

### Interpretation for Public Sustainability Education



#### Speakers

- Dr Prithi Nambiar, Senior Programme Director at CEE
- Mr Vinod Daniel, Chairman of AUS Heritage and Managing trustee of India vision Institute
- Dr P N Vasanti, Director General of CMS
- Mr David Manski, Former Director, Acadia National Park
- Ms Neha Raghav, Director- Education, WWF
- Mr Pacco Bunnik, Architect and Urban Designer

#### Presentations and Key Messages

**Dr Prithi Nambiar (CEE)** discussed that education for sustainability is the primary focus, with interpretation defined primarily through visual communication. She highlighted that CEE has designed and executed many interpretation programmes, and that interpretation must engage people's senses, as merely visiting parks and sanctuaries is insufficient for public education. The aim is that people's understanding of biodiversity and ecosystems will motivate them to conserve these resources, and that public areas, such as parks and sanctuaries, offer valuable opportunities for public education.

She further explained that creating an emotional connection, for example with climate change and cultural heritage, instils a sense of value and a notion of sustainability, which is the core message to be conveyed. Information and learning need to be science-based, accurate, engaging, and interesting, typically targeting all age groups and both interested and uninterested individuals. The design aspect is as crucial as research and content development.

Dr Prithi also shared that successful interpretation requires collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including government bodies, museums, municipal corporations, corporates, and

NGOs. Multimedia products for interpretation include photo-text panels, dioramas, Augmented Reality signage, and publications.

She provided examples of CEE's numerous interpretation projects, such as a mobile exhibition called 'Science Express' which reached 18 million people, and a Mumbai exhibition in a van that educated people about climate change in rural areas. Recent work for the Indore Municipal Corporation focused on Sirpur Lake. CEE has also done extensive interpretation work for the Sabarmati Ashram over the years, primarily through signage and panels. Other projects include an outdoor nature trail in Tadoba, featuring constructed dioramas to facilitate wildlife viewing, and cultural interpretation for the Sajjangargh 'Monsoon Palace' in Udaipur. CEE also produces publications/brochures, films, and documentaries.

Finally, Dr Prithi spoke about 'Global citizenship' as another interactive and engaging programme aiming to promote conservation. She concluded that educating for sustainability action ultimately encompasses ecology, culture, history, learning, and problem-solving, posing the fundamental question: "What can you do as a citizen towards sustainability?"

**Mr Vinod Daniel (AUS Heritage)** discussed the evolving role of museums, explaining that they encompass regular, heritage, and interpretation sites, as well as various collections. He shared an instance where, breaking traditional rules, he allowed visitors to touch a specific island-made cloth within a museum. This initiative enabled visitors to feel, document, and study the material, fostering the potential to recreate and sell these objects, thus revitalising tradition.

Mr. Daniel also recounted an anecdote about a man from Vanuatu with an art collection who sang a song detailing the trajectory of spears, implying that understanding the song could help one dodge a thrown spear. This example underscored the importance of focusing on intangible heritage alongside tangible collections. He stressed that museums must go beyond merely displaying objects. They need to tell compelling stories and provoke thought.

Furthermore, Daniel highlighted practical challenges, noting that museums are highly energy-intensive, with up to 60% of their budget often allocated to electricity. This necessitates exploring alternate energy sources. He shared an example of museum curators, whom he described as experts in storytelling, transforming a 'fake' sculpture in a California museum into an engaging "true or false" public question. Given that museums serve as custodians of objects potentially millions of years old, his final message was clear: museums should strive to enhance sustainability, raise public awareness, and contribute to the well-being of the planet.

**Dr P N Vasanti (CMS)** discussed her view that interpretation involves signs that connect to both the heart and the mind. She emphasised that in these times of technology, when interpretation initiates discourse, real action and inspiration can follow. She cited a project at the Shri Ram School in Delhi, where students successfully campaigned to ban the use of mongoose hair in brushes through their protests.

She further stated that films should initiate a dialogue and bring various stakeholders together, connecting global issues to local realities and prompting people to ask, "What is the issue?" Dr Vasanti shared examples of youth engagement programmes they ran, such as 'What is water?' for which they made a film and utilised technology to engage people.

She concluded by highlighting that the biggest challenge facing the environment is the sentiment of “It’s not my job,” stressing that it is everybody’s responsibility to make the world a healthier place.

**Mr David Manski (Former Director, Acadia National Park)** discussed his role in inspiring visitors to protected areas in the U.S.A. and focusing on park conservation. He explained that the U.S.A. national park system is part of the National Government, with courts, Congress making laws, and the president developing policies. The Parks Agency, part of the Department of Interior, is the equivalent of a Ministry of Environment, operating under the land management agency where many conservation organisations exist. At the state level, they protect state parks.

He highlighted that in 1916, Congress established the National Park System with a focus on conserving nature and its heritage, aiming to protect it and develop effective policies. National parks are dedicated to enjoyment, education, and inspiration, citing the Statue of Liberty as a protected national park site. The national parks in the United States employ 20,000 staff, cover 85 million acres, and receive approximately 325 million annual visits. All sorts of employees contribute, including teachers and scientists, who are often referred to as rangers. He shared an anecdote about Betty, a teacher and ranger who retired at 100 years old, having focused on the role of African-American women during World War II while men were fighting.

Dr. Manski further explained that every park has a visitor centre to orient people and provide maps, information, and interpretation. The parks also offer teacher/ranger-led walks and lectures. There is a ‘Junior Ranger’ programme for children aged 5-13, involving activities designed to teach them about conservation values and challenges. A Junior Ranger badge is awarded upon completion.

He also discussed his involvement in local schools, mentioning Acadia National Park, his last posting, which focused more on field-based learning than indoor activities. In the state of Maine, a citizen science program focused on real data collection, engaging children to monitor insects. This led to the discovery of 1,600 new insect species for the park, primarily involving schoolchildren and their parents. Finally, he noted that jobs were created for the next generation of conservation leaders.

**Ms Neha Raghav (WWF India)** discussed her focus on five key 'M's: Motive, Messaging, Medium, Milestones, and Magnify. She explained that the motive could be living in harmony with nature, and examples of messaging include raising awareness, changing behaviour, and raising funds. She emphasised the importance of ensuring the message conveys how biodiversity loss contributes to climate change.

She detailed various types of emotional messaging, such as conveying to schoolchildren that “Your children might not get water” to highlight the importance of water conservation. Fact-based messaging involves presenting facts and allowing people to interpret them, as seen in the WWF’s ‘Living Planet Report’, which studied 5,000 wildlife species. Behaviour-based messaging provides facts and calls for action, distinct from empathy-based messaging. She also mentioned storytelling messages, exemplified by Afroz Shah motivating people to clean beaches and take action in local ecosystems.

As a practical application, Raghav spoke about Sanjay Van National Park in Delhi, a reserve forest in the heart of the city, characterised as semi-arid and rocky with urban wildlife, where the Honey Buzzard serves as its mascot. She noted that different engagements cater to various audiences. Her team conducted surveys, dividing the park into seven sections with seven teams to document

biodiversity, which led to the discovery of a new species of leopard gecko. They also initiated a nature club in the park.

Regarding mediums, she mentioned developing field guides, such as 'Birds of North India', and conducting organised guided nature walks in parks. A digital exhibition on raptors (birds) in Delhi is now available online, eliminating the need for physical attendance. She also highlighted targeted campaigns, such as a water campaign, as examples of milestones. Finally, she noted that Vishwanathan Anand, serving as an education ambassador, advocated the practice of sustainability ourselves.

**Mr Paco Bunnik** discussed focusing on societal, political, and cultural forces which drive innovation and engage stakeholders. He noted that in Amsterdam, with a million people, nature interweaves in the centre of the city. He cited instances of social resistance, such as protests against construction in 1975, and social activism in Paris in 1977, where people displayed road safety messages during a car strike. In 2023, a protest was held regarding the housing crisis, and in 2024, the 'Extinction Rebellion' was seen blocking highways in the CBD. He also highlighted 'out-of-the-box' political activism, mentioning thousands of meme artists in Bogota stopping cars to let children and women cross, and a march for women's safety.

Mr. Bunnik spoke about an international competition for reinventing Paris, which focused on urban design for 23 different sites, giving the best plans for each, with one winner presenting their plan on just two A4 sheets. He highlighted Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo swimming in the Seine River as it was cleaned up in time for the 2024 Olympics. He then related this to Ahmedabad being a contender for the 2036 Olympics, stating that the aim should be for the people, for the community, and the environment.

He also described a project in the poorest area of Amsterdam called 'Schools Reinventing', where schoolchildren redesigned the library and the surrounding square using 'Minecraft' and virtual reality. He shared his involvement in Amsterdam's strategies for public participation in sustainable development, including the construction of a new library in a low-income area of Amsterdam, which took five years to complete, incorporating educational and technological elements for teenagers.