

Spatial aspects of the interpretation of cultural heritage

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Spatial aspects of the interpretation of cultural heritage

Creating an exhibition is a multidisciplinary task which, besides the work of the authors of the scenario, copywriters and experts in the given topic, involves also the work of architects and landscape architects. Although the paper reflects on various completed exhibitions, the scenario and form of an exhibition cannot be separated. The paper focuses on spatial aspects of outdoor exhibitions from the perspective of an architect and landscape architect and documents them via various completed exhibitions. In terms of architecture they can be classified upon the aspects of form and content, wherein form covers the spatial, i.e. architectural, design of the exhibition and means, and content covers the quantity, complexity, style and chronology of the information communicated. The motivation for the paper is the need to identify the factors influencing the educational quality of exhibitions that the professionals designing the space and form of exhibitions may use in their practice. This covers predominantly those factors that relate to the designing of spaces where exhibitions take place based on the given scenarios, to which the

viewers react rather subconsciously.

The method used for the research is a spatial and content analysis of three exhibitions presenting cultural and natural heritage, specifically Hardangervidda National Park in Norway, Kongernes Jelling visitor centre in Denmark, and the National Museum of Rural Life at Wester Kitchside – Scottish National Museum in Great Britain. Factors considered include: the connection to the site – landscape context; authenticity; spatial scenario; and so-called warm-up and cool-down spaces that create atmosphere. A scenario, as in a film, connects the environment and content in a defined chronology. By this research we want to follow up on the trend in museums and exhibitions to present information through powerful narrative storytelling.

Keywords: architecture, landscape architecture, heritage, interpretation, visitor centre

Introduction

Contemporary approaches to the presentation of natural and cultural heritage seek new ways for communicating the values of landscapes and territories. The first trend is to gradually abandon the tendency to separate natural and cultural topics, which are newly presented as a whole, e.g., through “House of Nature” programmes.¹ The second trend is storytelling,² which can communicate complicated topics in ways that are attractive for various age and interest groups and which at the same time have the capacity to connect the knowledge of different scientific disciplines. In terms of interpretation of landscape values, these two principles are the logical conclusion, as natural and cultural phenomena largely depend on each other and are mutually influenced.³ Moreover, the interpretation of local heritage and the conversion of historical (or authentic) objects enhance the authenticity of stories and provide these institutions with new possibilities for presenting and communicating artefacts or regions that they represent.

Exhibitions and displays in museums, visitor centres or educational trails are often based on structured scenarios through which they convey information to the visitor. Besides information, the scenario proceeds in individual steps to present the key message – the essential information that the visitor should bear in mind and take home. The success of the process depends on many factors that could be divided into factors of form and content. Form covers spatial or architectural design and means of the exhibition, while content comprises the quantity, complexity, style and order of the information communicated. A scenario, as in a film, is what links the environment and content in a defined chronology.

Several methodologies for historical gardens have been published over the past few years. These methodologies provide detailed instructions for creating activities for visitors of various age groups, or for educational programmes.⁴ However, in terms of landscape architecture there is a blank space: how to communicate values related to space, environment and a specific site. If we accept the thesis that the visitor’s experience is communicated via objects and a story is defined by the scenario of the exhibition, there is still the space that helps to communicate the

¹ *About the House of Nature Programme*. Accessed October 30, 2020, <https://www.dumprirody.cz/en/about-the-houses-of-nature/about-the-house-of-nature-programme/>

² LU, Fangqing. Museum architecture as spatial storytelling of historical time: Manifesting a primary example of Jewish space in Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum. In: *Frontiers of Architectural Research*. 2017, 6(4), pp. 442–455.; ROOS, Job, HOEBINK, Dorus, KOK, Arjen. *Metamorphosis: The transformation of Dutch museums*. Delft: TU Delft, 2019, p. 196; BEDFORD, Leslie. Storytelling: The Real Work of Museums. In: *Curator: The Museum Journal*. 44(1), 2001, pp. 27–34.

³ Council of. *European Landscape Convention, Florence 2000* [online]. Accessed October 30, 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/1680080621>

⁴ HUDEC, Petr, KŘESADLOVÁ, Lenka. *Způsoby edukačního využití památek zadržného umění*. 1. vydání. Praha: Národní památkový ústav. 2015, p. 85.

ideas of the curator and forms the experience of the visitor.

In our paper we focus on the spatial aspects of a scenario from the point of view of an architect, more precisely landscape architect, and we document it with regard to the examples of several completed works. This comprises mainly the factors that relate to the actual creation of the space for the exhibition (such as warm-up and cool-down spaces) and its connection to the landscape surroundings (landscape context, authenticity of the place) (Fig. 1). These are factors that the visitors often don't perceive; they react to them, but rather subconsciously. The planning of a spatial scenario is an integral part of the process of interpreting values – from the key message through the selection of suitable means of interpretation to the production and physical creation of an interpretive act.

The aim of the paper is to describe factors of the environment that can positively affect

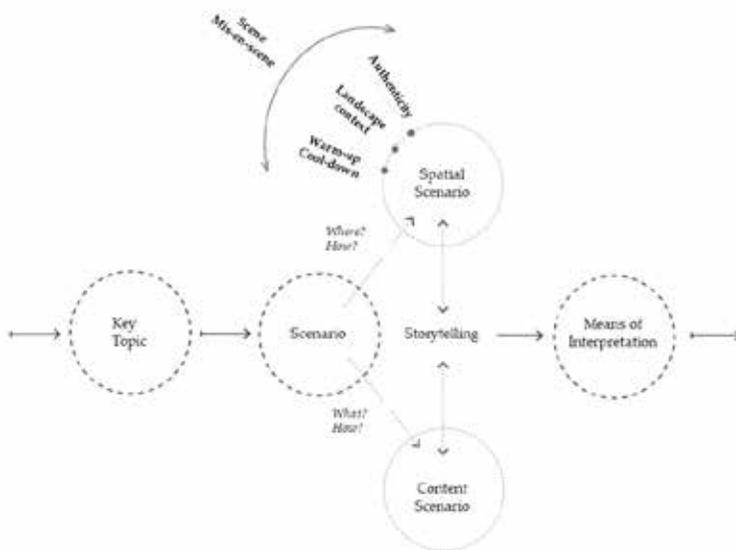


Figure 1: Diagram demonstrating the procedure of scenario-building for the interpretation of cultural heritage

the visitors' experience and support their interest in the given topic. Creating exhibitions and displays is a multidisciplinary issue, and besides the authors of the scenario, copywriters, and experts in the given topic, it involves also the work of architects or landscape architects. The motivation for the preparation of this paper was the need to identify the factors that affect the quality of interpretation, which may be used by the professionals involved in the practical designing of the space and form of exhibitions. The diagram above presents the circumstances related to the building of a scenario.

From museums to interpreting local heritage and back again

The currently promoted principle is the so-called interpretation approach,⁵ which is accepted as one of the ways towards sustainable tourism as well as a form of educating visitors.⁶ Tilden

⁵ TILDEN, Freeman, DICKENSON, Russell E., CRAIG, R. Bruce. *Interpreting Our Heritage*. 4th edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009, p. 224

⁶ BALLANTYNE, Roy, HUGHES, Karen. Using front-end and formative evaluation to design and test persuasive bird feeding warning signs. In: *Tourism Management*. 27(2), 2006, pp. 235–246.

defines it as: “an educational activity striving to reveal meanings and relations through original authentic objects, through immediate experience with these objects, and through the use of other illustrative media rather than through communication of facts”.⁷ Tilden stresses also the subconscious and multisensory perception in visitor education and states that quality interpretation should lie in “revealing, to those visitors who wish so, some of the beauty and magic, inspiration and spiritual importance (of the place) that extends beyond what they can perceive with their senses”. Don Aldridge defines the interpretation approach as: “an art of explaining the importance of place to the visitors in order to draw their attention to its protection”.⁸ Others use the interpretation approach as a method for influencing the visitors’ behaviour.⁹

The interpretation approach highlights the so-called key message, sometimes also referred to as the topic. This stands for the overarching idea of interpretation. Most commonly the key message is a one-sentence formulation that should very specifically express what we want to communicate through interpretation. The key message is therefore the basis that connects presentation, exhibition, plan or programme. It also helps to structure interpretation and select the most useful information, serves as a unifying or linking element, and is easily remembered. So-called detailed messages follow the key message. These work the key message out in three to five partial segments that develop the key message in greater detail. Through this they enable its logical structuring and can be used, for example, for the segmentation of the exhibition.¹⁰ The interpretation approach, which focuses on authenticity and presentation through a story, affects the form and the scenario of current exhibitions. Many museum displays follow interpretation principles, such as playfulness, emphasis on personal story, authenticity and multisensory perception, and reproduce them in their own exhibitions.

Storytelling is a means of interpretation that defines many contemporary museum exhibitions.¹¹ Storytelling is a way of communicating information “in an interesting way”, i.e., through attractive narration. It is a natural form of human communication that takes place in everyday life. Through storytelling we can capture the attention of visitors and explain the topic in a more accessible way. Through stories, current exhibitions open classical topics, such as heroism, treachery or fear, and communicate them to visitors on a more personal level, for instance through the story of a specific individual.¹²

Space is a part of the story

Communication with the visitor through stories logically issues from the subject on which the scenario is based. The scenario develops chronologically (content scenario), but also in the space. A spatial scenario defines the direction of the visitor’s movement through the exhibition and can be either clearly defined or based on randomness in the behaviour and

⁷ TILDEN, Freeman, DICKENSON, Russel, CRAIG, Bruce. *Interpreting Our Heritage ...*

⁸ ALDRIDGE, Don. *Principles of countryside interpretation and interpretive planning*. Edinburgh: H.M.S.O. for Countryside Commission for Scotland, Countryside Commission, 1975, p. 30.

⁹ ROBERTS, Mark, MEARNS, Kevin, EDWARDS, Victoria. Evaluating the effectiveness of guided versus non-guided interpretation in the Kruger National Park, South Africa. In: *Koedoe*. 56(2), 2014, pp. 8–28; BECK, Larry, CABLE, Ted T. *Interpretation for the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture*. 2nd edition. Champaign: Sagamore Publishing. 2002, p. 206; HAM, Sam. *Interpretation: making a difference on purpose*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing. 2013, p. 320.

¹⁰ BROCHU, Lisa. *Interpretive planning ...*

¹¹ BEDFORD, Leslie. *Storytelling ...*

¹² MOON, Jennifer. *Using Story: In Higher Education and Professional Development*. New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 208.



Figure 2: *Riesenwald, Elm, Switzerland – a playful educational trail based on a regional story about giants written by a local author Dan Wiener. There are 17 stops along the trail that inform the visitors, in a playful way, about the tectonic processes that have formed the site*

individuality of the visitors. In displays with a firmly defined story, which gradually reveals pieces of information that connect, it is necessary to guide the visitors along a defined route and prevent them from learning some of the facts earlier than they should. Individual halls or rooms in museums or panels on educational trails are placed at specifically selected points along the trail and guide the visitor. On the other hand, in certain types of displays (especially where a display comprises multiple topics regardless of the sequence in which they are presented) it is better to leave the freedom of discovery up to the visitor. The visitors decide in which direction they will proceed, which information they will obtain and when. At the same time, it is easier to modify such displays – by adding or removing individual elements.¹³ Adequate connection of the content and spatial scenario is important for orientation in space and the correct understanding of the key message.

The concept of spatial scenario can be illustrated by nineteenth-century museums that served as collections of artefacts. They were institutions with clearly distinguishable architecture. The space – building – had to comprise depositories as well as collections and to present them adequately.¹⁴ A museum had to present artefacts of different periods and place them side by side or in a chronological sequence to take the visitor through the entire history in just one afternoon.

The ability to adapt is an essential characteristic of a museum.¹⁵ If we imagine a museum from the Enlightenment era – a collection of meticulously arranged taxidermy in glass cabinets – or contemporary digital or interactive collections, we can state that one of the essential characteristics of a museum is the ability to use the existing resources, though not just them.

¹³ BROCHU, Lisa. Interpretive planning..

¹⁴ LU, Fangqing. Museum architecture as spatial storytelling ...

¹⁵ PARRY, Ross, SAWYER, Andrew. Space and the machine: Adaptive museums, pervasive technology and the new gallery environment. In: *Reshaping Museum space*. New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 14–25.

Museums absorb current scientific paradigms, which determine and transform their content. Parry and Sawyer¹⁶ illustrate this ability by two approaches. There is a difference between an exhibition of paintings that are arranged chronologically – canonically – and an exhibition of paintings that highlights topical, personal or other contexts. Science too can be presented chronologically – as an accumulation of knowledge – or focus on unclear issues and leave plenty of space for imagination. The architecture of museums currently builds on the multisensory perception of objects on display, as well as on connection with the landscape.

Another determining element of a story is the scene – the *mise-en-scène* presentation of the given object.¹⁷ The term, which is used in film science, refers to those aspects of the film that can be seen in the picture: the environment, lighting, costumes and behaviour of the characters.¹⁸ In the case of designing a visitor centre this comprises different ways of presenting an object. Most scenarios cover also the direction of the visitor's approach. Roos distinguishes between an approach that focuses on the object (object-centered) and an approach that strives to create an environment that is natural for the object.¹⁹ The first approach aims to encourage the visitor to explore the object – what it is made of, how it works. The second approach, on the other hand, allows the visitor to become immersed in the story and is more focused on sensory perception. It is a way to create an atmosphere. It could be to enhance the authenticity of the experience – the display might be situated in an authentic object, using authentic artefacts and connecting the object with the landscape, or the other way round, evoking the atmosphere of a historical era in which the situation takes place through light, sound and projection. If we continue in enumerating the spatial aspects of interpretation in terms of *mise-en-scène*, we can speak also about the authenticity of the environment, about the way the exhibition connects to the landscape and about the so-called warm-up and cool-down spaces.²⁰

Authenticity

The term authenticity refers to genuineness or originality, but also naturalness or the credibility of a specific statement. It is a characteristic that defines identification with the given environment and therefore the territorial competence of the given element or phenomenon with regards to its origin, place and time of its creation. An authentic experience is defined as “one during which individuals feel connected with the real world and with their real ‘me’”.²¹ The authenticity factor plays an important role in interpretation as it affects the visitor's own perception. Authenticity of interpretation is based mainly on the correct localisation (setting in the context of place) and autochthonism (local origin) of the presented element or phenomenon, which affects the quality of the visitor's experience. Appearance, function and selected material also play their roles in authenticity.

Transition spaces

The concept of warm-up and cool-down spaces is based on the idea that museums, visitor

¹⁶ PARRY, SAWYER, Space and the machine ...

¹⁷ ROOS, Job, HOEBINK, Dorus, KOK, Arjen. *Metamorphosis* ...

¹⁸ BORDWELL, David, THOMPSON, Kristin. *Umění filmu: úvod do studia formy a stylu*. Praha: Nakladatelství Akademie múzických umění, 2011, p. 600.

¹⁹ ROOS, Job, HOEBINK, Dorus, KOK, Arjen. *Metamorphosis* ..., p. 23.

²⁰ ROOS, Job, HOEBINK, Dorus, KOK, Arjen. *Metamorphosis* ..., p. 20.

²¹ HANDLER, Richard, SAXTON, William. *Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in “Living History”*. In: *Cultural Anthropology*. 1988, 3(3), pp. 242–260.

centres and other institutions interpreting cultural and natural heritage are separated from everyday life, both in terms of architecture (e.g., clearly distinguishable architecture of museums in the nineteenth century), in terms of the special character of a visit to these places, or in terms of evoking the atmosphere of a certain situation or historical era. To allow visitors to separate themselves from the bustle of the surrounding world, these institutions work with spaces which create a transition to the world of the display – so-called warm-up spaces where visitors get in the right mood – as well as spaces that prepare the visitors for their return to the world outside – so-called cool-down spaces where people can evaluate their experience and share it with others. These areas can be the museum foyer, restaurant, shop or toilets, and they can be connected or separated (e.g., a museum shop can be accessible before and after the visit, or it can be located at the end, i.e., only for visitors who are leaving).²²



Figure 3: *Geo Phänomene-Weg, Kerenzerberg, Sardona National Park, Switzerland – educational trail interpreting geological processes in Sardona National Park. Geological phenomena are presented and explained directly on the site where they have been forming for millions of years*



Figure 4: *Fjell Fortress, Fjell, Norway – the largest German World War II fortification system in Norway. The exhibition is situated directly in the authentic headquarters of the fortification. The highest point, originally a canon post, currently serves as an entrance to the display and a café with a scenic viewpoint*

Methodological resources

To document the work with space as a medium supporting the interpretation of a place, natural or cultural heritage, we have presented and described three museums or visitor centres. The main criterion for the selection of these examples was an in-situ interpretation of the place, which means that the object was located directly within the site that was the subject of the interpretation. In this setting, a display can work in connection to the site and set the presented information into the context of the landscape. The purpose of characterising the individual object is not to evaluate them, but to describe the way they use the space and work with it to support subconscious or multisensory perception. For each of the sites we have identified the following: a basic description of the exhibition, content and spatial scenario, storytelling, authenticity, landscape context, transition spaces and the key message.

²² ROOS, Job, HOEBINK, Dorus, KOK, Arjen. Metamorphosis...

Each of the sites is described in a general way at first, and later we get to the description of the authors' use of the space. Finally, the key message of the display or exhibition is interpreted.

Case studies

Visitor centre – Hardangervidda National Park

This visitor centre, situated near the Rjukan municipality in Norway, on the border of Hardangervidda national park, was opened in 2013.²³ The national park was established in 1981 and with its 3,422 km² it is the largest national park in Norway. Hardangervidda is the southernmost location of some arctic wildlife and plant species, and the largest mountainous plateau in Europe. The national park is popular for its herds of wild reindeer, which belong to the largest in Europe; there are more than 10,000 animals in the local herds. The interactive display presenting the national park and the wild reindeer has received several international awards. The visitor centre includes also an outdoor educational trail with an audio guide.

Description of the display

An interactive display focusing on wild reindeer comprises seven parts. The first one guides the visitor through the four seasons from the point of view of the reindeer. The second part is a scientific section, which presents the biology and ecology of wild reindeer. The historical section deals with the origin of wild reindeer and their migration patterns. Another section presents research on wild reindeer on the plateau. A so-called Red Light section presents different challenges and hazards faced by the reindeer today – loss of living space, increasing traffic, etc. In the reflection section the visitors reflect on the different scenarios connected to wild reindeer and the national park. In the last section the visitors can think about the future of the presented topic.

Content scenario

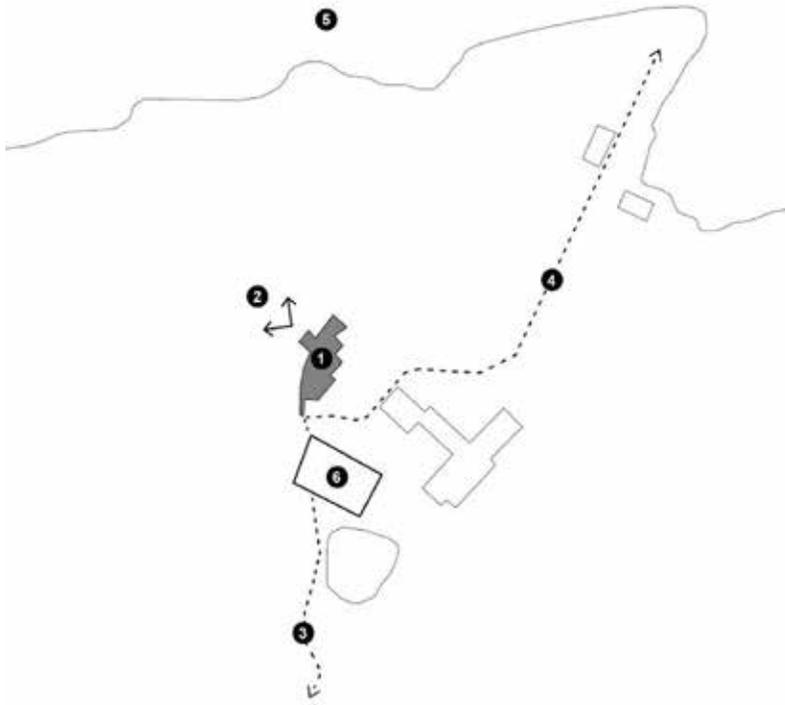
The connecting link of the display is one key theme – the life of the reindeer and everything that goes with it. The story gradually develops and concretises from general information on the national park and the characteristics of the reindeer to information about one specific animal – a female reindeer called Bella. The introductory screens displaying moody pictures from around the national park are followed with information about the anatomy, life cycle and behaviour of the reindeer throughout the history of Earth. Then comes information about the negative impact of humans on wild reindeer, and eventually the presentation of the research projects that take place in the park. One of them introduces Bella, who was monitored for one year using camera and GPS, and visitors can trace the trajectory of the wandering reindeer on an interactive map that also shows photos of her in real life. At the end there is a final recapitulation on an interactive screen with a questionnaire referring to the future of reindeer.

The key topic is developed by side topics that further specify or extend knowledge for more inquiring visitors (e.g., reference to the Lascaux site in France with Palaeolithic rock art of reindeers on the walls, and a short video presenting the nature of the national park).

²³ Hardangervidda National Park Centre – Award winning wild reindeer exhibition. Accessed on October 20, 2020, <http://hardangerviddanasjonalparksenter.no/en/>

Diagram 1: *Visitor centre – Hardangervidda National Park*

1 – visitor centre building; 2 – visual link of the display to the landscape of the national park; 3 – educational trail; 4 – footpath to lake; 5 – Mosvatn lake; 6 – car park



Spatial scenario

Visitors are clearly and logically guided through all that relates to the life of reindeer in the Hardangervidda National Park. They progress step-by-step and learn all the information in a clearly defined order – from general information about the national park and the situation of the reindeer popula-

tion therein, through reindeer anatomy, to the story of one specific female. The development of the key topic into auxiliary, less prominent topics, takes place in small rooms connected as tiny chambers to the main spaces. The relatively large area is not overwhelming in terms of information; it allows for individual immersion into specific topics. The transitions between the individual sections of the exhibition are demonstrated by changes of environment (different room, different colour scheme, etc.) clearly signalling a change of topic to the visitor.

Storytelling

The scenario of the Hardangervidda visitor centre tells the story of Bella, a female reindeer. Through her story, visitors learn about the entire national park and all the situations and threats from people that Bella is facing. It is a personification and presentation of issues through Bella and her life with which visitors are confronted throughout the entire exhibition. This fact creates a significant added value.

Landscape context

The visitor centre is situated outside the territory of the national park, but due to the key message (the threat of excessive human intervention in the natural territory of the reindeer) it is a logical siting – one that supports the key idea of the exhibition. The link to the national park is provided through a strategic position that fully utilises the landform, as well as through the architecture of the interior where the large glass walls of the café and several other parts of the exhibition draw the visitor into the surrounding landscape. The visitor centre is also the starting point of an outdoor educational trail (currently in construction) focusing on wildflowers.



Figure 5: *Spatial scenario – the main hall initially does not overwhelm with too much interest and information and rather allows an individual deep immersion in specific topics*

Authenticity

In the very first room, visitors can sit down on soft reindeer skins and watch a projection of visually impressive scenes from the national park.

Warm-up and cool-down spaces

The route through the exhibition starts in a spacious foyer with a café and shop, where it also ends. Thanks to this the visitors can visit the shop and café before and after they have seen the exhibition. An important characteristic of the exhibition is several nooks and quiet places to relax dotted throughout the entire space. The final part of the exhibition allows the visitor to summarise and recapitulate the information learned and absorb everything at their own pace by looking at the landscape outside through a glass wall covered with the key words.

Key message

The national park is a home to one of the largest populations of reindeer in the world and humans with their activities can become a threat for this population.



Figure 6: *Landscape context – the visitor centre is visually linked to the landscape it presents*

Kongernes Jelling visitor centre

The Kongernes Jelling visitor centre in Denmark is located on the site of a former Viking settlement entered on the UNESCO world heritage list since 1994. The original subject of protection was a complex of two tumuli and rune stones situated in between them. In 2006–2013 an archaeological survey took place in the area that revealed an extensive settlement surrounded by a massive stockade. The entire site underwent a major transformation in 2013 in order to present the monumentality of the place and its importance for Denmark. The UNESCO listed area currently covers the entire prehistoric settlement, and all information is presented at the visitor centre.²⁴

Description of the exhibition

The visitor centre complements the outdoor display that presents the size and layout of the prehistoric settlement at the time of the Viking kings Gorm the Old and Harald Bluetooth. The outdoor display is a modern concept presenting the vast extent of the actual settlement and the location of its individual objects using, for example, concrete slabs in place of the former timber stockades, and various types of paving stones highlighting the perimeters of buildings. The centre is dominated by two burial tumuli, in between which lies the most important artefact – a pair of rune stones presenting a testimony of the nation's conversion to Christianity.

To keep the outdoor display free of any explanatory panels, a new visitor centre has been built in close vicinity to the archaeological site. It introduces the topic and the period context in an attractive way. There is an interactive exhibition presenting the Viking way of life, including their spirituality – the legends, deities and conversion to Christianity. Throughout the exhibition,

²⁴ The Monument Area. In: *National Museum of Denmark*. Accessed on October 20, 2020, <https://en.natmus.dk/museums-and-palaces/kongernes-jelling-home-of-the-viking-kings/the-monument-area/>



Figure 7: Warm-up and cool-down spaces – the visitor centre works with contrasts between spaces with powerful atmospheres and tranquil spots of a relaxing or meditative character



Figure 8: Connection with the surrounding landscape is supported by the linking educational trail
general knowledge is supported by authentic artefacts and information about Jelling.

Content scenario

Just as the life of the Vikings consisted of the earthly life and the afterlife, the actual exhibition consists of two parts connected by a single story. The first part presents the life of the Vikings as they lived it. From peaceful days when men gathered around fires to hear the ancient stories and everybody did their usual work to survive the coming winter, the visitor continues to war conflicts and learns what it was like to be a Viking warrior and why it was important to die in battle. The first part ends with the transition from the earthly life to the eternal one.

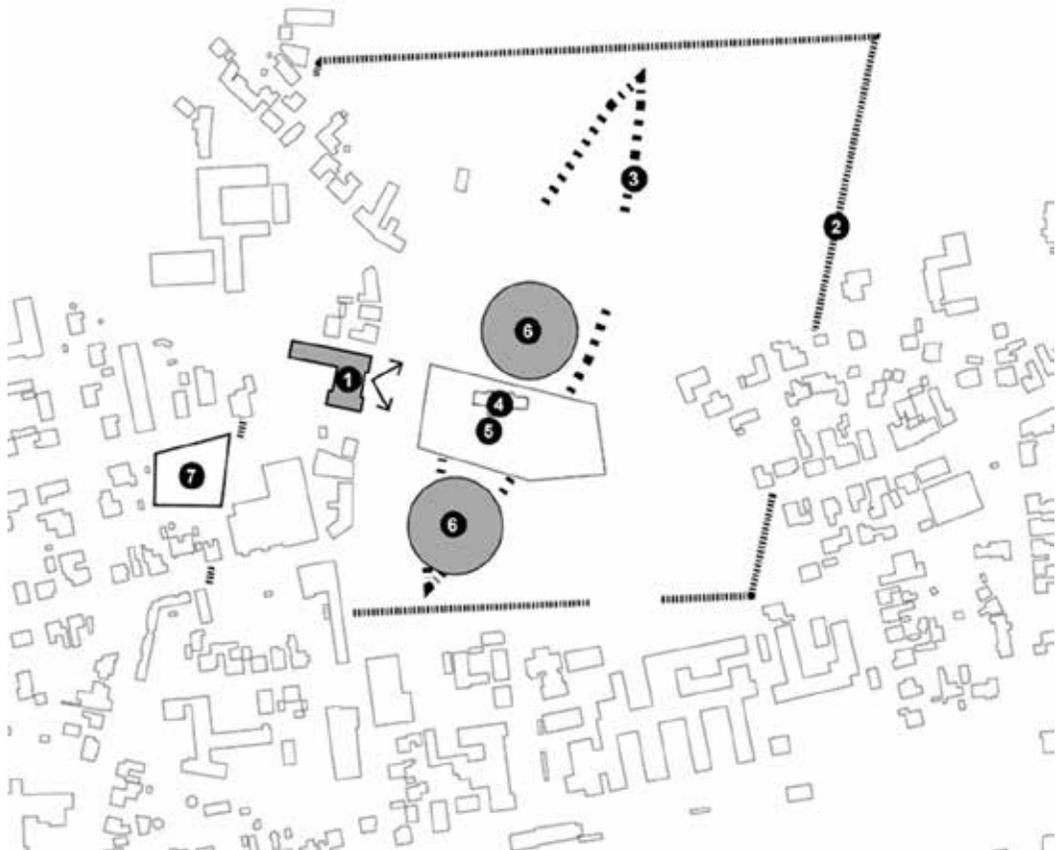


Diagram 2: *Visitor centre – Kongernes Jelling*

1 – visitor centre building; 2 – the original stockade lines; 3 – recently revealed boat-shaped foundation structure; 4 – church; 5 – rune stones; 6 – tumuli; 7 – car park

The second part is accessed after walking up steps to an upper floor where the visitor encounters the old gods – Odin, Thor and others – through stories. As the exhibition unravels, visitors learn about Christianisation and about the evidence given through the rune stones in Jelling.

Spatial scenario

The spatial scenario closely connects with the content scenario. First the visitors learn about the life of the Vikings and follow them from the earthly sphere to the eternal one, and next they are similarly guided through the visitor centre. The dimmed spaces on the ground floor talk about the earthly life including its bright and dark sides. A major part dedicated to the warrior philosophy of the Vikings ends with the death of a warrior and his transition to the afterlife – Valhalla. At this point the visitor walks “up the rainbow steps” to the upper floor, just as a dead warrior would enter the world of his gods. This floor then provides information about the ancient Viking deities that were replaced by faith in one God when Harald Bluetooth accepted Christianity.



Figure 9: *The outdoor spaces comprise also an early twelfth century Christian church. The rune stones, as a document of the conversion to Christianity, are located nearby*

Storytelling

The scenario of the Jelling visitor centre tells the story of the Vikings. From legends told around fires in the throne hall to the eternal life in Valhalla, by the side of gods, whoever they are. The Jelling visitor centre emphasises the chronology and continuity of stories, which directly links to the importance of telling stories and legends around fires in the Viking halls. Thanks to this it is easy to find your place in and way through the story and hence also through the display, and “storytelling” becomes one of the most prominent elements of the exhibition.

Landscape context

The visitor centre is situated in the place of an ancient Viking settlement. As the visitor walks through the exhibition, various references and links to the site emerge (e.g., the analysis of the

layout of the individual structures in the area and in its surroundings); the roof terrace at the end of the exhibition allows a panoramic view of the entire landscape from a single viewpoint. Despite this, the exhibition at the visitor centre is separated from the surroundings by the fact that all the displays are installed in darkened rooms and by the fact that the interactivity of the exhibition completely absorbs visitors and their attention.

Authenticity

Thanks to the link to the actual settlement, Jelling is an authentic place. Local artefacts are displayed within the exhibition that illustrates the told story. Within the outdoor display are the burial tumuli as well as two rune stones from the tenth century, which act as symbols of the place. The layout structure of the ancient settlement (stockade, perimeters of some of the buildings and the mysterious boat-shaped structure laid out with rocks) is modern rather than authentic.



Figure 10: *The spatial organisation of the display corresponds with the oral story of the Vikings – while the ground floor tells the story of the earthly life, the upper floor (seen in photo) tells the legends of the ancient gods and conversion to Christianity*

Warm-up and cool-down spaces

The spaces providing transition between the everyday life and the story of the exhibition act in a rather subconscious way. From the spatial foyer, the visitor enters a timber-clad room that evokes the throne hall where you can sit around a fire, listen to stories told about the ancient Vikings and absorb the general atmosphere of the place and time. The same principle is then repeated at the moment when the visitor enters the upper floor where the legends of the gods are told that take the visitor to the unearthly environment. This passage is highlighted



Figure 11: *Storytelling – exhibition at the Jelling visitor centre tells the story of the Vikings, from the everyday earthly life to the eternal afterlife*

by the contrast between the dark ground floor and the light first floor, which acts as the Viking heaven. Both parts are completely separated from the world outside. The second part – the Viking heaven – links to rooms with views of the tumuli and the church in the outdoor part of the exhibition, either seen through a window or from the roof terrace. For a full absorption of the experience the spacious foyer offers plenty of seating with tables and refreshments.

Key message

The life and heritage of the Vikings, their legends and deities, and the conversion of the nation to Christianity form an important part of the national identity of Denmark.

National Museum of Rural Life at Wester Kittochside – Scottish National Museum

A specialised facility of the Scottish National Museum focusing on rural life throughout the ages, the National Museum of Rural Life is located at the Wester Kittochside farm, which is situated on the north-eastern edge of East Kilbride, about six kilometres south of Glasgow, Scotland. The museum became a part of the national museums network in 2001 and on this occasion, it was converted to its current state from the former Museum of Agriculture founded in 1949. The current look of the museum is a result of a joint project of the National Trust for Scotland (NGO dedicated to protecting cultural and natural heritage) and National Museums of Scotland (NMS), an organisation associating national museums in Scotland. NMS was looking for a place to display its extensive collections of rural artefacts and was approached by the Reid family who donated their farmstead at Wester Kittochside near the museum. During the 1990s the project gradually developed, activity peaking in 1999–2001 when the new exhibition hall

was built²⁵.

Description of the exhibition

The exhibition of the museum of rural life consists of two parts – an eighteenth-century farmstead and the new museum building – linked by an outdoor display spread across fields and pastures. The entire area of the museum grounds is more than 24 ha and farming activities are carried out by the museum.



Figure 12: *Warm-up and cool-down spaces – the visitor centre works with spaces evoking atmosphere and spaces for calming down and returning to the everyday reality*

The historical farm provides an insight into the functioning of a Scottish rural farmstead in the 1950s. The farmhouse, along with all the adjacent structures, was donated by the last landlord and thanks to a guide with a personal relation to the place visitors get an opportunity to learn a lot of backstage information. The museum building displays a collection of agricultural tools and machines used throughout the centuries. The exhibition also uses interactive screens with an easy fun quiz that helps to review all the information – explanations are provided along with the correct answers.

The outdoor exhibition comprises several hectares of pasture and presents the contemporary state of farming as well as its link to the character of the landscape.

²⁵ National Museum of Rural Life Feature Page on Undiscovered Scotland. Accessed on October 15, 2020, <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/eastkillbride/kittochside/index.html>

Content scenario

The exhibitions present the everyday lives of people in rural areas throughout the centuries, from various working tools to the folklore linked to the rural way of life. The museum provides

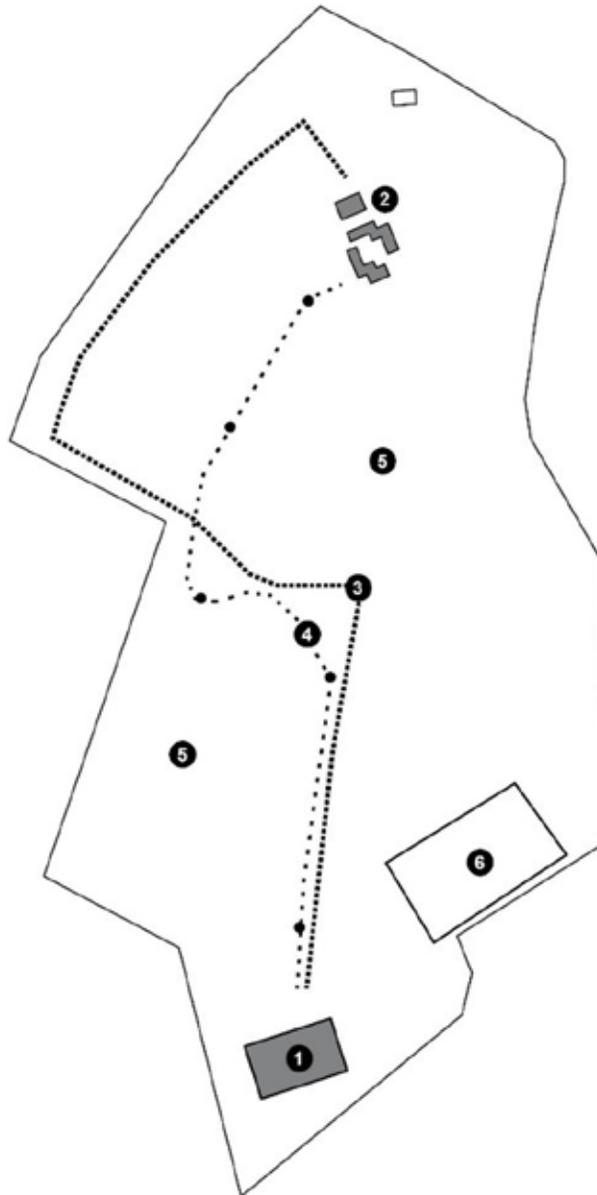


Diagram 3: *National Museum of Rural Life*

1 – main building of the museum of rural life; 2 – historical farm of Wester Kittochside Farmstead; 3 – road linking the museum with the farm by tractor rides; 4 – pedestrian path with an educational trail; 5 – land farmed as part of the museum activities; 6 – car park

a general introduction to agriculture, and presents historical tools and old machines such as tractors, combine harvesters and other farming technologies used in agriculture. The outdoor exhibitions and the historical farm present the environment in which these technologies have been used to this day.

The historical farmhouse tells the story of the family that grew up on the farm and explains how the owner and his family lived, the important moments in their lives and the eventual transformation of the property into the museum in 1992.

There is a separate small story presented in an exhibition on a German captive who served here as a farm hand during World War II; prisoners of war helping out at similar farms were nothing uncommon in the wartime period.

Spatial scenario

The overall configuration of the land is based on historical and spatial circumstances. There are no directions as to the order in which the parts of the exhibition shall be seen, but the situation of the ticket office in the museum generally predestines this building to be visited first. The visitor route is designed as a spiralling path that chronologically leads the visitor through the history of agriculture. One of the important turnoffs is a display of heavy machinery in a barn. The scenario of the exhibition at the farm is based on historical and spatial context. The building is preserved in the authentic state as it was left by the last inhabitants. A scenario is given, but it depends on the visitors whether they view it chronologically, either on their own, or with a guide.

Storytelling

The personal story of the Reid family, the former owners, is one of the key principles of the museum. The opportunity to perceive and live this story in an authentic environment allows the visitor to immerse deeply and perceive it as a whole. Connection with the specific period when the family lived on the farm, and also the added interest represented by the story of the German captive who worked here during the war, intensifies the strong impression from the environment. By this, the general information about agriculture that is provided to visitors inside the museum building is then transformed to concrete facts and, what is most important, demonstrated in a realistic environment.

Landscape context

The entire exhibition, with its setting in the authentic rural landscape, intensively works with the landscape context. The original Kilbride was a small Scottish village with farms scattered across the land. In the 1940s, Kilbride was one of the villages that decided to become “New Towns” with more than 80,000 inhabitants as a reaction to a social challenge represented by insufficient housing. The former farmland underwent a dramatic transformation to an urban landscape, of rather suburban character with streets of typical terraced houses that are seen throughout the UK.²⁶

The main effort or aim of the overall landscape design is the work with vistas that suggests to the visitors that they have arrived at a typical rural landscape. Vistas are applied at the museum building where there are large glass windows providing scenic views of the landscape,

²⁶ East Kilbride – BACKGROUND INFORMATION. Accessed on October 15, 2020, <http://www.eastkilbride.org.uk/info/index.htm>

but mainly along the way across the land and in the views from the farmstead. This is hugely supported by the landform as the view is framed by rows of green hedges and clusters of trees.

Authenticity



Figure 13: *Storytelling – exhibition telling the story of a German captive who served as a farm hand*

The authenticity of the place is presented mainly through the situation of the entire museum within the said farmland, and also through the incorporation of a working historical farm into the museum exhibition. The concept comprises a series of experiences and activities connected to rural life, such as the mentioned tractor ride from the museum building to the farm and feeding of the animals.

Warm-up and cool-down spaces

In the general concept of the museum of rural life, which includes a working historical farm, the atmosphere is evoked by the outdoor exhibition that introduces the visitor to the agricultural environment. It also plays a role at the end of the tour, as a space for returning to reality as it allows visitors to discuss their newly gained knowledge. Within the museum building these functions are delivered by the spacious foyer and café where the visitors remain in the normal environment, but with the open character of the space allowing them to peek into some of the parts of the exhibition – through this they can already perceive the main topic of the building.



Figure 14: *Landscape context – view back to the museum building across the land around the farmstead*

Key message

Knowledge of the historical use of land and ways of living is important for the proper development of society.

Conclusion

Stories have been told from the dawn of ages, and although the topics and key messages repeat, every era and every civilisation modifies them according to their specific habits and individual settings. Likewise, during the interpretation of natural and cultural heritage it is necessary to work with individual types of visitors at the given time. Every individual comes with different life experiences, and different levels of knowledge. To make sure everyone gets the same opportunity of a unique experience from interpretation, it is necessary to find a medium through which they can adjust the presented information to their pace, scale or level of knowledge.

As the presented examples of interpretation show, this medium could be the environment, or mise-en-scène. Where the interpretation of cultural or natural values with a direct connection to the landscape is in focus, it is convenient to work with the landscape to interpret these values. Such spatial aspects may include authenticity, presented through local and chronological relevance of the artefacts on display in Jelling, or landscape context, as is explained regarding the example of the museum of rural life in Wester Kittochside.

To avoid exhibitions having an overwhelming effect, an appropriate splitting and “dosage”



Figure 15: *Authenticity – authentic period interiors in the historical farmhouse at Wester Kittochside Farmstead*



Figure 16: *The footpath linking the landscape segments is accompanied by an educational trail*

of information is convenient; this is clearly demonstrated by the example of the warm-up and cool-down spaces. Whether it is the initial creation of atmosphere, or the application



Figure 17: *Physical model of the complex inside the museum building*

of this principle throughout the exhibition – for example through the transitions between individual topics – the right mood or state of mind of the visitors affects their potential to absorb perceptions, and therefore also their capacity to receive the key message (such as in the café area or the final part of the exhibition at the visitor centre of the Hardangervidda National Park).

Architecture is an artificial archive of culture that helps preserve memories, historical documents, books, etc. We can follow up on this by stating that landscape is a natural archive, an organic one, and as such it preserves more than just the history of mankind. In this way, landscape can be perceived as an environment of interpretation, but also as an actual object that is a part of interpretation through which the key message is communicated.

The use of landscape and work with the space where information is conveyed should come as a matter of course in good interpretations. Whether it is the context of the landscape, the authenticity of the place or the work with the space that makes the visitor feel welcome and relaxed, it is not necessary to apply all the media of a spatial scenario. Indeed, it is not always even possible. But the potential use of such media should be included in every interpretation plan and should be applied by professionals who use them in their standard practices.

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