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**Interpretive Master Planning: Heritage Interpretation Program  
for the Banská Bystrica Region**

*Program interpretácie dedičstva pre Banskobystrický kraj*

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*The paper presents a model of developing an Interpretive Master Plan. Basic information about heritage interpretation forms was also provided. The steps of developing the plan were discussed as well as its benefits and components were listed. A theoretical model was illustrated with a specific example of a plan developed for the Banská Bystrica Region. The main advantage of this approach to heritage interpretation is the integration of related facilities, themes and stories on the regional level. It also facilitates and enhances an optimal use of natural, physiographic, historical and cultural resources of the region.*

**Key words:** *Banská Bystrica Region. Heritage interpretation. Interpretive master planning.*

*Príspevok prezentuje základné východiská interpretácie dedičstva a približuje model vytvárania hlavného plánu interpretácie v cieľovom mieste. Uvádza postupnosť krokov vytvárania plánu interpretácie, jeho obsah a výhody. Teoretické východiská skúmania sme aplikovali na príklade vytvorenia plánu interpretácie pre región Banská Bystrica. Vychádzame z tvorby plánu interpretácie podľa modelu „Nova Scotia Museum“. Najväčší prínos tohto prístupu k interpretácii dedičstva spočíva v integrovaní príbuzných tém a príbehov na regionálnej úrovni. Zároveň interpretácia dedičstva umožňuje optimálne využitie prírodných, historických a kultúrnych zdrojov v regióne.*

**Kľúčové slová:** *Hlavný plán interpretácie. Interpretácia dedičstva. Región Banská Bystrica.*

## **Introduction**

Heritage interpretation is an educational activity that aims to reveal meanings about natural and cultural heritage. Through various media, interpretation enhances understanding, appreciation and protection of natural and cultural sites (Beck and

Cable, 1998). Interpretation can be delivered through different media types – either personal or non-personal. Personal media include (Shape, 1982): information services (eg. in visitor centers), conducted activities (eg. guided tours), talks (eg. auditorium talks in visitor centre, campfire talks), living interpretation (eg. historical re-enactment). Non-personal media include: audio devices (eg. audio stations, CDs), written materials (eg. leaflets, guidebooks), self-guided activities (eg. walking trails), exhibits (in visitor centers, in museums or open-air exhibitions) and visitor centers which combine many interpretive techniques.

Currently, many interpretative programs are designed only for one site or park with a little attention to the regional context and integration with other nearby sites or facilities. Agencies with interpretive planning responsibilities covering various areas generally emphasize only those facets or stories directly pertaining to the scope of their concern (Veverka, 1997). Therefore, a systematic approach to tourism development and heritage interpretation planning is necessary for the effective management of tourist areas. As a result, many of the interpretative services are limited to one site and thus do not promote regional stories and do not develop interpretive opportunities of the region.

## **1. Objective and material**

The objective of the paper is to provide a theoretical background of a Regional Interpretive Master Plan and to develop a specific plan for the Banská Bystrica Region. Theoretical approaches of foreign authors (Traweek and Veverka, 1997; Ham, 1994; Regnier et al., 1994; Veverka, 1997) are analyzed in order to accomplish this objective. Nova Scotia Interpretive master plan is researched in order to apply its components on the Banská Bystrica Interpretive master plan as an example. The steps of developing the plan are discussed as well as its benefits and components are evaluated. The steps include formulation of goals and objectives, inventory of natural and cultural resources, development of themes, marketing analysis, preparation of an interpretive plan for all facilities, plan implementation and monitoring.

## **2. Interpretive Systems Planning**

Interpretive planning is a strategic process which achieves management objectives for interpretation and education by facilitating meaningful connections between visitors and regional resources. Interpretive planning comprehensively analyzes all interpretive needs and determines a wide array of interpretive services.

facilities, and programs to communicate in the most efficient and effective way the area's purpose, significance and themes. Interpretive planning is a goal-driven process that determines appropriate means to achieve desired visitor experiences and provide opportunities for audiences to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with meanings/significance inherent in the resources while protecting and preserving those resources (CIP, 2000).

The main task of the Interpretive Master Plan is to identify regional significant stories. This "significant stories" in regional context refer to the mix of all tangible and intangible resources of the region, which together form what is commonly called "a sense of place". Systems' planning allows to look more broadly at the whole organizational system of tourism, heritage resources and tourism facilities in the region. The system can consist of all natural parks or reserves, historic or cultural sites, monuments, museums and trails within the interpreted region. According to John Veverka (1997), the most important advantages of this planning method include:

- integrating related facilities, themes and stories of the system within an agency,
- it facilitates a variety of levels of experience or "interpretive pacing" (Traweek and Veverka, 1979) for visitors with a common thread of experience on a regional level,
- it facilitates and enhances optimal use of natural, physiographic, historical and cultural resources (and stories) which might otherwise be ignored,
- it encourages a more expedient and rational approach to planning interpretive services along corridors such as cultural or natural trails or networks.

The key challenge of interpretation is to reveal to visitors why the province's heritage resources should be interpreted, or, why these resources matter (Nova Scotia Interpretive Master Plan, 2009). Therefore, Banská Bystrica Region Interpretive Master Plan should engage and involve local residents, all Slovaks and visitors of the region's heritage, to ensure an involved constituency for the future. In order to engage and attract visitors to Banská Bystrica Region heritage sites and resources, interpretation must enrich visitor experiences in meaningful ways. "Meaning making" happens when a visitor to a natural or historic site, a nature trail, or a museum exhibit is able to extract meaning from that experience, the experience has the potential to become memorable, transform their behavior and/or trigger an emotional response (Nova Scotia Interpretive Mater Plan, 2009).

Developing an interpretative plan should be based on a clear and proved scheme. Many organizations have developed their own schemes of the interpretive plans (eg. Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, US Forest Service). They usually consist of the following parts (Knudson et al., 1999):

*Formulating goals and objectives.* In the first stage of the plan development, it is necessary to clarify the interpretation plan goals and objectives for the entire system, then specific objectives for each site separately. Objectives are outcome-driven and measurable. The following are examples of goals and objectives of the plan formulated for Banská Bystrica Region<sup>19</sup>:

Goal 1: Contribute to an understanding and appreciation of the heritage of Banská Bystrica Region through interpretation.

*Objective 1:* Ensure a balanced approach to natural and cultural heritage.

*Objective 2:* Cause that authority as the voice for Banská Bystrica Region heritage be respected.

Goal 2: Achieve sustainability by ensuring that the heritage of the Region thrives and survives into the future.

*Objective 1:* Achieve resource sustainability.

*Objective 2:* Achieve social relevance through community involvement.

Goal 3: Ensure that interpretation is authentic, relevant and inclusive for all audiences.

*Objective 1:* Be accurate and authentic.

*Objective 2:* Be relevant to visitors' personal experiences.

*Inventory of natural and cultural resources.* In this phase an inventory of heritage resources has to be done: describe its current location, characteristics, availability (including seasonality), the importance for the interpretation, take pictures, plans, mark their location with relation to existing or planned trails, accommodation, etc. The aim of the inventory is insight into variety of regional resources, assessment of the possibility of its use in the interpreting plan and identifying other resources of the region, which may become part of the plan.

*Developing main- and sub-themes.* On the base of inventoried resources, the main theme for the region can be developed. The themes express a broad vision of what the region represents – what serves as its central messages. It is a 'vision' of the character of the place. This vision is then broken down into one to four major interpretive themes (Knudson et al., 1999). Themes are the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting the area. They tell what the most important ideas or stories to be interpreted are. The goal is to develop themes that are understandable, concise and complete thoughts, and are the most important ideas for that area (www.nps.gov). A theme should be stated as a complete sentence, contain one main idea, reveal the overall purpose of the plan and be

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<sup>19</sup> The plan concept is based on the Nova Scotia Interpretive Master Plan. (<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/cn/home/aboutnsm/imp.aspx>)

ated in an interesting manner (Ham, 1994; Regnier et al., 1994). The theme should be the most important message we wish that visitors will carry away from the area. Proposed main interpretive theme could be stated as follows: "*Banska Bystrica Region's unique natural and cultural heritage has given its citizens a strong sense of place and identification with its history*".

The main theme can be further divided into detailed sub themes which are implemented in the form of thematic trails, interpretative panels, guided walks and exhibits in interpretive centers:

1. The cultural richness of the region was formed by people of different origins and faiths (Hronsek – the articular wooden church, Brezno – a synagogue, Hronský Beňadik – a monastery and cathedral, Lučenec – the Calvinist church)<sup>20</sup>.
  - The history of the region and life of its inhabitants were marked by the mining of gold, silver and copper (Banská Štiavnica, Banská Bystrica, Kremnica, Špania Dolina).
  - The throne of the Hungarian rules was sustained by the royal mining towns of the region, where gold and silver were mined (Nová Baňa – old mining town and gold mines, regional museum, Pukanec, Hodruša-Hámre – old mining towns, folk architecture and mining houses, Banská Štiavnica – Slovak mining museum, Natural mining museum, Mining dams of Banská Štiavnica).
  - The Upper Hron has for centuries been a land of miners and steelworkers and industrial traditions have survived here till today (Hronec – first casted bridge in the Hungarian Kingdom from 1810, Osrbliie – the remains of the blast furnace from 1795).
2. Banská Bystrica region has become a center of identity formation of the Slovak nation.
  - History and culture of the region were created by Slovaks, Hungarians and Germans'. (Zvolen – Hungarian King's Castle, Pustý hrad – one of the most extensive castles in Europe).
  - Banská Bystrica was the center of one of the most significant historical events of the Slovak nation: the Slovak National Uprising of World War II. (Banská Bystrica – monument and museum of Slovak National Uprising).
  - The Upper Hron area was a scene of a bloody fighting during the Slovak uprising in the late summer of 1944 (Castle in Slovenská Lupča – the place of partisans' imprisonment, Nemecká – the monument and exposition of 900 partisans burned in lime kiln).

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<sup>20</sup> In brackets are examples of places where the theme could be interpreted.

3. Banská Bystrica region is rich in unique natural treasures.

- Forestry can exist without a man, but not vice versa (Harmanecká tisina – one of the largest yew forest in Europe, Čierny Balog – Čiernohronská Železnica Dobroč – Dobroč primaeval forest, Zvolen – Forestry museum, Borova Hora – Borovanska deŕa – arboretum, Badín primaeval forest).
  - The beech forests of the region have been depleted due to the production of charcoal for smelting silver and copper and intense shepherd colonization of the mountain in the region.
  - Landscape of the region is characterized by the presence of karst and volcanic forms (Bystrianska and Harmanecká caves, Pol'ana – the largest extinct volcano in Europe).
4. Folk traditions in the region are still present in everyday life and customs (Brezno – Upperhron Museum).
- The most characteristic musical instruments of the region include the fujara and the klopacka (Detva – production of the 'fujara', laces, folk costumes)
  - In the region survived the traditional songs and dances, ability to play unique musical instruments and distinctive costumes and wooden architecture (Jarabá Vyšná and Nižná Boca – mountain villages with wooden houses and huts and mountain pastures, Šumiac – former Wallachian village, Detva – rustic wooden cottages).

*Marketing analyses.* The next step involves a marketing analysis of the region tourist market. This includes identification of target segments and potential groups of people visiting the region. At this stage, following criteria must be specified: market characteristics, sector characteristics, visitors, means of transport, motives and motivation of the visit, duration of the stay, visitors' activities.

*Preparation of an interpretive plan for all facilities.* The next step is to decide how, when and where to implement the interpretive plan. The project should be defined in detail for each asset (Veverka, 1997):

- Interpretive theme for each individual site.
- Site objectives.
- Interpretive program objectives.
- Recommended interpretive media/services.
- Justification.
- General planner comments.

*Implementation and monitoring of the plan.* At this stage, it must be specified what will be needed to implement the plan, how much it will cost and determine the project contractors. The program should begin by printing pilot leaflets.

interpreting proposed themes and constructing a web site. Simultaneously, walks, guided tours, thematic trails and presentations can be suggested conducted by regional guides, nature parks staff, forestry workers and students of tourism on Matej Bel University. The next step would be to set the directional signs and interpretive panels at tourist attractions and the information boards at the entrances to the region. All signs, panels and tables should create a coherent 'The Visual Identity System'. Last stage is the construction of interpretive centers in selected sites (eg. in Špania Valley and Detva).

The last step of the plan includes development of strategies to assess the achievement of interpretation objectives. There is a need of evaluation to find out whether goals of interpretation (general and specific) have been achieved. The assessment should include an analysis of visitor's interest in interpreted themes, understanding of conveyed contents, attention focused on the panels, exhibitions or presentations and possibilities of changing visitors' attitudes and behaviour. Evaluation should be carried out at each stage of the plan development, to allow a current correction of errors committed in the planning and program modification.

## Conclusions

Heritage interpretation planning is an important management tool of areas attractive for tourists. It is also an instrument that helps to influence visitors' experiences and thus significantly affects attractiveness of tourism regions. System approach to the interpretation integrates interpretive services and thereby even further increases the attractiveness of the presented topics, increases the strength of their impact, efficiency and saving funds.

Planning system by increasing awareness of the local population also contributes to the development of favorable attitudes towards local authorities and organizations managing the area. The above presented interpretive solutions for the Banská Bystrica Region are a general outline of the project made on the basis of preliminary field research. Comprehensive inventory of the area resources, involvement of area government, tourism organizations, guides and travel agencies allow implementation of the plan in practice.

One of the possibilities of financing the plan may be the European Union structural funds and especially the European Regional Development Fund.

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