefebvre's perspective on the lived space highlights the importance of understanding cities not merely as physical constructs, but as a dynamic interplay

between experiences, facts, and political action. This requires urban studies to move beyond purely technical approaches and embrace a more holistic understanding of urban life. Furthermore, as cities grapple with pressing challenges like rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, and social inequality, the need for new collaborative tools and methodologies in urban planning becomes increasingly apparent.

HI provides a framework for unpacking the complexities of urban spaces and empowering communities to actively shape their environments through informed decision-making and collective action. Integrating IP into urban studies could enable cities to utilize heritage resources for community engagement, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. In order to apply IP for reshaping today's urban landscape, a unitary theoretical and methodological interpretive framework is essential. In doing so, further research connecting the disciplines is much needed.

Value-based HI offers promising avenues for addressing the current multifaceted challenges of urbanization. Even though UNESCO's guidelines are not legally binding in most countries, the permanent discussion on what values we consider universal and their interplay related to all heritage is one framework a bottom-up approach for global development can work on. Conceived and tested for offering dedicated training programmes at WHS, the *Learning Landscapes* initiative "has the power to profoundly change the way HI is perceived and placed in local strategies and management plans." (IE Management, 2024) In this respect, having the interpretive framework endorsed by UNESCO builds up an important instrument for applying effective mitigation measures for the current urgent issues this research has identified at the city scale.

In the case of Sinaia, the imbalance directing most economic activities into services and the unequal distribution of benefits from the tourist flow at Peleș castle is affecting its cultural identity beyond repair. Moreover, the unclear protection status for its cultural landscape allows the implementation of conflicting measures between nature and culture, thus changing the characteristics for its inclusion in the Nature 2000 area. A pertinent assessment of the current situation calls for a transdisciplinary approach, involving all stakeholders' interests in a strategic outcome. By aligning with UNESCO guidelines and leveraging interpretive frameworks, Sinaia can enhance its approach to heritage management and urban planning. Additionally, exploring successful case studies from other cities could provide valuable insights into practical applications. Ultimately, a collaborative, value-based approach to HI and urban planning can significantly contribute to the revitalization and sustainable development of Sinaia, ensuring that its cultural and historical assets are preserved while addressing contemporary challenges.

Acknowledgement

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