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Heritage Interpretation as a Catalyst for Sustainable Ecotourism in Protected Areas: A Systematic Literature Review

Abstract. This article provides a systematic review of the literature to explore heritage interpretation as a catalyst for sustainable ecotourism in protected areas. Premised on the importance of protected areas as a strategy for the conservation of the natural environment, the study seeks to identify trends that predominate contemporary scholarly discourse regarding the concept of heritage interpretation in protected areas. Having searched the main scientific databases (Sabinet, Scopus, Emerald, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis Online, and journals' websites), the authors have identified 129 publications, of which 57 met their relevance criteria. After conducting content analysis and thematic extraction, it turned out that most of the studies concerned the Global North, with themes reflecting the role of heritage interpretation in protected areas, interpretation planning, management and evaluation, environmental interpretation, cultural interpretation, the influence of interpretation on visitors' perceptions, behaviour and satisfaction, interpretation preferences, interpreters' experiences, creativity in heritage interpretation and heritage interpretation for sustainable development.

Keywords: heritage interpretation, ecotourism, protected areas, systematic literature review

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1. Introduction

Heritage interpretation is a growing area in ecotourism research, with scholars beginning to focus on ways of promoting heritage awareness among local inhabitants and making it part of their identity, with the aim of protecting and conserving sites and a knowledgeable development of tourism, (Continenza, Redi & Trizio, 2017; Harilal, Tichaawa & Saarinen, 2022). In addition, more attention is being paid to the value of protected areas as a fundamental component of the global strategy

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for the conservation and protection of natural environments (Harilal, Tichaawa & Saarinen, 2022). As a result, more and more scholars are trying to understand how to manage natural environments more effectively (Bushell & Bricker, 2016, p. 1). Originally conceived with the purpose of preserving iconic landscapes and providing habitats for wildlife, the conceptual and geographical scope of protected areas has undergone significant expansions in recent decades (Continenza, Redi & Trizio, 2017; Watson et al., 2014). According to the World Bank (2023), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has established six distinct management categories to delineate protected areas spanning a minimum area of 1,000 hectares. These encompass scientific reserves and strict nature reserves characterised by limited public access, as well as national parks of significant national or international value. This this classification system also includes natural monuments and natural landscapes possessing distinctive attributes, nature reserves, wildlife sanctuaries and protected landscapes, which can include cultural landscapes (Harvey, 2001; Mitsche et al., 2008). Such geographically demarcated areas serve as critical safeguards for the preservation of habitats inhabited by endangered species, threatened ecological communities, and noteworthy examples of well-known ecosystems (Nowacki, 2021; van der Merwe et al., 2020). Collectively referred to as indigenous or native biodiversity values, these elements of natural heritage represent essential targets for conservation efforts. Certain protected areas seek to preserve aesthetically remarkable regions and sites of historical or cultural importance. While terrestrial protected areas have traditionally received more attention, marine areas started to be recognised as requiring protection since the late 1980s (Bennett & Dearden, 2014).

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that tourism inside protected areas accelerated (Zeiger, Caneday & Baker, 1992) and proved to be economically viable (Watson et al., 2014). Consequently, many regions rely on protected areas not only to uphold conservation but also for economic development through tourism (Stone et al., 2022). Furthermore, Stone et al. (2022) noted that alliances between conservation and tourism contribute to a shift in attitudes regarding issues of biodiversity conservation and environmentally responsible business practices, which means that there is an enduring and symbiotic relationship between tourism and protected areas. According to SWITCH Africa Green (2020), tourism activities have an impact on the natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources in tourist destinations, and sustainability is becoming increasingly important worldwide. To achieve maximum economic and social benefits, while making sure that tourist growth and development does not lead to environmental deterioration, it is necessary to embrace sustainability principles.

The concept of ecology tourism [ecotourism], which combines nature and cultural tourism, has emerged to promote the conservation of natural and cul-

tural resources while providing economic benefits and growth to all stakeholders (Stronza, Hunt & Fritzgerald, 2019; Wondirad, 2017; Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020; Forje, Tchamba & Eno-Nku, 2021). The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2015) defined ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”. Furthermore, TIES notes that those who execute, partake in, and promote ecotourism activities should adopt the following principles:

- minimise physical, social, behavioural, and psychological impacts,
- promote greater respect for and awareness of cultures and the environment,
- provide positive experiences for both tourists and hosts,
- provide direct financial advantages to encourage conservation,
- generate financial benefits for both local communities and businesses,
- deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors to increase their awareness of political, environmental, and social contexts of host countries,
- design, build, and operate low-impact facilities,
- recognise and respect the rights and spiritual beliefs of indigenous people in local communities and collaborate with them to foster empowerment.

Heritage interpretation, a key pillar of ecotourism, involves informing visitors of heritage sites and artefacts about natural and cultural heritage through educational activities. Heritage interpretation, which originated in the context of promoting environmental heritage and later expanded to encompass cultural heritage and is now in widespread use and has gained international recognition (Continenza, 2020). It is commonly acknowledged that interpretation is crucial to the tourism industry, particularly at national parks and other places of cultural and natural heritage (Boemah, 2011; Lück, 2003; Moscardo, 1999). Hence, this study aims to systematically review scientific literature on the use of heritage interpretation to enhance ecotourism in protected areas, in order to identify (i) the importance of and knowledge that has been produced on heritage interpretation in protected areas, (ii) trends regarding techniques in heritage interpretation in protected areas research, and (iii) areas of improvement in heritage interpretation.

2. Methods

The objective of this study was to explore current trends and gaps in the research on heritage interpretation as a tool for enhancing ecotourism in protected areas.

A preliminary search on Google Scholar was conducted to determine criteria for including articles for analysis. The selection process consisted of four steps: (1) keyword search, (2) literature search, (3) selection of relevant studies, and (4) categorisation and synthesis of the findings (Figure 1). The authors looked for relevant journal articles and book chapters listed in major abstract and citation databases, such as Sabinet, Scopus, Emerald, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis Online, Web of Sciences, and on journals' websites. The search was conducted in May and June of 2023.

The keyword search included variations of heritage interpretation ("interpretation" AND "cultural interpretation" AND nature/environmental interpretation), variations of PAS ("national parks" AND "nature reserves"), and Global North and Global South, with emphasis on Africa. A number of keywords were combined by Boolean operators ("ecotourism" AND "heritage interpretation" AND "protected areas"). No time interval or language restrictions were imposed during the search. Publications which did not appear in the indexed databases might have been missed during searches on individual journal websites and therefore were excluded from the systematic review.

The keyword search of the databases yielded 129 articles. After reviewing their abstracts, 38 articles were excluded from further analysis because they did not meet the selection criteria. The content of the remaining 91 articles was reviewed in more depth, resulting in the rejection of another 34 articles, which were found not to be directly related to heritage interpretation in protected areas. The final set consisted of 57 scientific articles and monographic book chapters, including 11 about Africa, 36 about Global North countries, as well as 10 articles containing conceptual/literature reviews. In the third step, the title, abstract, keywords, authors' names, journal name, and year of publication of each article were exported to an MS Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. The articles were categorised based on their aims and topics, research methodologies applied, and results. A summary of the review results was used to identify the main trends and key areas of research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Characteristics of the Literature on Heritage Interpretation in Protected Areas

The oldest paper included in the review was published in 1996, and the number of articles published in the first decade of the 21st century grew rather slowly only to rise more rapidly in the second decade. As shown in Figure 2, 2021 saw the highest

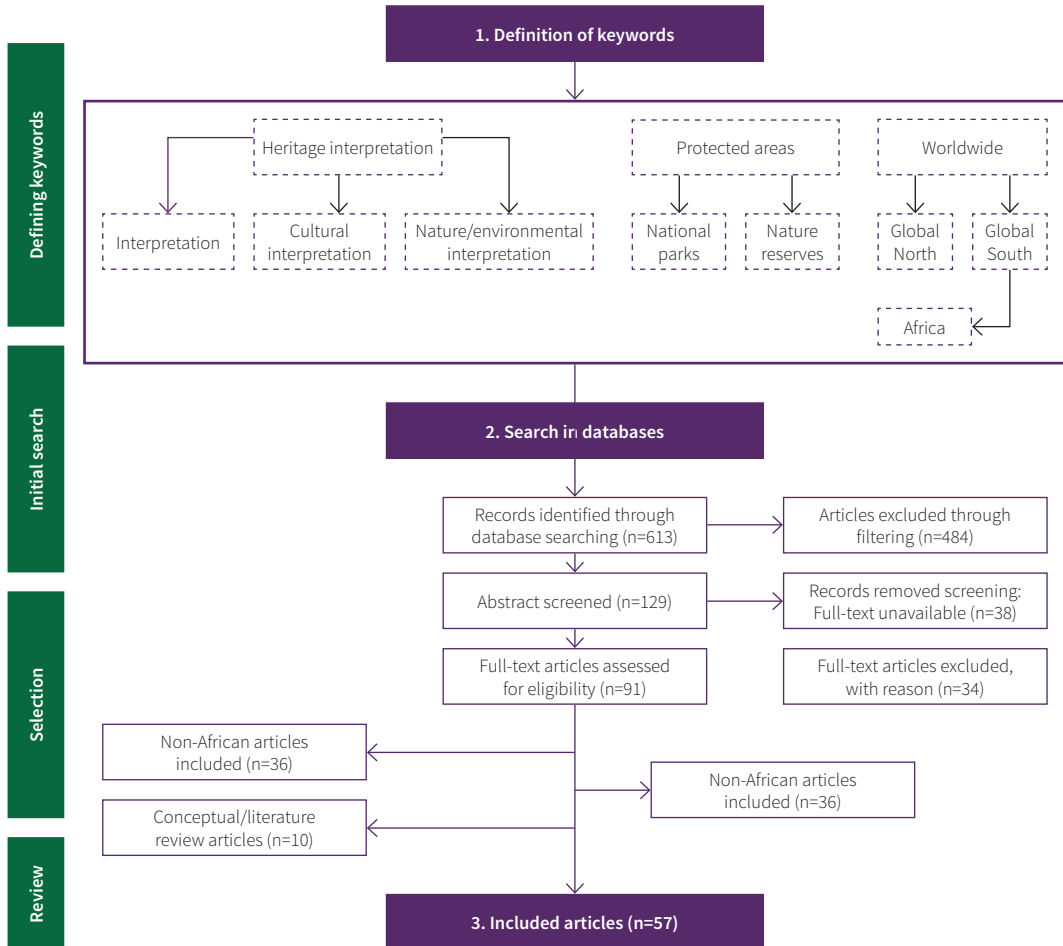


Figure 1: Flow chart illustrating the process and steps of the literature search and selection
Source: Author's own compilation

number of articles (7). This trend could be reflecting the rising interest in several international processes related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, later, to the COVID-19 pandemic, which gave rise to more research focusing on sustainable practices beyond protected areas, such as analysing visitor perceptions and behaviours regarding conservation and the equal representation of indigenous people/heritage in and in the vicinity of protected areas.

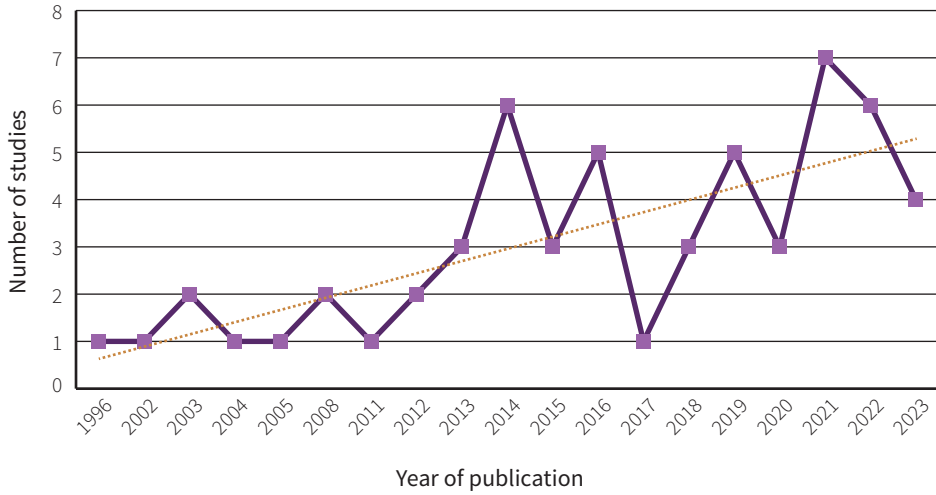


Figure 2: The number of journal articles and book chapters on heritage interpretation by year of publication
 Source: Author's own compilation

In terms of the geographical scope, the reviewed studies cover 24 countries (see Figure 3). The largest group of studies (16) concern Asia, including eight conducted in China, three in Malaysia, two in Vietnam and three in Indonesia, Jordan, and Taiwan. 11 of studies reported in the articles were conducted in Africa: five in South Africa and six in Botswana, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda. Eight studies were conducted in Australia and Australasia. Out of six studies concerning

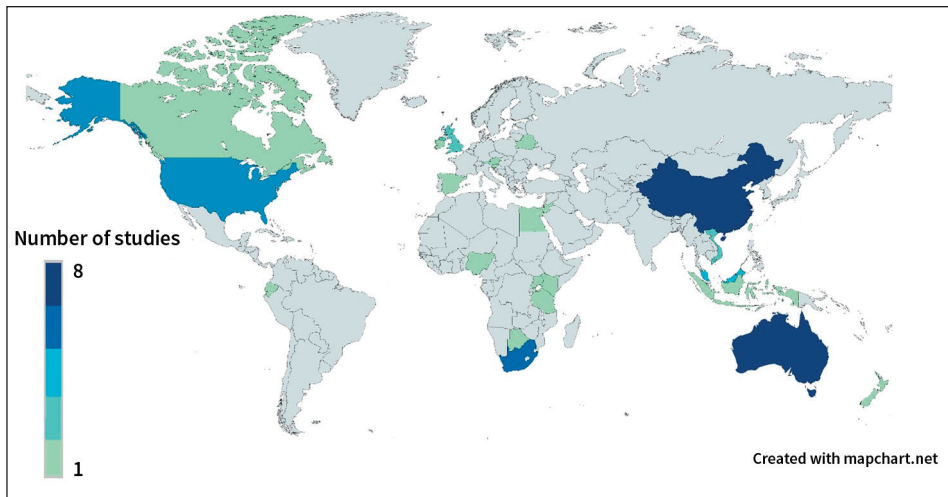


Figure 3: Geographical distribution of studies on heritage interpretation in protected areas
 Source: Author's own compilation

Europe, three were carried out in the United Kingdom and three others in Austria, Belarus, and Slovenia. Only six studies were conducted in the Americas: three in the United States, two in Alaska and Canada, and one in Ecuador.

3.2. Thematic Areas in the Literature

The studies selected for the review can be divided into several groups in terms of the main research topic (see Table 1). The biggest group of studies (21%) focused on the influence of interpretation on visitors' perceptions, behaviour, and satisfaction. Other research topics included interpretation planning, management, and evaluation (16%), environmental interpretation (16%), and contextualising literature on heritage interpretation in protected areas (12%). In other words, researchers have been interested in different stakeholders of heritage interpretation. Interpretation preferences are a central research topic in four studies (7%), while only two of the reviewed studies focused on interpreters' experiences. Heritage interpretation includes both environmental and cultural perspectives, with cultural interpretation accounting for 3% of the studies. Seven (12%) studies examined heritage interpretation contextually, while four studies (7%) identified new concepts in heritage interpretation and 7% linked heritage interpretation as a tool for sustainable development.

Table 1: Research themes covered in the reviewed studies

Research themes	Sources	%
Role of interpretation in protected areas	Moscardo et al., 2004; Trobec, 2015; Mearns & Botha, 2018; Klitsounova, 2020	7%
Interpretation planning, management, and evaluation	Orams, 1996; Archer & Wearing, 2001; Wearing & Archer, 2003; Ham & Sandberg, 2012; Robert et al., 2014; Quetel-Brunner & Griffin, 2014; Krisma & Marhaento, 2021; Juma & Khademi-Vidra, 2022; Maringer & Blank, 2023	16%
Environmental interpretation	Obua, 2003; Munro et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2013; Shittu, 2013; Ren & Folta, 2016; Phan & Schott, 2017; Dussler & Deringer, 2020; Tang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022	16%
Cultural interpretation	Wong, 2013; Keitumetse & Sikorei, 2018	3%
Influence of interpretation on visitors' perceptions, behaviour, and satisfaction	Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2005; Powell & Ham, 2008; Ballantyne, Packer, J., & Sutherland, 2011; Ballantyne et al., 2014; Jacobs & Harms, 2014; Huang et al., 2015; Loggerenberg et al., 2015; Botha et al., 2016; Kuo et al., 2016; Moreno-Melgarejo et al., 2019; Phan et al., 2019; Liao & Bartjie, 2022	21%
Interpretation preferences	Ballantyne et al., 2016; van der Merwe, Saayman & Botha, 2019; van der Merwe, Saayman & Botha, 2020; Zhao & Chan, 2023	7%
Interpreters' experiences	Ababneh, 2017; Moris & Zekry, 2021	4%
Creativity in heritage interpretation	Amin, Yok & Omar, 2014; Zhu, 2021; Johnston & Mason, 2021; Wan Shamsuddin & Harun, 2021	7%

Research themes	Sources	%
Heritage interpretation as a tool for sustainable development	Walker & Moscardo, 2014; Bidder et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2022; Moscardo & Hughes, 2023	7%
Contextualising literature on heritage interpretation in protected areas	Moscardo, 2014; Gilson & Kool, 2019; Finegan, 2019; Tatarusanu, 2021; Nowacki, 2021; Manthiou et al., 2022; Tang & Xu, 2023	12%
Total:	57	100%

Source: Author's own compilation

Next, the content of each grouped deemed most pertinent to the current or potential role of heritage interpretation in stimulating ecotourism in protected areas was identified, analysed, and synthesized based on a narrative or thematic approach proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), to present a narrative justification of the existing research:

1. Conceptualisation of heritage interpretation in protected areas
2. Role of interpretation in protected areas
3. Interpretation management
4. Creativity in heritage interpretation
5. Effectiveness of heritage interpretation in areas of sustainable development

3.3. Conceptualisation of Heritage Interpretation in Protected Areas (PAs)

The term 'interpretation' was proposed and defined by John Muir as a fundamentally personal learning process that enables the subject to transform the language of natural events into a personal experience (Wolfe, 1978). The concept has evolved over time and has been extensively applied, investigated and formalised into a new field of applied social science called Heritage Interpretation (Continenza, 2020). According to Continenza, the discipline was born in the USA and has been developed since the establishment of the US National Park Service in 1916, with the intention of advancing environmental conservation policies through the development of natural parks and the training of employees to engage visitors in a fun and educational learning experience.

The theoretical foundation for this discipline was established by Freeman Tilden in 1957. The goal was to create a new interaction between the user and cultural and natural assets by highlighting the fundamental connections between these and users' daily lives (Continenza, 2020). According to Tilden, the interpreter must elicit emotional responses in addition to providing thorough information about the event under discussion by revealing unexpected details or highlighting details that would otherwise go unnoticed (Tilden, 1957). Tilden defines heritage interpretation as:

An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experiences, and illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information (Tilden, 1957).

Table 2: Contemporary definition of heritage interpretation

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

Source: Author’s own compilation

Since the formulation of this definition, several others have been proposed (Table 2). All of them lead to the conclusion that heritage interpretation is considered an effective learning, communication, and management tool that increases visitors’ awareness of heritage sites and artefacts and aimed to protect them (Rahaman,

2018; Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011; Beck & Cable, 2002). In addition to helping tourists learn about the history of the areas they are visiting, heritage interpretation aims to popularise new ideas (such as new conservation trends), explain technical issues and physical phenomena, and make it feasible to see endangered species of animals and plants (Nowacki, 2021; Trobec, 2015; Moscardo & Ballantyne, 2008). For this reason, heritage interpretation is considered a crucial element in controlling tourist flow at natural and cultural heritage sites (Moscardo & Ballantyne, 2008).

3.4. Role of Heritage Interpretation in Protected Areas

According to Trobec (2015), the goal of PAS is to ensure that natural values, cultural heritage, landscape diversity, and biodiversity enjoy permanent protection. Reality, however, frequently diverges from this ideal despite society's favourable perception of protected areas and the conservation of the natural and cultural assets within them. Therefore, to ensure that the role of protected areas is fulfilled, all stakeholders (governments, park management, the public, and local inhabitants) should be involved and should identify with the natural and cultural heritage, which means they understand, respect, and appreciate it. Numerous methods exist for achieving this; however, heritage interpretation has recently gained popularity (Moreno-Melgarejo et al., 2020; Gilson & Kool, 2019; Continenza, Redi & Trizio, 2017; Trobec, 2015; Nowacki, 2012).

Many authors point to the role of interpretation in PAS and how through interpretation, visitors gain knowledge, people's attitudes and behaviours are changed, and tourists are encouraged to take care of the PAS and become more responsible citizens (Klitsounova, 2020; Mearns & Botha, 2018; Trobec, 2015). Furthermore, heritage interpretation can be used to solve key challenges facing PAS, such as effective management of national parks, increasing popularity, implementing sustainable tourism, and raising public awareness of the importance of parks' natural and cultural heritage (Trobec, 2015). Given the effect of increased visitation to fragile conservation areas and national parks on natural and cultural heritage, interpretation is seen as an important solution to mitigate some of the undesirable consequences of tourism in PAS (Mearns & Botha, 2018).

Numerous interpretation programs have been criticised for their predominantly Western Eurocentric approach and their strong emphasis on ecological issues (Staiff, Bushell & Kennedy, 2002). The same authors report suggestions that interpretation programs should be more culturally sensitive, should include a wider range of historical Western and non-Western contexts, and should have more emphasis on the sociocultural and ecological legacy. The fundamentals of interpretation can be applied to most situations and settings; however, when inter-

preting initiatives in practice, it is important to consider cultural appropriateness and inclusion (Mearns & Botha, 2018).

Additionally, there are numerous expectations created through social media communities for increasingly diverse audiences in PAS (Moscardo, 2022). Difficulties in controlling the detrimental effects of visitors who try to copy photographs from social media sites, such as Instagram, TikTok, and WeChat, are already visible in mainstream media (Pearce & Moscardo, 2015). The academic and professional literature has only just begun to include in-depth studies on visitors' use of mobile technology in PAS to connect to social media networks (Conti & Heldt, Cassel, 2020; Conti & Lexhagen, 2020; Lenzi, Speiran & Grasso, 2020; Tenkanen et al., 2017). These studies show that visitors rely extensively on mobile technologies, particularly to access social media groups, and that this dependence is essential to how visitors connect with, comprehend, and create their own meaningful private experiences of the environment and wildlife in PAS. Staiff (2016) noted that interpreters can no longer select and control a single narrative about a site and its significance in a digitally connected society. Instead, they must learn to cooperate and negotiate with this new connected digital strategy, which focuses on visitors as the primary source of information.

3.5. Approaches to Heritage Interpretation

Various authors have focused on the role that creativity plays in the interpretation of heritage since it is essential to enable visitors to have a thorough grasp of heritage (Zhu, 2022; Gilson & Kool, 2019; Perry, 2018; Amin, Yok & Omar, 2014). Amin, Yok & Omar (2014) cite examples of creativity in the interpretation approach, such as thematic interpretation, place of inspiration in heritage, and hot interpretation. The ability of thematic interpretation to affect visitors' attitudes and behaviours toward natural and cultural resources, as well as its significance in positively influencing both the nature and quality of visitor experiences, makes it a crucial component of conservation and sustainable tourism (Amin, Yok & Omar, 2014; Ham, 2016; Ham & Weiler 2007).

Approximately two decades ago, a thematic interpretation model was developed, primarily focusing on environmental and conservation purposes, aimed at translating the technical language used in natural science and related fields into terms that non-scientists could easily comprehend (Ham, 1992). The model consisted of four components, represented by the acronym EROT: enjoyable, relevant, organised, and thematic. The first component (enjoyable) emphasised the importance of making the interpretation engaging and motivating people to participate. The second component (relevant) involved providing stories and concepts that help individuals to connect with the park based on their own experiences. The

third component (organised) focused on offering a clear structure to guide visitors through the interpretation program. The fourth (thematic) component referred the notion that interpretation needed to be thematic by delivering a message that visitors would remember even after their visit. The fundamental premise underlying thematic interpretation was that when visitors leave with intangible values such as memories, thoughts, understanding, and new perspectives, they develop a deeper connection to the place. This, in turn, leads to higher satisfaction levels, positive word-of-mouth promotions, repeat visits, and increased on-site visitor spending (Amin, Yok & Omar, 2014).

More recently, based on the growing body of research in cognitive and behavioural science, the EROT model was revised in response to arguments that the first three components (enjoyable, relevant, and organised) were applicable to any form of entertainment (Ham, 2016). However, if the goal of interpretation was to influence visitors' attitudes towards protection agencies or foster personal connections with the park, it would be through the thematic component that park managers or guides should focus their efforts on. As a result, the order of the EROT model was changed to *thematic, organised, relevant* and *enjoyable*, represented by the acronym TORE. The TORE model was introduced as a mission-based approach to communication aimed at prompting audiences to discover personal meaning and establish personal connections with various entities, such as things, places, people, and concepts (Ham, 2016). By presenting a strong theme in an enjoyable, relevant, and organised manner, tour guides and park guides had a better chance of making a purposeful difference in visitors' thoughts, feelings, and possibly even their behaviour towards the subjects being interpreted (Ham, 2016).

Uzzell (1989) transitioned from a detached, objective approach to an active, emotion-centred interpretation using the phrase 'hot interpretation'. Such an interpretative strategy is particularly pertinent to challenging heritage sites and PAS because interpretation can help local populations and visitors understand and appreciate heritage assets and their associated historical meanings and values. More crucially, hot interpretation, as suggested by Ballantyne, Packer, & Bond (2012), not only elicits uncomfortable emotions, but also encourages contemplation and reassessment of history as a form of public education. Thus, heritage interpretation encourages an open, inclusive, and critical reflection on the nature of historical events in this way rather than pressuring people to reach a conclusion. Zhu (2022), inspired by the hot interpretation approach, claims that interpretation can achieve four goals: knowledge and fact sharing, understanding and recognition, imagination and reflection, and peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Building on the hot interpretation approach, Gilson and Kool (2019) note that limited research has been conducted on the concept of inspiration within heritage

interpretation, although the term is used regularly within the field. They identified nine inspiration characteristics related to the field of interpretation in practice. Particularly intriguing were the differences between being inspired by and being inspired to, as well as the notions that inspiration is contagious, uplifting, unique, transcendent, unexpected, holistic, and involves receptivity (Gilson & Kool, 2019).

3.6. Interpretation Management

With ecotourism widely promoted in association with the management of PAS in developing countries, one of the key strategies for achieving this wide range of lofty ideals is the frequent reliance on tour guides or park guides to inform, involve, and inspire visitors (Amin, Yok & Omar, 2014). Interpretation is commonly used by protected area management to support visitor management goals (Worboys et al., 2015) and is frequently a key component of and essential to tourists' views of a fulfilling experience (Moscardo, 2017). Research suggests that effective protected area interpretation and information enables visitors to derive maximum satisfaction with very little or no disturbance to the natural, cultural, and scenic features of the area (Moscardo, 2017; Shittu, 2013). Thus, interpretation is the process of providing each visitor with an opportunity to personally connect with a place, although these connections tend to vary from person to person. Heritage interpretation strives to enrich experiences, motivate activities, and increase knowledge to enable the accomplishment of all these goals (Nowacki, 2012). This is because heritage interpretation in PAS aims to reveal meaning and forge connections between tourists and natural and cultural heritage (Finegan, 2019; Nowacki, 2012).

The literature available on heritage interpretation in PAS places emphasis on interpretative techniques, demand, and/or preferences, as well as management (Gilson & Kool, 2019; Moreno-Melgarejo et al., 2019; Ababneh, 2017; Trobec, 2015; Quetel-Brunner & Griffin, 2014). This implies that ingrained/indigenous knowledge supporting both environmental and cultural interpretations is undeserving of scrutiny, which is not justified. The techniques for interpreting this knowledge and determining whether content delivery was successful are as crucial as how one learns what one interprets. Finegan (2019) notes that although the ultimate goal of interpretation is to get individuals to contemplate deeper, more intricate meanings of natural and cultural resources, limited consideration is given to the provision of these meanings and knowledge. In the Canadian national park system, very little is said about indigenous people and cultures in park interpretation, despite the fact that the use and occupation of the lands by indigenous peoples dates back thousands of years (Johnston & Mason, 2021).

In a study conducted by van der Merwe et al. (2020), it was noted that tourists favoured the interpretation of nature and heritage and wanted to gain more in-

depth information about them. Thus, the product (result) of interpretation is the increased tourist knowledge of natural and cultural heritage in PAS. Interpretation can involve both a program and an activity. As a program establishes a set of objectives for the things a visitor should understand, it requires skills and techniques to create understanding (van der Merwe et al., 2019). Interpretation can be divided into two types: direct, which takes place in face-to-face interaction and communication, such as guided walks and drives, or indirect or 'static,' which relies on printed materials, signage, exhibits, self-guided walks, prepared tour comments on cassettes or DVDs, virtual tours, or other electronic media (Nowacki, 2021; Boehm, 2011; Ham & Weiler, 2007). These media can be used to communicate with audiences in three different ways: educational (what to learn), behavioural (how to act and where to walk or places to visit), and emotional (what to feel). Chen and Weiler (2017) note that high-quality interpretation has been shown to significantly improve visitors' enjoyment and experience of national parks (experiential outcomes), which in turn encourages satisfied visitors to return and refer other potential visitors to national parks (economic outcomes), and it can improve understanding and encourage pro-conservation behaviour (environmental outcome).

3.7. Effectiveness of Heritage Interpretation in Areas of Sustainable Development

Tourism and sustainability have a complex relationship, with ecotourism's potential to have a positive impact on sustainability receiving a lot of attention (Walker & Moscardo, 2014). PAS are particularly susceptible to sustainability issues. There has been evidence of a significant and swift increase in international travel before the COVID-19 pandemic (Balmford et al., 2015) and PAS are once more under strain as a result of a general post-pandemic shift in preferences toward nature-based activities (Kupfer et al., 2021). According to Moscardo and Hughes (2023), the interpretation of protected natural areas can reduce the negative environmental effects of visitor activities and motivate them to adopt sustainable behaviours both at and away from tourist attractions. Thus, one commendable suggestion is to use visitor experiences, particularly those emphasising interpretation, to activate or alter sustainability-related values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours both in the locations visited and elsewhere. However, interpretation has frequently concentrated on highlighting the unique characteristics of PAS rather than using these characteristics as a resource for more comprehensive sustainability education.

- Sustainability is understood as a method of human decision-making that aims to protect and improve natural capital while also generating general gains in human, social, cultural, and political capital that underpins human flourishing (Moscardo & Hughes, 2023; Shoeb-Ur-Rahman et al., 2020;

Schaubroeck & Rugani, 2017). Sustainability necessitates thinking about how to reduce or eliminate the harmful effects of actions on the environment and nearby communities. Social justice, morality, and inclusivity are also significant issues (Moscardo & Hughes, 2023). Breiby et al. (2020) defined a sustainable tourist experience as having the following characteristics:

- It consists solely of initiatives and facilities that contribute to local community goals and have little to no adverse effects on the immediate environment.
- It is locally manufactured, recyclable, morally sound, and generated with little or no negative environmental effects.
- It provides honest, inclusive employment with favourable working circumstances for employees.
- It uses interpretation to persuade visitors to take sustainable actions outside the immediate environment, in addition to encouraging them to minimise their immediate effects on the environment.

It encourages visitors to either travel shorter distances or opt for more environment-friendly transportation methods to reach their destination.

Until recently, protected area interpretation rarely explicitly considered sustainability education outside the interpreted site (Moscardo & Hughes, 2023). This is partly due to a long-standing emphasis on interpreting the site itself and, in part, to the difficulty of relaying sustainability (Markman, 2018). This poses difficulties for interpreters because they must simultaneously create an enjoyable experience, control visitor impacts on the site, and determine how to connect the unique aspects of what they are interpreting to the greater sustainability agenda (Moscardo & Hughes, 2023).

4. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this systematic literature review was to explore the concept of heritage interpretation as a catalyst for enhancing ecotourism in PAS. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on ecotourism by identifying the main areas of knowledge present in the field of heritage interpretation in PAS, including the conceptualisation of heritage interpretation in PAS, the role of interpretation in PAS, interpretation management, creativity in heritage interpretation, and the effectiveness of heritage interpretation in areas of sustainable development. Although heritage interpretation in its broadest sense has been around for a while, it has become the topic of research relatively recently and has been closely related

to the development of national parks and the establishment of tourism. Though heritage interpretation has its roots in the founding and development of the first national parks in the USA, it is practised in PAS globally. PAS in English-speaking countries, which have the longest history, are often considered to be the most well-established. The management of sensitive heritage sites can be accomplished in part by interpreting both the natural and cultural heritage in PAS to enhance the quality of tourism experiences and change visitor behaviour. Furthermore, visitors could be enticed into the setting, immersed in the experience, and given a true understanding of nature. Interpretive components, with messages and activities aimed at inspiring visitors to consider their present and future roles in environmental protection, should be added to such experiences to enhance them. Thus, it is important for interpreters to establish a link between the place being visited and tourists' regular lives. To do this, it is necessary to bring sustainability concerns close to visitors in both time and space, as well as to offer advice on simple but effective measures that they may take once they leave the site. The goal is to offer these opportunities in a way that draws in and keeps a variety of huge numbers of visitors while avoiding the addition of amenities and features that have a negative influence on the environment.

Future research in this field could include (1) empirical studies on the role of heritage interpretation in solving the main challenges faced by protected area managers and possible solutions, (2) empirical knowledge concerning inspiration in heritage interpretation and how it can be used to enhance and improve the interpretive experience, (3) empirical studies into representations of indigenous people in the interpretive process, and (4) building of adaptive capacity and possible strategies for continuous improvement and applicable adaptation of trends in heritage interpretive approaches, especially in the light of the ever-expanding field of technology. More studies in this area are needed given the scarcity of research from an African perspective.

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Interpretacja dziedzictwa jako katalizator zrównoważonej ekoturystyki na obszarach chronionych: systematyczny przegląd literatury

Streszczenie. Artykuł prezentuje systematyczny przegląd literatury, żeby zbadać rolę interpretacji dziedzictwa jako katalizatora zrównoważonej ekoturystyki na obszarach chronionych. Uznając obszary chronione za formę ochrony środowiska naturalnego, autorzy dokonali przeglądu literatury, aby zidentyfikować trendy we współczesnym dyskursie naukowym dotyczące koncepcji interpretacji dziedzictwa na obszarach chronionych. Po przeszukaniu głównych baz naukowych (Sabinet, Scopus, Emerald, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis Online oraz stron internetowe czasopism) autorzy wyodrębnili 129 publikacji, z których 57 spełniło kryteria przyjęte w badaniu. Po przeanalizowaniu treści i określeniu głównych zagadnień okazało się, że większość badań dotyczyła globalnej Północy, a poruszane tematy obejmowały rolę interpretacji dziedzictwa na obszarach chronionych, planowanie interpretacji, zarządzanie i ewaluację, interpretację środowiskową, interpretację kulturową, wpływ interpretacji na postrzeganie, zachowanie i satysfakcję zwiedzających, preferencje interpretacyjne, doświadczenia interpretatorów, kreatywność w interpretacji dziedzictwa oraz interpretację dziedzictwa dla zrównoważonego rozwoju.

Słowa kluczowe: interpretacja dziedzictwa, ekoturystyka, obszary chronione, systematyczny przegląd literatury



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