

# A place that needs no introduction

or practical advice on how to be heard

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Photo: V. Ramanaukaitė

‘This place needs no introduction’ – there are many places of interest in the world that deserve such definition. Very few would doubt their uniqueness, the importance of heritage, and added value for tourism as well as human welfare.

This is exactly why effective communication is one of the pillars which help successful management of the heritage sites. It does not only inform and attract, it should also be designed to form the opinion of target audiences as well as their behaviour.

The following recommendations are an additional material to Prof. J. Veverka’s slides addressed to the participants of an international seminar which was held on September 28-29, 2015 in Nida, and are dedicated to the managers of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The file includes practical advice for heritage site managers responsible for the planning and implementation of communication, and is universal and easily adaptable. The following recommendations aim to emphasize the aspects that could be useful in attracting target visitors and raising awareness of the heritage site, as well as the awareness of its outstanding universal value.



## The universal language of signs and directions

The essence of the effective communication is based on assumption that nothing actually goes without saying, not even for a visitor who visits the cultural landscape of sand dunes (in Curonian spit, parts of which stretch in both Russian and Lithuanian territories) on a yearly basis. He does know the name of the location, however, could he describe its unique outstanding value, if asked?

A good information billboard would invite a visitor to look for something, smell it, touch it, reach for it... It would suggest a certain memorable activity.

The signs are a universal language which serves as information provider and attention seeker. Therefore, one should never underestimate their importance, be it a welcoming sign at the site's border, trail, exhibit sign or directions to a souvenir shop or a WC.



# Making an information board?

The two most important questions to be asked:

1. Why would a visitor want to know this?
2. What do you want him to do with this information?

Remember the best of the advertising: it provokes your attention, provides information that might be important for you, it is short and clearly indicates the action expected from you. That's also the way to make information boards.

- ➔ A good information board will provoke attention with a catchy illustration or headline which suggests its content.
- ➔ 100 words in no less than 30 pt font is about the right length of the text.
- ➔ Do not forget your main communication message: it should be revealed in every information board, every brochure, every sign.
- ➔ The content is far more important than its appearance – a rule that is often forgotten, since technological implementation of the board is rarely appreciated by visitors. Do invest in technologies if they substantially help to reveal the content.
- ➔ The visitor should be able to get the main message in about 15 seconds.

10-30-50-90. These figures illustrate that visitors remember only 10 percent of what they hear, 30 percent of what they read, 50 percent of what they see, and 90 percent of what they do.



One of the suggested activities at the Wadden Sea national park – tidal walks

Photo: Koruko

- UNESCO is one of the most recognisable signs among tourists, especially those seeking for unique experiences. It emphasizes the site's uniqueness world-wide – so use it. Compare: the official Denmark's tourism site points out the site's world heritage status already in the headline. However, in the official Lithuanian tourism website similar status of the Curonian spit is only mentioned among other features.
- If travelling by car, you may never get to discover the uniqueness of the Curonian spit. The journey to the Curonian spit to all its visitors begins at a ferry terminal. Many of them do not even get out of their cars, however, they all pay for their tickets (ticket office is a perfect spot for spreading information) and look for departure time at info board, which might also be used for showing three key points: what is this place, why is this place special and what experiences it offers. A simple way to give an impression of a warm welcome and visitor care.
- Languages. Languages. Languages. Every sign, every direction, every line written in foreign language show that the convenience and experience of a foreign visitor has also been taken into account.
- In the times of social networking, map the best panoramic spot, the most romantic bench, etc., so that the visitor may take a selfie. Relate these places with the facts you are aiming to inform about. For instance: 'stop here and make a selfie. Not only this place has the best panoramic view: you can also see [the towers of the church/the dunes/you are at the highest spot of the Curonian spit].
- A simple landmark on the border of the site's territory 'see you again' will remind the visitors that they are leaving a unique heritage site.

# Who would like to see the Struve Geodetic Arc?



Source: vilnius-tourism.lt

Various internet sources indicate that 'The Struve Geodetic Arc is a chain of survey triangulations stretching from Hammerfest in Norway to the Black Sea, through ten countries and over 2,820 km, which yielded the first accurate measurement of a meridian'.

Triangulation? Accurate measurement of a meridian? It is rather important for a visitor to know what he could see and do on the site – that information, however, is not provided.

Heritage site visitors, as well as all types of tourists, aim to escape their usual routine and seek for new experiences or activities that are not included in their daily agenda.

This sets the communication tone: they prefer informal, friendly tone, as well as easily understandable information.

We could hardly find a site manager who would not be an avid lover and an active guardian of the site. He is eager to introduce his visitors with the fascinating history of the site, however, the scientist's passion may confront the holidaymaker's shallowness.

# ‘Do not touch the exhibits!’



What is the difference between the dunes in Nida, Palanga and Jurmala? Those who know the answer tend to protect the Curonian spit dunes more.

Photo: V. Ramanauskaitė

Having said that, here are a few recommendations:

- ➔ When writing for the information board, keep it simple: how would you tell the story to your grandmother, little brother or the best friend? This will help to avoid ‘triangulation’ and other less common definitions.
- ➔ Visitors are often moralised and put into shame when asked for caring and protection. The best way to change or encourage certain behaviour is by explaining and provoking interest, for instance ‘Did you know that....’ No threatening!
- ➔ Phrases like ‘Do not step on the meadow!’, ‘Do not leave your trash!’, ‘It is strictly forbidden to do...[fill in the gap]’ repel, in worst cases – even provoke. Instead, let the visitors know about growing amounts of trash and money spent to utilise it, and how visitors contribute to a much more effective utilisation if they leave their trash where they are asked to.

# The importance of **all** target audiences

The more precisely you identify your target audiences, the more successful your communication is. Detailed description of the audience and its behaviour will lead you to more ideas on how to reach, attract them, offer experiences, and – most importantly – to communicate these to target audiences. Think of, for example, young families: would they appreciate a stroller storage service, a small nursery, etc.? Would they see it as an added value to their visit?

Important: most site managers put their visitor communication as communication priority (correct!), while local community and authorities, governmental institutions are considered as partners. However, it should not be forgotten that they are also an additional communication channel as well as the target audience. It is highly important to remember this in cases you strive for a significant change of public opinion.

In other words, if your partners and neighbours are not fully aware of your site's uniqueness, it may cause difficulties in cases like discussions regarding new constructions in accordance to heritage regulations, etc. For instance, almost every local resident would remember a situation when he did not know the answer to the question from a visiting guest about the local heritage site.



- ➔ Do inform local businesses about all visitor experience related news (new exhibits, services, working hours on bank holidays, etc.). In special cases, you may even consider making a special presentation for them. Hence, you would solve two problems at once: establish/keep a contact and make sure they know your site has always something new to offer.
- ➔ Do look for local business partners – they are constantly seeking for new marketing opportunities. A coffee shop that is popular among tourists might gladly use paper napkins, trays or coasters with interesting facts about your old town, sand dunes printed on them. You'd be surprised how receptive a client is when waiting for his dish or a cup of coffee to come.
- ➔ Have a list of 'things to do at [fill in the name] heritage site prepared in at least several foreign languages (foreign languages are an issue for places that are not yet familiar to significant number of foreign tourists) and distribute it through local hospitality service providers, especially short term rentals. Most of them use websites like booking.com, airbnb.com, tripadvisor.com and will make use of adding such information to their profile.
- ➔ When producing a new leaflet, distribute a part of the circulation to the local residents and business, especially those mentioned above.
  - ! In this age of technology leaflets, booklets and the like printed mass distributional material have become as somewhat 'old-fashioned advertising'. It is not necessarily so – ask private service providers to distribute their leaflets to every car in the enormous queue at the ferry port during peak season. **Distribution places and forms are the two important factors that help making the most of the distributional material.** Could your message about the uniqueness of the sand dunes/ an invitation to visit the site/ a request for preservation of the site/ an important fact about the old town, etc. appear on paper trays or coasters at a local restaurant? Printed on the back side of a ferry ticket or individually packed travel wet wipes (no one throws away them without using)? Paper caps or perhaps even plastic rain coats (distributed if rain is forecasted).
- ➔ Any discussions or implementation regarding heritage regulations must be preceded by an informational/educational campaign. In most cases, new or amended regulations cause negative reactions within local communities, therefore, it is crucial to communicate reasons for such needs and benefits they will bring beforehand.

➔ For instance, if local residents do not follow recommendations to paint the exterior of their heritage property in traditional colour that has been used locally for ages (such recommendation actually exists in the Curonian Spit, Lithuania (a picture bellow...))

➔... hold a lecture with an independent key speaker that would reveal the history and reasons of the formation of such colour range. Do emphasize how tourist businesses benefit from the attributes of unique local architecture, present case studies. Ask local paint shop or DIY store partner to offer a discount for certain paint as well as provide practical advice on painting the house.

➔ Make sure the property owners can always check the right colour codes online and are provided with correct colour codes in different pallets.

➔ Have a local paint shop provided with basic information about traditional colour scheme.

➔ Publish an article on the topic in a local newspaper.



Photo: T. Pusch

➔ If you spot a new house beautifully repainted in traditional colour scheme, post about it on your site's/municipality's/tourist information centre's Facebook profile.

➔ A small but a lovely detail: send a thank you note to all the campaign's partners. It emphasizes everyone's input, as well as ensures continuity. Besides, it is yet another way of spreading your message through. All in all, such a cooperation model is universal.



Photo: B. Rostad

## In the spotlight of attention - the media

Media relations are quite underestimated when it comes to communication planning of most touristic objects, including the heritage sites, at least in Lithuania. Many of them hardly have media relations as a thoroughly planned and implemented activity, and are mostly remembered only during the start of the new season or public discussions on heritage preservation and regulation.

The amount of news flow today and the total audience reach require truly hot topics, that are, however, most often negative. Therefore, when looking for the publicity in the media, it might be useful to explore possibilities of publicity in the specialised/niche media that targets specific narrow audience.

For instance, what could a biker do in the Curonian spit? Marathon runner – in Vilnius? Nordic walking lover – both in Vilnius and the Curonian spit? Ornithologist – in the Vega archipelago? The internet is full of blog and websites dedicated to healthy lifestyle, and most of them would appreciate the information about the experience possibilities for their audience at the unique World heritage sites.



Informal and friendly tone of communication is yet a challenge for organisations that have profiles in Facebook, at least for most of Lithuanian ones. However, it is a great tool for visitor communication, worth of investment.

**Even though social networks are an informal platform, it is essential to define communication goals, audience and message here as well.**

Facebook keeps on significantly diminishing possibilities of free advertising, therefore thoroughly defined target audiences (age, place, hobbies, education, job, etc.) help increase total reach, especially through sponsored posts.

Before posting, think – why would the audience care? For instance, the post ‘Trees being cut near Juodkrante for the new bike road’ emphasises the fact, that trees are being cut. It would sound better if written: ‘New bike road coming soon: even more experiences for bike lovers’.

Another post that actually exists: „Tree cutting in the Curonian spit for the sake of nature and landscape”. It also mentions ‘the strictest regulations’ and links to bureaucratic press release of the Ministry of Environment (is there a person who could read it to the end?). What if it wrote: “The Curonian spit will soon be adorned with new sapling”.

A few more examples that illustrate how usual things might inspire FB posts:

- ➔ Weekend weather forecast? Let your visitor know all the outdoor activities available. Point out that there is no bad weather for the activities you provide.
- ➔ Change of ferry timetable? It is even more convenient to reach the Curonian spit.
- ➔ The fountains are finally on again? When was the first fountain built here?
- ➔ Tonight is an exceptionally starry night or special moon? Tag the places where the view is best.