



European  
**Yeti**

The logo features the word "European" in a dark blue, sans-serif font above the word "Yeti" in a larger, bold, dark blue font. A yellow curved shape is positioned to the right of the "i" in "Yeti".

**THE INTERPRETATION OF  
NATURE AND HERITAGE**

A scenic landscape photograph showing a calm lake in the foreground, surrounded by lush green forests and rolling hills. In the background, majestic mountains with rocky peaks rise under a sky with scattered clouds. A small wooden cabin is visible on a grassy slope near the lake. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.



**Aim:** Understanding the interpretation of nature and heritage as an essential part of any ecotourism business. (It essentially is the story we tell about our business and how we tell it.)

## Objectives:



Understanding what interpretation is, how it appeared, what its purpose is, how it works, the aspects involved in it.



Interpretation as an activity indispensable to ecotourism and the protection and natural heritage, acknowledged and theorised on an international level (The Icomos Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites, Quebec, 2008).



Mastering the steps necessary in order to create an interpretative experience: knowing what stories we want to tell (related to our business, the environment, local communities, the relationships between these elements); who we tell the stories to; how we do it; and especially why we do it.



Carrying out an interpretation exercise.

## AIMS & OBJECTIVES





Unlike other types of tourism, ecotourism has a very important educational side concerning nature and the relationship between nature and human communities. This is done through a set of activities and an attitude towards education that has come to be known as interpretation.



# WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Interpretation is more than delivery of information and more than explication.

In the words of its creator, it is:



an educational activity that **aims to reveal meanings and relationships** through the help of original objects, by firsthand experience and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information



*More info on [aurora.turiba.lv](https://aurora.turiba.lv)*



# WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?



Interpretation is revelation based upon information.



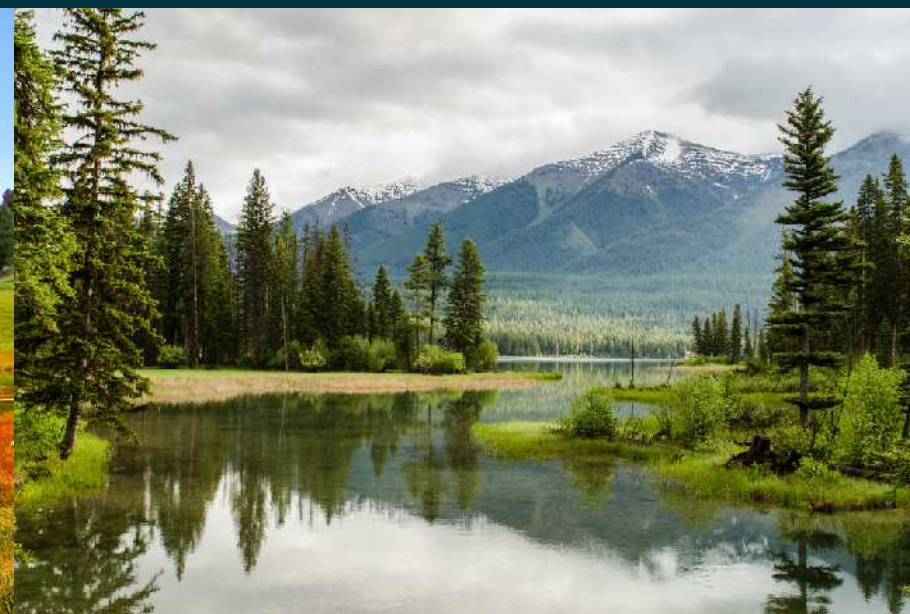
*More info on [aurora.turiba.lv](https://aurora.turiba.lv)*



# WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Interpretation applies to both the natural world and cultural heritage.

Although the principles are the same for both, in this presentation we will refer to nature interpretation.





# HOW DID IT APPEAR?



The notion was first introduced in the USA by Freeman Tilden (1883-1980), a writer and employee of the National Park Service. He was not an educator, but his job included travelling between National Parks and observing how Park Rangers delivered educational programs. In 1957 he published his third book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, which set the foundation for the discipline.

*More info on [www.savedbynature.org](http://www.savedbynature.org)*



“

**Through interpretation, understanding;  
through understanding, appreciation;  
through appreciation, protection.**



*More info on [www.savedbynature.org](http://www.savedbynature.org)*



# HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Six Principles of Interpretation

Any interpretation that does not make what is being shown or described, resonate with something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

In other words, **interpretation must create an experience for the visitor.**



*More info on [mylearning.nps.gov](https://mylearning.nps.gov)*





# HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Six Principles of Interpretation

Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.



*More info on [mylearning.nps.gov](https://mylearning.nps.gov)*





# HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Six Principles of Interpretation

Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.



*More info on [mylearning.nps.gov](https://mylearning.nps.gov)*





# HOW DOES IT WORK?

## The Six Principles of Interpretation

The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

In other words, it is not enough to deliver information and knowledge, one must challenge the visitor to think how the presented site relates to their life and perspective on life.



*More info on [mylearning.nps.gov](https://mylearning.nps.gov)*



# HOW DOES IT WORK?

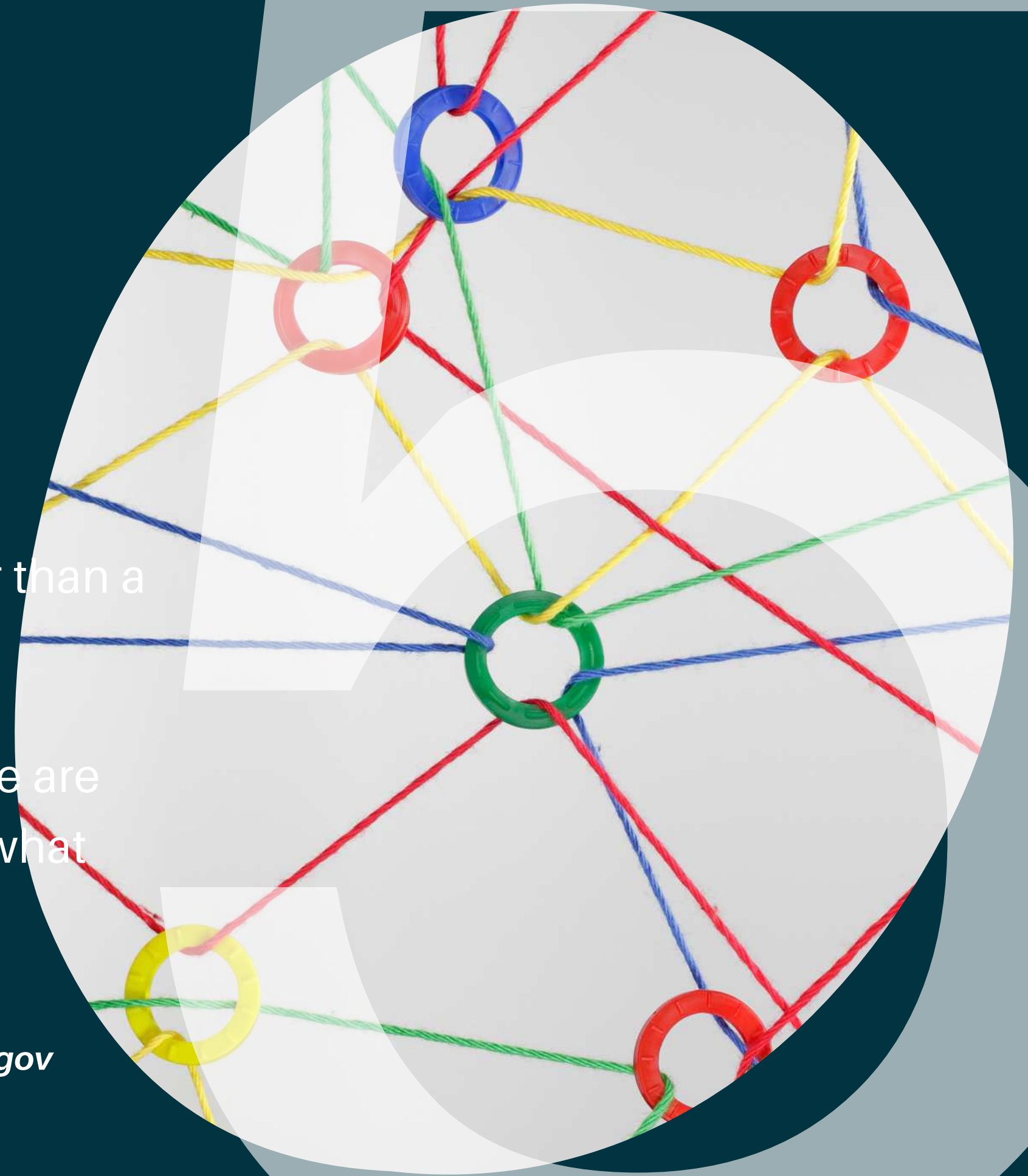
The Six Principles of Interpretation

Interpretation should aim to present a whole, rather than a part (...)

The relationships between various aspects of nature (as well as human society) are essential and this is what interpretation should aim to present.



*More info on [mylearning.nps.gov](https://mylearning.nps.gov)*





# HOW DOES IT WORK?

## The Six Principles of Interpretation

Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach.

Interpretation should be tailored to the audience, taking into account not just their age, but their cultural background, their life experience etc.

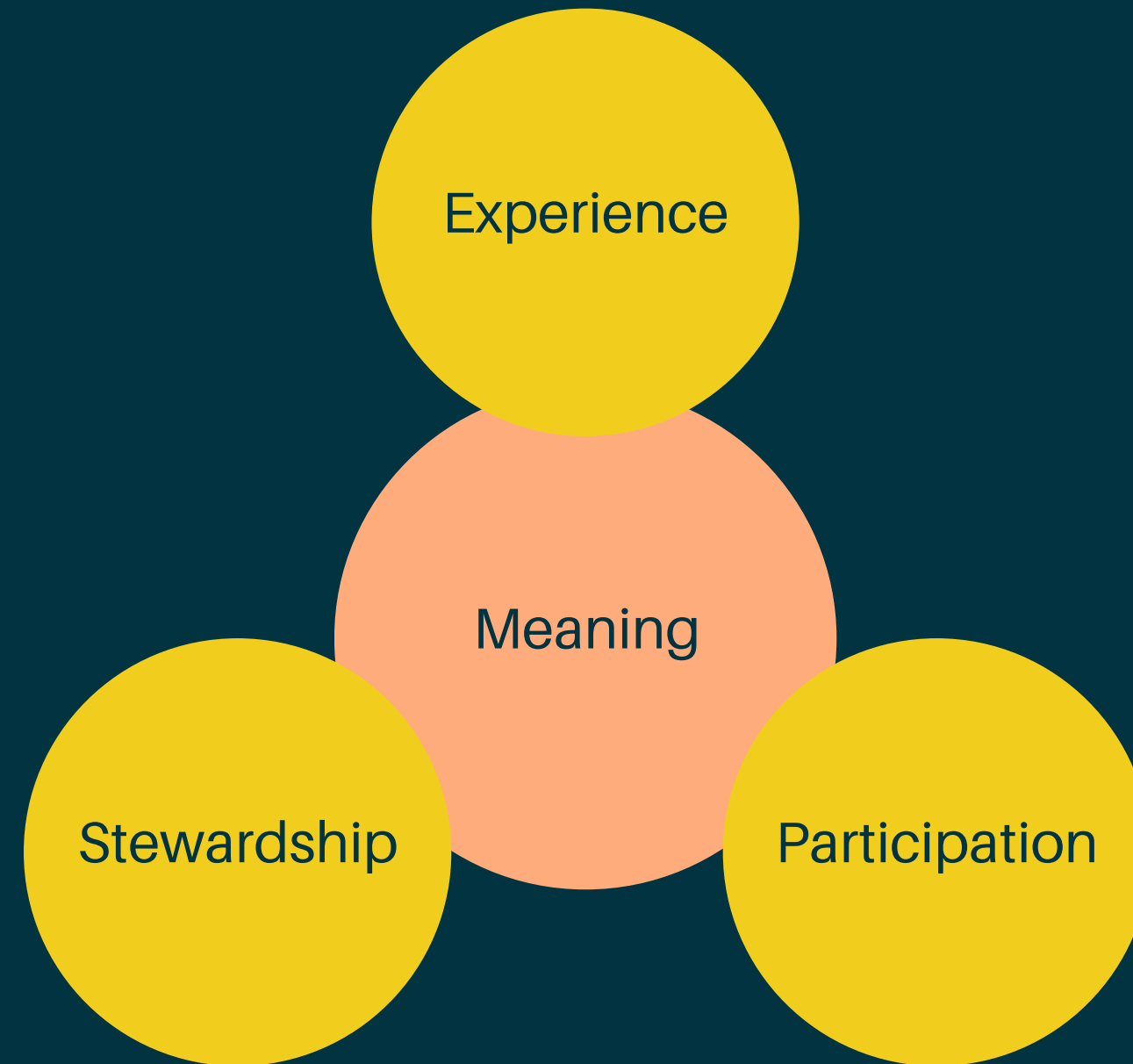


*More info on [mylearning.nps.gov](https://mylearning.nps.gov)*





# The Four Aspects



# of Interpretation





Meaning

## Meaning

helps visitors understand the history, functioning and value of the site. It refers to the information one communicates about the place. Meaning is enhanced by experience, participation and stewardship.

## Direct Experience

enables one to create a stronger relationship with a place and to better understand its meaning. It also creates the possibility for participation and stewardship. Being in a place, seeing it, going through an experience there (a walk, a meal, spending a night, any kind of activity) creates memories and a personal connection.



Experience

## Participation

refers to feeling involved and feeling that one is part of the experienced place. This supports understanding of the meaning, amplifies the experience and incentivizes stewardship. Participation refers to understanding how that place is relevant for one's life, and how one's actions impact the place and community one is visiting. It can come through direct activities (for example, picking garbage), through fair interactions with members of the local community (purchasing of goods, discussions etc).



Participation



Stewardship

## Stewardship

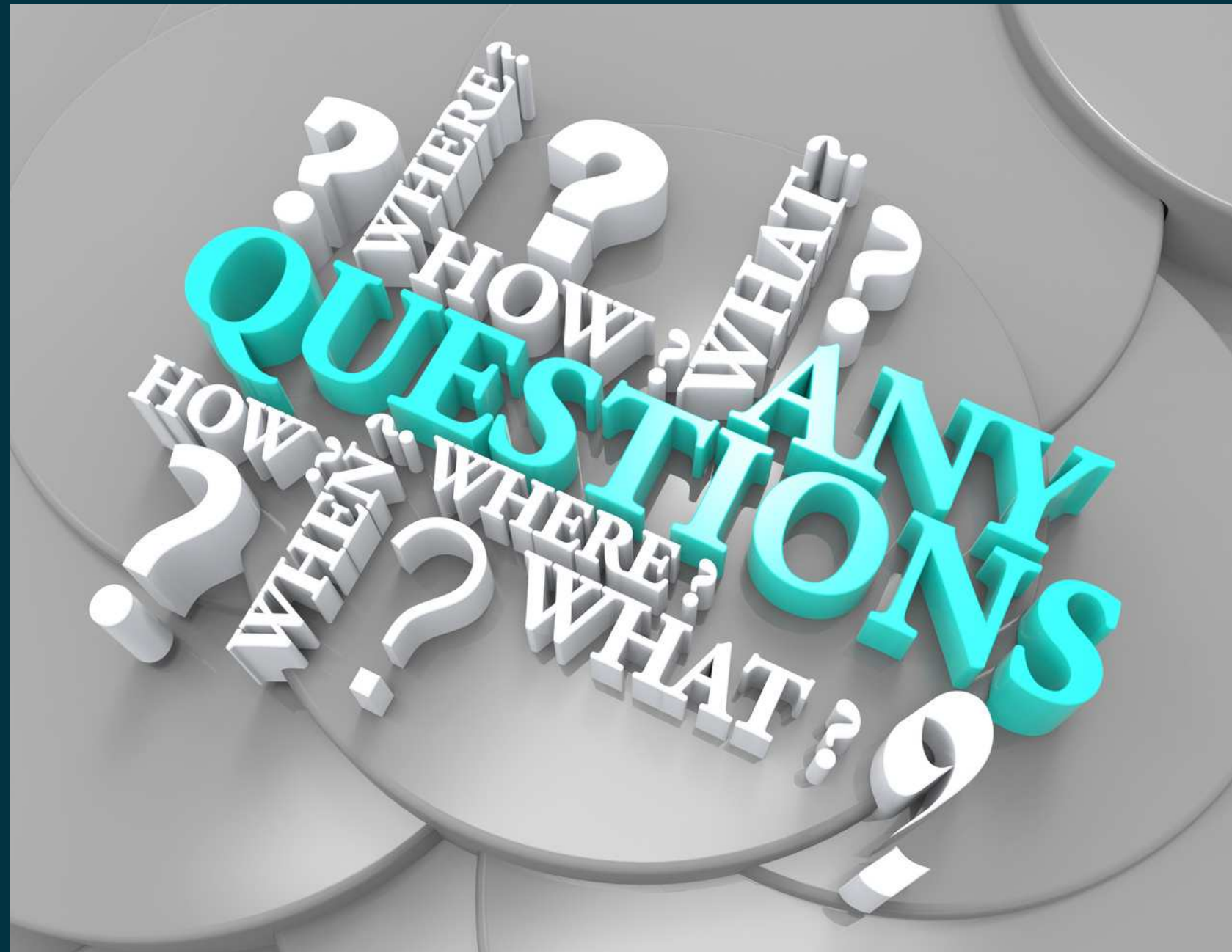
is the desire to protect, preserve and take care of a site. It is born out of understanding its meaning, experiencing it and participating in it. The minimum is to ensure the visitors' presence doesn't have a negative impact on the site. Other activities include explaining and enabling activities that bring value to the site and the local communities.



# The Five Aspects of Experience



# What Are the Questions We Should Start From?



1. What are the stories we are telling?  
(The term "stories" encapsulates information, actual stories, points we are trying to make etc.)
2. Who are we telling them to?
3. How are we telling them?
4. To what purpose?



As the main motivation of people who engage in ecotourism is the **observation and appreciation of nature** as well as the **traditional cultures**, the stories can include:

understanding of natural  
phenomena

understanding of the life of  
fungi, plants, animals etc.

the functioning of  
ecosystems, the relationships  
between various parts



the impact of those parts on  
our lives, and of our actions  
on the ecosystems

the threats faced by the  
site/elements of the site;



As the main motivation of people who engage in ecotourism is the **observation and appreciation of nature** as well as the **traditional cultures**, the stories can include:

existing and possible solutions, how the ecotourism activity the visitors are taking part it contribute to (hopefully) the solution

the interaction between local communities and nature

the functioning of traditional communities;



food growing

traditional crafts (with a low impact on the environment)

transformation of those local communities in time

threats, solutions





In order to convey your message effectively, you need to know who your listeners are. Their ages, their background, their level of awareness and interest in nature and culture.

Depending on the audience, you change the way you deliver the information, as well as the information itself.



Demographically, ecotourists have been grouped as follows (Blamey & Braithwaite, 1997; Diamantis, 1999; Palacio & McCool, 1997; Weaver & Lawton, 2002):

# YOUNGER ECOTOURISTS

(aged 18-44), consisting of:



**Young professionals** who have a high income but only a limited time to travel. They travel as couples or on their own, and are looking for unusual experiences. They choose the experience and comfort of a luxury eco-tourism holiday. Sustainability is not their main motivation.



**Backpackers and young people taking a year off.** They have a low budget. They want to experience the local way of life and try traditional products. They can also combine their trips with volunteer work on various conservation projects. Most of these young people will travel to the region for long periods of time.





# Families with children

(usually over 8 years old)

They are looking for experiences where they can relax and also spend time with their children. They are interested in activities that combine fun and adventure with learning. For this segment of ecotourists, health and safety are also very important.



# Empty nesters

(people aged between 45 and 65)

They are in good health, have time to travel without their children and often have high financial potential. They are experienced travellers and have high expectations in terms of value for money of tourist services, but are still willing to pay more for high quality ecotourism experiences.







The stories told will contribute to the understanding of nature and people living in the mist of it, with the purpose of protecting the environment and the well-being of local communities.

The aim of ecotourism is to offer tourist services that foster the protection of the environment and the well-being of local populations.





“

**Through interpretation, understanding;  
through understanding, appreciation;  
through appreciation, protection.**

*(Freeman Tilden)*



W W H Y ?



# ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

In 2008, ICOMOS (The International Council of Monuments and Sites, the only global non-governmental organization dealing with heritage sites) decided to draw guidelines for an optimal interpretation of heritage based in Tilden's definition and six principles, clarifying and expanding on them. Although they have been drawn for cultural sites, they apply to nature interpretation as well.



*[More info on icip.icomos.org](http://icip.icomos.org)*

# ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

Interpretation should:

1

Facilitate understanding and appreciation of sites and foster public awareness and engagement in the need for their protection and conservation.



*More info on [icip.icomos.org](http://icip.icomos.org)*

Understanding leads to appreciation.  
Appreciation leads to protection.  
Meaning creates Stewardship.



# ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

Interpretation should:

## 2

Communicate the meaning of sites to a range of audiences through careful, documented **recognition of significance, through accepted scientific and scholarly methods, as well as from living cultural traditions.**



*More info on [icip.icomos.org](http://icip.icomos.org)*

Meaning + Experience

**The information must be scientifically correct!**



# ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

Interpretation should:

**3** Safeguard the tangible and intangible values of sites in their natural and cultural settings and social contexts.



*More info on [icip.icomos.org](https://www.icip.icomos.org)*



Stewardship, protection and preservation.



# ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

Interpretation should:

4

Respect the authenticity of sites, by communicating the significance of their historic fabric and cultural values and protecting them from the adverse impact of intrusive interpretive infrastructure, visitor pressure, inaccurate or inappropriate interpretation.

5

Contribute to the sustainable conservation of sites, through promoting public understanding of, and participation in, ongoing conservation efforts, ensuring long-term maintenance of the interpretive infrastructure and regular review of its interpretive contents.

**The way interpretation is done and the information and message it communicates needs to be periodically reviewed and updated! If new information is discovered, if the circumstances of the site change, if the perspective on things changes.**

# ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

Interpretation should:

Encourage inclusiveness in the interpretation of cultural heritage sites.

# 6

This means interpretation must take into account the point of view of everyone involved in the site.

It also includes designing and making the interpretation accessible for various categories of public, including people with various impairments (motorically impaired, visually impaired, hearing impaired etc.)



*More info on [icip.icomos.org](http://icip.icomos.org)*



# ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

Interpretation should:

7

Develop technical and professional guidelines for heritage interpretation and presentation, including technologies, research, and training. Such guidelines must be appropriate and sustainable in their social contexts.



*More info on [icip.icomos.org](https://www.icip.icomos.org)*

**Tilden: interpretation is an art and can be taught.**

Interpretation is basically about **creating experiences** in order to learn about nature and cultures and become motivated to preserve and protect them.



Interpretation is a mix of **direct experience, information, storytelling, dialogue, and sometimes illustrative media.**





Interpretation must be based in correct scientific information, but it also must appeal to the visitor's emotional side.



It must also have a participative dimension: the visitor must feel they are participating in the site's and the communities' existence and preservation.



It must use the site to reveal the unseen connections between its various parts, between nature and local community, between the site and the visitor.





# Case Study of Interpretation of a Heritage Site

*The Mocioni Mansion in Bulci, Arad County, Romania*





## Available Information:

- the main mansion was erected in the second half of the 19th century, after the Antoniu Mocioni, Barron of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Romanian origin, bought the estate in Bulci, Arad county (in Transylvania), in 1857
- Antoniu's son, Zeno, and then his grandson, Antoniu II modified the ensemble giving it its current shape
- the building consists of the main house, rooms of servants, stables, a garage, a glasshouse, a garden and a park
- the main building is built in a romantic style that references medieval architecture
- architect/s unknown
- at the beginning of the communist regime, in 1949, all aristocratic property was nationalized, including this one
- the building was used as headquarters of the local collective farm, then as a psychiatry hospital, then as a tuberculosis hospital
- since 2011, the building has been abandoned, although it is still state property



***More info on [monumenteuitate.org](http://monumenteuitate.org)***



**Not very attractive, is it?**



# What stories can we tell?

## 1. Stories connecting the building to the community

In the 19th century, aristocratic estates made up the countryside in the same way cells make up a tissue. All of the land was divided between aristocratic estates. The estates were organized around the aristocratic mansions with their annexes (stables, garages, grasshouses, gardens, parks), but they also included a lot of workable land, forests, lakes, and villages whose inhabitants worked that land.

The aristocrats supported themselves from the profit made from their estates, especially from agriculture. In the 19th century, aristocrats built railways to connect their estates to commercial centres. Some built factories. A good estate manager would have also taken care of the people on his estate, building houses, schools and hospitals.

The life of the community revolved around the estate and the owner, with all the good things and bad things that derived from this.





# What stories can we tell?

## 1. Stories connecting the building to the community



During the communist period, estates were nationalized, becoming state property. Local communal farms were created and everyone in the village had to join. The land was still worked by villagers, but now it belonged to the state, or according to communist doctrine, to all the people. The mansions were given various public functions, headquarters of the collective farms, townhalls, hospitals, orphanages, whatever was needed. But no matter the function, the mansions continued to be an important employer. Farmers, then nurses, doctors, cooks and caretakers worked on the estate in Bulci for decades, becoming attached to the places.

# What stories can we tell?

## Personal story

My friend with whom I worked on this project, researching and creating an inventory of the abandoned aristocratic mansions in Romania, was once passing through the area when she decided to stop and eat her sandwich on the sunny terrace of the derelict mansion. There, she ran into the former security guard of the tuberculosis hospital, who lived in the village and sometimes went there to eat his lunch as well. As they ate together, another woman showed up, a former nurse. She too had come there to eat her lunch. All three of them agreed on how charming the place was and what a pity it was that it was left to fall into ruin.



**CONCLUSION:** People in the local community are still attached to the former aristocratic estate and wish that it was preserved and freely available to them.



# What stories can we tell?

## 2. Stories connecting the building to nature



This estate, the same as most aristocratic estates, was built on the shores of Mureș river, in order to have an easily accessible supply of water. During the Middle Ages, Mureș river was the watery highway used to transport salt from Transylvania to other areas of the Hungarian Kingdom. In an era without fridges, salt was highly valuable because it allowed to store food, especially meat, for longer periods of time. Now, the river is valued for the wetland it creates, which is home to many protected species of plants, fish, birds and animals.

The former estate now overlaps with one of the Natura 2000 areas (EU's main network of protected natural areas).

# What stories can we tell?

## 2. Stories connecting the building to nature

After being abandoned for decades, the aristocratic mansions, with their dark, damp basements and spacious attics, often became homes to protected species of bats. Restoration now poses the problem of safely removing the bats from the building without destroying the bat colony. NGOs concerned with the protection of bats are working with built heritage specialists and architects to design safe comfortable bat houses for the relocation.



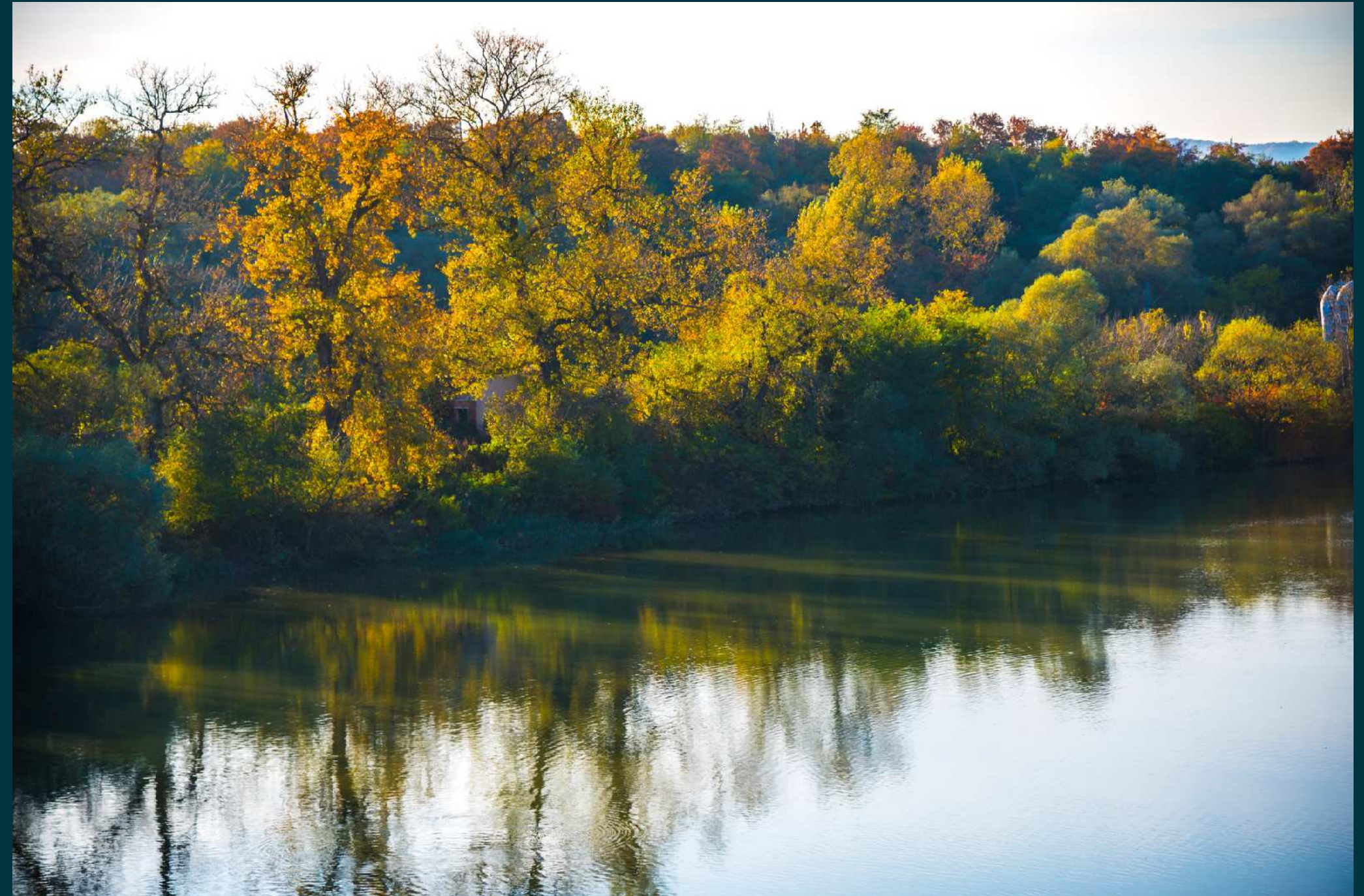
The former estate now overlaps with one of the Natura 2000 areas (EU's main network of protected natural areas).



# What stories can we tell?

## 2. Stories connecting the building to nature

Many aristocrats liked to plant their gardens and parks with exotic specimens (it was a symbol of status). Some of these species have survived and adapted to local conditions. Some gardens and parks (a couple) have been transformed, during communism, into botanical gardens. However, most estates offer visitors and locals the opportunity to see specimens of plants and trees that they wouldn't normally see because they don't normally grow in that area. Further research would also be needed into their interaction with the local environment, any threats posed etc.





In the absence of lived experience (which would offer the full experience), showing pictures can be helpful.



Sourced from [www.facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com)



In the absence of lived experience (which would offer the full experience), showing pictures can be helpful.



Sourced from [mapio.net](https://mapio.net)



In the absence of lived experience (which would offer the full experience), showing pictures can be helpful.



Sourced from [ziare.com](https://ziare.com)



# Conclusions

The stories in this presentation were designed for people who know next to nothing about the history of aristocratic estates in Romania and have little interest in such buildings. The stories were meant to put the building in context.

They aimed to connect the building to the community and nature, and convince the viewer of the need to save such a building.

The photos should create an aesthetic emotion that would make up for not being able to visit the place and acquire a personal experience of it.

Information about the aristocratic family (considered of minor local importance), the architectural style or the phases of construction was left out, as it didn't seem like it would make a strong point for the targeted audience.



# Exercise



1

**Think of a place** you know well, that you feel attached to and that you would like to share with other people. It can be natural or man-made. Write it down.

2

Think of **the facts you know about this place**. How old is it? How did it come to be? What historical information you know about it? How about geological or biological? Write the information down. (Like I did in the example of interpretation of the Mocioni Mansion).

3

Now think of your **personal connection** to this place. Why do you like it? Have you been there? What was your experience of the place? Did anything particular happen? What personal stories could you tell about this place? Write some of them down.



# Exercise



4

Now think of **why you think it's important for other people to learn about this place**. Can others understand something about the functioning of the nature or human societies from it? Do you want them to value and protect it? This is the answer to the very important **WHY** question that drives the stories we tell and how we tell them.

5

Think of the people in the workshop with you (or the people you want to interpret the place for). Are they from the same country as you? From the same region? From the same culture? Think of their age, their gender, their education. Do you think they know the same things as you or they might need you to explain some context? (For example, in my example of interpreting the Mocioni Mansion, I assumed people are not familiar with the history of Romania in general and of aristocratic estates in particular). What would catch their interest about your place? This is the **WHO** do we tell the stories to question. You need to keep in mind what your audience **knows** and **is interested in** and adapt the stories you tell to that.

# Exercise

6

Putting together the facts you know, your personal experience, why you want to tell people about your place and what you know about your audience, think of **WHAT STORIES** you want to tell about your place. (Like I did in trying to interpret the Mocioni Mansions). Write down minimum three. Keep in mind what your audience doesn't know and might be interested in.

**Remember!** A story is not just delivering facts. It is putting these facts in **context** and **establishing connections** between various areas of knowledge. Between different aspects of nature (how winds, water, lava or tectonic plates movements might interact to create a place), between the place and the people who created or inhabited it, between yourself and the place, between your listeners and the place.

**Remember!** You also need to try to **strike an emotional chord** with the listener. There is emotion in stories about people, but also in stories about the greatness and harmonious functioning of nature or the greatness and less harmonious functioning of history.





# Exercise

7

Think of what you would need in order to tell those stories in the most efficient way. What would help you? Do you need to look up images of the place and show them? Do you need schemes to explain natural phenomenon? Do you need to draw? Do you need to reference personalities and quotes? Do you need to show pictures of yourself? Would a rock or a seed or a physical artefact be of help for people to understand your stories better. This is the **HOW** part.



# Exercise

8

**Deliver a 5 minutes presentation** of the place you have chosen, telling the stories you have decided on and using the material you considered suitable.



When you are done, ask the listeners how they feel about the place.

Do they think it is valuable and worth protecting?