



# A CRITICAL RESEARCH ON INTERPRETATION CENTRE

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Nongsiej, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Jothilakshmy N

<sup>1</sup>Student (B.Arch. 5<sup>th</sup> Year), <sup>2</sup>Principal

<sup>1</sup>Architecture,

<sup>1</sup>Saveetha College of Architecture and Design, Chennai, India

**Abstract:** Interpretation Centre is a catalyst for cultural preservation, education, and appreciation through its engaging exhibitions, community engagement, and interactive experiential learning. The interpretation centre acts as a portal to discover the rich fabric of human history and cultures through a combination of interesting exhibits, interactive displays, and educational programs of learning. The experiential journey allows people to exchange ideas, share experiences, and promote cultural diversity and social cohesion. An analysis of how an interpretation centre works and its spatial organization for providing flexibility and showcasing different exhibits, displays, and experiences. The design parameters are investigated in this study, and the learnings have been taken into consideration for future reference.

**Keywords:** *Interpretation Centre, Culture, Heritage, Community, Experience*

**AIM:** A critical analysis of Interpretation Centres through spatial organization in Architecture.

## OBJECTIVES

- Classification of interpretation centres
- Sharing and exchange of different cultures and beliefs.
- Spatial connection and phenomenology

## LIMITATIONS

**Limited Data Sources:** The study mainly utilized data from research papers and different online sources, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness and diversity of the information analyzed.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Drawn by diverse geographies, a gateway to imparting knowledge or giving experiential information about the culture, history, and context of a certain subject Interpretation centres provide a dedicated space for educational activities, offering interactive exhibits, displays, and programmes that facilitate learning and often cater to tourists, students, researchers, and the public to spread awareness and knowledge about the various contexts of different parts of the world. With a deeper appreciation and understanding of the place, culture, history, and so on, an interpretation centre is one way to upkeep and connect future generations with their origins, where culture has no borders. An opportunity to collaborate with communities and organizations to keep their best foot forward in representing their culture. Visitors are taken on an intellectual voyage as they enter these revered walls, where mysterious stories from history, science, and nature are woven together with artistic storytelling and hands-on involvement. The facility, which is decorated with enthralling displays and cutting-edge multimedia presentations, reveals a panoply of enthralling insights that have been painstakingly curated to enthrall and enlighten the astute mind.

### 1.1 What is an Interpretation centre?

Freeman Tilden in his book "Interpreting Our Heritage" describes 'Interpretation' as revealing meanings and relationships through an educational activity and by using original objects and illustrative media.

With a deeper appreciation and understanding of the place, culture, history, and so on, an interpretation centre is one way to upkeep and connect future generations with their origins, where culture has no borders. An opportunity to collaborate with communities and organizations to keep their best foot forward in representing their culture. Visitors are taken on an intellectual voyage as they enter these revered walls, where mysterious stories from history, science, and nature are woven together with artistic storytelling

and hands-on involvement. The facility, which is decorated with enthralling displays and cutting-edge multimedia presentations, reveals a panoply of enthralling insights that have been painstakingly curated to enthrall and enlighten the astute mind.

## 1.2 Presentation as Pedagogy

'Presentation' defined in the 2008 International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Charter as "the carefully planned communication of interpretive content through the arrangement of interpretive information, physical access, and interpretive infrastructure at a cultural heritage site".

Ancient 'heritage sites' were all symbolic, physical manifestations of treasured legends, with each physical landmark representing a certain story. For generations, the presentation of place-based historical traditions affected human thinking and action rather than being a factual description of data. The contents of the presentations altered as times changed as thoughts processed, but the primary goal was maintained. Local guides and religious officials continued to offer significant landmarks and aspects of the terrain as physical proof of sacred events and individuals. Scattered allusions in ancient writings relate to a similar mythical view of the ever-present history manifested in tangible geographical elements. Geographical deviations, unusual geological events, and venerated landmarks were all viewed (or perceived) as apparent confirmations of treasured religious tales. These genesis stories were the oldest type of legacy presentations aimed at preserving traditional knowledge.

## 1.3 Evolving Philosophies of Interpretation Centre

Dating back to the first part of the twentieth century, the public interpretation and presentation of cultural and archaeological assets has become a key component in the conservation and protection of cultural heritage values and locations with conceptual origins. Considerations about relevance, community participation, and inclusivity prompted requests for a framework of principles and norms for interpretation and presentation. By the late of 20th century, professionals began to issue the research's contemporary environment in context of an establishing practical and moral awareness. In the past few years, public interpretation of archaeological and cultural heritage sites has come to be seen as a vital component of management systems involving the conservation and protection of cultural heritage sites and resources across the world.

## 1.4 Types of Interpretation centres

- i. **Natural History Interpretation Centres:** Focus on the natural world, including ecosystems, biodiversity, geology, and environmental conservation. Most often, museums feature exhibits, interactive displays, and educational programmes that help visitors understand and appreciate the natural heritage of a region or specific area.
- ii. **Cultural Heritage Interpretation Centres:** Provide insight into cultural diversity, historical significance, and intangible heritage through exhibitions, artifacts, multimedia presentations, and interactive activities.
- iii. **Historic Sites and Archaeological Interpretation Centres:** Aim to interpret the history, architecture, and significance of the site, providing visitors with context, information, and a deeper understanding of the past. Centres like these often include exhibits, guided tours, and multimedia presentations.
- iv. **Science and Technology Interpretation Centres:** Information and experiences on scientific concepts, discoveries, technological advancements, and their impact on society. These centres often incorporate interactive exhibits, demonstrations, and educational programs to engage visitors in scientific principles and encourage scientific inquiry.
- v. **Environmental Education Centres:** Raising awareness about environmental issues and promoting a sense of responsibility towards the natural world.
- vi. **Community and Cultural Centres:** Local communities promoting cultural exchange, and preserving community heritage. They may offer exhibitions, performances, workshops, and events that celebrate local traditions, history, and cultural practices.
- vii. **Virtual and Online Interpretation Centres:** With the advancement of technology, virtual and online interpretation centres have emerged. These digital platforms provide access to remote interpretation content, allowing people to participate in exhibits, multimedia presentations, and educational resources from anywhere in the world.

## 1.5 Forms of Interpretation

### ○ Personal interpretation

Informative services inform visitors about specific facilities and possibilities and how to use them, but they do not include interpretative programmes, as detailed below. In this day of technology, scheduled services utilising people as interpreters remain one of the most popular and successful kinds of interpretive events. These activities take occur at specific times and are marketed as such. Living interpretation depicts a distinct historical lifestyle than that of the tourists. Interpreters in historical costumes and realistic surroundings conduct out day-to-day activities, demonstrating to visitors how individuals lived in earlier times, frequently with technical information or original objects as an added component.

- Non-Personal interpretation

Visitor centres give tourists with important information about a region and its values, particular characteristics, visitor possibilities, and overall function in the park system. Visitor centres can also provide valuable services to both tourists and workers. Exhibits should be adaptable to adjust for variations in data and time. Signs interpret natural or cultural characteristics in the local environment; readers may choose what to read and how quickly. Self-guided interpretive trails to a more exposed experience and grasping information based on what one wants to learn.

## II. HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

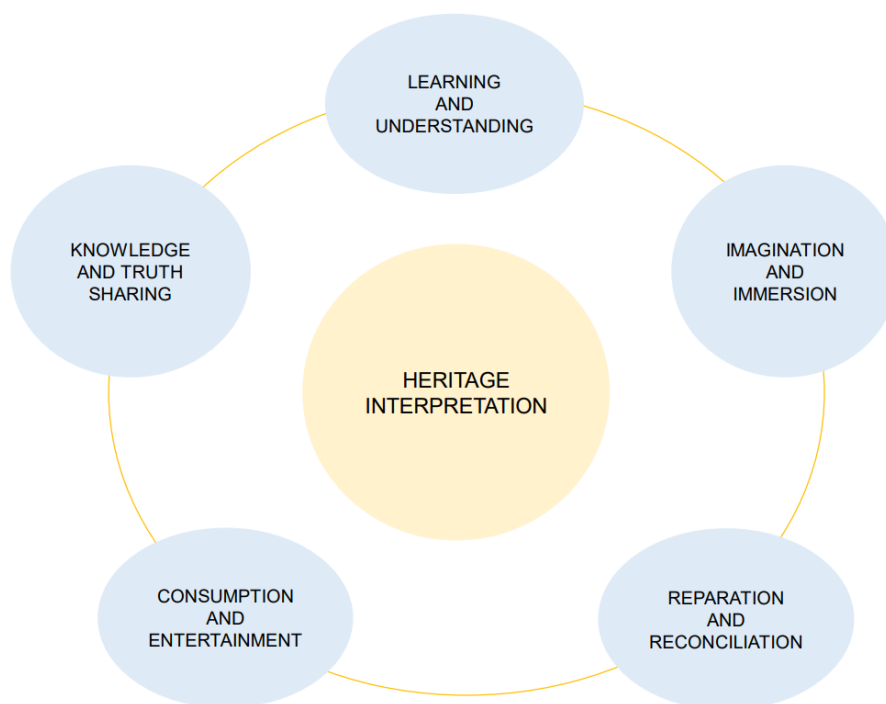


FIGURE 01: HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

### 2.1 The Ladder of Heritage Interpretation

- Consumption and Entertainment**  
Heritage interpretation adds to tourist entertainment and consumption on the first level of the ladder. At this point, the major goal of legacy interpretation is recreational space for communication and interaction of different types of audience. Authenticity is an important aspect which not only aesthetically pleases one but also leave an impact of significant value and knowledge.
- Knowledge and Truth sharing**  
An important role which shares factual knowledge of different events that had happened in the past. Narratives of the space is interpreted on information boards and interaction with the surrounding ambience, a collection of stories with the evolvement and development of the site. The focus on the where, what, how, when and who in truth sharing of the site is factual and objective to understand in depth of the social history of the site.
- Learning and Understanding**  
Processing information is done by learning, understanding, and making sense of the information parted. People gain a sense of understanding and knowledge not by passively receiving information but by active association with initial ideas and concepts.
- Imagination and immersion**  
This phase is required to assist visitors in developing empathy with history data that is peculiar to the cultural origins. Visitors will be able to move beyond cognitive understanding and actively reflect on their relationship with the heritage with the aid of various communicative programs and technologies.
- Reparation and reconciliation**  
In the framework of legacy interpretation, reparation and reconciliation may be interpreted from two perspectives: personally, and socially. Through interpretation and other appropriate methods, heritage sites can assist visitors achieve mindfulness and mental well-being. Many religious historical sites promote sanctity and calm, which aids in the healing process.

## 2.2 The Challenges of the Now and the Later

The key concept in interpretation is Multiculturalism and Community Engagement.

- **Multiculturalism:** A notion or idea that immigrants and other groups ought to retain their traditions while coexisting harmoniously within one nation. It is one of those difficult terms to define, but it is a key concept in heritage studies because it describes the general sociopolitical environment required for public policy in managing cultural diversity in multiethnic societies, emphasizing mutual respect and tolerance for cultural differences within a country's or region's borders. Multiculturalism, as a policy, emphasizes the distinctive traits of many cultures, particularly how they relate to one another beyond national lines. Multiculturalism is usually defined as retaining a "cultural mosaic" of distinct ethnic groups, as opposed to a "melting pot" that combines them. Some cultures and countries may reject multiculturalism entirely as flawed or undesirable, making the circumstances for inclusive interpretation more difficult.
- **Community Engagement:** Heritage studies are becoming more involved in public participatory research incorporating interpretation programmes developed by archaeologists as well as other heritage professionals in conjunction with the public. The link between community participation and site interpretation is a critical issue for present and future study. We must collaborate with our social science colleagues in domains such as sociology and social psychology to create approaches that may be used to cultural and archaeological heritage research. An active involvement by the community in the understanding of cultural materials is a necessary component for people to interpret the past. Indigenous cultures throughout the globe use tourism to as interpretative narratives, implying a shift in the respect and reevaluation of indigenous cultural heritage sites.

## III. Data collection

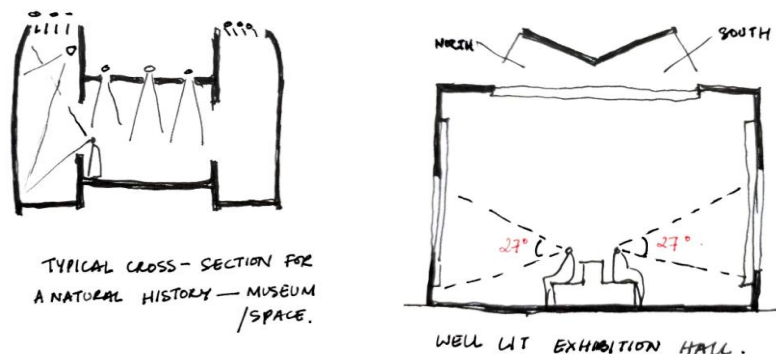
### 3.1 User

- Depending upon the area of subject, interpretation centres can encompass a range of age groups. Some groups found in interpretation centres would be
- General visitors – May include tourists, residents or individuals seeking for knowledge through these spaces of experience.
- Student and Educational groups – To gain a better understanding and practical knowledge, participate in different programs based on need and interests.
- Community and Cultural groups – Active participation for engaging the community and promoting culture and heritage.
- Research and Scholars – Specialized collections for researchers to be able to gather information, seek reference for a better output to their work in making a better future.

### 3.2 Neufert's guidelines

- Nowadays, many museum buildings are also used for culture. centres, and this possibility must be Included in the planning stage. Spaces must be available for permanent and temporary exhibitions, libraries, media rooms and lecture theatres. There should also be places for relaxation and refreshments, as well as space for transport, storage, conservation, workshops, and administration.
- In general, the main concerns of museums and art galleries are collecting, documenting, preserving, researching, interpreting, and exhibiting some form of material evidence. For this purpose, many people with varied skills are required.
- Technological innovations are having a big effect not only on museum function, but also on the design of exhibits. Two examples are the computerization of collection records and design documentation, and lamp miniaturisation and fibre optics and their effect on lighting design.
- There are institutions such as heritage centres, exploratory and some cultural institutes which are types of museums.
- To show works of art and objects of cultural and scientific interest, the institution should provide protection against damage, theft, damp, aridity, sunlight, and dust, and show the works in the best light (in both senses of the term). This is normally achieved by dividing the collection into (a) objects for study, and (b) objects for display.
- Exhibits should be displayed in a way which allows the public to view them without effort. This calls for a variety of carefully selected, spacious arrangements, in rooms of a suitable shape and, especially in museums, in an interesting and logical sequence.
- The normal human angle of vision starts 27° up from eye level.





#### IV. Case study

##### Mapungubwe Interpretation Centre, South Africa

*Location:* Mapungubwe National Park, South Africa

*Site Area:* 2750 sq m

*Built up area:* 1130 sq m

*Architect:* Peter Rich Architects

*Completed in:* June 2009

*Client:* South African National Parks

The interpretation centre promotes awareness of the local ecology's vulnerability and the significance of maintaining it. The installations were created to communicate a story about the region and the artefacts.

The purpose was also to incorporate local unskilled labour in the poverty reduction programmes by training them to make bricks required for construction.

##### *Spatial Organization:*

- Gentle pathways form a zig-zag ramp across the complex, via the exhibition rooms, and slowly rising the mesa to the highest point of the site, providing the visitor with a variety of sensations and vistas that highlight the intricate social relationships of different spaces.
- Shows construction of dramatic cave-like spaces with a domical language of the vaults.
- Terraced seating links the volumes, while diaphanous arched and dome structures contrast with the designs' structural horizontality. All of the brickwork is completed by native rubble stone, giving it a timeless look as though it burst from the soil in the same geological event that built the area's mesas and Mapungubwe Hill.
- The center typically features a designated entrance area where visitors are welcomed. An orientation space is provided to introduce visitors to the center's theme, objectives, and guidelines.
- The exhibition spaces within the center are carefully organized to guide visitors through a narrative or thematic journey. The spatial arrangement allows for a logical flow of information and a progressive exploration of the Mapungubwe heritage.
- The pathways could be designed to create a sense of discovery and anticipation, gradually revealing the depth of the cultural significance.

##### *Materials:*

Stabilized earth tiles are utilized in Mapungubwe as opposed to fired-clay bricks that need more energy. The tiles are made from local soil, sand, and 5% cement in a customized Hydra-form block press. The modification allows to produce thin tiles using a standard press and reclaimed plywood blanks. Despite their fragility, the tiles are strong enough to be employed in constructions. They must be handled with care since water and transportation might damage them.

#### 3. Conclusion

An interpretation centre is one that helps retain the values and beliefs for the community and preserve, promote, and understand the cultural heritage, beliefs, and environment. They serve educational, community-building, research, and tourism purposes while fostering cultural diversity, identity, and pride.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] M. Nowacki, "Heritage interpretation," Marek Nowacki - Academia.edu, Jan. 01, 2012. [https://www.academia.edu/2202669/Heritage\\_Interpretation](https://www.academia.edu/2202669/Heritage_Interpretation)
- [2] "Heritage Interpretation case study," SlideShare iOS. <https://www.slideshare.net/ahmedshaikhon/heritage-interpretation-case-study> (accessed Sep. 19, 2023).

- [3] C. Pui-ha, "Space, Body and Power/Play: A Case Study of Hong Kong Cultural Center," The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Jul. 2004.
- [4] S. Seixas, "Hands on Science: The Case Study of Pedra do Sal Interpretation Center," Sonia Seixas - Academia.edu, Jul. 26, 2017. [https://www.academia.edu/34045458/Hands\\_on\\_Science\\_The\\_Case\\_Study\\_of\\_Pedra\\_do\\_Sal\\_Interpretation\\_Center](https://www.academia.edu/34045458/Hands_on_Science_The_Case_Study_of_Pedra_do_Sal_Interpretation_Center)
- [5] G. Moscardo and P. L. Pearce, "Visitor centres and environmental interpretation: An exploration of the relationships among visitor enjoyment, understanding and mindfulness," Journal of Environmental Psychology, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 89–108, Jun. 1986, doi: 10.1016/s0272-4944(86)80011-1.
- [6] J. Daimary, Bodo Cultural Interpretation Centre. National Institute of Technology Rourkela, 2018.
- [7] Freeman Tilden, Interpreting Our Heritage. University of North Carolina Press, 1967.
- [8] A. S. Mukherji, "Design Guidelines for Interpretation Centre, Jantar Mantar Delhi, Third Stage Report, 2009," Anisha Shekhar Mukherji - Academia.edu, Oct. 29, 2014. [https://www.academia.edu/9020992/Design\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Interpretation\\_Centre\\_Jantar\\_Mantar\\_Delhi\\_Third\\_Stage\\_Report\\_2009](https://www.academia.edu/9020992/Design_Guidelines_for_Interpretation_Centre_Jantar_Mantar_Delhi_Third_Stage_Report_2009)
- [9] L. van der Lee, "Playful Learning for All Ages: Participatory Exhibits," Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences, vol. 76, no. 2, pp. 115–121, 1986, doi: 10.2307/24536677.
- [10] "Gallery of Learning Center / Sebastian Mariscal Studio - 1," ArchDaily. [https://www.archdaily.com/51881/learning-center-sebastian-mariscal-studio/5008983d28ba0d50da00121a-learning-center-sebastian-mariscal-studio-photo?ad\\_medium=widget&ad\\_name=navigation-next&next\\_project=yes](https://www.archdaily.com/51881/learning-center-sebastian-mariscal-studio/5008983d28ba0d50da00121a-learning-center-sebastian-mariscal-studio-photo?ad_medium=widget&ad_name=navigation-next&next_project=yes) (accessed Sep. 19, 2023).
- [12] J. Ochsendorf, "Design and Construction of the Mapungubwe National Park Interpretive Centre, South Africa," ATDF ..., Jan. 2010.
- [13] H. AlMuhanna, "Neufert Arch Data," Hana AlMuhanna - Academia.edu, Feb. 27, 2019. [https://www.academia.edu/38451335/Neufert\\_Arch\\_Data](https://www.academia.edu/38451335/Neufert_Arch_Data)
- [14] J. Ochsendorf, "Design and Construction of the Mapungubwe National Park Interpretive Centre, South Africa," ATDF ..., Jan. 2010.
- [15] Roy Ballantyne, "Heritage that hurts: interpretation in a postmodern world", Jan 1, 1998, [https://www.academia.edu/301491/Heritage\\_that\\_hurts\\_interpretation\\_in\\_a\\_postmodern\\_world](https://www.academia.edu/301491/Heritage_that_hurts_interpretation_in_a_postmodern_world)
- [16] Brian Goodey "Heritage and Interpretation: Designed Integration and Explanation", [https://www.academia.edu/19982743/HERITAGE\\_AND\\_INTERPRETATION\\_DESIGNED\\_INTEGRATION\\_AND\\_EXPLANATION](https://www.academia.edu/19982743/HERITAGE_AND_INTERPRETATION_DESIGNED_INTEGRATION_AND_EXPLANATION)
- [17] Monique Van Des Dries, "Putting the Soul into Archaeology—Integrating Interpretation into Practice", Publisher: Cambridge University Press (CUP) [https://www.academia.edu/49984170/Putting\\_the\\_Soul\\_into\\_Archaeology\\_Integrating\\_Interpretation\\_into\\_Practice](https://www.academia.edu/49984170/Putting_the_Soul_into_Archaeology_Integrating_Interpretation_into_Practice)
- [18] Glen T. Hvenegaard, "Interpretation and environmental education" [https://www.academia.edu/12125041/Interpretation\\_and\\_environmental\\_education](https://www.academia.edu/12125041/Interpretation_and_environmental_education)
- [19] John Jameson, "Cultural Heritage Interpretation" Publication Date: 2020, Publication Name: Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology [https://www.academia.edu/42108064/Cultural\\_Heritage\\_Interpretation](https://www.academia.edu/42108064/Cultural_Heritage_Interpretation)

