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# FEASIBILITY STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL ROUTE “THE BALTS’ ROAD”

The feasibility study was prepared as part of the 2021–2027 Interreg VI-A Lithuania–Poland Cross-Border Cooperation Programme project *“Improve attractiveness of Lithuanian–Polish border region through cross-border cooperation and sustainable use of Balts cultural heritage by creating the international cultural route ‘The Balts’ Road’, acronym ‘Balts’ Road LT–PL’, No. LTPL00327.”*

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## About the Project “Balts’ Road LT–PL”

**“Improve the attractiveness of the Lithuania–Poland border region through cross-border cooperation and the sustainable use of Balts cultural heritage by creating the international cultural route ‘Balts Road’.”**

“Balts’ Road” is a project that gives tourism deeper meaning by combining history, nature, and contemporary culture into one memorable experience. It is an international cultural route that previously connected historical Balts settlements in Lithuania and Latvia, and now also extends into Poland. The route promotes interregional mobility and enables visitors to discover the rich cultural heritage of the Balts, preserved both in natural landscapes and in museums.

“Balts’ Road” offers a holistic travel experience that includes not only guided tours, but also museums, craft centers, educational programs, and the authentic flavors of local cuisine. The project has united Balts heritage sites in the Lithuanian–Polish border regions into one coherent tourism destination. Based on academic sources, new heritage objects and services related to Balts culture are continuously being integrated, and new travel routes are being developed. By creating a sustainable travel experience, “Balts’ Road” aims to increase the visibility and attractiveness of these regions and make them more accessible to visitors.

To achieve this goal, modern communication tools are widely used, including social media content, video production and broadcasting on Lithuanian and Polish television channels, as well as information published on the website [www.baltukelias.lt](http://www.baltukelias.lt) in four languages, making the project accessible to travelers from different countries.

“Balts’ Road” is an international project aimed at promoting the sustainable use, preservation, and development of Balts cultural heritage sites, services, and products in the Lithuanian–Polish border regions. The project emerged from the need to protect ancient Balts culture, encourage public interest in it, and strengthen cultural identity and community pride. At the same time, it provides tourists with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the region’s history and traditional way of life.

Project No. LTPL00327 is implemented by:

Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre (Lithuania) [www.visitsiauliai.lt](http://www.visitsiauliai.lt)

Vilkaviškis Tourism and Business Information Centre (Lithuania) [www.vilkaviskisinfo.lt](http://www.vilkaviskisinfo.lt)

Association “Goldap Community Foundation” (Poland) [www.funduszgoldap.pl](http://www.funduszgoldap.pl)



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# 1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT, CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE, AND CONTEXT OF THE BALTS' ROAD

Dr Rasuolė Andrulienė

Cultural routes are a key instrument of contemporary heritage preservation and cultural tourism, offering a means to revitalise historical, social, and cultural phenomena through territorial connections and symbolic narratives. The Balts' Road draws on the historical, linguistic, mythological, and cultural heritage of the Balts, underscoring its significance for both national identity and the broader European historical and cultural context. This initiative seeks not only to develop tourism itineraries, but also to foster an ongoing and dynamic cultural process that brings together diverse communities through activities centred on the shared identity, memory, and heritage of the Balts.

The concept of the Balts' Road emerged as a cross-border initiative between Lithuania and Latvia, aimed at promoting Balts heritage through cultural tourism. The initiative commenced in 2017 with the launch of the international project *The Balts' Road*, followed by *Explore the Balts*. These projects conducted a comprehensive analysis of Balts cultural heritage, identified potential tourism routes, assessed infrastructure readiness, and formulated communication strategies. In addition to mapping sites of interest, they also highlighted living traditions and the role of local communities. The ongoing *The Balts' Road LT–PL* project represents the first cross-border cooperation between Lithuania and Poland, connecting Balts heritage sites in the border region and further expanding the international scope of the Balts' Road.

Based on previous feasibility studies, the Balts' Road connects the historical territories of the Balts tribes (Curonians, Selonians, Semigallians, Yotvingians, Latgalians, Prussians, Samogitians, and Aukštaitians). This has resulted in an extensive geographical road linking sites of interest in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, including museums, hillforts, mythological sites, folklore events, local communities, and educational programmes. It is important to note that the creation of the Balts' Road involved the active participation of experts, educational institutions, tourism information centres, and other partners.

At the cross-border level, the Balts' Cultural Road fosters:

- **Cultural identity** – reinforcing the self-awareness of Balts communities, as well as the appreciation and dissemination of their heritage. The Balts’ Road has evolved into a platform for dialogue on historical memory, where the values of Balts culture are revived through symbols, traditions, and landscapes.
- **Social engagement** – actively involving local communities, artisans, educational providers, and other service operators. This encourages cross-sector cooperation, the mobilisation of regional communities, intergenerational dialogue, and non-formal education through initiatives such as living history festivals and educational camps.
- **Economic potential** – increasing cultural tourism flows, creating new services and jobs, and stimulating small businesses (craft centres, educational programmes, guided tours, accommodation, and catering services). The Balts’ Road contributes to enhancing regional attractiveness, developing seasonal tourism, and promoting local products.

It is important to emphasise that the Balts’ Road promotes sustainable tourism grounded in local culture, ecology, and respect for local communities. It provides an alternative to mass tourism by focusing on slow, experiential travel, cultural engagement, and long-term impact.

The Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes Programme requires cultural routes to be based on a shared European cultural theme, to have a cross-border dimension, to be supported by scientific research, and to possess an integrated management structure. The Balts’ Road meets these criteria:

- Cross-border scope (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland) – with potential expansion to a wider European level through partnerships with other regions where traces of Balts culture exist.
- A strong scientific foundation – supported by ethnological, historical, archaeological, and linguistic research, including studies prepared by academic institutions.
- Educational dimension – involving schools, museums, thematic camps, and the creation of interpretive programmes for all age groups.
- Cultural narrative – a unique Balts identity with European significance. Balts culture represents the heritage of the last pagans of Europe and is distinguished by the preservation of spiritual worldviews, language, and symbolic traditions.
- Digital and physical accessibility – including digital tools, online travel guides, and maps.

The Balts’ Road is a strategically significant project dedicated to presenting and safeguarding Balts culture – a heritage unique not only at the national, but also at the European level. Its strong scientific foundation, inclusiveness, social and economic value, as well as its

international scope provide a solid basis for seeking certification both as an internationally recognised Lithuanian cultural route and as a Council of Europe Cultural Route.

The Balts' Road has the potential to become not only a flagship cultural tourism itinerary, but also a key platform for strengthening cultural identity, fostering historical dialogue, and enhancing community cooperation across the Baltic region.

The Importance of the Balts' Road for Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland in the European Context:

### **1. Revitalising Shared Heritage and Strengthening Cultural Identity**

The Balts' Road is based on the shared cultural and historical heritage of the Balts, encompassing the Curonians, Semigallians, Latgalians, Samogitians, Aukštaitians, Selonians, Yotvingians, and Prussians. These tribes have inhabited the territories of present-day Lithuania, Latvia, and northern Poland since ancient times. The thematic framework of the road enables:

- the preservation and revitalisation of unique Balts heritage, among the oldest in Europe
- the strengthening of historical self-awareness and regional identity rooted in cultural heritage
- the international dissemination of Balts culture, linking it to the broader history of European civilisation

### **2. Enriching Europe's Cultural Diversity**

Balts culture represents one of the last pagan civilisations in Europe, preserving archaic linguistic, mythological, and worldview elements. The Balts' Road provides Europe with:

- a lesser-known yet highly significant layer of cultural memory, offering an alternative perspective to Western Europe's Christian heritage narratives
- a model of the relationship between mythology, nature, and humanity, highly relevant to contemporary cultural and ecological discourse
- an opportunity to integrate regions of Eastern Europe more strongly into the broader space of European cultural dialogue

### **3. A Platform for Cross-Border Cooperation**

The Balts' Road links Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland into a sustainable cultural partnership that:

- is based on a shared historical narrative rather than competing identities
- encourages institutional cooperation among municipalities, cultural centres, museums, NGOs, and research institutions
- provides a foundation for joint educational, tourism, and cultural policy initiatives

- strengthens regional solidarity within the European Union, particularly in its eastern regions

#### **4. Economic and Tourism Potential for Regional Development**

The Balts' Road creates opportunities to develop sustainable, thematic, and seasonal tourism that:

- stimulates economic activity in smaller regions and diversifies local income sources
- integrates cultural sites into an internationally recognisable cultural road
- creates jobs in education, craft revival, guiding, accommodation, and catering services
- attracts international cultural tourists seeking authentic and meaningful experiences

#### **5. Compliance with the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Requirements**

The Balts' Road meets the main criteria of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme:

- it is based on a cross-border theme rooted in a shared European cultural narrative
- it is underpinned by a strong scientific foundation in archaeology, linguistics, and ethnology
- it promotes cultural dialogue through the active involvement of local communities
- it fosters a European identity grounded in diversity and respect for heritage

#### **6. Strategic Geopolitical Significance**

The Balts' Road can serve as a counterbalance to the marginalisation of historical memory, particularly in Eastern Europe, where cultural identities still lack full European recognition. At the same time, it:

- contributes to strengthening knowledge of the region's history
- promotes cultural diplomacy among countries sharing a common heritage
- ensures the inclusion and active participation of peripheral regions within the shared European cultural space

In summary, the Balts' Road is far more than a tourism itinerary – it represents a joint cross-border endeavour centred on historical memory, cultural identity, and European dialogue, linking neighbouring countries through the shared heritage of the Balts. Its implementation strengthens regional cooperation, contributes to the safeguarding of Europe's cultural diversity, generates sustainable economic and social value, and enables participating countries to take a more active role within the shared European cultural policy framework.

Authors of the Feasibility Study (Experts)

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**Prof. Dr Ilona Vaškevičiūtė (Lithuania).** Historian and archaeologist. Former researcher at the Lithuanian Institute of History. In 1993, she defended her doctoral dissertation “The Spiritual Culture and Material Life of the Southern Semigallians in the 5th–12th Centuries”. From 1996 to 2018, she worked at the Vilnius Pedagogical University; in 2006 she was awarded the academic title of Associate Professor, and since 2011 she has held the title of Professor. Her research fields include Balts tribes and their burial customs, as well as the material and spiritual culture of Balts tribes.

**Dr Marcin Engel (Poland).** Certified curator at the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw. From 1998 to 2005, he conducted archaeological research in Konikowo near Gołdap, and in 2006–2007 he led excavations at the Šurpilis settlement complex. Since 1998, he has been researching Yotvingian fortified centres in Eastern Masuria and the Suwałki region. He also conducts excavations of Yotvingian burial sites, including excavations carried out since 2018 in the Krukówek area near Raczki. Between 2014 and 2016, he participated in the Polish–Norwegian project “Archaeology of the Yotvingians”. In 2013, he defended his doctoral dissertation, which later became the basis for the 2020 publication “Centres of Yotvingian Hillforts”. He is also a co-author of the monograph on the Jegliniec hillfort. His main research

fields include early medieval Yotvingia and other Prussian tribes – settlement systems, defensive structures, burial rites, as well as Balts archaeology and written sources from the Viking Age to the early Middle Ages.

**Cezary Sobczak (Poland).** Archaeologist and museum professional. Since 2008, he has worked at the Department of Balts Archaeology of the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw. He has led several projects aimed at identifying selected regions of historical Yotvingia using airborne laser scanning (LiDAR). He is one of the initiators of the scientific project “Atlas of Yotvingian Hillforts”, which aims to create a catalogue of wooden and earth defensive structures in north-eastern Poland. His main research areas include archaeological landscape analysis, with particular focus on prehistoric and early medieval defensive systems of the Balts tribes, as well as non-invasive archaeological research methods. He is the author and co-author of several dozen scientific articles and studies. His most significant achievement is the co-authorship, together with Grażyna Iwanowska and Dr Marcin Engel, of the monograph on the Jegliniec hillfort.

**Wioletta Anuszkiewicz (Poland).** Specialist, lecturer, consultant, and social activist in the fields of local development, tourism development, and the creation of tourist routes and quest-based tourism products (quests as an interactive method of presenting tourist attractions). She served for many years as Head of the Marketing and Development Department of the Gołdap District. She initiated numerous projects integrating the public and non-governmental sectors. Her activities focus on promoting the social, cultural, and economic development of the Masuria region, based on the sustainable use of local natural and cultural heritage.

## 2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BALTS' ROAD FOR EUROPEAN HISTORY AND VALUES

Prof. Dr Rimvydas Laužikas

### 2.1. CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANT TO LITHUANIA AND LOCATED ABROAD

The Balts' Road is a journey through space and time that connects the shared Balts heritage of a vast European region spanning several millennia, as well as scientific knowledge about the Balts and related histories, with contemporary society and its identities. When examining the links between this theme and cultural heritage of importance to Lithuania located in other countries, its promotion, cultural phenomena significant to multiple states, and historical figures, we may speak of the interaction of at least three types of heritage: tangible (natural and cultural), intangible, and documentary. This interaction unfolds across different spatial and temporal levels (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Levels of Representation of Balts Culture within the Balts' Road

Level	Chronological Scope	Geographical Scope (Potential cultural route participants)	Examples			
			Tangible Cultural heritage	Tangible Natural Heritage	Intangible Heritage	Documentary Heritage
Balts' Culture in Prehistory and History	2nd millennium BCE – 14th century CE	Territories historically inhabited by peoples associated with Balts' culture within the present-day territories of Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Belarus, and Russia.	Hillforts and cemeteries associated with Balts' culture.	Individual natural sites (e.g., trees, stones) or groups of such sites that hold significance in the context of Balts' mythological interpretation.	Myths, legends, and oral traditions associated with Balts' culture.	Collections of artefacts, natural remains, and written sources important for the study of Balts' culture, held and exhibited in museums, archives, and libraries.
Contexts of Balts' Culture in Prehistory and History	2nd millennium BCE – 14th century CE	Territories beyond the core area of Balts' cultures for a given period, where heritage characteristic of these cultures has been identified, as well as geographical locations recorded in documentary sources through their association with Balts' culture (these may include sites located in present-day Ukraine, Eastern and Central Europe, the Mediterranean region, and Scandinavia).	Cemeteries associated with Balts' cultures (e.g., along the Ros River in Ukraine).		Toponyms of Balts origin; lexical borrowings of Balts' origin in other languages.	Collections of artefacts, natural remains, and written sources important for the study of Balts' culture, preserved and exhibited in museums, archives, and libraries.

Cultural layer arising from and inspired by associations with Balts' culture, encompassing artistic interpretations as well as the principal centres for research and scholarly publication in Balts studies	15th–20th centuries	Entire geographical area of Europe	Centres dedicated to the study of Balts' culture, memorial sites of scholars who have researched it, and artistic interpretations of Balts' culture (e.g., the frescoes by P. Repšys at Vilnius University).		Scholarly knowledge about the Balts and their culture.	Collections of artefacts, natural remains, and scholarly publications important for the study of Balts' culture, representing its research and artistic interpretations, preserved and exhibited in museums, archives, and libraries.
Layer of Contemporary Identities Encompassing Current Cultural Phenomena Associated with Balts' Culture	21st century	Region in which Balts' identity is present in various forms (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Belarus).	Contemporary material interpretations of Balts' culture (e.g., Žemaičių Alka / sanctuary in Šventoji).	Contemporary natural heritage sites of a commemorative nature (e.g., Vykintas Memorial Oak Grove).	Contemporary interpretations and representations of Balts' intangible heritage realised through reconstructions, living archaeology festivals, and educational programmes.	Physical and virtual exhibitions that interpret and represent Balts' culture (e.g., Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre).

The proposed schema for representing Balts culture serves as a practical instrument for the development of thematic networks and routes that encompass specific past and contemporary cultural phenomena associated with Balts culture and of transnational significance, while also emphasising the role of historical figures.

## 2.2. LITHUANIA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES

According to the Register of Cultural Property of Lithuania, there are 4,548 recorded archaeological heritage sites and 753 mythological heritage sites, classified according to the nature of their significant characteristics. The vast majority of these are, in one way or another, associated with Balts culture.

Lithuanian museums hold approximately one million archaeological artefacts, a substantial proportion of which are related to Balts' culture. The largest collections representing Balts culture are housed in the Lithuanian National Museum, the M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art, the Lithuanian War Museum, the Šiauliai "Aušra" Museum, the Telšiai "Alka" Museum, and the Museum of Lithuania Minor.

The Library of the Lithuanian Institute of History and the Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture hold the largest collections of archaeological research reports on Balts' archaeological heritage sites.

The Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Lithuania contains at least 20 elements whose links to Balts' culture can be clearly identified and substantiated.

The principal centres for the study of Balts culture in Lithuania include Vilnius University, Klaipėda University, the Lithuanian Institute of History, the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, the Institute of the Lithuanian Language, and Vytautas Magnus University. Most research on Balts culture is conducted in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and the Nordic countries.

Research on Balts culture is extensive. A search of the Google Scholar database returns approximately 25,400 publications on the topic. The Lithuanian Academic e-Library (eLABa) contains 1,714 publications analysing various aspects of Balts' culture, with linguistics, mythology, folklore, and archaeology dominating the field. The leading authors in this area include Bonifacas Stundžia, Nijolė Laurinkienė, Vytautas Rinkevičius, Rolandas Kregždys, Rimantas Balsys, Dainius Razauskas, Audronė Kaukienė, Bronė Stundžienė, Vykintas Vaitkevičius, Lina Būgienė, Daiva Vaitkevičienė, and Eugenijus Jovaiša.

### 2.3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BALTS' ROAD FOR LITHUANIAN AND EUROPEAN HISTORY AND VALUES

The Balts' Road plays a significant role in highlighting and communicating Lithuania's history and its connections with European history and values. Balts culture provided the foundation for the establishment of Lithuanian statehood in the 13th century when the state was formed by one of the Balts' tribes – the Lithuanians. The Balts cultural foundation (material culture and language) is one of the most important markers of the identity of the region encompassing present-day Latvia, Lithuania, parts of Belarus, Poland, and Russia.

Through both peaceful and conflictual interactions with neighbouring Slavic, Germanic, and Finno-Ugric tribes (in present-day Estonia, the Nordic countries, Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic), the prehistoric Balts and the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania are embedded in the broader cultural and political contexts of Europe. The Balts, together with other so-called "barbarian" tribes, represent a significant stratum of medieval European civilisation (the European *barbaricum*), which, alongside the legacy of Antiquity and Christianity, formed the foundations of present-day European civilisation.

The late Christianisation of the Balts, the varied fates of different tribes, and the existence of a pagan Lithuanian state – interacting both with Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Catholic)

Christianity – constitute a remarkable example of a distinct European region. Pagan Balts culture (not centred on a single universal god) strongly influenced the political and cultural identity of the medieval and early modern Grand Duchy of Lithuania, marked by openness and tolerance towards other cultures.

The Balts' Road reflects Europe's shared memory, history, and heritage, emphasising cultural continuity, diversity, and interconnections among the ancient Balts tribes – Curonians, Prussians, Yotvingians, Selonians, Latgalians, Lithuanians, Samogitians, Semigallians, and others – whose territories encompassed present-day Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Belarus, and Russia. This international perspective contributes to a collective European narrative that transcends contemporary national borders.

The route embodies shared memory by preserving and interpreting tangible, intangible, and documentary heritage – archaeological sites, folklore, traditional crafts, culinary heritage, languages, festivals – embedded in the pre-Christian, medieval, and early modern history of Europe. Through these elements, the route fosters local and regional memory, strengthens contemporary identities grounded in heritage and historical scholarship, and encourages cultural interaction as part of a broader European past. A focus on authenticity, context, and sustainability supports the long-term preservation of heritage, helping people to understand their place within the wider European continuum of time and space.

Cultural Routes connect different European regions through common cultural elements – such as artefacts made of non-ferrous metals, worldviews and spirituality, folklore, and agricultural practices – that were once shared by all Balts tribes and are now recalled through living history and archaeology festivals, museum exhibitions, guided tours, and other communication initiatives. These cultural sites, practices, and artefacts are presented as part of Europe's common heritage, contributing to a shared sense of belonging to a common cultural space.

Moreover, the Balts' Road raises the visibility of lesser-known but historically significant European narratives. It promotes mutual understanding and cultural exchange by engaging diverse stakeholders – municipalities, cultural institutions, educational organisations, and communities – fostering intercultural dialogue and solidarity in line with the Council of Europe's vision of a diverse yet united European heritage.

The Balts' Road reflects the values of the Council of Europe by fostering intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, respect for human rights, and the appreciation of Europe's cultural diversity and interconnections. It promotes cooperation between different countries and regions. The theme is grounded in interdisciplinary research and seeks to preserve both tangible

and intangible cultural heritage, adapting it to the needs of contemporary society and thereby strengthening European cultural identities.

The route encourages democratic participation by involving local communities, public sector institutions, NGOs, and educational organisations in the creation and interpretation of cultural content. It ensures the accessibility and understanding of heritage for all, supports sustainability by protecting natural and cultural resources, and respects the authenticity of culture by providing accurate, contextually appropriate heritage interpretation and communication. Its emphasis on education, cultural exchange, and international cooperation aligns with the Council of Europe's goal of building a peaceful and inclusive Europe through culture and heritage.

The Balts' Road implements the principles and values enshrined in the conventions of the Council of Europe and other international organisations:

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN):** The Balts' Road promotes the right to participate in cultural life (Article 27) by ensuring public access to cultural heritage and enabling active participation of communities, individuals, heritage professionals, and researchers. It encourages participation regardless of nationality or origin, fostering inclusion, dignity, and equality in cultural expression.
- **European Cultural Convention:** The Route fosters international cooperation among European countries by focusing on the shared Balts cultural heritage and its connections with other cultures across different historical periods. It promotes mutual understanding among peoples through the exchange of cultural values, educational initiatives, and joint research, directly supporting the goal of strengthening a common European cultural space.
- **Faro Convention:** The Balts' Road embodies the Faro Convention's vision that heritage is a resource for human development, identity, and democratic participation. It actively engages local communities, encourages the sustainable use of heritage, and treats cultural heritage not only as a product of the past but also as a living, dynamic element contributing to the development of contemporary society.
- **European Landscape Convention:** The Route encompasses the cultural and natural landscapes of historical Balts' territories, promoting their protection and sustainable management. Its planning emphasises respect for the physical and social environment, infrastructure, and ecotourism, aiming to preserve landscape diversity and to raise awareness and education on environmental issues.
- **White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue:** The Balts' Road promotes dialogue among different cultural and ethnic groups, using shared heritage as a foundation for mutual

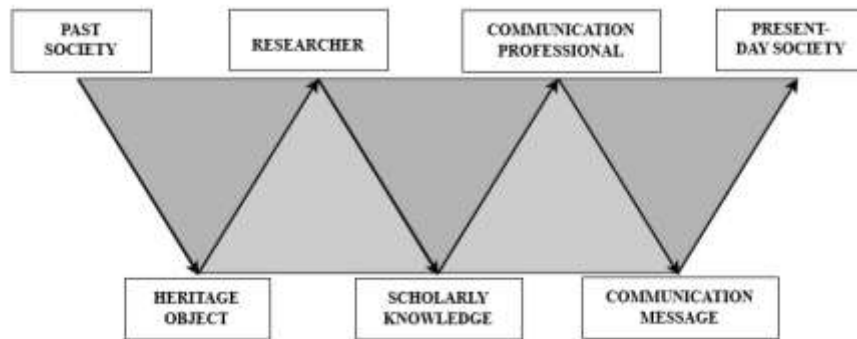
- understanding. It brings together people from different regions and social backgrounds, supports intercultural exchange, and fosters tolerance and inclusion through joint activities, living history and archaeology festivals, and the telling of shared stories.
- **UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage:** While the Route is not exclusively focused on World Heritage sites, it contributes to the safeguarding of significant cultural heritage through scientific research, preservation of authenticity, and the development of infrastructure for protection and public accessibility. It promotes heritage as a tool for education and tourism in the context of sustainability and highlights the contextualisation of World Heritage sites (such as Kernavė) within the broader Balts' cultural heritage.
  - **UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage:** The Route encourages the communication and safeguarding of living heritage – such as oral traditions, crafts, festive events, and traditional knowledge – through exhibitions, community engagement, festivals, and creative camps. It facilitates the transmission of traditions, fosters cultural continuity, and involves both tradition bearers and youth in intergenerational learning. The Route also promotes linkages between intangible, tangible, and documentary heritage, thereby strengthening the contexts in which intangible heritage is understood and preserved.

## 2.4. THE ROLE OF HERITAGE COMMUNICATION

To understand cultural routes and their role in contemporary society, a communication-based approach may be adopted. This perspective is particularly important for interpreting cultural routes as platforms for intercultural dialogue that foster a deeper knowledge and understanding of European history. The communication-based approach is grounded in the perception of cultural heritage as the totality of all material and symbolic expressions transmitted from the past to each culture and, consequently, to humankind as a whole. As an essential component in affirming and enriching cultural identity, and as a legacy belonging to all humanity, cultural heritage endows each place with distinctive characteristics and functions as a repository of collective human experience. This approach conceptualises a cultural route in a broader and more abstract sense – as a network of sites or geographical areas united by a shared theme and linking community-based activities into wider international frameworks. In this context, a

cultural route is understood as a text, while its functioning in contemporary society is interpreted as a semiotic process comparable to acts of reading, translation, and encoding.

Within the framework of Yuri Lotman’s theory of the semiosphere, when applied to heritage, historical scholarship, and its communication, the interaction between contemporary culture (as a structural component of the semiosphere) and past cultures can be understood as occurring through three interrelated levels of textual structures (see Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** The Heritage Communication Process

First, we – contemporary individuals – interact with past societies through fragments of past cultures preserved within the semiosphere, which are recognized as tangible, intangible, and documentary heritage objects (artifacts, ecofacts, traditions, documents, or their complexes). Heritage complexes can be understood as first-level texts, with “text” here referring to any ordered system of signs intended for communication, whose distinction from other systems can be clearly identified. The individual heritage objects (finds, artefacts, ecofacts) that constitute these complexes can be interpreted as signs, which are assembled into texts (complexes) not chaotically, but according to specific rules known as codes. Thus, heritage objects and their complexes are, in essence, signs and systems of signs organized by codes – texts – that point to the mental constructs of past societies, shaped by the culture or subculture to which they belonged.

In this way, the relationship between the heritage researcher (scholar) and the past (as fragments of a once-lived reality) can be understood in the semiotic sense of “reading,” in which the scholar becomes the interpreter, seeking to identify and decode the signs and sign systems (heritage objects, primary texts) left by ancient societies in order to understand their object of study – the past society itself. At the same time, the scholar becomes a subject who creates new signs and sign systems: second-level, scholarly texts intended for a professional audience (other researchers) and designed to communicate scientific knowledge – such as research reports,

conference presentations, journal articles, scholarly monographs, and similar outputs.

The coexistence of these two levels of texts (heritage objects and scholarly knowledge) creates the conditions for – and acts as a catalyst within the semiosphere for – the emergence of third-level texts intended for non-professional audiences (cultural routes, tourist itineraries, museum exhibitions, textbooks, lessons, lectures, exhibitions, computer games, television programmes, works of fiction, etc.). The creator of a third-level text, interacting with contemporary society (and being part of it), becomes an interpreter who reads scholarly texts and uses corresponding sets of heritage objects (collections) to produce the third-level text (in our case, a museum exhibition).

In constructing heritage communication messages (third-level texts) for contemporary audiences, heritage objects and their complexes, along with scholarly knowledge about them, function as signs, while the role of the organizing code is assumed by the author's interpretation. This interpretation is closely linked to a broader communicative structure – the narrative. In the context of communication and information sciences, the narrative is understood not merely as a theoretical tool of historiography or a means of popularizing historical knowledge, but as a conceptual communicative meta-construct, a form of discourse employed as a “framing structure” for creating third-level texts. From this perspective, it is the narrative that determines which codes the creator of third-level texts will select and how they will be used, as well as the message conveyed through the museum exhibition.

From a communicative perspective, a cultural route can be understood as a “text” that connects past societies with the target audiences of contemporary society. Young Europeans represent a potentially important target audience for which specific cultural route messages should be designed. The theme of the Balts' Road could encourage young Europeans to engage in cultural and educational exchanges. The levels of Balts cultural representation discussed above provide favourable conditions for networking, linking different European regions by connecting a specific region's history and the personal experiences of its inhabitants with Balts heritage, thereby encouraging visits to tangible heritage sites and museum exhibitions, as well as engagement with intangible and documentary heritage.

Such networking fosters a deeper understanding of shared European citizenship by promoting cross-border cooperation between Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland and, once these countries' neighbours recognise European values, also with Belarus and Russia, thus contributing to a shared understanding of Europe's cultural roots, prehistoric and historical connections, and the formation of pan-European values. Networking based on the Balts' Road emphasises the value of new experiences through immersive heritage interpretation, such as

living history and archaeology festivals, traditional crafts, culinary traditions, mythology, folklore, and creative workshops, enabling young people to learn through direct, on-site participation.

The route promotes social integration and exchanges among young people from different regions and social backgrounds, involving a range of institutions, such as schools, NGOs, cultural organisations, and municipalities, all working together to provide an inclusive and accessible heritage experience. It also offers opportunities for cooperation among educational and research institutions of various levels, enabling interdisciplinary research, joint cultural projects, and the creation of cultural and creative industry products – such as exhibitions and cultural programmes – based on scholarly research. A focus on authenticity and context fosters personal and genuine experiences through visits to historical sites and direct engagement with local traditions and communities.

Without specifying pilot programmes, the transnational, inter-institutional, and interdisciplinary structure of the route creates excellent conditions for initiating youth mobility programmes, thematic camps, and exchange initiatives. The entire initiative is grounded in the principles of cooperation, partnership, and sustainability, encouraging active participation by young people and communities, and creating opportunities for youth-oriented cultural projects aligned with EU policy objectives – intercultural dialogue, social inclusion, and the shaping of a European identity.

### 3. THE BALTS' ROAD: CROSS-BORDER PARTNERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Dr Rasuolė Andruliėnė

The idea of the “Balts’ Road” originated in Šiauliai, where its author, Rūta Stankuvienė, brought together partners to realise a shared vision. This initiative, founded on a strong belief in the contemporary relevance of Balts cultural heritage and its potential, received support from a wide range of institutions and organisations. The active involvement of partners enabled the idea to evolve into a series of consistently developed projects, the principal aim of which was to systematically assess opportunities and create the necessary conditions for the implementation of the Balts’ Road. In recognition of its significance, the Balts’ Road was nominated as one of the “*Most Successful Tourism Projects in Lithuania in 2021*”, confirming not only the relevance of the cultural route but also its importance at the national level.

The Balts’ Road is an ambitious international initiative which, through several stages of development, has become a significant example of cultural cooperation between Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland. This cultural route connects the heritage of the ancient Balts tribes – the Curonians, Semigallians, Selonians, Prussians, and Yotvingians – encompassing both tangible and intangible heritage. Through three major projects – “The Balts’ Road” (LLI-187), “Explore the Balts” (LLI-447), and “Balts’ Road LT–PL” (LTPL00327) – the cultural route has been developed in a consistent manner, integrating cultural, educational, and tourism dimensions.

The first project, the *International Cultural Route “The Balts’ Road” (The Balts’ Road)*, launched in 2017, laid the foundation for the route, created infrastructure, and initiated a common thematic narrative. The lead partner was the Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre (Lithuania), with project partners in Latvia: the Zemgale Regional Planning Agency, the Kurzeme Regional Planning Agency, Talsi Municipality, Talsi Museum, Jelgava City Municipality, and the National Regional Development Agency; and in Lithuania: the Šiauliai branch of the National Regional Development Agency. The project was implemented in 2017–2020 under the Interreg V-A Latvia–Lithuania Cross-Border Cooperation Programme. Funding sources included contributions from project partners and the European Regional Development Fund. The main activities were conducted in four Lithuanian regions (Klaipėda, Telšiai, Šiauliai, Panevėžys) and two Latvian regions (Kurzeme, Zemgale). Activities implemented in Lithuania and Latvia included marketing measures (travel guide, mobile application, map, video clips, participation

in international exhibitions and fairs); three interactive products (an innovative Balts' culture education centre in Šiauliai, and interactive installations in the Ģederts Eliass Jelgava History and Art Museum and Talsi Museum); and a feasibility study assessing the identity of ancient Balts tangible and intangible heritage and its applicability to the needs of modern society; as well as training sessions and information seminars.

The subsequent project *Exploring Balts and Promoting Awareness of the International Cultural Route "Balts' Road" (Explore Balts)* expanded the activities of the cultural route by integrating modern technologies, educational products, and enhancing public knowledge about Balts heritage. The lead partner was again the Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre (Lithuania), with project partners in Latvia: the Zemgale Regional Planning Agency, the Kurzeme Regional Planning Agency, Kuldīga Municipality, and Rundāle Municipality; and in Lithuania: Klaipėda District Tourism Information Centre and National Regional Development Agency. The project was implemented in 2020–2022 under the Interreg V-A Latvia–Lithuania Cross-Border Cooperation Programme. Funding sources included project partners' contributions and the European Regional Development Fund.

The main joint goal was to further develop the already established Balts' Road by improving the existing common product through activities that foster awareness, recognition, and invite visitors to "experience" the Balts. During the project, the Balts Route itinerary, approximately 2,145 km long, was created, linking areas formerly inhabited by the Curonians, Semigallians, and Selonians in Lithuania and Latvia. Project results included the creation of 3D films, virtual reality tours, educational programmes for children and school students at the Balts Culture Education Centre "The Balts' Road" in Šiauliai, improvement of site environments (Sēlpils, Mežotne Hillfort), and reconstruction of the Klaipėda District Tourism Information Centre. The renovated centre incorporated ancient Balts symbols in its interior, and an interactive map of the Klaipėda region was installed, highlighting the most attractive sites to encourage tourists to explore Balts Route locations. The project also included activities related to experience-sharing, such as study visits to Sweden's renowned Viking Route and participation in tourism fairs.

Currently, the project *Improve attractiveness of Lithuania-Poland border region through cross-border cooperation and sustainable use of Balts cultural heritage by creating an international culture route „Balts' Road“ (Balts' Road LT–PL)* marks a geographical expansion into the Lithuanian–Polish border areas, integrating Balts cultural sites located there into the common route and strengthening sustainable cross-border tourism. The project is implemented under the Interreg VI-A Lithuania–Poland Programme.

The goal of the *Balts' Road LT-PL* project is to create a Balts cultural heritage route in the border zone, uniting important Balts cultural sites in Lithuania and Poland into a single international route. The project is being implemented in 2024–2025. The Lithuanian participants include the Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre, with partners: Gołdap Local Fund (Poland) and the Vilkaviškis Tourism Information Centre (Lithuania). During the implementation, a route with cultural sites is being developed. The project promotes the integration of the Lithuanian and Polish border regions into the cultural tourism network and develops the *Balts' Road* concept through cooperation between Lithuanian and Polish partners.

This project represents the first Lithuanian–Polish cooperation in the context of Balts cultural heritage, complementing and expanding the international cultural route *Balts' Road* by creatively combining natural and cultural sites, educational activities, and community involvement.

In summary, thanks to these three projects, the *Balts' Road* has become not only a tourism route but also a living cultural dialogue between countries, fostering the shared preservation of historical memory, regional identity, partnership, and an advanced heritage management model. The implementation of all the above-mentioned projects has contributed to increasing visitor numbers, diversifying tourism services, involving local businesses, and creating opportunities to integrate the *Balts' Road* initiative into the European Cultural Routes system.

## 4. BALTS' ROAD: CONCEPT AND BASIS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Dr Rasuolė Andriulienė

The development of the “Balts’ Road” concept is based on a consistent and interdisciplinary analysis aimed not only at identifying historically and culturally significant sites but also at establishing a cultural route framework that meets the criteria of the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes. This section reviews the main research studies, feasibility assessments, and qualitative evaluations conducted in Lithuania and Latvia between 2017 and 2022 to substantiate the content, structure, and significance of the cultural route. The analysis draws upon cultural heritage selection methodologies, evaluation criteria, regional data on tangible and intangible heritage, as well as the integration of educational, tourism, and community activities. The work conducted has encompassed both scholarly aspects (linguistic, mythological, archaeological) and practical considerations (assessment of service offerings, infrastructure, and communication). The studies have made it possible to identify priority areas, incorporate narratives reflecting local identity, and ensure the integrity of the cultural route and its potential for international expansion.

In the applied research document “*Cultural Memory and its Transformations in Semigallia*” (Stankuvienė, Salatkienė, Latvienienė, Repšienė and Ališauskienė, 2018), a theoretical and practical foundation is established for the cultural route “*The Balts’ Road*”, which integrates the tangible and intangible Baltic heritage through tourism and cultural promotion tools. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of historical, archaeological, linguistic, mythological and landscape aspects relevant to the Baltic cultural route, together with practical guidelines for the development of cultural tourism. *The Balts’ Road* is expanded into a cross-border territory encompassing Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. Particular attention is given to the Semigallian region as a core area of the *Balts’ Road*, examining its natural features, historical processes (before and after Christianisation), language, social life, architecture, folk art, festivals, folklore and mythology. The document presents an analysis of transformations in cultural memory, highlighting the significance of the Semigallians within the context of Baltic tribes and positioning their narrative as a distinct line of interpretation. A substantial part of the document is dedicated to cultural heritage interpretation and sustainability principles, emphasising the safeguarding of authenticity, sustainable tourism development, community involvement and the importance of education. The necessity of interdisciplinary research is strongly underlined to

substantiate the content and to develop an adapted communication model. The study includes an extensive analysis in which sites of interest are identified: hillforts, museums, sacred places, natural sites and community events. Each object is presented with its status, historical significance, cultural content and recommendations for presentation and interpretation. Based on the research, the strategic objectives of *The Balts' Road* are formulated: to conduct comprehensive resource studies underpinning content development; to create tourism routes tailored for travellers; to ensure cross-border cooperation and cultural integration; to establish management models that involve municipalities, communities and businesses; and to develop educational and informational tools. The document stresses the necessity of creating a complex cultural route model grounded in authenticity, digital accessibility, inclusiveness, education, cross-border partnership and sustainable tourism. The results of the study form the basis for further development – strengthening tourism infrastructure, pursuing certification, expanding the partnership network and integrating into the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Programme. In summary, the document encompasses both scientific and applied dimensions and proposes a coherent strategy for the *Balts' Road* initiative, bringing together the historical narrative with contemporary cultural and economic potential.

Prof. Dr Vykintas Vaitkevičius prepared the feasibility study “*Cultural Route ‘The Balts’ Road’*” (2018) – a comprehensive interdisciplinary research project aimed at substantiating the cultural route concept, defining its cultural, historical, social, and economic value, and providing systematic recommendations for developing the route in Lithuania and Latvia. The main objective was to identify and evaluate natural and cultural resources, design thematic itineraries, and integrate the project into the context of the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes. The study examined the legal framework for cultural and educational tourism, the social environment, and the existing cultural resources. It noted that although cultural and educational tourism is thriving in practice, there remains a need to improve the way information is presented to visitors – emphasising that digital access and content interpretation are still fragmented. The heritage resources of the Balts' Road were categorised into three types: (1) Aestian (Balts) heritage – hillforts, sacred hills, stones, springs, mythological sites (864 archaeological and mythological objects); (2) Research sites and sites related to researchers – birthplaces, graves, and research locations of S. Daukantas, M. Gimbutas, and A. J. Greimas (44 sites); (3) Contemporary expressions of Balts culture – festivals, events, and artistic projects (7 sites). The route also incorporates 45 museums, approximately 80 educational programmes, and activities by traditional heritage craftsmen. Special evaluation criteria are applied to each group of sites: geographical accessibility, mythological, archaeological, historical, aesthetic and social value,

as well as the availability of tourism infrastructure (see Annex No. 1). In assessing development potential, the network of accommodation and catering facilities, pedestrian, cycling and water routes, as well as the accessibility of tourism information, was analysed. It was established that in the main regions the existing infrastructure is generally sufficient; however, it requires adaptation to the needs of the cultural route by introducing information boards, QR codes and attractive visual signage.

The main routes identified are:

1. **Curonian Loop** – connecting the areas of Klaipėda, Kretinga, Palanga, Skuodas, and Šilutė.
2. **Semigallian Loop** – linking the areas of Šiauliai, Radviliškis, Joniškis, and Pakruojis.
3. **Aukštaitian/Selonian Loop** – covering the regions of Panevėžys, Utena, Rokiškis, and Zarasai.

In each region, specific sites are proposed, including hillforts, sacred sites, springs, museums, and community festivals. A site selection methodology is applied to identify only the most valuable points. Additional thematic routes are also presented: “*Path of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom*”, “*In Search of the Nation’s Memory*”, “*The Great Narrative of Lithuanian History*” and “*Path of the Sacred Fire*”. These routes feature cultural narratives, historical references, natural landmarks, and mythological symbols. Each route is accompanied by a specific list of sites, their evaluation scores, and accessibility analysis. The feasibility study emphasises the need for unified visual communication – logo, narrative, and storytelling. Educational activity is proposed as an essential component of the route’s existence. The involvement of communities and service providers, the provision of educational content, and the importance of storytelling are strongly highlighted. The *Balts’ Road* feasibility study provides a comprehensive justification for the cultural route, based on science, heritage protection, tourism, and education. Its recommendations include establishing a clear management structure; obtaining certification for the *Balts’ Road* under the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes Programme; maintaining authenticity and ensuring sustainability; encouraging the engagement of communities, municipalities, and cultural institutions; including Latvia and potential partners from Poland and other countries. The study offers a solid foundation for the *Balts’ Road*. Based on detailed heritage analysis, historical context, and modern tourism principles, the route becomes a unique platform for cultural dialogue, discovery, and sustainable regional development. It is a route not only in a geographical sense but also in cultural and historical memory, connecting the heritage of the Balts peoples with contemporary values. The *Balts’ Road*

is identified as having both national and European significance, underpinned by identity, educational, and economic arguments.

The document “*Quality of Activities of the Cultural Route ‘The Balts’ Road’ Stakeholders*” (Stulpinaitė, 2021) was developed to establish a system of quality criteria ensuring the sustainable development of the *Balts’ Road* and a high-quality visitor experience. It was prepared within the framework of the project “*Explore Balts*” (LLI-447) with the aim of identifying and justifying stakeholders’ readiness to become part of the *Balts’ Road*, as well as evaluating the content of services and products, their compliance with the cultural logic, and alignment with visitor expectations. Key themes and guiding principles: (1) Cultural rationale: The quality of locations and activities is assessed not through commercial indicators but through the transmission of cultural meaning; the importance of authenticity, identity, appropriateness, and reliability is emphasised; the cultural route should not only present heritage but also explain, actualise, and contextualise it. (2) Cultural Route quality criteria system: Applied not only to services but also to the content of guided tours, communication, and visitor experience; the criteria aim to reveal the authenticity of Balts heritage, its integration, and its impact on the community. (3) Evaluation methods: Self-assessment questionnaires for stakeholders; visitor surveys (focusing on experience, perception, and satisfaction); external expert evaluations based on a set of criteria (authenticity, communication, value to the user, sustainability). Groups of evaluation criteria (see Annex No. 1): Authenticity of Balts’ heritage – the connection with Balts culture and the accuracy of its presentation; (2) Integration of Balts’ heritage – how well a site or activity fits into the overall cultural route theme; (3) Socialisation – how heritage is made known: interpretation, education, communication; (4) Value to the visitor – whether the offer creates a unique cultural experience; (5) Sustainable development – partnerships, community involvement, sustainability, and local impact. The document concludes that a system of quality criteria is essential for the *Balts’ Road* to ensure cultural depth of content, increase visitor satisfaction, support sustainable development of locations, and prepare the route for international certification under the standards of the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes. Applying the system strengthens the integrity of the cultural route and builds trust between stakeholders and visitors.

“*The study on Tourism Resources Characterising the History of the Curonians in Kurzeme*” (2018) was aimed at creating a new route – *Baltu ceļš (The Balts’ Road)*. This study was conducted within the framework of the Latvia–Lithuania cooperation project LLI-187, with the goal of identifying cultural and natural sites in Kurzeme linked to Curonian history and lifestyle that could form the basis of a new international cultural tourism route. The study was commissioned by the Kurzeme Planning Region and conducted by SIA *Civitta Latvija*.

The objectives of the study included identifying and assessing tourism resources in the Kurzeme region that reflect Curonian culture, developing new international tourism routes under the *Baltu ceļš* brand integrating tangible and intangible heritage, and evaluating the service offer. The Curonians were one of the most significant Balts tribes, renowned for their military strength, seafaring skills, and strong pagan worldview. They inhabited the present-day territories of western Latvia and north-western Lithuania. Despite the German crusaders' conquests in the 13th century, their legacy has survived in place names, relics, mythology, and spiritual culture.

The document identified around 400 sites in Kurzeme, of which 200 were evaluated as linked to Curonian culture; from these, 70–100 key sites were shortlisted, 30 were described in detail, and four thematic routes were created: *Sajūti kuršu spēku!* (*Feel the Power of the Curonians!*), *Izbaudi kuršu bagātību!* (*Enjoy the Treasures of the Curonians!*), *Izjūti kuršu svētumu!* (*Experience the Sacredness of the Curonians!*), *Pa vadoņu takām kuršu zemēs!* (*Along the Leaders' Paths in Curonian Lands!*). Each site was assessed according to authenticity (connection to Curonian culture), interactivity (opportunities for engagement), availability of information, potential for strong storytelling, suitability for target audiences, diversity of services, and geographical accessibility (e.g., proximity to Liepāja or Kuldīga). Key elements of the Curonians' intangible heritage were identified: sacred linden trees (symbols of feminine spiritual power), sacred oaks (sites of offerings and worship), sacred hills (places for spiritual and communal gatherings), sacred springs (healing water traditions), ritual stones with cup-marks (linked to fertility cults), military vassals (descendants of the Curonian aristocracy), Curonian economy (agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, trade). The recommendations included: developing interactive content (guided tours, themed educational activities, QR codes), ensuring a balance between authenticity and modern presentation, fostering cooperation with Lithuania to develop the *Balts' Road* as a European Cultural Route, producing printed and digital publications, implementing marketing activities. The study provides a solid foundation for creating the *Balts' Road* in Latvia's Kurzeme region, integrating historical narrative, cultural heritage, intangible cultural memory, and tourism opportunities. It is based on a meticulous territorial analysis, heritage interpretation, and tourism development strategies tailored for both local communities and international travellers.

The master's thesis "*Challenges and Opportunities for the Development of Cultural Routes: The Case of the Balts' Road*" (Stankuvienė, 2022) analyses the development processes of cultural routes in Lithuania, with a particular focus on the country's first international cultural route *The Balts' Road*. The study explores the challenges and opportunities of cultural route development through the case of *The Balts' Road* and outlines development scenarios. The

research is based on interdisciplinary theoretical analysis and qualitative empirical methods, including semi-structured interviews with 10 creators and partners of *The Balts' Road* and a focus group discussion with eleven representatives of other cultural routes in Lithuania. The triangulation of methods revealed in-depth processes, partner experiences, and systemic shortcomings affecting the development of cultural routes: (1) Development and relevance of The Balts' Road – it is the first international cultural route being developed in Lithuania, uniting the cultural heritage of the Balts tribes in cooperation with Latvia. The initiative was launched as a project-based activity (LLI-447) without a clear national policy for cultural routes. It holds precedent value, contributing to the formation of cultural route management practices in Lithuania. (2) Key challenges: Gaps in management and administration (absence of a unified management structure, lack of coordination, unclear division of responsibilities between partners). Insufficient and fragmented funding (often reliant solely on project-based financing, with no long-term sustainability model). Human resources limitations (development depends on individual enthusiasts or institutions, often without systematic support). Lack of vision and communication (partners have no shared understanding of the route's mission and objectives, and no refined narrative). (3) Opportunities: Sustainable tourism potential (cultural routes can help reduce seasonality and redirect tourist flows to less-known areas). Strengthening Balts identity (one of the few cultural routes based on an ethno-cultural narrative relevant both nationally and at the European level). Community engagement (the route can serve as a platform for education, local product promotion, and heritage revitalisation). International certification (it meets the Council of Europe's criteria and therefore has the potential to become an officially certified cultural route). The thesis concludes that while cultural route development in Lithuania is important, it is currently fragmented and poorly coordinated. The case of *The Balts' Road* highlights the need to establish a national system for managing and financing cultural routes, to develop partnerships, education, and sustainable tourism, to strengthen human resources (experts, guides, administration), and to create a unified communication model with a clearly defined narrative.

The concept document "*The Concept of the International Cultural Tourism Route 'Balts' Road*" defines the vision, objectives, and implementation principles of the international cultural tourism route *The Balts' Road*, in accordance with the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Programme (2010), Lithuania's cultural routes development documents (2019), and international best practices. *The Balts' Road* is a transnational cultural route covering the former lands of the Balts tribes' former lands: Lithuania, Latvia, and potential expansion areas, including Poland. It

focuses on preserving and revitalising Balts identity, developing cultural tourism, fostering interregional cooperation, and implementing principles of sustainable development.

Key conceptual principles:

- Scientifically grounded structure: The route is based on interdisciplinary research (history, ethnology, linguistics, economics, management) that integrates tangible and intangible heritage.
- Inter-institutional and cross-sectoral cooperation: Involving municipalities, NGOs, tourism, culture, education, and business sectors.
- Balts cultural resource base: Hillforts, sacred sites, architectural heritage sites, festivals, exhibitions, folk art, folklore, language, mythology.
- Engaging diverse visitor groups: Families, individual travellers, students, organised groups, and international cultural tourism enthusiasts.

Strategic activity directions outlined in the concept:

- Research and analysis – mapping Balts heritage, preparing “passports” for cultural sites, developing methodological bases, analysing infrastructure and tourism service capacities.
- Route planning – creating thematic routes, defining geographical coverage to include territories of the Prussians, Yotvingians, Semigallians, Selonians, Curonians, and other tribes (in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and beyond).
- Building a partnership network – fostering cooperation between culture and tourism sectors, involving local communities, strengthening service providers, and ensuring political and institutional support.
- Information system development – digital communication (website, social media, mobile applications), visual identity (logo, signage), educational materials, and marketing tools.
- Sustainability – protecting cultural heritage from excessive (overtourism) tourism, developing ecotourism (walking, cycling, nature trails), involving residents and sharing benefits.
- Tourist flow management and impact assessment – monitoring visitor flows, evaluating economic and social benefits, and integrating the transnational route into the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes network.

The concept of the *Balts’ Road* is based on the principle that its functionality is ensured through the joint efforts of its creators, implementers, partners, and participants:

- Cultural Route Operator – The Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre – develops and coordinates the *Balts' Road* based on cooperation and partnership.
- Active members and partners – municipalities; cultural, tourism, educational, protected areas, and other public institutions, enterprises, and organisations operating within their territories; associated structures; holders of *Balts' Road* cultural and tourism resources and service providers; legal or natural persons who are committed both materially and immaterially to collaborating in the development of the cultural route.

The “Balts’ Road” is a cultural route where the past and the present, local identity and the international context, as well as tangible and intangible heritage converge. It is a unique space for discovering and experiencing the distinctiveness of Balts culture, which brings together archaeological, historical, mythological, ethnographic and contemporary cultural layers. The “Balts’ Road” offers different audiences – local communities, researchers, tourists and cultural professionals – the opportunity to engage in a shared process of learning, experience and cooperation.

The concept constitutes the essential foundation for the development of the international cultural route and therefore requires continuous updating by incorporating the categories, principles and strategic directions required for the Council of Europe Cultural Routes. The most pressing need for renewal lies in strengthening the international dimension, improving the governance model, enhancing the involvement of youth and academia, expanding digitalisation and clearly demonstrating compliance with the Council of Europe criteria.

The “Balts’ Road” concept document has been prepared in a sufficiently comprehensive manner; however, in order to pursue certification as a Council of Europe Cultural Route, several areas require updating and reinforcement, namely:

1. **Compliance with the Council of Europe Cultural Routes criteria.** Although the concept outlines the main fields of activity, it lacks a clear alignment with the certification requirements (e.g. European dimension, scientific research, cultural tourism, youth involvement, cultural exchange). A dedicated table or section should be added to demonstrate how each activity area corresponds to the Council of Europe criteria.

2. **International dimension and partnerships.** At present, the document lists the participating countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Belarus and Russia), but it is necessary to more clearly define the active partners (organisations and institutions) and their specific commitments. Given the current political context, cooperation with Russia and Belarus is problematic; therefore, the Lithuania–Latvia–Poland axis should be emphasised, along with potential expansion to other countries.

3. **Sustainability of activities and governance model.** Although an operator (Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre) is mentioned, a long-term governance mechanism is lacking (board, working groups, membership contributions, membership model). The concept should be supplemented with clear provisions on how funding, continuity of activities and partner coordination will be ensured.

4. **The role of youth, education and scientific research.** While research is mentioned in the text, there is no systematic plan for the involvement of schools, universities and youth organisations. This is one of the priorities of the Council of Europe certification and therefore requires significant strengthening.

5. **Digitalisation and innovation.** Communication is addressed, but a coherent digitalisation strategy is missing (virtual routes, interactive platforms, digital guides, VR/AR technologies). For European cultural routes, an innovative and contemporary image is essential.

6. **Measurement of results.** At present, impact assessment tools are mentioned only fragmentarily. A clear system of indicators should be introduced (e.g. visitor numbers, partner engagement, number of educational programmes, international events, growth in visibility).

An updated concept would enable the “Balts’ Road” to become not only a core axis for regional cultural and tourism development, but also an internationally recognised cultural route, contributing to the visibility of Balts cultural heritage in Europe and strengthening cultural dialogue between countries.

## 5. ROUTES CONSTITUTING THE BALTS' ROAD IN LITHUANIA AND LATVIA

Dr Rasuolė Andrulienė

Based on information available at [www.baltukelias.lt](http://www.baltukelias.lt), the *Balts' Road* currently includes over than 230 sites in Lithuania and Latvia, incorporated into routes across three Balts lands – Curonian, Semigallian, and Selonian territories. The total length of the *Balts' Road* is approximately 2,145 kilometres (see Table 2).



**Figure 2.** Territories of the Curonian, Semigallian, and Selonian tribes within the present-day borders of Lithuania and Latvia

Source: [www.baltukelias.lt/puslapis/baltu-gentys-arealas-laidosena-kostiumas/](http://www.baltukelias.lt/puslapis/baltu-gentys-arealas-laidosena-kostiumas/)

### **Routes of the Curonians, Semigallians, and Selonians in Lithuania and Latvia**

*The Balts' Road* is divided into three main thematic loop routes (circuits) reflecting the historical territories inhabited by the Balts tribes. Each route offers a distinctive narrative of culture, mythology, economy, and the contemporary vitality of heritage.

The loop routes that constitute the Balts' Road are as follows:

- **Curonians Loop**, comprising 105 points of interest (museums, archaeological complexes, hillforts, mythological sites, natural landmarks, traditional crafts centres, gastronomy venues, educational programmes, folklore festivals, etc.), located within the historical territory of the Curonian tribe in Lithuania and Latvia (Samogitia, Western Lithuania, Courland). *Cultural axis*: Curonian maritime culture, artisan traditions, and warfare. *Key themes*: interactions between Vikings and Curonians, pagan sacred sites, fishing and boatbuilding, amber

in culture, Curonian mythology. The tourist guidebook “Curonians. Samogitians. Tourist Guide” has been published<sup>1</sup>.

- **Semigallians Loop**, comprising 69 points of interest (castles, museums, archaeological complexes and hillforts, sacred and mythological sites, natural landmarks, cultural and crafts centres, ethnographic villages, etc.), located within the historical territory of the Semigallian tribe in northern Lithuania (Šiauliai, Joniškis, Pasvalys) and southern Latvia (Jelgava, Tērvete, Bauska). *Cultural axis*: Semigallian heritage of resilient farmers and defenders of freedom. *Key themes*: resistance to the Crusaders, hillforts as symbols of defiance, agricultural traditions, folk crafts. The tourist guidebook “Semigallians. Tourist Guide” has been published<sup>2</sup>.

- **Selonians Loop**, comprising 62 points of interest (museums, mythological sites, natural landmarks, cultural and crafts centres, the Ethnocosmology Centre, culinary heritage locations, etc.), located within the historical territory of the Selonian tribe in north-eastern Lithuania (Zarasai, Dusetos, Biržai) and eastern Latvia (Jēkabpils, Aknīste, Nereta). *Cultural axis*: Selonian heritage of forests, nature-based spirituality, religious rituals, and oral traditions. *Key themes*: linguistic heritage, rituals and mythology, sacred landscape sites, ecological worldview. The tourist guidebook “Selonians. Tourist Guide” has been published<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 2.** Distances and Main Locations along the “Balts’ Road” Routes

Balts’ Road Route	Length, km	Locations
Curonian Route	~930	Rucava → Liepoja → Grobinia → Jūrkalnē → Alsunga → Kuldīga → Ventspils → Talsai → Valdemarpils → Sabilē → Saldus → Embūtē → Mosēdis → Plateliai → Kretinga → Klaipēda → Palanga → Rucava
Semigallian Route	~640	Viīni → Biksti → Zebraņē → Duobelē → Jelgava → Cena → Tērvetē → Vilcē → Mežuotnē → Bauskē → Barbelē → Pasvalys → Šiauliai → Šatrija → Papilē → Vieķšniai → Mažeikiai
Selonian Route	~730	Aizkrauklē → Kuoknēsē → Vecbebri → Sēlpils → Jēkabpils → Viesīte → Nereta → Rīta → Aknīste → Zasa → Dunava → Zarasai → Dusetos → Kulioniai → Skudiškiai → Utena → Užpelkiai → Kupiškis → Biržai

Through targeted marketing tools, the routes representing the Balts’ Road incorporate points of interest across Lithuania and Latvia, enabling the presentation of Curonian, Selonian, and Semigallian heritage through diverse cultural experiences, educational value, and a wide range of tourism services.

<sup>1</sup> www.baltukelias.lt/data/ckfinder/files/1.pdf

<sup>2</sup> www.baltukelias.lt/data/ckfinder/files/3.pdf

<sup>3</sup> www.baltukelias.lt/data/ckfinder/files/2.pdf

## 6. DEVELOPMENT OF THE BALTS' ROAD IN THE LITHUANIA–POLAND CROSS-BORDER REGION

### 6.1. LITHUANIA: YOTVINGIANS – SUDOVIANS

Prof. Dr Ilona Vaškevičiūtė<sup>4</sup>

#### Introduction

In the early centuries CE, distinct Balts cultures began to emerge along the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, identified by archaeologists through burial monuments. Within the present-day territory of Lithuania, seven such cultures have been identified. These include the Western Lithuanian Flat Grave Culture, from which the Curonian tribe developed around the 7th century; the Northern Lithuanian Barrow Culture, which gave rise to three tribes – the Samogitians, Semigallians, and Selonians – by the 5th century; the Central Lithuanian Flat Grave Culture, attributed from the 5th–6th centuries to the ancestors of the Aukštaitians; the Nadruvians and Scalvians in the lower Nemunas region from the 6th century; the Eastern Lithuanian Barrow Area, where the Lithuanian tribe is identified in the 6th–7th centuries; and, in Užnemunė (the Suvalkija region), the Užnemunė Burial Monument Area, distinguished from the very first centuries after Christ.

#### Užnemunė and Burial Monuments

This region covers a considerable territory, which today extends across three countries – Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus. The culture is dated to the 1st–4th centuries CE. From its very beginnings, it was not homogeneous. As mentioned earlier, cultures are distinguished based on burial customs. Within this territory, both flat cemeteries and barrow cemeteries are found – in the northern part, flat cemeteries with inhumation graves are known; in the northeast, barrows with earthen mounds, stone circles, and inhumation graves occur. In the southwestern part of

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<sup>4</sup> References:

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Užnemunė, barrows with stone and earth mounds and cremation burials (Rudamina) have been excavated, while in the eastern periphery of the region, similar barrows surrounded by stone circles, with stone cairns, stone pavements, and inhumation burials (Dirmiškės) have been identified. In Užnemunė, both stone-covered inhumations and cremation burials have been identified (Delnica, Radastai-Aleknonyš, Zapsė). At Zapsė, archaeologists examined inhumations with and without stone coverings, a cremation under a stone cairn, and a cremation in an urn. Such stone constructions, the coexistence of both burial rites – inhumation and cremation – and alternating burials in barrows and flat cemeteries indicate that this region was influenced by both Eastern Balts and Western Balts cultures. Recent studies suggest that the influence of Western Balts culture was more pronounced, as evidenced by grave goods matching those found among Prussian tribes.

Archaeologists tend to associate this entire cultural group of Užnemunė burial sites with the Yotvingian–Sudovian tribal confederation, which in later periods of the Iron Age (from the 4th to the 13th centuries CE) “reorganized” and developed into four tribes in this territory – Yotvingians (in the narrow sense), Sudovians, Dainavians, and Polexenians. These different names for the same tribal confederation were given by neighbouring peoples: to the Rus’, they were *Yatvyagi* (Yotvingians); to the Poles – *Polekszanie* (Polexenians); to the Prussians – Sudovians; and to the Lithuanians – Dainavians (as referred to by King Mindaugas in a 1259 document).

Written sources about this tribal group are relatively early. The Alexandrian geographer Claudius Ptolemy (ca. 100–178 CE) already provided detailed information about the Baltic Sea lands at the time when Roman legions were closest to the Balts territories. There is little scholarly doubt about the identification of Ptolemy’s *Galindoi* (Latin *Galindae*) and *Sudinoi* (Latin *Sudini*) as the Balts tribes of Galindians and Sudinians or Sudovians. From the 10th century, Yotvingians are mentioned in the Rus’ chronicles. Sometimes they are recorded as “Sudovians or Yotvingians,” sometimes as “Dainavians or Jotva.”

Of all the Yotvingian tribes, the Dainavians were the first to be assimilated (around the 7th century CE) by more numerous and warlike tribes – the Lithuanians – or they retreated southwest beyond the Nemunas River. The 13th century proved decisive for the Yotvingian–Sudovian confederation. The princes of Rus’ (Halych–Volhynia) and Poland (Masovia), together with the Teutonic Order, formed a military alliance against the Yotvingians. They agreed that two-thirds of Yotvingian lands would go to the Teutonic Knights, while the remaining part would be divided among the allies. Between 1277 and 1283, the region was completely devastated.

Some Yotvingians moved across the Nemunas into Lithuania, while others remained in lands occupied by the Order.

After fierce battles with the Poles, the Rus', and the Teutonic Order, these lands came under the control of Rus', Poland, and the Order. The Sudovians were the last to maintain their independence, eventually becoming part of the Lithuanian state.

**Objective** – to gain a deeper understanding of the tribes that once inhabited Lithuanian Užnemunė. The modern-day Užnemunė does not entirely coincide with the prehistoric Užnemunė culture, a fact that is particularly evident in the northwestern periphery. Here, archaeological sites date to a later period and, by their cultural characteristics, are closer to the Aukštaitians (e.g., Mikytai, Pakalniškiai, Ramoniškiai – Šakiai District).

The territory of prehistoric Užnemunė can be defined as follows: the southern part of Užnemunė and the right bank of the Nemunas River – between the Merkys River in the south and the Strėva River in the north, extending to the vicinity of Aukštadvaris in the northeast (i.e., the present-day Marijampolė and Alytus Counties – excluding Kudirkos Naumiestis and Kazlų Rūda in the north; the eastern boundary would run from Alytus to Varėna). Beyond present-day Lithuania, this area extends into modern-day Poland, covering the regions of Sejny, Punska, and Suwałki.

It is relatively difficult to strictly distinguish the burial monuments belonging to this large tribal confederation, as few have survived. This was influenced by the high level of agriculture in those areas. In various atlases and reference works, one can roughly count up to 25–35 burial sites (barrow and flat cemeteries) dated from the 1st–2nd to the 11th–12th centuries CE. However, some of them have only been recorded. One such site is **Bakšiai** (Alytus District), where, during construction work, human bones and bronze ornaments dating to the late 4th – early 5th centuries (bronze horseshoe-shaped brooches decorated with enamel, bronze cuff bracelets) have been excavated. **Lauksėnai** (Alytus District) – skeletons of two individuals covered with stones been identified, dating to the 4th–5th centuries. **Viečiūnai** (Alytus District) – there had been several barrows of earth and stone, which were dismantled when stones were taken for construction. Several spearheads and other artefacts have been excavated but have not survived. **Kazimieravas** (Alytus District) – there were three barrows with stone circles; no further information has survived. **Baraučizna** (Vilkaviškis District) – during gravel excavation, human bones and artefacts dating to the 5th–7th centuries have been identified, including socketed axes, spearheads, and knives. **Delnica** (Lazdijai District) – inhumation graves covered with stones have been recorded, and jewellery dating to the 3rd–4th centuries reached the museum. **Rudamina** (Lazdijai District) – a surviving barrow of earth and stones was found, with

a cremation burial and grave goods typical of the 4th century; the finds have not survived. Only a small portion of burial monuments are better preserved, and an even smaller portion has been investigated.

One of the more extensively investigated and frequently mentioned barrow cemeteries of this region is the Slabadėlės (Alytus District, Alovė vicinity) barrow cemetery. However, more detailed information about its excavations has practically disappeared. It is known that in the forest near the village there was a group of barrows made of stones and earth. In 1888–1889 they were excavated by E. Volteris, who investigated 26 barrows. Beneath 25 of the mounds, in pits, he found human skeletons, and in one case a cremation burial. The grave goods date to the 4th–5th centuries. Only part of the grave goods has survived, and there is no information regarding the detailed construction of the barrows.

The best-known burial sites, or those that can provide the most information for the study of the Sudovian–Yotvingian tribe, are Liepynai, Nendriniai (Marijampolė District), Ožkabaliai (Vilkaviškis District), Radastai (Alytus District), Seiliūnai, Krikštonys, Zapsė (Lazdijai District), Vilkiutinis, and Papiškės (Varėna District). The latter two – Vilkiutinis and Papiškės – are located near the boundary separating the Yotvingian–Sudovian and Dainavian tribes, both lying 4–5 km west of Liškiava. Since the boundary between the Sudovian and Dainavian tribes has not been clearly established, it is most often drawn along the present-day borders of the administrative districts, or these sites are classified by researchers as belonging collectively to the Užnemunė archaeological monument culture. Today, it is practically impossible to determine which of these two closely related tribes left these monuments.

What, then, do these burial monuments reveal about the Sudovian–Yotvingian tribe?

First, we turn to what archaeological literature says about Sudovian burial customs and trace how these changed over time. The dead were buried in cairn-type barrows, constructed from stones and earth, and encircled with a stone ring. Such barrows typically measure 8–15 meters in diameter, and a particular group may contain several dozen mounds. The deceased was placed in a burial pit beneath the mound. In the early period (1st–2nd / 4th centuries CE), cremation was the dominant custom; the burnt remains were placed in an urn. Grave goods are sparse, with no weapons found at all, and few ornaments – in stark contrast to other Baltic regions where they are abundant. This was due in part to the custom of placing the dead in urns: ornaments were probably burned together with the body, or, during the funeral feast, inherited by the family. Such practices are even mentioned in later written sources, which describe unusual Balts funerary rites, including tournaments held during the burial, where the winners would divide the possessions of the deceased.

The 4th/5th–9th centuries CE are referred to as the period of tribal differentiation or the Migration Period. As mentioned earlier, during this time the Dainavian tribe disappeared from the Yotvingian–Sudovian tribal confederation, either becoming extinct or assimilated by the Lithuanians. In their former territory, barrows of the Eastern Lithuanian type, built from sand and containing cremation burials, became widespread. The Sudovians, however, continued to cremate their dead and bury them in barrows constructed from stones and earth. Stones comprised the absolute majority of the mound fill.

These barrow cemeteries were generally smaller than those of the Lithuanians, usually consisting of a dozen to several dozen mounds, except in the southern part of Užnemunė, where larger cemeteries occurred. One of the largest was Vilkiautinis, where in the late 19th century around 150 cairns were recorded. The barrows varied in size from 5 to 12–15 m in diameter and up to 1.5 m in height. The mounds were composed of stones and earth, with a central stone structure. The stones were laid in several irregular layers.

Such a barrow was discovered and excavated at Zapsė (Varėna District). The upper stone layer consisted of 15 larger stones (up to 22 cm in diameter) and smaller ones measuring 8–10 cm. Immediately beneath the first layer lay a second row of similar stones. At a depth of 35 cm, the outline of an irregular oval-shaped pit became visible, measuring 174 cm in length (N–S). The upper row of stones was placed slightly closer to one end of the pit. Scattered cremated bone fragments were already found in the humus layer, with the main concentration in the centre of the pit among the stones. The bones were poorly burned – some skull fragments measured up to 5 cm, and long bone fragments up to 10 cm in length. Grave goods included an iron D-shaped buckle and two indeterminate, heavily corroded objects; at the bottom of the pit lay half of a clay cup, crushed by a stone. The cup's neck had an S-shaped profile, was 9.1 cm in diameter, with sharply swollen shoulders and walls 0.5–0.8 cm thick; the clay contained fine mineral inclusions. The burial is dated to the 5th–6th centuries CE.

In total, 13 burials were found in this cemetery – all with stones above the graves. The grave 2 was an inhumation burial, containing the remains of a child aged 7–8 years; grave goods included an iron profiled brooch, a D-shaped buckle, a white glass bead, and several pottery sherds. Graves 3 and 11 were also inhumations, with finds including coloured glass beads, an iron buckle, a cup with swollen shoulders, a spearhead, a bronze arched profiled brooch, and a bead necklace composed of glass and amber beads. Grave 12 was a cremation; the burnt bones were placed in an urn, though it survived only partially. The urn measured 23 cm in diameter and 25 cm in height, had a rough exterior surface and a smoothed rim, and was decorated with a row of small, impressed pits. The burials are dated to the 3rd–5th centuries CE.

A different burial was grave 13, in which a 30-year-old man was placed in a hollowed wooden coffin (the interior of which was charred), with legs crossed at the shins. On the deceased's feet lay an object resembling a wooden ladle. The unusual nature of this burial suggests that it may have been the grave of an individual who did not conform to the normative burial practices of the 3rd–5th century community – or perhaps may be associated with ritual practices. The Zapsė cemetery thus illustrates that both inhumation and cremation burials occur together within a single cemetery, with cremated remains placed both in urns and without them.

Another cemetery with burials dated to the 4th–5th centuries CE is Papiškės (Varėna District). The site originally covered several hectares, but only two barrows were preserved and investigated. The better-preserved mound was conical in shape, a cairn-type barrow (i.e., covered with stones), 4–5 m in diameter and about 1 m in height. The deceased was interred uncremated; the skeleton measured approximately 172 cm in length. Along the length of the skeleton lay an iron spearhead with a profiled blade, on the right side an iron fighting knife, and in the waist area an iron belt buckle.

In the already mentioned Vilkiutinis barrow cemetery (Varėna District), five barrows were excavated. The barrows range from 5.5 m to 10–12 m in diameter. The better-preserved examples reach a height of 90 cm, while others are more flattened. These are *krūsinių* (stone-covered) barrows; once the first layer of stones was removed, traces of the former stone kerbs could be recognised, consisting of at least 2–3 additional courses of stones encircling the mound. The stones measured, for example, 13 × 10 × 16 cm or 28 × 19 × 11 cm. Within the excavated area of one barrow, approximately 800 stones were recorded. Each barrow contained two cremation burials. The cremated bone fragments were scattered over an area of c. 30 × 30 cm, with a layer thickness of 6–10 cm; in some cases, the burial was additionally encircled with stones (barrow 1, grave 2). The grave goods included spearheads, fighting knives, belt buckles, an iron long-footed bow fibula, and an iron bow fibula with a small triangular foot (barrow 2, grave 2; barrow 3, grave 2).

Barrow 5 differed in form and was described by the excavators as a 'long barrow'. It measured about 40 m in length, 4 m in width, and c. 60 cm in height. Only part of this barrow – an area 8 × 5 m – was investigated. It was constructed from 2–3 courses of piled stones, beneath which two cremation burials were found. In both graves, only small quantities of bone were recovered, suggesting that these burials belonged to children. The grave goods consisted of belt buckles and small melted fragments of bronze objects. The excavated graves belonged to both men and children. Based on the grave goods, the burials are dated to the 5th–7th centuries CE.

In the Late Iron Age – also referred to as the state formation period or the period of Viking influence – stone-covered graves became very rare in Lithuania. Each barrow typically contained only one or two graves. These usually consisted of a small pile of cremated bone fragments buried in various parts of the mound or beneath it. Graves that can be dated to the Viking Age are often represented only by disturbed remains within the barrows or by isolated finds (Pamusiai, Varėna District, 6th–12th CE). The overwhelming majority of Viking Age burials contain no grave goods. Finds from the 9th–11th centuries CE are extremely scarce, with only a few early examples of type E spearheads with socketed sleeves decorated with arched ornamentation, occasional iron belt buckles, bronze neck-rings with bent-back terminals, bow fibulae with polygonal knobs, trapezoid sheet pendants, sickles, and socketed axes. Graves dated to the end of the Viking Age sometimes contain wheel-thrown pottery. By the close of this period, cremation burials begin to be replaced by inhumations, which start to appear alongside cremations in the same barrows. The composition of grave goods also changes accordingly. Thus, the 11th century to the mid-13th century marks a transitional phase in which cremation and inhumation coexisted before the eventual predominance of inhumation

### **Hillforts**

The material culture of the Sudovians–Yotvingians is better known not from burial monuments but from investigations of hillforts.

In this part of Lithuania, there are over 100 hillforts, both large and small. Only a small portion of them (about 20) have been partially investigated, while the others have only been described and recorded. Hillforts in the lands inhabited by the Balts began to be established around 1200 BCE. Their purpose was to create settlements protected from enemies. Throughout prehistory, the role of hillforts changed – from fortified settlements permanently inhabited by local communities to defensive refuges into which people from several nearby villages would gather only in times of danger and eventually into the residences of local rulers (chieftains) – a well-protected castle. Today, hillforts have not lost their importance in the cultural landscape – they are an eye-pleasing element of the landscape and a testimony to the region’s historical past.

The most prominent hillforts of Užnemunė include those of **Alytus**, **Kaukai–Obelytė**, **Punia**, **Rumbonys** (Alytus District), **Meškučiai**, **Šakališkiai**, **Varnupiai** (Marijampolė District), **Sudargas** (Šakiai District), **Liškiava**, **Merkinė** (Varėna District), **Kaupiškiai**, **Kunigiškiai–Pajevonys**, **Piliakalniai** (Vilkaviškis District), **Rudamina**, and **Paveisininkai** (Lazdijai District). Not all of these have been excavated. More extensive research has been

undertaken at the hillforts of Punia, Paveisininkai, Meškučiai, Kunigiškiai–Pajevonys, Varnupiai, Rudamina, Sudargas, Obelytė, Kaukai, and Piliakalnai. Most of them were investigated by the archaeologist Pranas Kulikauskas.

Yotvingian hillforts were typically constructed on isolated hills, where the courtyard is surrounded on all sides by ramparts up to 5 metres in height, although some are situated on river promontories with similar fortifications. A characteristic feature of Yotvingian hillforts is the large-scale earthworks not only in constructing the defences but also in forming the courtyards themselves from piled earth. Such hillforts are distinguished by steep slopes reaching up to 10 metres in height. In the cultural layers of the 10th–12th centuries at several Yotvingian hillforts, clear traces of assaults resulting in the destruction of the former fortifications have been identified. These were often rebuilt and additionally reinforced. The buildings within the courtyards were mostly located along the edges, adjacent to the ramparts. Extensive foothill settlements are commonly situated near Yotvingian hillforts.

A distinctive feature of this territory (as noted by archaeologist Manvydas Vitkūnas) is that in some cases two fortified sites – two hillforts – are located close to each other. Such a Yotvingian hillfort complex exists at Šiurpilyš (Poland) as well as in the **Kaukas** and **Obelytė** localities (Alytus District). It consists of two hillforts situated in different villages, a bailey, and an adjacent foothill settlement. The main Kaukas Hillfort was constructed on an elevation in a bend of the Peršėkė Stream. Its oval courtyard, measuring 25 × 17 m, is surrounded by a rampart 1–5 m high, reaching its greatest height on the southern side, where it protected the hillfort from the adjoining fields. At its base in this section, a ditch 12 m wide and 1.5 m deep was dug. To the west of the hillfort, on the opposite bank of the Peršėkė, in the corner of an elevation, stands the Obelytė Hillfort. Only a disturbed rampart 25 m in length and 2 m in height, with the edge of the courtyard, has survived; the rest has been eroded by the stream. Beside this hillfort lies a bailey with a rectangular courtyard measuring 70 × 65 m, fortified on the elevation side by a very sloped rampart up to 1 m high created by ploughing. Both hillforts are encircled on all sides by a foothill settlement covering an area of 7.5 hectares.

Two main cultural layers have been distinguished at the Kaukas Hillfort. The lower layer, dated to the 5th–9th centuries CE, contained coarse pottery and individual artefacts (bow-shaped fibulae, spiral temple ornaments). At that time, the hillfort was fortified with a modest rampart constructed from stones and timber. The upper cultural layer of the Kaukas Hillfort dates to the 10th–11th centuries CE. It revealed the remains of former buildings – stone pavements and hearths. Near the latter, various charred grains (barley, peas, beans, and even poppy seeds) and animal bones (all domestic species, as well as dog, wild boar, elk, red

deer, roe deer, bear, beaver, and unidentified bird species) were identified. The collection of personal ornaments was particularly abundant, and more than 1,000 sherds of wheel-thrown pottery were recovered. During the investigations, in the middle of the Kaukas Hillfort courtyard, human bones were found scattered in a disarticulated manner (a total of 130 pieces). These were determined to be the remains of approximately 25–35 individuals, predominantly adult males, together with 2–3 females and 4–5 adolescents (11–15 years old). They are interpreted as the remains of the castle's defenders and local inhabitants who had taken refuge in the stronghold from the enemy. The wealth of finds indicates that all the possessions of those who perished remained here. The wooden castle standing on the Kaukas Hillfort was burned after having been subjected to intense archery fire. In the excavated area, as many as 126 arrowheads of various forms were collected, some of them embedded in the rampart. The chronology of the artefacts found during the investigations indicates that the stronghold on the hillfort was destroyed in the 11th century CE. The attackers are to be sought among the princes of Kievan Rus', who organised military campaigns against the Yotvingians.

The hillfort located in **Kunigiškiai** village (Vilkaviškis District), also known by the name Pajevonys, is one of the larger Balts hillforts. It was constructed on a promontory at the confluence of the Jevonis and Ėglupis rivers. The courtyard is oval in shape, 150 × 76 m in size (approximately 1 ha in extent), and is surrounded by a rampart which, on the western side, is 4 m high and elsewhere up to 2 m high. To the west of the hillfort lies an elevation, and here additional fortifications were built: followed by a second rampart 1.5 m high and a second defensive ditch. Some of the hillfort's slopes were also fortified: on the southern slope there were two ditches and two ramparts. The slopes of the hillfort are steep, reaching 10 m in height. Surrounding this already large hillfort is a foothill settlement 100–300 m in width, covering an area of about 12 ha. Over two excavation seasons, an area of 900 m<sup>2</sup> (5.3% of the courtyard) was investigated on the western and southern edges of the courtyard. A cultural layer up to 80 cm thick was found, containing traces of buildings, a Roman coin, iron arrowheads, knives, awls, bridle parts, tweezers, a pin, bronze brooches, spiral rings, pendants, a bracelet fragment, a stone whetstone, clay spindle whorls, and various ceramics (predominantly coarse and smooth types). A cross-section of the large rampart on the western side of the courtyard showed that it was constructed in three stages, while the smaller lateral ramparts were built in two stages. The first fortifications consisted of a 1.4 m wide and 1.3 m deep ditch dug at the edge of the courtyard, in which birch logs measuring 11–25 cm in diameter were driven into the ground at intervals of 7–24 cm, supporting horizontally laid smaller logs. The first rampart was 3 m high, the second was raised by one metre, and the third reached 6 m in height and 20 m in width at the base. Its surface

was paved with stones. On top of the earlier outer smaller rampart, one metre in height, there was also a wooden barrier.

The phases of rampart construction remain undated; however, based on the artefacts recovered, the hillfort's excavator, P. Kulikauskas, assigned it to the 1st–4th centuries. This chronological attribution is not fully accepted by other scholars. On the basis of wheel-thrown pottery found in the hillfort's stratigraphy – a type that appears only at the beginning of the 2nd millennium – M. Vitkūnas argues that the site most likely remained in use until the 13th century.

One of the best-known sites dated to the Late Period is the **Punia** Hillfort (also known as Margis Hill). Together with the hillforts of Birštonas, Alytus, Merkinė, and several other smaller or now less well-known sites bearing wooden castles, it formed part of the middle section of the Nemunas River defensive system. The hillfort was constructed on a promontory at the confluence of the right banks of the Nemunas and the Punelė rivers. The courtyard is triangular in shape, measuring  $155 \times 85$  m, with a rampart at its eastern end 75 m long, 6 m high, and 30 m wide, beyond which lies a ditch 60 m long, 30 m wide, 4 m deep, and 10 m wide at the base. The slopes are steep, 36–44 m in height.

It has been determined that the rampart of the hillfort was constructed in three stages: on its surface stood an oak defensive structure that was destroyed by fire; after this, the rampart was raised to 3.5 m, and a wooden defensive wall was erected on it, which also burned down. In the third reconstruction stage, the rampart was heightened by a further 1.7 m by adding a layer of clay, reinforced with oak beams. Wooden buildings once stood in the courtyard, the charred remains of which have been found.

Another hillfort impressive for its size is **Rudamina**. It was constructed on the summit of a large hill; the oval courtyard measures  $75 \times 51$  m and is surrounded on all sides by a rampart 2–3 m high and 10–16 m wide. The slopes are 26 m in height. It has been determined that the rampart was reconstructed four times, each reconstruction occurring after fires resulting from intense assaults on the castle. This is evidenced by arrowheads found in the outer layers of the ramparts. The hillfort is dated to the 5th–13th centuries CE.

Our knowledge of the Užnemunė culture and the tribes that lived there – the Yotvingians–Sudovians – is owed solely to the hard work and insight of archaeologists. Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, Jonas Puzinas, and Adolfas Tautavičius delineated the boundaries of the lands inhabited by these tribes and described the distinctive features of their culture. Pranas Kulikauskas and Regina Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė investigated the hillforts and barrow cemeteries they left behind. A considerable number of other researchers have also contributed to the study of the prehistory of this region: V. Juodagalvis, G. Grižas, Gintautas Zabiela, and Zenonas

Baubonis compiled and published the three-volume *Atlas of Lithuanian Hillforts*, in which all Lithuanian hillforts, including those of Užnemunė, are recorded and described. The research on Užnemunė is by no means complete. Further research is expected to be continued by future generations of scholars.

## 6.2. POLAND: YOTVINGIANS

Dr Marcin Engel, Cezary Sobczak<sup>5</sup>

### Introduction

Yatvingia is a historical region situated between the Great Masurian Lakes to the west and the middle course of the Neman River to the east, as well as between the middle course of the Šešupė River to the north and the drainage basins of the Biebrza and Supraśl Rivers to the south. The northern and central parts of this area are occupied by lake districts – specifically, the eastern portion of the Masurian Lake District and the southwestern zone of the Lithuanian Lake District – while its southern fringes lie within the North Podlasie Lowland. The landscape of the lake district zone is characterised by pronounced relief, featuring chains of moraine hills, closed depressions, kames and eskers, along with numerous ribbon and moraine lakes. The small rivers originating in this area belong to the Neman, Narew, and Pregolya river basin. The southern zone is distinguished by relatively less varied topography and the presence of extensive wetlands and marshes. The Yatvingians are classified among the Baltic peoples, closely related to the Prussians and the Letto-Lithuanian tribes. Recent archaeological findings indicate that Yatvingian

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settlement began as early as the late 9th century and persisted until at least the early 14th century. Based on historical sources, the chronology of this people can be framed between the years 945 and 1283.

### **Before the Yatvingians**

From approximately the turn of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE until the 7th century CE, the lands that would later constitute historical Yatvingia were inhabited by Baltic tribes. The Balts were an Indo-European people settled along the southeastern shores of the Baltic Sea. The term “Balts” is an artificial construct, coined in 1845 by the German scholar F. Nesselmann, derived from the Latin name *Mare Balticum*, to describe the peoples of this region who spoke the so-called Baltic languages (today spoken only by Lithuanians and Latvians).

The Balts entered the historical record through their association with amber, whose richest deposits in Europe were found in their territory. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote in the 1st century CE about the inhabitants of the amber-rich land, referring to them as the *Aestii*. An imperial official from the court of Emperor Nero even journeyed to the Balts in search of the “Gold of the North,” as recounted by another Roman author, Pliny the Elder, in his *Naturalis Historia*. This emissary returned with such a quantity of amber that it sufficed to adorn an entire circus arena – one single piece weighing over 4 kilograms.

The flourishing culture of the peoples inhabiting what would become Yatvingia suffered a collapse at the turn of the 7th and 8th centuries. At that time, the region experienced a marked decline in settlement activity, possibly linked to climatic changes, although a complete depopulation likely did not occur. Archaeological evidence of human activity re-emerges during the era of the Yatvingians.

### **The Yatvingians – the strongest among the Prussians**

The first recorded mention of the Yatvingians dates to the year 944, when Scandinavian rulers of Rus' dispatched envoys and merchants to the Byzantine imperial court to negotiate a peace treaty. Among the delegates was a figure named *Jatviag Gunariev* (perhaps *Játvígr Gunnarson?*), who was likely, like the rest of the delegation, a Varangian and a trusted retainer of the Rurikid court. According to a recent hypothesis, the warriors under his command – possibly members of his lineage – subsequently came to be referred to in Rus' sources as *Jatvjagi* (Yatvingians).

The Teutonic chronicler Peter of Dusburg described one of the Prussian tribes with the following words: “*The noble Sudovians, as they surpassed others in the nobility of their customs,*

*so too did they exceed them in wealth and strength. They possessed six thousand horsemen and an almost countless number of other warriors”*. This account refers to the Yatvingians, the easternmost branch of the Prussian peoples. Terms such as *Sudovia* and *Sudovians*, used by Danish, Teutonic, and other Western European sources (as well as *Galindia*), have clear antiquarian connotations, echoing the ethnonym found in the works of Claudius Ptolemy in the 2nd century CE. Polish written sources most frequently employed the term *Pollexiani*, while to the Lithuanians, the land of the Yatvingians was known as *Dainava*. However, it was the Rus' designation *Yatvings* that ultimately gained the greatest prominence in historiography and popular memory.

In the late 12th and throughout the 13th centuries, the Yatvingians significantly intensified their military activity, directing frequent raids and campaigns against their Christian neighbours – Poland, Rus', and the nascent Teutonic Order state. These incursions contributed to the growing power, wealth, and military prestige of the Yatvingians, as noted by Peter of Dusburg. The chronicler expressed admiration for this warlike people, who were the last among the Prussian tribes to resist the expansion of the Teutonic Order and the pressures exerted by Rus', Poland, and Lithuania.

The proximity of Christian monarchies fostered, on one hand, cultural exchange, technological diffusion – especially in military affairs – and other forms of contact; on the other hand, it contributed to the political and civilizational isolation of Yatvingia and other Prussian tribes. During the era of the Northern Crusades, Teutonic conquest, and Rus' expeditions, this process intensified. Feudal Christian rulers had no interest in the emergence of an independent pagan polity in this region. The persistence of pagan beliefs and a political system based on a competitive noble class (*nobiles*) rendered the Prussian territories a natural target for Christian expansion.

The resulting waves of armed incursions led to the eventual collapse of the early medieval political and economic structures of the Prussians, with 1283 – marked by the defeat of Yatvingia – serving as a symbolic watershed. Much of the region was brought under the administrative control of the Teutonic Order, while other parts were absorbed into the territorial frameworks of Poland, Rus', and the rapidly developing Lithuanian monarchy, which likely annexed the eastern portion of Yatvingia.

Historical sources indicate that the numerous wars and conquests caused a partial depopulation of Prussian territories, particularly in the borderlands with Lithuania, including Yatvingia. However, contrary to earlier assumptions in the literature, this was not a total depopulation, but rather a severe demographic crisis, marked by migration and the incorporation

of Prussian elites into the service of victorious feudal rulers. Evidence that Yatvingia was not entirely abandoned includes land grants issued by the Teutonic Order to Yatving nobles, the latest of which date to the first half of the 14th century.

### **Settlement**

During the period from the 9th to the mid-11th century, strong settlement centers emerged across the vast areas located on the southeastern coast of the Baltic Sea, characterized by fortified constructions such as hillforts and subordinate settlements of varying sizes – often fortified – and supported by a network of small villages and single- or multi-manor farmsteads. These settlements were established in naturally defensible, difficult-to-access terrain. In Yatvingia, settlement centers are situated away from medium-sized watercourses and positioned on elevated grounds surrounded by lake waters and their peat-bogged arms, as well as near the floodplains of small rivers and streams.

Throughout the Balts territory, including Yatvingia, hillforts represent a characteristic form of settlement. The majority of these are significantly elevated above the surrounding terrain and prominently exposed. Their shapes and sizes vary; however, medium-sized, oval-shaped hillforts with one or multiple lines of ramparts and a system of moats – more often internal than external – predominate. In most cases, such fortifications served a refugial function, likely hosting a defensive garrison and being inhabited only periodically. The same applies to smaller-scale sites. Conversely, larger hillforts were generally intended for permanent habitation and functioned as defensive human settlements. These large complexes feature elaborate fortification systems composed of several lines of ramparts and moat networks. Such hillforts were typically located in strategically important locations.

Closely linked to the hillforts were the adjacent suburban settlements, most often located in their immediate vicinity. These varied in size; however, at the onset of Yatvingian settlement, extensive multi-manor villages predominated. Due to their location within the defensive system, such settlements were fortified, although the scale and quality of fortifications differed. The nature of the finds suggests that at least some of these suburban settlements were inhabited by elite groups likely associated with the nearby hillforts. Typically, other settlements were located within a short distance from the hillfort complexes. Single- and multi-manor settlements situated on elevations near the shorelines of lakes and watercourses dominated. As previously mentioned, hillforts, suburban settlements, and their neighboring villages formed settlement centers. The distance between these centers varied by region, ranging from 2–3 km up to 6–8 km in a straight line. This, however, did not imply that the intervening space was uninhabited; on the contrary,

numerous satellite settlements were located near water bodies and watercourses. These were primarily single- and multi-manor settlements, though larger villages comparable in size to suburban settlements also occurred.

Due to the limited archaeological exploration of these settlements, little can be said about the internal spatial organization of their buildings. Nevertheless, it appears that already in the early phases – especially in larger suburban settlements – regular layouts were present, either linear or with a central square surrounded by buildings. Smaller settlements are characterized by an irregular, so-called cluster-type arrangement, composed of closely spaced residential and economic buildings.

Architecturally, the dominant dwelling types in the analyzed area were houses with square or rectangular plans, measuring no less than 3 meters and not exceeding 10 meters in wall length. These structures were either partially dug into the ground or founded on stone footings. Both in settlements and hillforts, dwellings were constructed using log (horizontal timber) or post-and-wattle techniques. Frequently, various types of hearths (most commonly fireplaces and stoves) were located inside the houses, positioned either in a corner or centrally within the building.

In the Yatvingian territories, the only site that can cautiously be assumed to have functioned as a center of trade exchange is the settlement at Targowisko in Szurpiły. Here, not only traces of artisanal production (including metallurgy, pottery, weaving, etc.) have been discovered, but also several bronze weights.

There remains the question of settlement elements whose existence is highly probable, yet which are difficult to detect archaeologically or have not been included in settlement research programs for various reasons. This refers, for example, to communication routes such as roads, fords, embankments, and bridges. Field observations of Yatvingian settlement complexes have revealed artificial cuttings, convenient passageways between sites, and similar features in most locations. Unfortunately, their chronology remains problematic, as they are generally associated with later phases of the Early Middle Ages. However, it cannot be ruled out that at least some of these communication solutions were replicated based on earlier ones, situated in favorable geomorphological conditions. A good example includes roads paved with stones or wood adjacent to ramparts being reconstructed in the same locations – such as the hillfort on Castle Hill in Szurpiły. There is also considerable evidence suggesting that local roads between Early Modern farms may, to some extent, reflect the Early Medieval communication network. Similarly, ramparts, visible as topographical features in the landscape, may have served as field boundaries up to the present day.

In the late phases of the Early Middle Ages, two settlement development trends are visible in the area occupied by Balts tribes: progressive and regressive. The progressive trend characterizes most of this territory, while the regressive trend can be observed, among others, in Galindia (excluding the eastern Galindian–Yatvingian border zone) and western Yatvingia. Throughout the Balts region, there is a continuation of settlement within ecumene inhabited since the Viking Age. Most of the centers established during the Viking period experienced further development in the late phases, leading to the expansion of local settlement systems, especially defensive systems (progressive trend). In contrast, other centers experienced a settlement crisis, leading to their decline. It should be noted, however, that this process was rarely sudden, rather representing a gradual decline and withdrawal of settlement (regressive trend). Where centers developed intensively, new settlement points were also founded, which consequently resulted in the formation of additional centers and densification of the settlement network. Such a situation can be observed in eastern and southern Yatvingia. It is worth emphasizing that similar criteria as during the Viking Age guided the choice of new settlement locations – namely, centers were established in naturally defensible, difficult-to-access geographic environments.

Hillfort centers continue to dominate the settlement landscape of Yatvingian lands. In most cases, hillforts erected during the Viking Age were remodeled or replaced by new defensive complexes in the late Early Medieval phases. As before, the construction of fortifications favored prominent elevated locations surrounded by water bodies and watercourses or marshes and floodplains. Due to the significant expansion of defensive installations observed in the late Early Medieval phases, medium and large-sized hillforts predominate. The baileys' surfaces were more frequently built-up than in the preceding period. Mainly above-ground buildings constructed with post-and-wattle or log (horizontal timber) techniques were used, featuring hearths inside and/or outside. Alongside residential buildings, the baileys sometimes contained economic structures, such as artisanal workshops. Buildings were primarily located in the rampart-adjacent zone but often also occupied the central part of the bailey. This internal organization of the hillfort may indicate a prolonged presence of garrisons or inhabitants of the center. However, it appears that, at least in medium-sized hillforts, the refugial and prestige defensive functions of these sites still predominated.

The strengthening of the defensive system in the late phases of the Early Middle Ages influenced the development of suburban settlements (suburbs). Previously extensive settlements located in close proximity to hillforts were incorporated within the fortifications. Their defensive structures often complemented the lines of ramparts surrounding the fortresses, creating a unified defensive complex. The evolution of such settlements into suburbs was also shaped by

transformations within their internal structure. The example of Szurpiły demonstrates that the need to accommodate as many buildings and homesteads as possible within large settlements led to a more regular spatial arrangement. Based on research conducted in Szurpiły, it can be assumed that suburbs consisted of independent homesteads separated from one another by a street system, each comprising residential buildings as well as economic structures and facilities. The discovery of luxury items, tools, semi-finished products, production waste, and technologically advanced pottery may indicate the artisanal character of these suburbs and their occupation by elite population groups.

The concentration of buildings and the incorporation of nearby single- or multi-homestead settlements into the boundaries of suburbs coincided with the abandonment, in some centers, of more distant settlements. However, this does not imply that single- or multi-homestead settlements disappeared entirely; on the contrary, new settlements of this kind were established, but located significantly closer to hillforts and suburbs. Satellite settlements relative to the main centers continued to develop, filling the space between them. It appears that compared to the Viking Age, at least in some areas, the distance between individual hillfort centers decreased.

Most commonly, above-ground buildings were constructed on square or rectangular plans, with walls built in log (horizontal timber) or post-and-wattle techniques. Hearths or ovens were usually located inside the houses, while floors were either coated with clay or covered with wood.

Additional elements of the settlement system also functioned in Yatvingia. These primarily included structures supporting the defense of hillfort centers, such as longitudinal ramparts, towers, and watch forts. In some cases, where favorable conditions in the water network (lakes, floodplains, etc.) permitted, natural defensive conditions were “enhanced” through artificial interventions such as cuttings, dams, embankments, and similar features. Such measures significantly increased the security of hillfort inhabitants but simultaneously led to a reduction in the settlement and economic zones – though in some cases only temporarily. This development created a concurrent need to improve communication between the various settlement components. In marshy areas, roads were reinforced (e.g., with stone or wooden paving), fords were used, and stone embankments and wooden bridges were constructed.

### **Economy**

The dominant branch of the Yatvingian economy was agriculture, although it must be emphasised that this was not on the same scale as in neighbouring Christian states. In the Early

Middle Ages, rye, barley, wheat, oats, vetch, hemp, and flax were cultivated on the partially deforested sandy slopes of the Suwałki Lake District and Eastern Masuria. Small plots might have been established near marshy meadows and bodies of water. It is likely that slash-and-burn (swidden) cultivation techniques were used. Partially open areas and thinned forests were utilized as sources of fodder for livestock, which probably constituted a primary food source for the local community. The main livestock consisted of cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and pigs.

Another means of obtaining food was the exploitation of the rich resources of the surrounding forests and lakes. At settlement sites, remains of wild animals were found, primarily deer, elk, and wild boars. Remains of wild birds and fish were also discovered. The presence of numerous iron fishhooks, for example at the settlement complexes in Szurpiły and Jeglinec, testifies to advanced fishing practices. Numerous forest beehives were probably maintained in the surrounding woodlands, providing honey and beeswax.

The forest was also a source of timber. Around a settlement center, people likely had to travel greater distances to obtain this valuable resource. Wood had many uses but primarily served as a building material and fuel. Constructing massive fortifications, in which wood was a fundamental structural element, required cutting down large numbers of trees – mainly oak – and processing the timber, a task demanding considerable organizational effort.

Developed pottery production, especially in the late phases of the Early Middle Ages, required high-quality clay. This raw material was abundant in numerous moraine hills and some kame slopes. Both glacial clays rich in iron compounds and clayey soils saturated with organic remains were readily accessible.

Iron metallurgy could also be based on local raw materials. Many meadows and peat bogs in Yatvingia are rich in turf ore, which was probably a source of this valuable raw material. Some iron might also have come from “recycling” through melting down used or captured tools and weapons. The situation was similar with non-ferrous metals; however, the basis of metal production was raw material imported from elsewhere. Traces of metallurgical production were found, among other places, at settlements in Szurpiły and Judziki near Mieruniszki.

In summary, the inhabitants of Early Medieval Yatvingia exploited the land in search of natural resources that formed the basis of their economy. Meat, cereal grains, fodder for livestock, furs and hides, wood, clay, and iron were sourced locally or gathered from the surrounding area within a radius of several to a dozen kilometres. It is also possible that some raw materials or finished products were supplied to hillfort centers by satellite settlements, which in return could expect shelter during times of danger. Especially valuable goods were obtained through armed raids or trade. A place of organised trade exchange could have been the suburb at

Targowisko, where several metal weights and imported ornaments were found. It appears that intentionally cut bronze ornaments – especially numerous in Szurpiły, Jeglinec, Dybów, and Yatvingian cemeteries – might have served as currency. The only silver coin discovered was found at the aforementioned production settlement in Judziki near Mieruniszki. It is a cross denar minted between 1070 and 1100 in Eastern Saxony.

### **Funerary rites and beliefs**

Along with the deceased nobles, weapons, horses, servants, maidservants, garments, hunting dogs, birds of prey, and other items necessary for the knightly craft were burned. This is how Peter of Dusburg described the funeral customs of the Prussians, including the Yatvingians. It is one of the few chronicler references regarding the treatment of the dead among the Prussian tribes. They reveal nothing about the location of cemeteries or the forms and construction of graves. Until recently, archaeology had little to say on these matters. Regarding the Yatvingians, the prevailing view was that burial rites in the 9th–13th centuries left no traces detectable by archaeological methods.

Recent research has brought much new information. In the Viking Age (9th–11th centuries), on Yatvingian lands, the dead were cremated on pyres, then their remains were placed in shallow pit graves with grave goods. Cemeteries were located near human settlements. On the slope of the fort in Szurpiły, a grave of a young warrior, probably a chieftain, was discovered. The burned remains were placed in several small pits covered with stone paving. The burial was surrounded by a stone wreath. The deceased was given several items for the journey to the afterlife, emphasising his social position in life. The entire grave complex was accompanied by mysterious objects made of animal bones, charcoal, and even single pieces of weaponry. The fact that this grave was contemporaneous with the defensive stronghold suggests that, along with the living defenders, the spirit of the warrior was to guard the fortress against enemy attacks.

Owing to research in Krukówek and on Mosiężysko Hill in Szurpiły, we know how the Yatvingians buried their dead during the period of their greatest development – i.e., in the 12th–13th centuries – i.e., in the 12th–13th centuries. As in the Viking Age, the deceased were cremated on a specially prepared pyre made of carefully selected wood species to achieve high temperatures. The burned remains were deposited with grave goods directly in graves of various sizes and depths. Graves were certainly marked on the surface, probably with large worked stones, so-called stelae. The gifts placed in graves manifested the social and economic status of the deceased, preserved even after death. This primarily distinguished the nobles – the Yatvingian nobility – who were buried not only with weapons, clothing, and ornaments but also

horses, slaves, and even hunting dogs and falcons. The deceased of lower social status were cremated with what they needed in their service.

Most metal objects placed in graves were deliberately destroyed so they could be reborn with their owner in the afterlife and used there. Warriors enjoyed special regard, even forming armed bands in the afterlife. The Dzierzgoń Treatise mentions that pagan seers/priests, acting as mediums at funerals, conveyed visions to the family and mourners of the deceased noble as a warrior riding a horse in shining decorated armor, accompanied by other armed men. Such beliefs were probably reflected in collective burials with weapons, known as *Aschenplatz* type graves. These were extensive (up to several meters in diameter) shallow pits filled with pyre ash, containing the graves of many people. Research at the Krukówek cemetery showed that, in addition to male warriors, women, probably their wives, were buried in these communal graves. Archaeologists find luxury items in such burials, indicating not only the high status of the deceased but also their broad cultural contacts, mainly with Western and Eastern Europe.

Men were buried with weapons: swords, spears, javelins, equestrian equipment such as spurs, stirrups, and bits, as well as clothing and ornaments. Women were provided for their journey to the afterlife primarily with elaborate bronze multi-strand necklaces, bracelets, and brooches, as well as small tools like iron awls and knives, and clay and stone spindle whorls. In all graves, both wealthy and poor, fragments of small clay vessels were found, possibly containing symbolic food offerings for the deceased.

An interesting aspect of the Yatvingian funerary rite is the presence among grave goods of Christian metal crosses. These finds correspond with information from the *Descriptiones Terrarum* (a 13th-century source discovered in Ireland), stating that Lithuanians and Yatvingians readily accepted baptism because they were raised from infancy by Christian wet nurses.

However, it seems that the devotional objects found at cemeteries and sacred sites are rather expressions of religious syncretism, where the Yatvingians incorporated Christ into their pantheon of gods.

Sacred places, including cemeteries, were located in the immediate vicinity of human settlements. The closeness of forests, hills, waters, and fields, all regarded with reverence and cult, sanctified the guarding forts and watchtowers and their owners, who could combine chieftain and priestly functions.

### **The Yatvingian language**

The Yatvingians most likely formed a distinct group within the Baltic peoples, on an equal footing with the Prussians and the Letto-Lithuanian tribes. From a linguistic perspective,

they were a transitional people between the Prussian tribal group and the Letto-Lithuanian tribal group, which manifested itself in the Yatvingian language combining certain features characteristic of both the Prussian and Lithuanian languages.

The use of contemporary toponymy must be approached with great caution due to the Lithuanian, Polish, Ruthenian, and German colonizations that undoubtedly spread into Yatvingian territories between the 15th and 17th centuries. It is also known that working with material related to the Sambian Sudovians (descendants of the Yatvingians resettled by the Teutonic Knights to Sambia) is risky, and attributing the results of such studies to the medieval Yatvingians is unacceptable.

The most reliable basis for characterising the Yatvingian language undoubtedly consists of the personal names and place names of the Yatvingians transmitted by written sources from the 13th and early 14th centuries.

### **Anthropology**

Unfortunately, due to the widespread cremation burial rite among the Yatvingians, there is no possibility for extensive anthropological studies of the early medieval Yatvingian population. The burned bones also do not allow of the extraction of DNA samples, and consequently, it is impossible to determine the genetic lineages of this people.

### **Material Culture**

Medieval chroniclers regarded the Yatvingians as barbarians, thereby excluding them from the sphere of European civilisation and culture. This perception has persisted into modern times. However, archaeological research conducted at the centres of Szurpiły, Jeglinec, Grodzisko, and Konikowo, as well as at Yatvingian cemeteries, has enabled a reassessment of this unjust view. Today, we possess a substantial body of material culture artefacts made of clay, stone, bone, horn, glass, as well as iron and non-ferrous metals. Most of the tools, ornaments, and weapons display interregional characteristics common to both the Christian and pagan neighbours of Yatvingia, while some objects originate from much more distant regions. In terms of manufacturing techniques and the pace of technological development, Yatvingian artefacts are fully comparable to those from neighbouring and more remote countries.

At every Yatvingian centre, clay vessels were produced, fragments of which are frequently discovered at settlement sites. These vessels were used for the preparation and storage of food. In addition, items typically found within households but also in graves include spindle whorls – weights attached to spindles – attesting to textile production, as well as various knives,

razors, and awls accompanied by whetstones for sharpening them. To kindle fire, the Yatvingians used iron firestrickers struck against stone flints. Finds of keys and locks indicate that the wealthiest inhabitants stored their valuables – possibly crafted in local workshops or acquired through trade – in locked chests. Trade is further evidenced by the discovery of balance-scale weights.

Only a limited number of finds directly attest to agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, and fishing. These primarily include half-sickles – tools intermediate in form between a scythe and a sickle – used for cutting grass, shoots, and thin branches as fodder for livestock. Some arrowheads discovered by archaeologists may have served hunting purposes, while harpoons, hooks, and net weights, used in a manner comparable to modern practices, were employed in fishing.

Alongside everyday items, another very numerous category of finds at Yatvingian sites – especially in cemeteries dating from the 11th to the 13th centuries – is ornaments. Most were made of bronze, with only a few types, such as multi-coiled necklaces known as *Totenkrone*, being characteristic exclusively of the Prussians and Yatvingians. Fragments of various necklaces, bracelets, clothing clasps, as well as rings, ear ornaments (so-called ear-spools), and particularly multi-shaped pendants, rank among the most common archaeological finds in Yatvingia after pottery fragments.

### **Military art**

In the pages of history, the Yatvingians are primarily remembered as ruthless mounted warriors. In their raids, they often ventured hundreds of kilometres from their homelands, seizing spoils such as slaves, valuables, and even entire herds of cattle and horses. These attacks, which intensified at the end of the 12th century and throughout the 13th century, were mainly directed at Rus' and Polish lands. Historical sources report that the Yatvingians devastated regions including Kujawy, the Lublin Land, the Sandomierz Land, and the territories of Galicia-Volhynia. During the Teutonic Order's conquest of Prussia, the Yatvingians supported their kin by raiding distant corners of the Order's territory. The strategy of Yatvingian expeditions relied on sudden and unexpected cavalry attacks deep into enemy territory. They avoided prolonged sieges and, in the face of strong resistance, would withdraw and shift their target, rarely engaging in large pitched battles on open fields. After a swift and bloody fight, followed by gathering loot and taking captives, they would retreat just as quickly. This tactic caused disarray among defenders and significantly delayed pursuit and immediate counterattacks.

These armed raids inevitably provoked retaliatory campaigns against Yatvingia. Chronicles record several major military expeditions led by Rus' and Polish rulers, including joint Rus'-Polish actions and, later, numerous Teutonic raids. Archaeological discoveries indicate that armies of the Rus' princes Vladimir the Great and later his son Yaroslav the Wise likely reached the settlement complex in Szurpiły. Military campaigns were mainly organized during cold, snowless winters when ice froze lakes, swamps, and marshy areas that otherwise effectively protected Yatvingia. The well-trained, heavily armored invading forces sought swift confrontation in open field soon after entering enemy territory. However, employing guerrilla tactics, the Yatvingians harassed their enemies with constant ambushes, effectively using natural defensive conditions and their own constructed fortifications.

Historical sources provide limited information about the weapons used by the Yatvingians. Much more data comes from archaeology. Warrior weaponry and equipment items date from the 10th to the 13th centuries. These finds appear at hillforts, settlements, and cemeteries, as well as in scattered contexts without clear association. Not all these artifacts can be attributed to the Yatvingians since weapons found at settlement sites or isolated finds might belong to invaders. Therefore, the most valuable artifacts are those from burial complexes at Yatvingian cemeteries. The richest information concerns offensive weapons, primarily swords, spears, and axes, with pole weapons clearly dominating the finds – historical sources indicate that the Yatvingians specialized in these. Numerous horse gear items from cemeteries and settlement areas have been discovered, including spurs, stirrups, bits, and parts of bridles. Other finds prove that Yatvingians wore iron chainmail, lamellar armor, and steel helmets.

For over 300 years, the Yatvingians formed a significant military force in Central and Eastern Europe. Warfare was the foundation of their economic and political existence. They raided neighboring territories, leaving destruction and devastation in their wake. They were also hired as fearsome warriors even by Christian armies competing with each other. Their extensive contacts and long-range military expeditions ensured they were well-armed and equipped, combining Western and Eastern European, Scandinavian, and nomadic elements in their gear. Expecting retaliation from raided neighbors, and relying on difficult terrain, they created a sophisticated defensive system.

### **Defensive System**

The earliest Yatvingian fortified settlements appeared in the 9th–10th centuries. They typically took the form of small, usually single-compound hillforts with one, two, or three lines of fortifications, often featuring a circular or oval central courtyard, sometimes raised. The

plateau of the fortress was surrounded by simple wooden or wood-and-earth defensive structures, such as fences/palisades and/or earthen ramparts faced with wood and reinforced with stones. The fort primarily served as a self-sufficient stronghold. There is no information about any defensive constructions located at the foot or in the forefield of these forts. Similarly, nothing is known about fortifications protecting the single-farm settlements established around the stronghold during this period. The fortified centers at that time were small in area; due to the poorly recognized forefield, their size can only be cautiously estimated at a maximum of about 0.01 km<sup>2</sup>.

In the next phase, dated to the 10th–11th centuries, the defensibility of the fortified centers was noticeably strengthened. The central stronghold's courtyard could still be surrounded by several lines of fortifications, but these were significantly more robust. Additional ramparts were constructed in the lower parts of the terrain and at the foot of fortified hills. The ramparts of that time mostly had a layered construction, although older types of fortifications might still have been in use. Gates probably took the form of integrated timber structures incorporated into the ramparts. The fort functioned as a defensive structure, and small, lightweight buildings likely providing shelter for the garrison could have been situated on the courtyard. So far, no evidence has been found of fortifications around the settlements or in the forefield of the fort. The estimated area of the center during this phase could have been approximately 0.1–0.2 km<sup>2</sup>.

In the latest period, dated to the 11th–13th centuries, large, expansive, and multi-compound fortified complexes were established. The central stronghold's defences had a geometric, sometimes multi-part layout. Courtyards were surrounded by a single line of fortifications. The rampart crests in key defensive locations were equipped with galleries, usually near gate passages. Gate passages might have had the form of asymmetric complexes incorporated into the courtyard's rampart system, additionally reinforced by towers, while those at the lower ramparts took the shape of simple barbicans. The ramparts were box-shaped constructions, filled with earth and faced with stones, which sometimes also covered large parts of the slopes of the hills. Over the years, the fortifications were widened and heightened, sometimes with additional layering. Similar ramparts were built at the lower parts or foot of the strongholds. On the courtyard, alongside towers and sometimes inner ramparts, there could be single buildings serving as shelters, possibly also with cultic functions. It cannot be ruled out that burials and deposits of bronze ornaments found within the stronghold were intended to gain the favor of gods and the assistance of deceased warriors in defending the fortress. The courtyard surface may have been partly paved, as were some of the internal roads adjacent to the ramparts.

At the foot of the fortress, a fortified suburb (podgrodzie) with a regular layout functioned. Its defensive perimeter could have been integrated with the stronghold or, alternatively, protected by its own fortifications. Additional protection for the network of satellite settlements was provided by both natural and artificial protective barriers, such as marshes and wetlands or ditches between lakes. The center's boundaries were secured by long lines of outer ramparts with box-like construction, located at critical points of the forefield, with smaller forts and watchtowers. Together with the central stronghold, these formed an integrated defensive system of the fortified center. Commonly used barriers made of wood and vegetation – such as wooden fences and water obstacles – provided further security. The area protected in this manner could exceed 1 km<sup>2</sup> in size.

### **Defensive objects**

**Bajtkowo, commune Elk.** The hillfort in Bajtkowo is located approximately 17 km southwest of Elk. The site is situated on a kame hill adjacent to the southern bay of Lake Bajtkowskie. Originally, the hill was surrounded on the west and south sides by the waters of a small lake, which was drained during the modern period. The current appearance of the hillfort is partly the result of modifications made to the hill in the late Early Middle Ages and partly during the modern era.

The fortress consists of two separate courtyards, upper and lower. These are two semicircular platforms of roughly the same size, positioned at different heights. There is about a 5-meter height difference between the upper and lower courtyard, separated by a steep slope. Both parts were surrounded by ramparts, likely of box construction, especially developed on the northern side. The large size and shape of the rampart in this area may indicate it served as the base for a wooden tower or gallery. This kind of fortification measure was intended to protect the main gate, which was probably located in the northwestern part of the fort.

The entrance to the stronghold split inside, leading separately to the lower and upper courtyards. In the modern period, the hillfort was significantly transformed (idealized) and incorporated into a park-and-palace complex. A large cellar is dug into the northern part of the rampart.

The site has been mentioned in literature since the 1820s under the names Baitkowen, Baitenberg, Bajtkowo.

**Dating:** 10th–13th centuries

**Grodzisko, commune Banie Mazurskie.** The hillfort in Grodzisko is located just under 6 km directly south of Banie Mazurskie. The site lies on a high moraine hill locally called Grodzisko, dominating the surrounding area. On the west, south, and east sides, the elevation was protected by the flooded, modern-era-drained marshes of an unnamed tributary of the Gołdapa River. The flat, roughly oval-shaped courtyard measures about 150 by 90 meters and is bordered on the northern side by a barrier rampart. On the other sides, the interior of the hillfort is surrounded by an almost invisible encircling rampart. A very distinctive feature of this hillfort is a pond located roughly in its central part. This water body is natural but was probably artificially deepened. The entrance to the fort was likely on the eastern side, where, in a later phase, an expanded gate connected to the encircling rampart was located. To the north of the hillfort's hill lies an extensive area of flattened moraine hilltops where subordinate settlements may have existed. On the west side, traces of fortifications extend several hundred meters northward from the ramparts of the hillfort. The early medieval fort was built on the remains of settlements from the Early Iron Age and the Roman influence period.

The site has been mentioned in literature since the early 18th century under the names Grodzysko, Schlossberg, Grodzisko.

**Dating:** 10th–13th centuries

**Jegliniec, commune Szypliszki.** The hillfort is situated at the highest point of a moraine hill locally called Pilekalis (224.4 meters above sea level). The southern slopes of the hill gently descend toward a marshy valley; to the west at its base runs a deep gully; to the north and south, broad and deep valleys extend. On the northern side of the hillfort, a long, narrow "causeway" with steep slopes, about 100 meters in length, reaches the hill's foot. This feature is mostly natural but has been modified by human activity.

The courtyard of this hillfort is oval, about 40 by 20 meters, surrounded by massive ramparts built during the fort's last phase of use. It consists of two parts, separated by a kind of rampart/causeway: a lower northern part and a higher southern part. The exact location of the gate passage is unknown but was probably on the southern side, near a "ledge" adjoining the ramparts where a wooden tower may have stood. Traces of additional fortifications are preserved at the hillfort's base. The rampart shows damage in several places from excavations dating to World War II. The early medieval fort was erected on remains of settlements from the Early Iron Age and the Roman influence period.

The site has been mentioned in literature since the late 18th century under the name Jegliniec.

**Dating:** 10th–13th centuries

**Konikowo, commune Gołdap**

The hillfort in Konikowo is located about 2.5 km south of Gołdap, on a high kame hill locally known as Zamkowa Góra (Castle Hill) at 242 m above sea level, which is the lower peak of the Gołdapska Góra (272 m a.s.l.). The site consists of a courtyard occupying the summit area of the hill, surrounded by a single ring of ramparts. No additional fortifications have been found on the hill, except for a “ledge” on the northern side, which was probably an extended front of the rampart as well as part of the communication route encircling the fortress. The defensive rampart enclosed the courtyard along a length of approximately 160 meters. The rampart is particularly high and massive on the northern side, with somewhat lower sections on the southern and eastern sides. On the western side, the rampart’s fortification almost completely disappears. A deep depression in the eastern section of the rampart marks the remains of a gate guarding the entrance to the hillfort. The courtyard has an oval shape measuring 47 meters along the north–south axis and 27 meters along the east–west axis. Its area is about 1400 square meters and is not completely flat. There is a small rise in the central and eastern parts, while the southern part of the courtyard is noticeably sunken. Despite visible damage to its surface dating from World War II, the courtyard seems to have retained its original shape.

The site has been mentioned in literature since the mid-18th century under the names Goldap (Gołdap), Klein Wronken (Wronki), and erroneously as Rostek.

**Dating:** 10th–11th centuries

**Rajgród, commune Rajgród.** The hillfort in Rajgród occupies most of a large moraine elevation at the western end of a peninsula projecting into the eastern bay of Lake Rajgrodzkie. The hill with the hillfort was heavily altered in modern times (a manor house from the 16th–17th century), which makes it difficult to reconstruct the appearance of the early medieval fort. Nevertheless, it can be said that the courtyard probably had a polygonal shape measuring about 100 by 70 meters. Excavations revealed that the hillfort had ramparts, which were leveled during the construction of the aforementioned manor. Apart from early medieval materials, the site yielded artifacts from the Early Iron Age, the Roman influence period, as well as late medieval and modern periods. The entrance to the fort was probably located on its eastern side. To the south of the hillfort’s slope lies a rather large plateau settlement area, where in addition to earlier and modern materials, early medieval stratifications and ceramics were discovered. This area may have been partially fortified. Field observations indicate that the peninsula on which the

fortress stands may have been intensively used for settlement; a subordinate settlement (suburbium) may have existed on the northeastern side of the site. This is a large flat area bounded by sharply sloping slopes descending to the lake, ideally suited for such a purpose.

The hillfort is identified with the fortified settlement Raj known from written sources. Known in literature since the 19th century under the names Zamczysko, Góra Zamkowa, Rajgród.

**Dating:** 10th–13th centuries

**Rogale, commune Stare Juchy.** The hillfort locally known as Zamczysko or Góra Zamkowa is situated on the northwestern shore of the ribbon lake Rogale, on the edge of a hill. To the north, the site borders a deep ravine in the isthmus between lakes Rogale and Rogaliki. The courtyard of the hillfort is oval-shaped, measuring about 30 meters along the north–south axis and about 23 meters along the east–west axis, and is surrounded by a single, massive rampart. On the northwestern side, the ramparts adjoin an extensive plateau of a suburban settlement. The early medieval stronghold was built on the remnants of settlement from the Early Iron Age.

The site has been known in the literature since the 17th century under the names Rogallen (Grodzisko, Schlossberg), Rogale.

**Dating:** 10th–13th centuries

**Skomack Wielki, commune Stare Juchy.** The hillfort in Skomack Wielki is located on a peninsula (Ostrów) between Lake Orzysz and Lake Wylewy (formerly called Czarne). The hillfort is situated on an anthropogenically transformed hill locally known as Grodzisko. The site consists of two concentric lines of ramparts. The upper rampart surrounds an oval courtyard measuring about 58 meters along the east–west axis and about 25 meters along the north–south axis. Excavations conducted by the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw and the Society of Antiquarians uncovered remains of two lines of wooden-earth ramparts as well as a gate passage in the eastern part of the hillfort. Traces of the hill's use during the Early Iron Age and the Migration Period were also uncovered at the site. In the Early Middle Ages, the peninsula where the hillfort stands was likely an island.

The hillfort has been known in the literature since the 16th century under the names Kymmenau, Schlossberg Kaymenau, Arys, Skomatzko, Schlossberg, Werder, Werder am Arys-See, Góra Zamkowa, Grodzisko, Ostrów, Pańska Wola, Skomack Wielki.

**Dating:** 9th–11th centuries

**Szurpiły, commune Jeleniewo.** Zamkowa Góra was first settled at the turn of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, during the Bronze Age. A fortified settlement was established here, surrounded by a wooden fence or palisade. From the 2nd to the 4th century CE, a new elite community settled Zamkowa Góra. At the end of the 9th or the beginning of the 10th century, the warlike Jotvingians arrived in the area and built a fortress on Zamkowa Góra, surrounded by two or three lines of ramparts. On its slopes, remains of their cremation burials were recorded. War damage in the first half of the 11th century prompted the Jotvingians to rebuild the stronghold. It gained new lines of massive wooden-stone-earth defensive walls with large towers and wooden gates. From the 11th to the 13th century, the stronghold on Zamkowa Góra was rebuilt several more times.

The hillfort has been known in the literature since the 19th century under the names Jeglówek, Góra Zamkowa, Szurpiły.

**Dating:** 9th–13th centuries

**Szwałk, commune Kowale Oleckie.** The hillfort is located on a peninsula of Lake Ciche, at the northeastern end of a large elevation locally known as Smolnik or Góra Zamkowa. The hill with the hillfort is separated from the rest of the elevation by a deep, artificial, probably modern trench connecting the shores of Lake Ciche and the now partly dried Lake Ślepek. The slopes of the hillfort hill are surrounded on the north and south sides by the waters of Lake Ciche. To the eastern part of the site adjoins a moat, which separates it from a high ridge of an irregular peninsula jutting deep into the lake basin. The hillfort consists of a courtyard roughly trapezoidal in shape, measuring approximately 42 x 36 x 55 x 19 meters, and a single line of ramparts, today almost invisible. The early medieval stronghold was built on remnants of settlement from the Early Iron Age.

The site has been known in the literature since the interwar period under the names Klein Schwalg (Smolnik, Schlossberg), Szwałk.

**Dating:** 10th–11th centuries

**Talusy, commune Elk.** The hillfort in Talusy is situated on a high, extensive kame hill on the western shore of a dried, unnamed lake. Access to the hillfort is difficult due to the high, steep slopes of the hill. The courtyard of the stronghold has an oval shape, measuring about 145 meters along the NE-SW axis and about 50 meters along the NW-SE axis, with a marked elevation in the northeastern part. No clear traces of ramparts have been recorded. The hillfort

area has been almost entirely destroyed by the construction of trenches and a mausoleum cemetery from World War I. Traces of settlement from the Early Iron Age were discovered on the hill.

The hillfort has been known in the literature since the 19th century under the names Pillno kalne, Renkussen, Schanze Pil o Colina, Wachtberg, Wallberg, Thalussen, Rękusy, Talusy.

**Dating:** Early Middle Ages (?)

### 6.3. PRESENTATION OF THE ROUTES

Ona Gintė Uldinskaitė, Wioletta Anuszkiewicz

Based on the work of scholars from various disciplines (including historians, archaeologists, ethnologists, and others), the collected research material was used by tourism specialists to design six cultural routes in Lithuania and Poland. The routes developed around the Balts theme lead through hillforts and burial mounds, ancient settlements, museums, manor estates, educational trails, observation towers, and sacred sites – places where past and present, nature and culture, and tangible cultural heritage converge. Each stop represents a narrative grounded in the context of Balts culture, telling the story of landscape, crafts, beliefs, everyday life, and the transmission and creative reinterpretation of these traditions for the contemporary visitor. The routes also incorporate craft workshops, educational activities, and community-created sites adapted to the needs of travellers.

The diverse thematic routes – *The Balts' Road: From the Semigallians to the Yotvingians*, *The Veil of Time over Hillforts*, *The Balts' Road: On the Borderland of the Yotvingians and Aukštaitians*, *The Balts' Road: The Great Yotvingian Route in Lithuania*, *Stones, Sky and Gods*, and *Among Hills and Lakes – In the Lands of the Yotvingians* – primarily connect locations in southern Lithuania and northern Poland.

These routes offer travellers varied interpretative experiences and opportunities to explore the world of the Balts from multiple perspectives. By promoting slow and responsible travel, they encourage respect for heritage sites and attentive observation of the surrounding landscape, where the Baltic world reveals itself as a living, research-based cultural experience. The routes presented below are structured sequentially and include descriptions of key sites as well as recommended travel segments.

#### **THE BALTS' ROAD. FROM SEMIGALLIANS TO YOTVINGIANS**

Balts' Culture Education Centre "Balts' Road" – Sundial Square – Šiauliai History Museum – Bubiai Castle Mound – The Museum of Sticks – Kelmė Regional Museum – Kubiliai Mound – Pagryžuvys Mound – Visitor Centre of Tytuvėnai Regional Park – Raseiniai Regional History Museum – Veliuona Mound Complex – Visitor Centre of Panemuniai Regional Park – Sudargas Mound Complex – Ethnographic Suvalkietis Homestead – Suvalkija (Sūduva) Cultural Centre–Museum (Paežeriai Manor) – Old Crafts Centre “Virbalis Gates” – Kunigiškiai (Pajevonys) Mound – Pajevonys – Jonas Basanavičius Birthplace and the Oak Grove of Lithuanian National Revival – Piliakalniai Mound

Crossing the Lithuania-Poland Border at Kalvarija – Budzisko

Jegliniec hillfort – District Museum in Suwałki – Castle Hill in Szurpiły – Bridges in Stańczyki and Path “To the Emperor’s Stone” – Masurian graduation towers in Gołdap – The hill fort in Konikowo (Piekna Gora near Gołdap) – Ściborki Republic – Mill in Budry – Borecka Forest – The hill fort in Szwałk – The Yotvingian sacrificial altar in Stare Juchy – Observation tower in Stare Juchy – The hill fort in Rogala – The hill fort in Bajtkowo – Ełk History Museum – Ełk Narrow-Gauge Railway

Distance travelled – approximately 670 kilometres.

Duration – 3-4 days optionally.

The first possible overnight stay is between Veliuona and Jurbarkas (<https://jurbarkas.info/lt/turizmas/apgyvendinimas/>), the second possible overnight stay is at the “Dobilynė” homestead (or another place of your interest in Vilkaviškis district (<https://www.vilkaviskisinfo.lt/apgyvendinimas/>)). Accommodation must be arranged in advance. If you wish to stay elsewhere, search for information at tourism information centres, they will offer the best options. We suggest spending other nights in Poland, in Suwałki or Ełk (Lukas) or other towns.

The ancient Baltic world is a history shrouded in mystery that cannot be accurately reconstructed today. We know about beliefs and customs from the chronicles of neighbouring countries, stories, and folk works: songs, legends, and traditions. With the establishment of Christianity, the old worldview was mixed with folk customs, and only quiet echoes remain in our traditions.

Embark on an impressive journey leading from Semigallian to Yotvingian lands. Feel the centuries-old spirit of the land, listen to the rustle of winds in the forests and mound-filled legends, touch the customs that are still alive in our regions. This route will take you through places where myths, history, and living Baltic traditions merge into one impressive experience.

We invite you to start your journey in the city of Šiauliai, located at the intersection of three Baltic tribes – Semigallians, Samogitians, and Upper Lithuanians. Visit Balts' Culture Education Centre "Balts' Road", where modern technologies open the door to the ancient Baltic world. Go to Sundial Square to count time, where the date of the Battle of Saule that took place in Šiauliai land, the origin of the city's name, and the first mention of the name are commemorated. This place reminds us that for the Balts, the Sun was the bearer of life, so stop, breathe in and feel the flow of the day as our ancestors saw it. In Šiauliai History Museum, ancient shadows come alive in archaeological exhibitions. Here, great attention is paid to Šiauliai land until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, namely, to the Semigallians and Samogitians, to the similarities and differences in the tangible culture of these two Baltic tribes. In the museum, you can not only watch but also twist ropes with your own hands, mould pots, or learn about archaeologists' work.

The Samogitian tribe was forming on the fertile highlands between the Dubysa, the Jūra, and the Venta rivers, while one of the strongest castles standing on Bubiai Mound in the 13<sup>th</sup> century was extremely important in fighting enemies. Archaeological findings tell about warriors who were defending this land and about fire that destroyed what the locals had built more than once.

The older the period of the findings being investigated is, the more questions, discussions, and interpretations arise. This is also the case with sticks– they are believed to have been used as a means of fighting or one of the variants of the crooked stick. Although times have changed, the magic of stick carving is still alive in Mečislovas Ežerskis' Sticks Museum. An exhibition presenting folk art is also available in Kelmė Regional Museum, which is located in manor buildings.

Having familiarised with the manor's secrets, go to defensive bastions – Kubiliai Mound, known as Birutė's Hill, and the nearby Pagryžuvis Mound. These hills are like frozen giants, witnessing the Baltic times when castles were built on natural heights surrounded by river valleys.

The journey then leads to the Visitor Centre of Tytuvėnai Regional Park, where nature sounds and bird voices merge with a knowledge-filled exhibition. Here you can look at the landscape “from a crane's flight,” see what the depths of lakes hide, or learn about the Baltic signs and symbols.

There are more than 20 mounds in Raseiniai district, on which castles had stood and battles had taken place, so when you arrive at the Raseiniai Regional History Museum, you will be introduced to dukes' weapons, archaeological findings, and stories about legendary leaders.

The Upper Lithuanians were founding their place on the plains by the Nemunas, the Nevėžis, and the Neris rivers. Their land had long been famous for trade and crafts, and mounds were built on high riverbanks. Veliuona Mound Complex stands on the Nemunas bank like a giant guardian of time. The first Veliuona mound is also called Gediminas' Grave. It is believed that in these places, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Gediminas, died. The second mound is called Pilaitės, and a bit further north is Antkalnė mound. If you climb the mounds and close your eyes, you will hear legends carried by the wind about the wooden castles that had stood here.

When traveling along the Nemunas bank, stop by the Visitor Centre of Panemuniai Regional Park, which features an exhibition “The Nemunas and Life by It” presenting the nature, culture, and traditional occupations of the residents on the banks of the father of the rivers.

In Jurbarkas, cross the country's largest river and set off to explore the ancient spirit of the Baltic fortresses surrounded by five majestic signs of time – Sudargas Mound Complex.

Mounds are silent witnesses of our history that come alive only in stories and travellers' imagination, so we suggest resting your thoughts and visiting the Ethnographic Suvalkietis (Suvalkija resident) Homestead. This is a private homestead of the Rutkai family, where a prosperous house of Suvalkija resident without any eclecticism is still cherished, so if you book a tour or a meal in advance, don't be surprised to find yourself in a real Lithuanian well-maintained village.

We suggest continuing getting acquainted with the history of Užnemunė (Trans-Nemunas region) and to discover the Yotvingian world in the Suvalkija (Sūduva) Cultural Centre – Museum. This institution, also called Paežeriai Manor, is famous for its abundance of cultural events and variety of educational programs, among which are those related to culinary heritage, making it an excellent place to combine knowledge and lunch. For those wanting an alternative, we suggest visiting the Old Crafts Centre “Virbalis Gates” by making a prior arrangement. In this centre, you can bake a loaf of bread, taste traditional Suvalkija treats, try weaving and candle making.

Kunigiškiai (Pajevonys) Mound is one of the largest Baltic mounds. The Roman coins, ceramics, and other artifact remains discovered during archaeological research indicate that people lived here as early as the first years of our era. Legends say that in the ancient times, Kunigiškiai mound had underground communication with Žinyčia Hill in Pajevonys town, where a church now stands. Of course, we won't offer you to travel through a tunnel now, but we recommend visiting Pajevonys town because locals call it a centre of the earth.

Mounds were cultivating the national consciousness of Jonas Basanavičius, so visit the patriarch's birthplace and the nearby rustling Oak Grove of Lithuanian National Revival

covering 40 hectares. By prior arrangement, you can book an educational programme related to culinary heritage and thus not only gain knowledge but also eat heartily.

Narrative culture has ancient traditions. Some call it legends, others untrue stories, but often stories about mounds mention ancient battles. One of the most beautiful legends about the battles that took place at Piliakalniai Mound is the one telling about Margiris' death. Whether to believe it or not is up to you, but we recommend climbing and imagining a desperate battle.

Before crossing the Lithuania-Poland border, we suggest stopping at "Dobilynė" homestead and resting from the day's impressions.

Lithuania-Poland Border Crossing Kalvarija – Budzisko.

There is Jegliniec hillfort rising on a moraine hill in Poland, next to the Lithuanian border, where powerful ramparts and possible gates still remind of warring tribes' vigilance. You can learn more about the people who lived here by visiting the Suwałki Regional Museum. The museum organizes numerous cultural events, including an Archaeological Festival at the Yotvingian cemetery in Switzerland.

Castle Hill in Szurpiły, surrounded by the silence of four lakes, still guards the legend of Yotvingian nobleman Šiurpa and the 13<sup>th</sup>-century might when a castle fortified with double ramparts stood here.

We then invite you to go to the place where nature's grandeur and human creation unite – to the Bridges at Stańczyki and the Path "To the Emperor's Stone". The railway bridges built in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century above the Błędzianka River look like giant Roman aqueducts.

In Gołdap, the only resort in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, you will find one more impressive human creation that gives meaning to the dialogue between nature and architecture – Masurian graduation towers in Gołdap. Salt is extracted from a depth of 646 meters and flows over rowan branches, so inhaling this mineral-saturated air is like opening your body and soul to nature's care.

The Beautiful Mountain (*Piękna Góra*) stands out with a stunning panorama of Gołdap, Mazury Garbate, surrounding lakes, and Romincka Forest Landscape Park, where Yotvingian mounds had stood for centuries. Today, ancient sacred heights and modern entertainment are combined on the mountain – you can encounter both, ceremonial tranquillity and bustle of winter fun. Nearby is the Castle Hill, on which the Konikowo Mound still maintains the silence of its defensive ramparts, as if guarding ancestors' secrets from outside eyes.

Ščiborki Republic is like a living story about the ancient Balts' connection with nature, where, by abandoning civilization's noise, one can touch primordial harmony.

Mill in Budry that is hiding ancient echoes of millstones invites you to feel the spirit of the Baltic worldview – here grain becomes not only bread but also a reviving tradition.

The route then turns south and southeast, where the quite hilly terrain was not favourable for agriculture. However, this allowed to preserve natural deciduous forests, and Borecko Forest is the largest forest complex in Elk Lake District. It is like a mysterious image of the Baltic forest kingdom, where hilly landscapes, lakes, and sacred groves guard ancient secrets.

Water and hills create a natural fortress by the mysterious Ciche Lake, so the old Mound in Szwalki is found here – a symbol of defence and sanctity of the Baltic ancestors.

There is a mysterious Sacrificial Stone – a giant boulder reminiscent of the Yotvingian rituals and worship of ancient gods – in the village of Stare Juchy. Its powerful form and legend-entwined aura still radiates sacral power, inviting one to touch the roots of the Baltic worldview. The village panorama can be admired by climbing the 20-meter-high observation tower.

When traveling, note that many mounds are simply called Castle Hills, as is the case with the Mound in Rogale, also called *Zamczysko*.

The mound by Bajtkow Lake with two terraced platforms reminds of the dual perception of the world – earthly and sacred.

We invite you to end your journey at Elk History Museum, located in the old building of a narrow-gauge railway station, inviting you on a journey through Masuria's past – from primordial Baltic communities to the present day. The locomotives standing in the museum's courtyard and the narrow-gauge railway that is being revived allow you to experience those times when iron and fire connected people and spirits.

This route is a journey not only through geographical places but also through time, myths, and ancestral memory.

### **TIME MIST OVER MOUNDS**

Lithuania-Poland Border Crossing Lazdijai – Ogrodniki /Rudamina Mound – Prelomčiškė Mound – Radžiūnai Mound – Alytus Mound – Memorial Museum of Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius – Merkinė Mound – Rooster Dune of Kloniai Hill – Šaudzykla – Visitor Centre of Dzūkija National Park in Marcinkonys – Exhibition of Hollow-Tree Beekeeping Apiary – Margionys – Information Centre *Girios Aidai* – Švendubrė Village with the Great Stone and Views of Raigardas Valley – Leipalingis.

Distance travelled from the Lithuania-Poland border – approximately 220 kilometres.

Duration – 2 days.

Overnight stay is possible at one of many homesteads by Dusia or Metelis lakes, in Alytus or Druskininkai. Accommodation must be arranged in advance. More detailed information is available at tourism information centres; they will offer the best options.

Embark on a journey where every step leads deep into the past – into the mysterious Yotvingian land, where mounds recall warriors' battles, legends come alive in rustling forests, and the breath of ancient gods can still be felt in the reflections of rivers and lakes. This is a route where nature's grandeur, history's echoes, and the magic of legends intertwine.

We invite you to start your journey from Rudamina Mound, where Duke Ringaudas' castle once stood proudly. When you climb the mound, you will feel how the quiet wind brings the echo of battles and the whisper of legends – perhaps you will even hear the footsteps of brave girl Raudonė. It is said that enchanted treasures lurk in the mound, and the panorama opening in the distance reminds of horizons unmoved by time.

On the shore of Dusia Lake, Prelomčiškė Mound guards a legend about a girl Onelė and the devil who proposed to her, who, it is said, piled up this hill. When you reach the top, you will see the “the Dzūkija Sea” and feel the mysterious connection of water and earth, where myths merge with reality.

In Vidziris Botanical Reserve, on the Nemunas bank, there is Radžiūnai Mound, surrounded by 9 km of educational trails. Legend tells that two brother counts piled up this hill, and archaeological findings testify to a settlement here as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> century.

Alytus Mound is a place where the legend of Alytas and priestess Mirgrausėlė lives to this day, while miraculous frogs live in the Alytupis stream flowing near the mound – they are said to bring love. Nearby there is Lithuania's highest pedestrian bridge, from which the Nemunas opens up as if from the eyes of ancient gods.

Legends about mounds are a living form of memory, introducing us to our ancestors' worldview. The same are proverbs, sayings, and folk songs collected by Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius. In his memorial museum in Subartonys, you will see book manuscripts, personal items, and hear historical stories about the daily life that the writer so masterfully conveyed in his works.

An impressive confluence of the Nemunas and the Merkys opens up from Merkinė Mound – as if nature itself decided to meet here. This is one of the oldest settlements in Lithuania, where Jogaila possibly granted Magdeburg rights to Merkinė and Vilnius.

This region is distinguished by very light and sandy soil, and Kloniai Hill (Rooster Dune) is a living, moving continental dune that amazes with white sand and wind-created forms in the

forests. Here you can feel the real spirit of the seaside, only instead of waves, the whistling of sand will accompany you.

Sand is everywhere here – both on plains, hills, and riverbanks. Šaudzykla Hill is a sand cliff reminiscent of war times. Today it has become a connection of peace and history. During the Polish occupation, a shooting range operated here, which was later taken over by the Germans – wooden rails with a target wagon were installed at the foot of the hill, which they would shoot at from a house standing in the forest, and missed bullets were “absorbed” by the high slope.

One of the largest villages by area in Lithuania with authentic wooden architecture and living ethnography is Marcinkonys. The Visitor Centre of Dzūkija National Park operates here, and there you will learn about rituals, crafts, and old residents’ secrets – from candle pouring to folk songs that accompanied people from birth to death.

A living symbol of nature and human communion is the old hollow-tree hives in trees, which the Exhibition of Hollow-Tree Beekeeping Apiary invites you to get to know more closely.

According to the residents of Margionys village, all travel worries can be washed away by the spring of “Crone’s Kitchen Garden” – a place where gushing crystal-clear water, bubbling *burbaklės* (springs), and a nearby four-trunked linden tree create a special aura.

Just a few kilometres from Margionys – and you’ll find yourself at the “Girios Aidas” (echo of the wood) museum. In a house that seems to have emerged from a fairy tale, nature and art merge into one – exhibitions about forest life, wood carvings, and myth-breathing sculptures allow you to feel the forest spirit.

The road then leads to Švendubrė village, which streets preserve the image of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Dzūkija village. Here you will find one of the most impressive mythological objects – the Devil’s Stone. It is said to cover the entrance to the underground city of Raigardas. This area also inspired M. K. Čiurlionis to create the famous triptych “Raigardas.”

End your journey in Leipalingis, a town which name recalls the Yotvingian times. Visit the old manor, walk through the park, and if you visit in summer, participate in the Yotvingian Festival, where ancient rituals, crafts, and the warlike spirit of ancestors come alive.

This route is not just a walk through nature but also a mysterious journey into the world of the Baltic mythology: springs where children are born, stones covering mysterious undergrounds, towns which names recall the Yotvingian times. Everything here breathes with legends, and the peace of the forests invites you to listen to the voice of old Lithuania.

## **THE BALTIC WAY. ON THE BORDER OF YOTVINGIANS AND UPPER LITHUANIANS**

Kazlų Rūda Regional Museum Exhibition – Višakio Rūda Household Museum of Valdas Arbašauskas – Spring in Višakio Rūda – Homestead “Gervių Giesmė” – Samanojus – Bird Watching Tower in Novaraistis Ornithological Reserve– Lekėčiai Great Spring – Vaiguva River-Street – Gelgaudiškis Educational Trail – Miestlaukis Mound – Kubiliai Family Apiary – Hammer Museum in Degučiai – Marijampolė Regional Museum – Amalva Swamp Educational Trail.

Distance travelled – slightly more than 200 kilometres.

Duration – 2 days. Possible first day overnight is at “Gervių Giesmė” homestead.

If needed, there is an opportunity to stay in Marijampolė at the end of the route.

Embark on a journey through ancient Baltic lands – springs, swamps, mounds, and fireplaces. Discover our ancestors’ worldview, nature’s laws, and historical memory. If you choose this route, you will visit places inhabited by Yotvingians and Upper Lithuanians, so don’t be surprised if seemingly similar places tell different stories. In the 6<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Upper Lithuanian area in the south encompassed the territory on both sides of the Nemunas, between the Šešupė and the Neris estuaries, and bordered the Yotvingian lands. The Upper Lithuanian tribe (together with Lithuanians) formed the core of the Lithuanian nation, while Yotvingians were famous for their warlike nature.

We invite you to start your journey at Kazlų Rūda Regional Museum Exhibition in the Tourism and Business Information Centre. Here, the secrets and history of the region’s heritage will be revealed to you, you will hear about iron ore mining, forestry customs, and Baltic life in these lands. Kazlų Rūda region is the land of iron and forests, where sacred trees were not cut but spoken to.

There was an abundance of bog iron ore in spring areas, swampy places, lakeshores, and riverbanks. The bloomeries (old iron extraction facilities) in Višakio Rūda Household Museum of Valdas Arbašauskas testify that people in these regions have been extracting gold-valued iron with the help of fire since the ancient times. You will also see old furniture and farm tools in the museum spaces that tell about daily life that is now unusual for us.

In forested areas, there is an abundance not only of revered trees but also of sacred springs. The Spring of the Old Baltic Sacred Site in Višakio Rūda is a natural miracle because, according to legends, the water here heals the body, and above the spring, the voices of tree spirits whisper.

After fire comes the bird song at “Gervių Giesmė” (Song of Cranes) homestead. This homestead is like a small paradise where peace and natural rhythm remind of the Baltic harmony with the world. We invite you to stop here longer and spend the night in a chosen building – a barn or *stuba*. At the homestead, you can enjoy sauna pleasures or replenish your knowledge by participating in educational programmes.

When traveling through Kazlų Rūda forests, we also recommend trying sauna pleasures offered by “Samanojus”.

The Baltic spirit lives here between silence and song, while the Bird Watching Tower in Novaraistis Ornithological Reserve is nearby. Representatives of at least 33 bird species included in Lithuania’s Red Book can be seen in the former peat bog, after raising the water level. On autumn evenings, flocks of up to 3,000 cranes land here to rest, so if natural conditions are favourable, you can see unprecedented views when time is counted not in hours but in wing strokes.

According to legends, Lekėčiai Great Spring is also miraculous. Allow yourself to refresh with the constantly gushing spring water (even in winter), and you will unconsciously see how it becomes easier, as if lifting the fog from your eyes. It is said that if you express a sincere wish and wash your hands the water will answer you.

Ilguva Manor is standing on the Nemunas cliff slope between Lekėčiai and Plokščiai. It has not yet revealed all its secrets. The famous Polish violinist, composer, and conductor, founder of the Warsaw Philharmonic, Emil Młynarski called this place “Lithuanian Switzerland.” While living here, he created the famous *F-dur* symphony and opera “On a Summer Night.”

As legends tell, this place inhabited since the Stone Age is guarded by giant Ilgis, whose four-century-old 32-meter-high three-trunked oak planted by ancient priests in the ravine slope is found only by the most persistent. Many kings, counts, nobles, musicians, writers, and painters have visited the land of the legendary giant Ilgis over many centuries. Visit it yourself.

In Plokščiai, there is a place where the river and people live in one flow. Vaiguva River-Street is an example of how a flowing water current becomes the axis of life because the only way for the residents of this street to get home is through the spring-fed river.

Discover the balance between legends and reality by walking Gelgaudiškis Educational Trail. The trail through mature forest begins at Gelgaudiškis Manor and leads to the old manor park, which allures travellers with one of the largest (as much as 118 ha) forest-type parks in Lithuania with legend-entwined objects – the Assessor’s Grave, the Devil’s Hill, the Barons’ Cemetery, the Hanged Men’s Hill, and of course, the “Star”, a clearing from which paths are cut

regularly in eight directions of the world. It is said that this was the wish of hunters as they could see game while dining.

Miestlaukis aka Juodupė (also called “Napoleon’s”) Mound was an ancient observation and defence site near Kudirkos Naumiestis. Here, on the hill, you can still hear the echo of a war horn, which seems to call together the tribes that used to live around – Yotvingians, Nadruvians, Scalovians, and perhaps Lithuanians.

Kubiliai Family Apiary reflects ancient traditions and connection between generations. It is famous in Vilkaviškis district not only for sweet nectar but also for Devynbitė Mead. This is not just a drink – it is a ritual-like experience. Mead here is aged with cold-dried berries, fruits, and medicinal herbs, each of which is important in its own way. We recommend booking a tasting and getting to know this mysterious drink more closely.

The hammer is one of the oldest and most commonly used tools of human civilization. Our ancestors used it to break bones or shells to get food. Currently, the spectrum of hammer use is very wide, so we invite you to visit the Hammer Museum in Degučiai, where you will be presented with a collection of more than 1,400 hammers when pre-arranged.

Marijampolė Regional Museum is a cognitive stop where archaeology, language, daily life, and beliefs intertwine. You can see how people’s way of life has changed, but the basic principles have remained the same: respect for the land, the cycle of time, celebration, and work songs.

According to the elders, a swamp is a path of souls where you can forget time, so the last stop is Amalva Swamp Educational Trail, which will pleasantly delight tired travellers with its shortness – only 121 meters.

May this journey be a small rebirth, a reminder, and a spark of consciousness.

### **THE BALTIC WAY. THE GREAT YOTVINGIAN PATH IN LITHUANIA**

Šilelis Educational Trail – Holy Spring – Pavištytis Mound – Visitor Centre of Vištytis Regional Park– Vištytis Stone – Tadarinė Pedestrian Path “Let’s Travel Ancestors’ Paths” – “Dobilynė” Homestead – Kačergos Hill – Kalvarija Regional Museum. Information Centre – Ethnographic Pranas Dzūkas Homestead – Exposition in Žuvintas Reserve Visitor Centre – Archaeological Museum, Alytus Regional Museum Branch – Ceramic Workshop “Vienaragių Šilas” – Liškiava with the Mound Complex by the Nemunas – Salt Studio – Dzūkija *Banda* Baking – Snaigyna (Veisiejai) Observation Tower – Lazdijai Regional Museum – Stone Museum *Yotvingian Yard*.

Distance travelled – approximately 300 kilometres.

Duration – 2-3 days optionally. Possible overnight stay is at “Dobilynė” homestead or ethnographic Pranas Dzūkas homestead. Accommodation must be arranged in advance. If you wish to stay elsewhere, search for information at tourism information centres, they will offer the best options.

A journey through the Yotvingian lands is a step into a mysterious, hilly, and forest-shrouded region where a warlike Baltic tribe used to. Yotvingians left many traces in this region – from stone-covered burial mounds to mounds reminiscent of the grandeur of old defensive fortifications. This tribe, famous for its agricultural skills and combat bravery, was established in southern Užnemunė (Trans-Nemunas region) and their lands extended to the territories of present-day Belarus and Poland.

When arriving from Poland, on the Lithuanian side, you immediately enter Vištytis Regional Park, where the Sūduva Upland landscape, its natural ecosystem, and cultural heritage values are protected. We invite you to begin getting acquainted with this protected area by hiking the Šilelis Educational Trail, which winds along the picturesque shore of Vištytis Lake – in some places, gentle slopes can shoot up to 50 meters in height. If you raise your heads up, you will see the “Witch’s Broom” settled in trees, as well as hollow trees, the tallest Vištytis spruce, and halfway along the trail you will find the Holy Spring, from which you may choose either to go back or to continue traveling to the viewpoint “View of Rominta Forest.”

Pavištytis Mound stands like a watcher – it has seen more than one ritual fire and heard more than one glee. This is the highest of all mounds in Vilkaviškis district, reaching 229.5 meters above sea level. You will learn more about this region’s values by visiting the Visitor Centre of Vištytis Regional Park.

It is said that in the Vištytis area, people harvest two crops – one of stones, and then what nature and work have grown. So, in this stone region, we suggest visiting the Vištytis Stone, guarding more than one legend from those testified by the devil’s footprint imprinted on its top.

The pedestrian path “Let’s Travel Ancestors’ Paths” in Tadarinė forest leads not only past mossy trees but also through time. They say wolves walked here, and ancient priests followed their tracks. This is a miraculous place that both frightens and calms down. When walking here, control your thoughts and desires very carefully because the universe can fulfil everything you think about while walking.

If you want to stop for the night, the “Dobilynė” homestead will welcome you with pleasure.

Kačergos Hill, located near the Polish border, is believed to have been a site of idols where men forged signs into stones and women showed respect to goddess Laima.

At Kalvarija Regional Museum, exhibits related to the region's history, ethnography, contemporary culture, and personalities that locals are proud of are collected, preserved, and presented to the public.

There were mounds of various purposes: some were used for reconnaissance, others for defence, while communities used to live on third ones, and next to them homesteads were established. Today the Baltic household and lifestyle heritage is presented here. In the Ethnographic Pranas Dzūkas Homestead, you can get to know more closely the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century crafts and the rhythm of daily work that came from the Yotvingian times. You can spend the night on hay here.

Birds, reed beds, swamps – all this was considered gates of sacred places, and Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve is one of the few places where visitors are given the opportunity to observe and hear the never-quiet life of the lake.

The exposition of Alytus Archaeological Museum opens the memory hidden in the depths of the earth – here lie amulets, urns, spears, and clay figurines. According to the Yotvingian tribal customs, it was believed that souls are embodied in trees, so visit the exhibition “When No Trees Were Left for Souls” in the museum and learn about the origins of Alytus region's history.

Various archaeological findings, most often pottery shards, tell about the life that existed in mounds, so visit the ceramic workshop “Vienaragių Šilas” (the Unicorn Boscage) in Merkinė, where you can feel creation of ceramic products yourself.

We recommend indulging your palate at one of Merkinė's dining establishments.

Liškiava Mound with the remaining ruins of the southwestern tower attracts not only for beautiful views of Liškiava Church and the Nemunas but also for the stories that here a castle was being built when preparing to repel Crusader attacks, but possibly due to the victory at Žalgiris (Grunwald), its construction was abandoned and left.

One of the symbols of abundance and eternity for ancient people was salt, and this mineral is abundant in Druskininkai waters, so we invite you to visit the Salt Studio, where, by prior arrangement, you can learn how salt is extracted, experience its plasticity, and ability to become a sculpture.

In the past, food was not very easily obtained, a lot of work had to be put in, so a *banda* (potato cake) made in Dzūkija is like a small sun, baked out of respect for nature's generosity. In Rima's Chamber, *banda* are placed on cabbage leaves and baked in a bread oven heated with birch wood. By booking in advance, you can enjoy undiscovered flavours and old traditions.

Snaigyna (Veisiejai) Observation Tower like a wind whirlwind invites you to rise to a height of 15 meters and observe the wide open spaces – waters, paths, treetops, and sky.

In the exhibition of Lazdijai Regional Museum the experiences of this road are joined: legends, people's daily life, celebrations, and archaeological findings.

We will end our journey in Lithuania at the mystical private Stone Museum of Donatas Mazurkevičius "Yotvingian Yard". Here, the set power of nature still recalls the Yotvingian gods, rituals, and idols.

The Yotvingian region attracts with its wild nature, hilly landscapes, and river valleys where wooden castles once stood and ritual songs were sung. We are convinced that here, between the Šešupė, the Nemunas, and the Merkys, you will feel the ancient Baltic world.

### **THE STONES, SKY AND GODS ROUTE**

District Museum in Suwałki – Yotvingian cemetery in Switzerland – Viewpoint in Rowełe – Tripoint Poland-Lithuania-Russia (Kaliningrad) – Romincka Forest Landscape Park – Tree Cake Monument in Żytkiejmy – Observation Tower in Stańczyki – Yotvingian Mound in Stańczyki – William's Trail in the Romincka Forest – Monument to Immanuel Kant in Gołdap – Stone Rotunda in Olecko – Market Square in Olecko – Rospuda River Valley–Raczki – The Holy Place on Rospuda – The Hill Fort in Rajgród

Distance travelled – about 200 kilometers.

Duration – 2 days.

*"The Stones, Sky, and Gods Route"* leads through areas of exceptional natural and cultural wealth, closely linked to the heritage of the ancient Balts and Yotvingians. Here, among lakes, hills, and ancient forests, traces of their settlements, beliefs, and traditions have survived. This route is not only a journey through the picturesque landscapes of Masuria and Suwałki, but also a journey into the depths of history, where the tribes that created the region's identity once lived.

The journey begins at the District Museum in Suwałki, which houses a wealth of archaeological finds from the Yotvingian era. The route then leads to the Yotvingian cemetery in Switzerland, a unique place where you can still see the remains of ancient burial mounds and feel the atmosphere of the cult of the ancestors. The next stop is the viewpoint in Rowełe, which offers a panoramic view of the borderlands once guarded by the warlike Yotvingians. A symbolic meeting place of cultures is the Tripoint Poland - Lithuania - Russia (Kaliningrad), reminiscent of the old and modern divisions of this corner of Europe. For more than six centuries, this place has remained the border between states and cultures.

The road continues through the Romincka Forest Landscape Park, where mighty forests hide not only natural treasures, but also the secrets of ancient beliefs. Tree Cake Monument has been erected in the village of Żytkiejmy, symbolizing the regional culinary tradition, which has

its roots in the Yotvingian communities. Another attraction is the observation Tower in Stańczyki, from which you can see the famous aqueducts and the land of the Yotvingians, and nearby is the Yotvingian hillfort, evidence of an ancient settlement that can be explored on a sightseeing route. The next stage is William's Trail in the Romincka Forest, reminiscent of Prussian times and leading past stones associated with Emperor Wilhelm II.

In Gołdap, travelers are greeted by a symbolic stone arch – a monument to Immanuel Kant, a thinker considered to be the founder of the European Union. The route then leads to Olecko, where the unique Stone Rotunda, associated with the ancient inhabitants of these lands, stands. Olecko Market Square is the largest in Masuria, reminiscent of the colonists who settled here after the Yotvingians. Today, the history of Masuria is intertwined with the daily lives of its inhabitants.

Other stops include the Rospuda River Valley and Raczki, where wild nature and beauty have remained almost untouched, as well as the sacred site of the The Holy Place on Rospuda, the legendary place of baptism of the last Yotvingian tribes, where traces of other Balts tribes were found along the Rospuda River in 1273.

The route ends at the hill fort in Rajgród, another place closely related to the past of the Yotvingians. From the top of the hillfort, you can see the lake and the sky, while the stones and the earth still tell the story of the ancient gods and warriors.

The entire journey is not only an encounter with the beauty of Masuria and Suwałki, but first and foremost with the heritage of the Yotvingians – a tribe whose spirit still lives on in the landscape, myths, and culture of the region.

### **AMONG THE HILLS AND LAKES OF THE YOTVINGIANS**

Wigry National Park – Yew Mountain – “Suwalki's Fujiyama” – The Yotvingian Memorial Room in Szurpiły – Castle Hill in Szurpiły – Suwalki Landscape Park – Turtulu – Bachanowo Boulder Field Nature Reserve – Observation Tower on Leszczynowa Hill in Przełomka – Masurian Graduation Towers in Gołdap – Water Tower in Gołdap – The Hill Fort in Konikowo (Piekna Gora near Gołdap) – Cisowy Jar Nature Reserve – Bison Enclosure in Wolisko – Lake Gołdapivo (Kruglankès) – Observation Tower in Stare Juchy – The Hill Fort in Rogala – Water Tower in Ełk – Lakeside Boulevard in Ełk

Distance travelled – about 250 kilometres.

Duration – 2 days.

Discover a region where hills meet lakes and nature intertwines with the history of the ancient Balts and Yotvingians. The route "*Among the hills and lakes of the Yotvingians*" leads

through the most beautiful corners of Suwalki and Hilly Mazurzy – from wild national and regional parks, through hillforts and places of remembrance, to resort towns and picturesque boulevards. Every step of this journey brings you closer to the secrets of this extraordinary land.

This route is a journey through the heart of Suwalki and Hilly Mazurzy, a land full of picturesque hills, sparkling lakes, and traces of the ancient Balts. Here, among the silence of the forests and the valleys formed by glaciers, you can still feel the spirit of the Yotvingians, a warlike people who once lived in these lands.

The journey begins in Wigry National Park, where Lake Wigry, surrounded by forests and marshes, reveals itself in all its beauty. This is a landscape that has remained almost unchanged since the days of the ancient Balts. From here, the road leads to Yew Mountain in Gulbiniškės, also known as the "Suwalki's Fujiyama". The cone-shaped hill stands out in the landscape, and from its top you can see a boundless mosaic of fields, forests, and lakes.

Nearby lies Szurpiły, considered the heart of the Yotvingian lands. The Yotvingian Memorial Room here preserves archaeological finds and tells the story of the daily life and beliefs of this great tribe. Above the village stands Castle Hill in Szurpiły, where the Yotvingians once had their defensive castle. Walking along the old ramparts, you can feel the history preserved in the earth.

The route stretches through Suwalki Landscape Park–Turtulu, the oldest in Poland. It is a land of glacial landscapes – deep lake basins and wave-shaped hills. Turtule is the park's headquarters, from where you can travel to the Bachanowo Boulder Field Nature Reserve. Another impressive spot is the observation tower on Leszczynowa hill in Przełomka, which offers panoramic views of valleys and lakes reminiscent of Balts sagas and legends.

The road then leads to the resort town of Gołdap. Here, among the aromas of the Masurian graduation towers, you can take a deep breath – this aroma is healing. From the Gołdap water tower, you can see the Romincka forest, and from the nearby the hill fort in Konikowo (Piekna Gora near Gołdap), your eyes can take in wide panoramas that reach beyond the Polish border.

Next, you will encounter nature and its inhabitants. In the Cisowy Jar Nature Reserve, ancient trees create the atmosphere of sacred Balts forests, and in the bison enclosure in Wolisko, you can see these majestic animals, once considered sacred by the Balts, up close. Near Lake Gołdapivo (Kruglankės), the landscape becomes gentler, inviting you to relax and reflect. The nearby observation tower in Stare Juchy offers another opportunity to take in the vast lake district.

In Rogala, there is a hillfort – an ancient “castle site”, one of many where the Balts and Yotvingians built their defensive settlements. Here, their connection to the land is most strongly felt.

The last stop is Ełk. From the historic water tower, you can enjoy views of the town and the lake, and a walk along the lakeside boulevard is a great way to end your trip, combining history, modern life, and the natural beauty of Mazurzy.

The route "Among the hills and lakes of the Yotvingians" is more than just a tourist trail. It is a journey through time and space – from the ancient legends of the Balts and Yotvingians, through the silence of protected parks and reserves, to today's resorts and lively cities. It is a story about a land where nature and history coexist, creating a landscape of unique beauty and mystery.

## 7. CERTIFICATION OF CULTURAL ROUTES

Dr Rasuolė Andrulienė

### 7.1. EUROPEAN CULTURAL ROUTES CERTIFICATION MODEL

According to the 2013 Resolution of the Council of Europe, a cultural route is defined as *a cooperation project in the fields of culture, education, heritage, and tourism, based on a historical route, cultural concept, or figure of transnational importance, which contributes to an understanding of and respect for common European values*. For the Balts' Road to be recognised as a Council of Europe Cultural Route, it must meet the following criteria:

1. **The European significance of the theme** must represent a cultural phenomenon relevant to more than one country.
2. **Network structure** – a partnership of at least three countries with a legal governing entity.
3. **Scientific basis** – an active scientific committee conducting research and ensuring the quality of content.
4. **Education** – programmes for schools, youth, and local communities.
5. **Cultural and artistic content** – festivals, exhibitions, publications, and artistic cooperation.
6. **Tourism and sustainability** – development of tourist services in accordance with ethical and environmental principles.
7. **Networking and visibility** – clear signage, a website, and international promotion.

Management is based on a network model. Each route has a coordinating organisation (e.g., an association), a management structure, a scientific committee, and a community network involving local residents, tourism service providers, and institutions.

The implementation of the programme includes the following main activities: creation of cultural products (exhibitions, performances, publications); education (school programmes, student exchanges, summer academies); community engagement (local projects, volunteering, educational activities); tourism development (integration of services), route maps, signage; dissemination and visibility (brand, social media, forums).

The impact of cultural routes is assessed based on:

- **Cultural value** – the enhancement of heritage and the strengthening of identity.
- **Social value** – community cohesion and education.

- **Economic value** – tourist flows and the development of local services.
- **Environmental responsibility** – promotion of ecotourism and cultural ecology.

Slow tourism, respect for local culture, and authenticity are emphasised.

The Council of Europe Cultural Routes model is a refined, multi-layered system that integrates heritage, identity, tourism, and education; is grounded in the principles of scholarship, community involvement, and cultural partnership; and creates long-term social and economic value.

Cultural route evaluation and certification criteria include the following: the theme reflects European values and is shared by at least three European countries; it is the subject of international, multidisciplinary scientific research; it strengthens European memory, history, and heritage, and contributes to the interpretation of contemporary European diversity; it supports cultural and educational exchanges for young people; it develops exemplary and innovative projects in the fields of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development; it develops tourism products and services aimed at diverse groups.

## 7.2. ASSESSMENT OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES' PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL ROUTES

Southern and Western European countries are particularly active participants in various European cultural routes, as their territories contain a great wealth of historical, religious and artistic heritage closely linked to the formation of a shared European identity. Countries such as Spain, Italy, France and Portugal take part in numerous international routes that connect traditions of pilgrimage, architecture, music, gastronomy and literature. Their geographical position, cultural diversity and the legacy of ancient civilisations mean that they naturally become focal points where different cultural influences intersect. Active engagement by European states in cultural route initiatives not only strengthens international cooperation but also contributes to tourism development, community empowerment and the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage.

Poland has been actively developing cultural routes for several decades, aligning them with the Council of Europe's *Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe* programme. Lithuania's and Latvia's participation in European cultural routes represents an important step towards strengthening regional identity and presenting their heritage in an international context; however, compared with Southern and Western Europe, their involvement is not yet as intensive. Lithuania

and Latvia have only in recent years begun to engage more actively in these initiatives (see Table 3). This indicates that the Baltic States are increasingly recognising the potential of their historical and cultural heritage yet still have room for expansion if they are to reach the level of engagement characteristic of Southern and Western Europe.

**Table 3.** Participation of neighbouring countries in the Council of Europe certified cultural routes

Cultural Route	Total number of counties	Lithuania	Latvia	Poland
Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes	10	+	-	+
The Hansa	14	+	+	+
Viking Route	15	-	+	+
Via Francigena	4	-	-	-
Routes of El legado andalusí	6	-	-	-
Phoenicians' Route	14	-	-	-
Iron Route in the Pyrenees	3	-	-	-
European Mozart Ways	4	-	-	-
European Route of Jewish Heritage	24	+	-	+
Saint Martin of Tours Route	13	-	-	+
Cluniac Sites in Europe	8	-	-	+
VIA REGIA	5	-	-	+
TRANSROMANICA	10	-	-	-
Iter Vitis Route	23	-	-	-
European Cemeteries Route	22	-	-	+
Prehistoric Rock Art Trails	9	-	-	-
European Route of Historic Thermal Towns	18	-	-	+
Route of Saint Olav Ways	5	-	-	-
European Route of Ceramics	16	-	-	+
European Route of Megalithic Culture	12	-	-	-
Huguenot and Waldensian Trail	4	-	-	-
ATRIUM	9	-	-	-
Réseau Art Nouveau Network	16	-	+	-
Via Habsburg	7	-	-	-
Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route	10	-	-	-
European Routes of Emperor Charles V	13	-	-	-
Destination Napoleon	12	-	-	+
In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson	5	-	-	-
Fortified Towns of the Grande Region	3	-	-	-
Impressionisms Routes	13	+	-	+
European Route of Industrial Heritage	29	-	+	+
Iron Curtain Trail – EuroVelo 13	14	-	-	+
Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades	6	-	-	-
Liberation Route Europe	12	-	-	+
European Route of Historic Gardens	11	-	-	+
Aeneas Route	8	-	-	-
Alvar Aalto Route	5	-	-	-
Cyril and Methodius Route	10	-	-	+
European Route d' Artagnan	6	-	-	-
Iron Age Danube Route	8	-	-	-
Historic Cafés Route	15	-	-	-
European Fairy Tale Route	9	+	-	-
Women Writers Route	8	-	-	+
Transhumance trails	9	-	-	-
Leonardo Da Vinci Route	6	-	-	-
European Route of Historic Pharmacies and Medicinal Gardens	13	+	-	+
Romea Strata	7	+	+	+
Saint Francis Ways	13	-	-	-
Pyrenean Freedom Routes	10	-	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>

Source: [www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes](http://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes)

It is worth noting that the number of countries participating in a cultural route varies. Although most routes are dominated by partners from 10–20 (or more) countries, there are also certified routes in which partners from only 3–7 countries are involved.

### 7.3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CERTIFICATION OF CULTURAL ROUTES IN LITHUANIA

The *Description of the Procedure for Determining the Levels and Certification of Cultural Routes in Lithuania*, approved by Order No. ĮV-1457 of the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania on 22 December 2021 (hereinafter referred to as *the Procedure Description*), establishes a unified methodological and administrative framework for the certification of cultural routes in Lithuania. It regulates the criteria for awarding regional, national, and international status to routes, the procedures for submitting and evaluating applications, the operation of the expert commission, the issuance of certification documents, and the monitoring of activities.

The Procedure Description introduces a consistent and transparent mechanism for the certification of cultural routes, enabling the systematic development of regional, national, and international projects. The document is significant not only as an administrative instrument but also as a quality standard for assessing content and cultural value, grounded in scholarly evidence, community engagement, and principles of sustainability. This certification model serves as a strategic tool for embedding cultural routes as an integral component of cultural policy, tourism development, and identity formation.

The Procedure Description establishes three levels of cultural routes in Lithuania:

- **Regional level** – the route covers at least three municipalities and highlights regional identity.
- **National level** – the route connects at least three regions of Lithuania or at least six municipalities and emphasises historical processes of national significance.
- **International level** – the route is implemented in the territories of at least two countries, has European significance, and is linked to a shared historical experience.

**Table 4.** Compliance of the *Balts' Road* with the international cultural route criteria set out in Paragraph 8 of the Procedure Description (assessment of the current situation)

Paragraph No.	Criteria	Compliance	Explanation
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8.1.	Cooperation is carried out in the territories of at least two neighbouring states, including Lithuania, in collaboration with organisations from these states.	Yes	Cooperation between partners in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland is implemented through project-based activities.
8.2.	The theme is grounded in tangible and intangible cultural heritage of significance to Lithuania, located in other countries, its promotion, and cultural phenomena of importance to several states, (...) revealing connections with the history and values of both Lithuania and Europe. It reflects the cultural identity of the region within the European context, emphasising local and regional heritage (tangible and intangible alike) within the framework of cultural route development, linking it to the foreign countries participating in the route's activities, as well as to shared European experience, history, and values.	Yes	The justification of the theme is presented in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of this study.
8.3.	A clear cultural route concept has been formulated:		
8.3.1.	the cultural resources developed within the scope of the cultural route in Lithuania (tangible and intangible cultural heritage, museums, cultural centres, etc.) and their links with other European countries are defined.	Yes	The cultural resources developed within the scope of the cultural route in Lithuania are defined in the context of scientific research (conducted studies and investigations), with thematic links to Latvia and Poland provided (see Section 4 and Section 6). The resources are presented on the website <a href="http://www.baltukelias.lt">www.baltukelias.lt</a> , in publications, and on route maps.
8.3.2.	target markets and specific visitor groups (families, individual travellers, tour groups, school students, etc.) have been identified, along with the needs of these groups.	Yes	This study identifies markets and specific traveller segments, as well as their needs (see Section 8.3).
8.3.3.	a continuous route of the cultural route (map) has been drawn up, indicating the sites to be visited.	Yes	Thematic routes in Lithuania and Latvia have been prepared ( <a href="http://www.baltukelias.lt/marsrutai/">www.baltukelias.lt/marsrutai/</a> ). A historical justification for the Balts Cultural Route (Yotvingian Route) in the Lithuania–Poland border region has been carried out (see Section 6).
8.3.4.	tourism and cultural service infrastructure has been developed at the main points of the continuous route.	Yes	42 information centres (“Balts Culture Interpretation Centre”, visitor and tourism information centres), 48 museums and exhibitions, 49 craft centres and sites, 30 educational activities, food and accommodation services, and other points of interest. In the future, it is planned to create a route on the Yotvingian theme and include service providers.
8.3.5.	An activity plan for a period of at least three years has been drawn up.	Yes	This study includes a draft three-year activity plan (see Section 8.4).

8.4.	A network of participating institutions and organisations, the non-governmental sector, and community partnerships has been established: the organisational (management) structure of the cultural route, existing and potential partners in Lithuania and in participating foreign countries (agreements with foreign partners).	Yes	This study provides recommendations for networking, the selection of strategic partners, and the management structure (see Section 8.1 and Section 8.2). Agreements with foreign partners have been concluded during project implementation.
8.5.	An international cultural route communication and marketing system has been created, promoting domestic and inbound tourism:		
8.5.1.	cultural route branding (logo) and a website (in the languages of all participating countries) have been created.	Yes	A logo and a website (in Lithuanian) have been created. Improvement measures are set out in this study (see Section 8.6).
8.5.2.	cultural route signage using the cultural route's branding (logo) is planned.	Yes	Improvement measures are set out in this study (see Section 8.6).
8.5.3.	Information dissemination is carried out at the international level:		
8.5.3.1.	on the cultural route's website and social media platforms.	Partially	Information on the website and social media is provided in Lithuanian. Recommendations are presented in this study in Section 8.6.
8.5.3.2.	in the information dissemination channels of the participating municipalities in the country and the participating foreign countries (websites, social media, etc.).	Partially	Publicity of project activities.
8.5.3.3.	cultural route is included in tourism guides distributed in participating countries.	Yes	Tourism guides (publications): <a href="http://www.baltukelias.lt/puslapis/leidiniai-1/">www.baltukelias.lt/puslapis/leidiniai-1/</a>
8.5.3.4.	cultural route is promoted at least once a year at the national level (cultural events, campaigns, etc.).	Yes	Conferences and seminars are held, along with project activities (study tours, exhibitions, etc.).
8.6.	The historical development of the cultural route, its importance for the cultural, social, and economic development of the country, and its connections within the historical and cultural context of Europe are substantiated by scholarly historical material.	Yes	Research and studies have been prepared (see Section 2.2 and Section 4).
8.7.	Stable funding for cultural route activities is ensured.	Yes	Projects have been implemented, the website ( <a href="http://www.baltukelias.lt">www.baltukelias.lt</a> ) is updated, the activities of the Balts Culture Interpretation Centre are ensured, communication is carried out on social media, and conferences and seminars are organised.
8.8.	A visitor flow monitoring and benefit analysis system has been created to assess the popularity and economic impact of the cultural route.	Yes	This study presents proposals (see Section 8.4).

It should be noted that an international cultural route is subject not only to cultural content requirements but also to those concerning geopolitical relations, multilingual communication, and European integration.

#### 7.4. CULTURAL ROUTES IN POLAND

Poland is actively developing cultural routes that connect historical sites, cities, and regions. These cultural routes are linked both to the Council of Europe's *Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe* initiative and to national programmes. In Poland, certified routes are most commonly understood as those holding the status of *Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe*, i.e. those with international recognition. The cultural routes recognised by the Council of Europe that pass through Poland include: the Way of St James (Camino de Santiago) – a pilgrimage route leading through Polish cities (e.g. Gdańsk, Toruń, Poznań, Kraków) to Santiago de Compostela in Spain; the Iron Curtain Trail – a cycling and cultural route covering the territory of the former Iron Curtain, including parts of the Polish border region; the Hanseatic Route – connecting former Hanseatic League cities, including Gdańsk; the Art Nouveau Route – covering Łódź and other cities renowned for their modernist architecture; the European Route of Jewish Heritage – of particular importance due to the rich Jewish cultural heritage in Kraków, Warsaw, and Lublin; the Route of Saint Martin – linking places associated with the cult of Saint Martin, including towns in Poland, among others.

In Poland, national and regional cultural routes are regulated, although there is no single dedicated legal act governing them. Cultural routes are not established arbitrarily – they are supported by legal regulations and guidelines derived from legislation and programmes on heritage protection, tourism, and regional development. The concept of cultural routes in Poland is closely linked to the Act on the Protection and Care of Monuments (*Ustawa o ochronie zabytków i opiece nad zabytkami*, 2003). The establishment and maintenance of routes are most often initiated by municipalities, regional tourism organisations, or museums, while overall coordination is carried out by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Regulation is also connected with the National Tourism Development Programme and regional development strategies.

At the national level, National Cultural Routes (Narodowe Szlaki Kulturowe) are officially recognised in Poland and are granted special status and funding. One of the earliest examples is the Piast Route (Szlak Piastowski), which was awarded this status because of its

significance for Polish statehood. The Wooden Churches Routes and the Industrial Monuments Route in Silesia have also been included in official national registers.

At the regional level, each voivodeship (region) may establish and manage its own regional cultural routes. For example, the Industrial Monuments Route of Upper Silesia operates under its own statute and is overseen by an official supervisory body (the Silesian Museum and local municipalities). Defined standards apply to such routes, including identity, signage, tourist infrastructure, and heritage protection criteria.

**Table 5.** Status of Cultural Routes

Level	Examples	Supervisory Institution	Status
<b>Council of Europe Cultural Routes</b>	Way of St James, Hanseatic Route, European Route of Jewish Heritage, Art Nouveau Route	Council of Europe (European Institute of Cultural Routes, Luxembourg), Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland	International certification; obligation to carry out educational, tourism, and cultural activities, as well as networking across participating countries
<b>National Cultural Routes (Narodowe Szlaki Kulturowe)</b>	Piast Route, Wooden Churches Routes, Royal Route of Kraków, Industrial Monuments Route of Upper Silesia	Ministry of Culture and National Heritage; in some cases national museums or foundations	Included in the official register; eligible for state funding; mandatory heritage protection status and signage
<b>Regional Cultural Routes (Regionalne szlaki kulturowe)</b>	Gothic Route in Pomerania, Literary Routes (Sienkiewicz, Miłosz), Manor House Routes (e.g. in Masovia), regional pilgrimage routes	Voivodeship authorities, regional museums, tourism organisations	Regulated by local strategies; criteria defined (authenticity, tourist infrastructure, information signage); may be promoted through tourism marketing

## 8. PROPOSALS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BALTS' ROAD

Dr Rasuolė Andruliėnė

### 8.1. NETWORKING

Networking is essential for building and developing successful partnerships between various institutions, organisations, NGOs, and communities. Below are recommendations for forming the Balts' Route partnership network, organisational structure, and potential partners.

The goal is to create an operational international partnership and cooperation structure that ensures the sustainability and cultural significance of the cultural route, stakeholder engagement, and compliance with the *Council of Europe Cultural Routes* standards. Certification by the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme requires that the initiative be properly coordinated, managed, and supported through network-based cooperation rather than through the activities of a single project.

To ensure that the Balts' Road is not only a cultural concept but also an official, long-term international cultural route, it is necessary to establish strategic partnerships in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland. Partner participation should be formalised through agreements, and the entire Balts' Road should be administered by a dedicated formal organisation.

#### **Need for strategic partners:**

- 1. Long-term sustainability and operational efficiency of the cultural route.** Strategic partners are institutions that not only contribute to individual activities but also share responsibility and invest in the long-term development of the cultural route. Without them, the route would remain merely a network of individual points (sites) rather than a coherently functioning system.
- 2. Content quality and cultural authenticity.** Strategic partners – museums, scholars, cultural heritage specialists – ensure that the content of the cultural route is grounded in scientific, historical, and cultural perspectives. This helps to avoid superficiality and a purely commercial approach, while strengthening authenticity, which is important both for travellers and for the certification of European Cultural Routes.
- 3. Regional and international network.** Strategic partners ensure that the Balts' Route is not merely a local tourism itinerary but an international cultural project connecting Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and potentially other countries. A broad network enhances

the project’s added value, helps attract international funding, and brings in expert knowledge.

4. **Access to resources (human, financial, infrastructural).** Strategic partners – state institutions, museums, municipalities, universities, tourism centres – can delegate specialists, share expertise and knowledge, contribute funding, provide tourism infrastructure (information centres, accommodation, etc.), and offer publicity channels.

**Table 6.** Potential Strategic Partners

Type of Partner	Examples
State institutions	National culture, tourism, and heritage organisations
Municipalities	Municipalities of cities/districts along the route
Science and research	Universities in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland
Non-governmental organisations	Local communities, elderships, associations, youth organisations
Business and tourism	Tourism information centres, tourism associations, guides, travel agencies, hotels, catering establishments, artisans
International partners	Existing cultural route networks in other countries

For the certification as a Council of Europe Cultural Route, a clear governance structure must be established, based on network cooperation and involving institutions, researchers, and representatives of the heritage and tourism sectors.

This is determined by the clear legal status of associations – they can sign agreements, conduct activities, and receive funding; by open membership – allowing for the inclusion of new partners; and by flexibility in governance – enabling members to elect governing bodies and make decisions collectively. Cooperation can be formalised through a memorandum/agreement between the partner countries, along with the creation of an operational coordination regulation.

The Council of Europe Cultural Routes programme requires a clear legal and governance structure; therefore, most certified routes operate as:

1. **An international non-governmental association (NGO)** – the most common model. The association unites partners such as museums, municipalities, universities, travel agencies, cultural centres, and others. The association has governing bodies: members, a board, a president/chairperson, and a coordinator. For example, the *Hanseatic Route* operates as an international association, while the *Saint Olav Ways* has a coordinating organisation established in Norway.
2. **A consortium or partner network with a formalised governance agreement.** If an association has not yet been established, the route can be managed by a formal network of partners who sign a memorandum of cooperation, along with a

governance scheme (specifying the responsibilities of each partner) and the appointment of a coordinating institution (designating which organisation performs the main functions).

3. **A foundation or public institution** – a less ordinary form, but possible, especially if the project involves financial commitments or ownership.

In summary, the most frequent choice is an association. This is determined by the clear legal status of associations – they can sign agreements, conduct activities, receive funding; open membership – allowing for the inclusion of new partners; flexibility in governance – members elect governing bodies and can make decisions collectively. This format is well-suited for international cooperation, as the Council of Europe certification model is oriented towards long-term networks.

An association must have statutes, an activity plan (aligned with the cultural route objectives), a list of members (from at least three countries), a coordinating institution, an operational budget, a communication and marketing strategy, and plans for research and tourism development.

## 8.2. GOVERNANCE MODEL

Governance Structure of the “Balts’ Road” Cultural Route:

1. **Board / Board Committee** – responsible for strategic decisions, financial management, and overall project leadership.
2. **Scientific Committee / Expert Council** – provides advice and recommendations on partnership, content, narrative, and heritage interpretation, as well as on route development and projects; contributes to education, publications, and research development.
3. **Project Manager** – coordinates day-to-day activities, manages communication, and ensures the implementation of the project.
4. **Partner Management Group and its Coordinator** – oversees partner engagement and cooperation, organises meetings and working groups.
5. **Communication and Publicity Department** – responsible for information dissemination, public relations, and event organisation.
6. **Finance and Administration Department** – manages the budget, prepares financial reports, and implements projects in accordance with the budget.

The Scientific Committee (or Expert Council) is one of the essential elements if a cultural route is seeking the Council of Europe Cultural Route certification.

### **Why is a Scientific Committee necessary?**

- **Compliance with the Council of Europe criteria.** The Council of Europe requires that every cultural route has a scientific committee to ensure the scientific grounding and integrity of the route. A cultural route must have a scientifically substantiated theme assessed by independent experts. Without a scientific committee, the route cannot be officially certified. The “Balts’ Road” concept emphasises that the route must be based on scientific, interdisciplinary research – history, ethnology, cultural studies, and more. However, to obtain the “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” certification, it is essential to have an independent academic body that ensures the reliability of content, thematic depth, and authenticity of the narrative.
- **Scientifically substantiated narrative.** The Scientific Committee shapes the historical and cultural narrative, ensuring that the facts presented along the route are accurate, non-discriminatory, and historically grounded, and that it helps to avoid errors. The “Balts’ Road” Scientific Committee would ensure a clear, consistent narrative of Balts identity and historical heritage, as well as an objective assessment of which sites, traditions, or regions should be included in the “Balts’ Road”, maintaining a balance between regional identities of nations and the broader European context.
- **Enhancing international credibility.** The Council of Europe requires that the route be supported and evaluated by members from different countries and institutions. A Scientific Committee comprising members from different countries (Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland) demonstrates that the route is not a single-country project, that evaluation is conducted independently, and that it is based on academic consensus. This would ensure an international perspective and independent assessment.
- **Methodological and educational functions.** The Scientific Committee develops educational programmes, publications, and printed materials, contributes to research on the cultural route, and may initiate joint projects with universities and doctoral programmes. The committee assists in preparing high-quality applications to the Council of Europe for the certification of the “Balts’ Road” and to EU programmes (e.g., Creative Europe, Horizon Europe), ensures the continuity of research, and involves students, young people, museums, and research centres.

- **Educational and publishing activities.** The committee may initiate scientific publications, educational materials for schools and young people, and academic events (seminars, conferences) on Balts heritage. This is important not only for the visibility of the project but also for academic integration.

**Table 7.** Composition of the Scientific Committee

Position	Examples
Experts in history and cultural heritage	University lecturers, museum professionals
Heritage conservation specialists	Representatives of cultural heritage institutions
Interdisciplinary researchers	Ethnologists, art historians, architects
International experts	Representatives of the European Institute of Cultural Routes or other cultural routes

The Scientific Committee of the Balts’ Road could consist of at least 5–7 members from at least three countries (Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland), meeting at least once a year. Members should represent diverse fields such as history, heritage research, cultural studies (ethnology, folklore), art history, architecture, and cultural tourism. Candidates are proposed by the coordinating organisation and approved by the Board Committee. The term of office is three years, with the possibility of renewal.

For example, the Scientific Committee of the “Camino de Santiago” assesses the historical significance of each site or location, develops educational programmes for schools and pilgrims, publishes materials, conducts research, organises conferences, and approves the inclusion of new sites along the route.

The Scientific Committee for the Balts’ Road, composed of experts from Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, would serve as an advisory body whose aim is to ensure that the route’s content and development are based on sound scientific, historical, and cultural foundations, in line with the Council of Europe Cultural Routes programme criteria.

The Scientific Committee could perform the following functions:

- Advise the coordinating organisation on matters of content, narrative, and heritage interpretation.
- Assess and approve the inclusion of sites, activities, or locations in the Cultural Route.
- Contribute to the development of educational activities, publications, and research.
- Participate in the preparation of applications to the Council of Europe or EU institutions.

- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Cultural Route from a scientific perspective.
- Recommend directions for research or projects.
- Maintain relations with the scientific councils of other cultural routes and academic institutions.

### 8.3. MARKETS AND SEGMENTS

The Balts' Road is thematic and experiential, making it suitable for target segments in various markets, particularly across European countries. For the successful development of the Balts' Cultural Route, it is essential to clearly define target markets and visitor segments, considering their needs, motivations, and behaviours. This enables the adaptation of content, communication, and service strategies for different audiences, ensuring greater engagement and economic sustainability.

#### 1. Domestic / National Market:

- Residents – families, youth, seniors, members of local communities. Target market motivation: Easy accessibility, weekend leisure, cultural identity strengthening.
- Schools and universities – educational trips, themed camps, study tours. Target market motivation: Curriculum-based learning, interactive heritage experiences.
- Themed travellers – history, archaeology, and ethnocultural enthusiasts. Target market motivation: In-depth exploration of cultural and historical narratives.

#### 2. Regional Market (Baltic States and neighbouring countries):

- Latvia, Poland – shared history and cultural heritage routes, joint tourist infrastructure. Target market motivation: Cross-border heritage discovery, cultural similarities, common events.
- Estonia, Germany – opportunities for cultural exchange and heritage tourism. Target market motivation: Curiosity about Balts' history and traditions, combined trips with neighbouring destinations.

#### 3. International Market:

- Cultural tourists from Western Europe (Germany, France, Scandinavia, Benelux, United Kingdom). Target market motivation: Interest in lesser-known European heritage, authentic cultural experiences.

- Diaspora communities – heritage tourism, visiting places of origin, genealogical routes. Target market motivation: Emotional connection, rediscovering family roots, cultural reconnection.

- Special interest groups – archaeology, ethnology, historical re-enactment enthusiasts. Target market motivation: Participation in festivals, workshops, or research-based travel.

#### 4. Segmentation by Motivation:

- Heritage explorers – seeking deeper historical and cultural experiences.
- Families with children – looking for interactive and engaging educational activities.
- Active leisure enthusiasts – hiking, cycling, and water routes.
- Cultural event visitors – festivals, concerts, exhibitions.
- Religious and sacred tourism – sacred sites, ancient rituals, pilgrimage trails.

Communication channels should be adapted to each segment (social media, educational publications, travel portals, tourism fairs). The diaspora segment has a particularly strong emotional link and can become a driver of loyalty and international visibility.

Below are the segments, with an explanation of why each would be interested in the routes:

- Cultural tourism / heritage-oriented travellers – Motivated by the desire to learn about history, local culture, and authentic sites. They are attracted to hillforts, museums, sacred sites, and traditional events. For this segment, appealing and accessible information is essential: audio guides, site maps, museum exhibitions, and guide services.
- Families with children – Motivated by active and educational leisure (especially in nature). They are attracted to living history camps, gamified elements, craft workshops, and various hands-on activities (e.g., bread baking, candle making). Routes for this segment should be adapted as short regional circular itineraries with child-friendly sites and engaging content.
- School pupils and students (educational groups) – Motivated by integrated learning through culture, history, religion, and geography. They are attracted to museums and unique sites (e.g., the wooden castle in Tērvete or the Balts Culture Knowledge Centre). For this segment, thematic tours, educational programmes, and games can be offered.
- Slow tourism / sustainable living enthusiasts – Value slow travel: meaningful, mindful journeys connected to nature and ancient worldviews. Attractive elements include sacred groves, nature trails, mythological sites, spiritual practices, herbs,

crafts, and ecological workshops. They can be offered walking and/or cycling routes, eco-farms, and accommodation in rural guesthouses.

- Active travellers (on foot / by bicycle / by car) – Seek discovery through movement and adventure. Route lengths can range from 100 to 900 km. They appreciate diverse surfaces, scenic circular routes, accessible information (information boards, interactive maps, GPS, trail signage), and recommendations for accommodation and dining.
- Diaspora – Seek identity and ancestral roots. Members of the Balts diaspora (especially younger generations) often aim to reconnect with their origins, discover ancestral history, language, and culture. The Balts’ Road connects historically important places, offering an authentic and emotionally powerful way to experience heritage. Diaspora travellers often look for meaningful, authentic experiences rather than superficial tourism. The route can offer educational itineraries on Balts tribes, interactive museums, craft centres, and participation in rituals, festivals, and creative workshops. In recent years, global interest in genealogy, ethnoculture, and sustainable tourism has grown; genetic research often prompts travel to the country of origin.
- Foreign travellers seeking non-commercial tourism – Targeted at visitors interested in alternative travel, “lesser-known” Europe, and authenticity. They can be introduced to Balts culture, spirituality, unique crafts, authentic rural landscapes, and unspoiled nature. For this segment, the route should include audio guides (in English and other foreign languages) and integration of sites and itineraries into digital travel platforms.
- Creative industries professionals, artists, and cultural researchers – Motivated by inspiration drawn from mythology, local history, and folklore. Attractive elements include mythological sites, landscapes, art, and storytelling. Programmes for this segment could include creative camps and open-air art workshops (plein airs).
- Tourism industry representatives / guides – The Balts’ Road can attract business segments that develop and provide culture-based services. For these, the route framework, list of sites, and partnership network must be clearly defined. Guide training, tailored offers, and familiarisation tours for travel organisers can be arranged.

Based on this segmentation analysis, it is recommended to develop engaging Balts’ Road content, itineraries, and programmes in the future, aligned with the travel motivations and needs of the target segments.

## 8.4. VISITOR FLOW AND BENEFIT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

When developing the Balts’ Road, it is important to establish a visitor flow monitoring and benefit assessment system to evaluate the route’s popularity and economic impact.

This system is necessary to:

- Monitor domestic and international visitor flows, seasonality, origin, and movement patterns.
- Assess the economic and social impact on the region (tourist spending, use of services).
- Analyse the route’s popularity and cultural value (awareness, satisfaction, feedback).
- Provide evidence-based data needed for decision-making, investments, and policy development.

First, it is essential to ensure the implementation of visitor flow measurement tools. From the measures listed in Table 8, it is recommended to select at least two (for example, digital registration and partner statistics) to track visitor flows effectively.

**Table 8.** Visitor Flow Measurement

<b>Tool</b>	<b>Description</b>
Automatic Counters	Physical counters installed at key sites (hillforts, starting points of nature trails). Options: infrared or WiFi/Bluetooth-based systems.
Digital Registration	QR codes on information boards directing visitors to a webpage (records location and time of visit).
Partner Statistics	Data from museums (number of tickets sold or guided tours booked), tourism information and visitor centres, rural tourism homesteads (occupancy rates), and tour guide services (number of guided tours booked).
Bicycle and Car Flow Analysis	Uses road sensors or anonymised mobile operator data.

Another essential element of the system is conducting visitor surveys (see Table 9), which are recommended to be carried out every 2–3 years.

**Table 9.** Survey Methods

<b>Method</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
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On-site surveys	Collect data on travelers’ origin, purpose, expenses, and feedback
Digital surveys	Can be embedded in QR codes or sent after the visit
Social media analysis	Reviews (TripAdvisor, Google, Facebook)
Interviews with service providers	Quantitative and qualitative impact on businesses

Another essential element is the analysis of economic and social benefits, with indicators presented in Table 10.

**Table 10.** Economic and Social Benefit Indicators

Indicators	Measurement Sources
Average tourist expenditure	Surveys, surveys conducted by tourism centres, partner dat
Length of stay	Surveys, hotel occupancy data
Employment, income	Surveys of small service providers (guides, craftsmen, educators, etc.)
New jobs	Municipal statistics

**Table 11.** Indicators for Assessing Visitor Flows and Economic Benefits

Category	Indicator
Visitor Flows	Number of visitors at sites, seasonal distribution, geographic origin
Economy	Average expenditures, number of overnight stays, purchase of services
Social Benefit	Employment of residents, volunteering, community involvement
Cultural Value	Visitor knowledge, engagement, number of educational activities

By establishing such a system, it becomes possible to objectively assess the impact of the cultural route, identify weaknesses, justify funding, adjust development, and inform policymakers and the public.

## 8.5. ACTION PLAN

**Strategic goal** – to ensure the sustainable operation, development, and international visibility of the Balts’ Road, based on the principles of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes and the values of the Balts’ Road.

Main objectives for achieving the strategic international goal of the Balts’ Road:

- 1. Networking development** – to create and expand a strong network of partners in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, as well as to cooperate with international cultural routes. This includes establishing a Balts’ Road development working group (archaeologists, museum specialists, tourism experts, communication specialists), approving a procedure and criteria for joining the network, organising regular partner meetings, and participating in international cultural route events.

2. **Ensuring effective governance** – to establish a transparent and efficient Balts’ Road organisation and its governance structure. This can be achieved by founding the Balts’ Road Association and appointing a coordinating institution (e.g., Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre), forming a board consisting of the coordinator’s representative, a heritage expert, a tourism sector representative, a culture/education sector representative, and partner representatives from Latvia and Poland. A Scientific Committee should also be established, with clearly defined duties and reporting procedures for the board, the committee, and partners.

3. **Partnerships and signing agreements** – to ensure that cooperation with institutions, municipalities, museums, tourism centers is legally formalized. A standard contract form should be prepared, cooperation agreements signed with partners (specifying rights and obligations), and clear communication guidelines for network members established (signage, logo use, communication tone).

4. **Installation of information infrastructure** (signboards, directional signs, QR codes) – to create a unified and recognizable information system for sites and the Balts’ Road. Signage guidelines should be developed, and as needed, information boards, directional signs, and QR codes with relevant information should be installed at sites. Signage must be visually consistent, weather-resistant, and environmentally appropriate.

5. **Applications and securing funding** – to maintain the vitality of the cultural route, it is essential to attract funding for activities, development, and international integration. This includes preparing and submitting applications for Lithuanian and Council of Europe Cultural Route certification, as well as for EU programmes (e.g., Creative Europe, Interreg). Joint projects with partners should be implemented in areas such as events, education, and research, while also seeking corporate sponsors, patrons, and other funding sources.

6. **Conducting research and content creation** – to actively contribute to historical, archaeological, and linguistic studies and develop reliable informational content. This includes implementing research projects with universities, historians, and archaeologists; contributing to the production of Balts’ Route publications, interactive maps, and virtual tours; and organizing scientific conferences and seminars.

7. **Implementation of marketing and communication** – to increase awareness of the Balts’ Road among residents, tourists, and international audiences. Actions include creating a unified website (in four languages), maintaining an active social media presence, conducting thematic campaigns, forming partnerships with influencers and travel bloggers, and participating in fairs and exhibitions.

8. **Educational activities and community engagement** – to encourage local community involvement and education on Balts culture. This involves developing educational programmes for schools, organizing children’s and youth summer camps, creating volunteering programmes, and holding events (festivals, workshops, hikes).

9. **Monitoring and evaluation** – to assess the impact, growth, and quality of the Balts’ Road by preparing annual activity reports, monitoring visitor flows, and gathering feedback from partners.

**Table 12.** Preliminary Three-Year Action Plan

<b>Year</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Year 1	Networking Development	Establishment of a working group, organisation of regular partner meetings, definition of procedures and criteria for joining the Balts’ Route network.
	Ensuring Effective Management	Establishment of the Balts’ Road Association, appointment of a coordinating institution, formation of a board and scientific committee, preparation and approval of duties and reporting procedures.
	Partnership and Agreement Signing	Preparation of a standard contract template, signing of cooperation agreements with partners.
	Signage Implementation	Preparation and approval of Balts’ Road signage guidelines.
	Marketing and Communication Implementation	Approval of marketing and communication activities, creation of a unified visual identity and communication guide, development of routes, publication of printed materials, communication on social media, update of the website, and related activities.
	Scientific Research and Content Creation	Development of content for publications and interactive maps.
	Education and Community Involvement	Recruitment of new members, organisation of seminars.
	Monitoring and Evaluation	Approval of the three-year action plan and the visitor flow monitoring system.
Year 2	Networking Development	Participation in international cultural route events.
	Information Infrastructure and Signage Implementation	Installation of information boards at sites and/or direction signs, creation of QR codes with information.
	Application Preparation and Funding Acquisition	Preparation and submission of an application for Lithuanian cultural route certification, implementation of projects with partners.
	Marketing and Communication Implementation	Communication via social media, dissemination of tourism information through partners’ digital channels, organisation of media events, publication of materials, participation in tourism fairs.
	Scientific Research and Content Creation	Organisation of scientific conferences/seminars, creation of content for publications and interactive maps.
	Education and Community Involvement	Implementation of volunteer programmes, organisation of Balts’ Route Days in the regions (festivals, workshops, hikes), educational programmes for schools, strengthening of the international partner network.
	Monitoring and Evaluation	Preparation of an annual activity report, implementation of the visitor flow monitoring system.
Year 3	Application Preparation and Funding Acquisition	Preparation and submission of an application for Council of Europe Cultural Route certification, search for funding sources (EU programmes, corporate sponsors, etc.).

Marketing and Communication Implementation	Implementation of a cultural events programme, thematic campaigns on social media, partnership projects with influencers and travel bloggers, development of a mobile application.
Scientific Research and Content Creation	Implementation of research projects with universities, historians, and archaeologists, training for guides.
Education and Community Involvement	Implementation of volunteer programmes, organisation of Balts' Route Days in the regions (festivals, workshops, hikes), summer camps for children and youth.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Preparation of an annual activity report, visitor flow monitoring system, collection of partner feedback, analysis of activity results.

The Board Committee of the Balts' Road should approve the three-year action plan.

## 8.6. INTERNATIONAL MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

The aim of international marketing and communication is to enhance the visibility, attractiveness, and visitor numbers of the cultural route *Balts' Road*, ensuring consistent and professional communication at both national and international levels.

This goal is pursued through three key marketing and communication objectives:

### 1. Consistent development of the Balts' Road brand at national and international levels:

- Signage rules and design templates (for publications, digital products, presentations, etc.), route signage (information boards, direction signs, QR codes leading to extended information or an audio guide).
- A communication guide (in Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, and English).

These measures enable all Balts' Road partners (municipalities, tourism centres, service providers, etc.) to follow a unified communication strategy in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, helping to build a recognisable identity for the international Balts Cultural Route.

At present, the *Balts' Road Brandbook* has been created, containing the logo (in Lithuanian, English, and Latvian) and guidelines for its use (colours, size, conditions of application, etc.).



**Figure 3.** Balts' Road logo (designed by Jurgina Jankauskienė)

*Source: Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre*

## **2. Implementation of Digital Marketing Tools:**

- A regularly updated “Balts’ Road” website in four languages (Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, and English).
- Communication on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), using educational and emotional content (in four languages).
- QR codes at sites, directing visitors to the Balts’ Route website to provide additional information about the site, offer an audio guide/virtual tour, or activate an interactive map (in four languages).
- A mobile application with virtual tours, audio guides, and interactive maps (in four languages).

Digital marketing is an essential tool for a modern cultural route seeking international visibility, partnerships, and traveler engagement, as well as educational goals. It enables not only the dissemination of information but also active storytelling about Balts culture and heritage, reaching diverse audiences and supporting sustainability goals.

Benefits of digital marketing – accessibility and international reach, as it removes geographical boundaries and allows communication with audiences ranging from local communities to international tourists. It also enables simultaneous communication in multiple languages, which is crucial for a transnational cultural route like the Balts’ Road.

By leveraging social media platforms, the Balts’ Road will become visible to foreign travelers planning their trips. Social media helps to create an emotional connection, share stories, photos, and traditions – spreading not just information but the identity of Balts culture. Social media platforms and Google Ads allow precise audience segmentation (by age, interests, location, behavior), making it possible to tailor Balts’ Road messages for cultural tourists, families, schools, diaspora communities, and other target segments.

Digital tools (mobile app, VR tours, audio guides, video stories) allow engagement with travelers even before they physically visit the site.

For cross-border communication on social media, it is advisable to use three main languages (Lithuanian, Latvian, and Polish) along with English. Lithuanian, Latvian, and Polish maintain national identity and encourage engagement among travelers, service providers, and communities, while English is essential for international audiences – travelers, foreign partners, journalists, researchers, the Council of Europe, etc.

Main purposes of QR codes: direct visitors to the Balts' Road website, provide additional site information, offer an audio guide/virtual tour, and activate an interactive map. Example of QR code text (on a sign, pointer, or object): “*Scan the QR code to learn more about this site*”. The QR code should be integrated into Balts symbolism (logo), use the main identity colors, include the site's name, and language symbols (flags). The QR code could open a page with a detailed site description, an audio guide recording, a virtual tour (e.g., 360° photos, 3D hillfort model), and an interactive map with nearby sites.

Audio guides should also be created in four languages. Recommended format: interactive QR codes at sites, integration into the mobile app and the website [www.baltukelias.lt](http://www.baltukelias.lt). Duration: 1–2 minutes. The language should be non-academic, narrative, and engaging, with sound effects (e.g., nature sounds, ancient ambient sounds). They can be tailored for different audience segments (e.g., children) or thematic routes (e.g., “Mythological Symbols,” “Hillforts,” “Balts Warriors”). Audio guides ensure accessibility and narrative depth (without needing a live guide) and increase the value of the Balts' Road by revealing not just facts but also the spirit of the place.

### **3. Publicity, Public Relations, and Events for the Balts' Road:**

- Press releases, articles, and interviews in national and regional media.
- Partnerships with influencers and travel bloggers.
- Themed campaigns and events (e.g., “*Week with the Balts*”, “*Balts Symbols in Your Region*”).
- Familiarization tours for journalists and tour operators.
- An events calendar.

Press releases, articles, and interviews help to build awareness and highlight the significance of the Balts' Road (as an important cultural phenomenon, not just a tourist site), reaching a wide audience. For example, an article about Balts heritage could inspire older target groups to plan a trip or encourage teachers to get involved.

Partnerships with influencers and travel bloggers present information in an emotional, appealing, and authentic way – through personal experience. This approach can reach younger, more active travelers who prefer platforms like Instagram or YouTube. Influencers create visual content that can also be reused in Balts' Road communication. For example, a travel blogger from Latvia could produce a video story about the “*Curonian Route*” in Lithuania and Latvia, attracting audiences from Riga or Liepāja.

Themed campaigns (“*Week with the Balts*”, “*Balts Symbols in Your Region*”, etc.) can combine all communication tools at once (media, social networks, events), encouraging active

participation – invitations to share photos, join hikes, and attend educational activities. These campaigns strengthen community bonds and cultural identity, especially when aimed at residents. For example, a “#BaltsSymbol” week where people are encouraged to photograph Balts symbols in their surroundings.

Familiarization tours for tour operators and journalists provide a direct introduction to the Balts’ Cultural Route, encourage inclusion in travel catalogues, and generate quality articles and reports that inspire more trust than advertising. For example, a tour operator from Poland might add the Balts’ Route to their travel program after such a tour.

An events calendar ensures consistent information for both visitors and partners, helps plan trips in advance, and increases visibility when the route becomes a content platform rather than just a physical itinerary. All events related to Balts heritage should be available on the [www.baltukelias.lt](http://www.baltukelias.lt) website.

Simply listing events on the website or in communications is not enough if the aim is to achieve national and international visibility or obtain the Council of Europe’s Cultural Route certification. A certified cultural route must be an active participant in cultural life – not just record but also organize events clearly tied to its theme. For the Balts’ Road, this means developing a consistent program of events related to Balts culture, involving the public, experts, and local communities.

Importantly, events should be held not only at major sites but across the entire network – in partner institutions, museums, tourism centers, and schools. This model strengthens the Balts’ Road identity and meets one of the key Council of Europe cultural route criteria – active, living cultural cooperation.

Proposed event ideas:

- Annual flagship event (e.g., in September): “*Balts Days*” / “*Balts Week*” – a major international event featuring historical reenactments (warriors, crafts, rituals), music, dance, culinary heritage evenings, exhibitions, lectures, children’s educational activities, mythological walks, and the international folklore festival “*Voices of the Balts*”.
- Seasonal events: spring equinox – exploration of mythological symbols, fire rituals, honoring ancestors; midsummer (Rasos/Joninės) – Balts sun cult traditions, herbal customs, living traditions; autumn harvest festival – culinary heritage and old-style farming; winter light evenings – mythological storytelling, candles, fire, and masks symbolism.

- Educational events: traveling educational programs for schools (camps, creative workshops “*Discover the Balts*”); themed family weekends with interactive tasks, games, and treasure hunts; guided tours or audio-guided tours as part of event days.
- International events/exchanges: Balts culture days abroad (for diaspora, universities, museums); partnerships with other cultural routes (e.g., Viking Route – joint “*Warriors of the North*” event); participation in the European Cultural Routes Forum with an interactive installation or tasting session.

Key implementation principle – involve municipalities, museums, tourism information centers, and communities. Each event should be linked to a specific site, tribe, symbol, or season. Communication must be multilingual and integrated with digital campaigns. Events should be filmed and archived for use as content in Google and social media advertising.

All these activities help to tell and spread the story of the Balts’ Road, create emotional connections with audiences, inspire, and build long-term, sustainable relationships with travelers, while attracting partners, media, schools, and guides.

**Table 13.** Preliminary International Marketing and Communication Action Plan for Three Years

<b>Year</b>	<b>Main Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Year 1	Build the image of the Balts’ Road and increase awareness in neighbouring countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland)	Preparation of a unified communication manual and the development of route signage guidelines and publication layout templates (in Lithuanian, Latvian, and Polish). Implementation of communication across social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube). Preparation of an events calendar presenting the “Balts’ Road”. Preparation of press releases and interviews for national and regional media. Updating the content of the website <a href="http://www.baltukelias.lt">www.baltukelias.lt</a> (in Lithuanian, Latvian, and Polish), including storytelling sections, the events calendar, and the presentation of guide services.
Year 2	Increase the international visibility of the 'Balts’ Route'	Implementation of joint social media communication (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) in English. Dissemination of tourist information via partners’ digital channels (websites, social networks, etc.). Organization of 2–3 events for media representatives. Preparation and publication of 4 tourist guides on the Yotvingians, Selonians, Curonians, and Semigallians (in English). Participation in 2 tourism fairs (in Lithuania, Latvia, and/or Poland) and presentation of the 'Balts’ Road' tourism product.
Year 3	Sustainability and strengthening internationalization	Development and implementation of a cultural events program (annual, seasonal, educational, and international events/exchanges) with the involvement of partners from all countries. Preparation of press releases and interviews in national and regional media. Implementation of themed campaigns on social media (e.g., 'Week with the Balts', 'Balts Symbols in Your Region', etc.). Implementation of partnership projects with influencers and travel bloggers. Creation of a mobile application (VR tours, audio guides,

		interactive maps, GPS). Strengthening the network of international partners (joint exhibitions, familiarization tours for journalists, travel operators, etc.).
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Results (KPI Indicators):

- $\geq 30\%$  increase in the number of visitors over 3 years.
- $\geq 10,000$  social media followers over 3 years.
- $\geq 10$  media appearances per year.
- $\geq 10$  tourism service providers integrated into the communication system per year.
- Information available in four languages (Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, and English).

The three-year international marketing and communication plan, along with the indicators, should be approved by the Board Committee of the Balts' Road.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Balts' Road is founded on a strong historical and cultural basis that integrates both tangible and intangible heritage of significance at national and European levels. The international dimension of this initiative constitutes a major strength: Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland already form a solid axis of cooperation. Nevertheless, a systematic and formal expansion of the partnership network, together with a clear definition of partners' commitments, remains essential. Compliance with the Council of Europe Cultural Routes criteria is the principal prerequisite for certification. This requires strengthening the governance model, ensuring sustainable financing, and expanding the involvement of youth, education, and scientific research. The benefits of the Balts' Road are multifaceted: it strengthens cultural identity, encourages community engagement, increases tourism attractiveness, generates economic value, and enhances international visibility.

The renewal of the concept is necessary in order to ensure that the Balts' Road remains relevant, meets the standards of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Programme, and becomes a certified international cultural route.

Key steps for the further development of the Balts' Road:

- Strengthening the governance model: establishing an international coordinating council or association (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland) with clearly allocated functions between the operator

(Šiauliai Tourism Information Centre) and the partners; formalising membership principles, partner obligations, financial contributions, and decision-making mechanisms.

- Ensuring compliance with the Council of Europe criteria: preparing a structured matrix/map demonstrating how the Balts' Road fulfils each criterion (scientific research, education, youth engagement, tourism products, European dimension); strengthening youth programmes (education, summer schools, exchanges); establishing a joint research platform involving universities from Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland.

- Expansion of the partner network and international visibility: engaging new partners from the cultural, educational, and tourism sectors; developing cooperation with other European cultural routes and initiating joint projects; strengthening communication at the international level (conferences, participation in Council of Europe events).

- Digitalisation and innovation: developing interactive tools and creating a joint multilingual Balts' Road digital platform with integrated maps, routes, and educational modules.

- Ensuring sustainable financing: seeking international funding sources (Creative Europe, Interreg, Horizon Europe); establishing a system of membership contributions and a model for attracting private partners (sponsors, patrons, and business partnerships).

- Indicators and evaluation system: introducing clear performance indicators, including visitor numbers, number of events, youth programme participants, scientific publications, and regional economic impact; preparing an annual Balts' Road progress report.

## SUMMARY

*The Balts' Road* is a transnational cultural route initiative that originated in Šiauliai and has grown into a strategic project connecting Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. The roots of this idea date back to 2017, when the first projects were launched, forming the foundations for the cultural route concept through heritage identification, narrative development, and the creation of tourism routes and infrastructure. Over nearly a decade, *The Balts' Road* has evolved into an international platform for cooperation, research, education and tourism, bringing together municipalities, museums, scholars, local communities and private service providers.

The foundation of *The Balts' Road* is the heritage of the Baltic tribes – the Curonians, Semigallians, Selonians, Yotvingians, Prussians, Latgallians, Samogitians and Aukštaitians – whose legacy constitutes not only the core of Lithuanian and Latvian identity but also an important element of Europe's cultural diversity. *The Balts' Road* integrates tangible heritage (hillforts, mythological sites, museums, archaeological finds), intangible heritage (folklore, crafts, traditions, cuisine and language), as well as documentary heritage (written sources, research and academic publications). It is not merely a network of tourism routes, but a broad cultural narrative that reveals history, culture and provides a platform for cooperation.

Cultural and social impact. *The Balts' Road* serves as a powerful instrument for strengthening the identity of local communities and regions. It encourages community engagement, youth participation and the activities of craftspeople, artists and educators. Festivals, educational programmes and living history camps create opportunities for non-formal education, intergenerational dialogue and social integration.

Economic benefits. The cultural route generates new tourism products, fosters job creation, extends the tourism season and creates opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship (education services, guiding, accommodation, catering and local products). The existing tourism routes (Curonian, Semigallian, Selonian and Yotvingian routes) already include more than one hundred visitor sites, while recent projects further expand the route along the Lithuanian–Polish border.

Compliance with the Council of Europe Cultural Routes criteria. *The Balts' Road* meets the key criteria of the Council of Europe programme: Transnational dimension – linking Lithuania, Latvia and Poland (with future expansion to other regions); Scientific foundation – supported by studies and research in archaeology, history, ethnology, linguistics and mythology; Education – involving schools, universities and museums, with programmes developed for

diverse age groups; Cultural narrative – emphasising the unique Baltic identity and its European significance; Accessibility – through guides, maps, interactive tools and digital products.

Challenges and future opportunities. In order to achieve official certification under the Council of Europe Cultural Routes programme, it is necessary to further strengthen the governance model (clearly defining the roles of the operator and partners), ensure long-term financial sustainability, enhance international communication and broaden youth engagement. It is particularly important to position the project at the European level and demonstrate its contribution to shared European memory and cultural diversity.

*The Balts' Road* is a broad cultural initiative that connects history, heritage, communities and contemporary cultural life. It possesses all the prerequisites to become a certified Council of Europe Cultural Route and an internationally recognised platform that strengthens Baltic regional identity, creates new economic opportunities and contributes to the preservation and promotion of Europe's cultural diversity.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Evaluation criteria for significant archaeological and mythological sites proposed for inclusion in the Balts' Road routes <sup>6</sup>

Criterion	Rating	
<b>Geographical location of the site in relation to settlements and roads</b>	<b>Easily accessible</b> – located within a settlement or in an area accessible by car throughout the year; if necessary, the site can be reached on foot within approx. 0.5 km or less.	2
	<b>Remote</b> – located outside a settlement, not easily accessible by car in all seasons; if necessary, the site can be reached on foot within approx. 1 km.	1
	<b>Very remote</b> – located outside a settlement, not easily accessible by car in all seasons or weather conditions; if necessary, the site can be reached on foot within approx. 1.5 km or more.	0
<b>Complexity</b>	<b>Part of a complex</b> – the site forms part of a complex (has one or more historically related components, or there are other easily accessible sites significant to the Balts' Road in the same area).	1
	<b>Single site</b> – an individual site significant to the Balts' Road.	0
<b>Tourism infrastructure</b>	<b>Adapted for visitors</b> – at least one visitor-oriented facility is present: signpost, parking area, information board, QR code stand, stairs, footbridge, etc.	1
	<b>Not adapted</b> – none of the visitor-oriented facilities is present.	0
<b>Appearance</b>	<b>Unique</b> – exceptional, distinctive visual appearance; aesthetically outstanding and widely recognised as visually significant for the Balts' Road.	3
	<b>Rare</b> – an uncommon visual appearance and an aesthetic value recognised by many, though not necessarily by all.	2
	<b>Typical</b> – a frequently encountered visual appearance, with limited distinctive aesthetic qualities.	1
	<b>None</b> – the site has been fundamentally altered or the object destroyed; visitors learn about it only through narrative and imagination.	0
<b>Scientific research</b>	<b>Conducted and published</b> – research has been carried out and its results have been published.	1
	<b>None</b> – research has not been conducted or has been conducted but the results are unpublished and not publicly accessible.	0
<b>Archaeological significance</b>	<b>Unique</b> – exceptional and non-recurrent archaeological finds and/or structures are known.	3
	<b>Rare</b> – rarely encountered archaeological finds and/or structures have been discovered.	2
	<b>Typical</b> – commonly encountered archaeological finds and/or structures have been discovered.	1
	<b>None</b> – no archaeological finds and/or structures are known.	0
<b>Mythological significance</b>	<b>Unique</b> – exceptional and non-recurrent mythological knowledge associated with the site and/or a unique mythological name.	3
	<b>Rare</b> – mythological information and/or name is rarely encountered.	2
	<b>Typical</b> – widespread mythological information and/or frequently recurring name.	1
	<b>None</b> – no mythological information is known and the name is unknown.	0
<b>Historical significance</b>	<b>Unique</b> – exceptional, non-recurrent historical facts associated with the site and/or structure.	3
	<b>Rare</b> – rarely encountered historical facts.	2
	<b>Typical</b> – commonly occurring, recurring historical facts.	1
	<b>None</b> – no particularly distinctive historical facts.	0
<b>Public (social) significance</b>	<b>High</b> – a nationally significant festival and/or event is held at least once a year.	3
	<b>Medium</b> – a local community festival and/or event is held at least once a year.	2
	<b>Low</b> – only occasional, irregular events take place.	1
	<b>None</b> – no events are held.	0

<sup>6</sup> Vaitkevičius, V. (2018). Kultūros kelio „Baltų kelias“ galimybių studija.

## Annex 2. Areas and Attributes for the Evaluation of Activity Quality<sup>7</sup>

### 1. Authenticity of Balts heritage (resources, culture)

- Authentic (natural, occurring or found in situ) – a resource (e.g., amber), a material (e.g., stone), an artefact (e.g., an object in a museum), a sound (e.g., birdsong). *Example: amber catching in the Seaside Regional Park.*
- Authentic (replicable with reasonable accuracy) – a technology or process (e.g., baking on a hot stone; sewing with a bone needle), a product (e.g., a stone-baked flatbread made from crushed grain). *Example: “Anitos žuvys” in Rusnė – an educational tasting session using local raw materials and traditional smoking, yet the fish shown in visual materials is mackerel, a species rare along the Lithuanian coast.*
- Typical (presumed to be close to the authentic) – a resource (e.g., wood), a material (e.g., clay), an object (e.g., a flint knife), a tool (e.g., fern stuffing), a taste (e.g., wild bee honey), a raw material (e.g., wild berries), a crafted item (e.g., a bark bucket). *Example: tree-beekeeping and foraging in the Dzūkija National Park.*
- Local forms of traditional Balts lifestyle and economy, including associated resources and phenomena (raw materials, agricultural products, production methods, objects, food, ethnomedicine, etc.). *Example: herbalist J. Balvočiūtė’s farm – gathering and preparing medicinal herbs.*
- Heritage authenticity expressed through contemporary forms, including new modes of presenting heritage that support understanding of authenticity. *Examples: contemporary clothing inspired by ancient cuts and ornaments; jewellery produced using 3D technology yet reflecting typical ancient forms; cord-making with stones.*
- Creative practices, crafts and modern expressions inspired by Balts heritage (art, music, dance, traditional games, crafts, lifestyle elements, interpretative activities). *Example: the sutartinės singing group “Trys keturiose”.*

### 2. Integration of Balts heritage (resources, culture)

- Sustainable integration of tangible heritage into present-day environments and infrastructure. *Example: the Žagarė esker and Žagarė II hillfort (Žvelgaitis Hill) form part of a recreational-educational complex.*
- Respect for traditional meanings and functions when integrating heritage into contemporary use: textiles, colours, motifs in modern clothing; household or ritual objects (e.g., straw gardens, palm decorations). *Example: MB “Juostė”, producing garments incorporating traditional woven sashes.*
- Practical use of a typical ancient object, device or tool in the present. *Example: the weathervanes of the Curonian Lagoon are a living contemporary expression of historic tradition.*
- Adaptation of ancient heritage using modern technology. *Example: a 3D-printed “kaukai” figure at the Telsiai Alka Museum.*
- Explaining ancient heritage through contemporary language, symbols or narratives. *Examples: in the Žemaitija Village exposition in Telsiai, the educational programme “How Our Ancestors Lived” includes ecological themes; interactive installations at the Balts Cultural Centre in Šiauliai.*
- Modern presentation of heritage in various environments (museums, public spaces, cultural buildings), ensuring clarity, aesthetics, structured information and connection between past and present. *Example: the Upytė Traditional Crafts Centre with permanent and demonstrational exhibitions.*

### 3. Socialisation of Balts heritage (dissemination, transmission, interpretation, user-oriented presentation)

- Accessibility – physical (roads, public transport), informational (physical and digital), infrastructural (equipment, services, facilities, including specialised ones). *Example: the viewing platform at Lake Plateliai is adapted for visitors with mobility and visual impairments, including a tactile stand with Braille.*
- Visitor-friendliness – availability of infrastructure, self-accessible information, recreational and comfort facilities, signage, leaflets, terminals; supporting and protective infrastructure (stairs, pathways).
- Public engagement and promotion – active effort to disseminate key cultural content. *Example: the Inkakliai folklore ensemble “Dainoriai” (Šilutė district), preserving traditional “dūnininkai” dialect and customs.*
- Inclusiveness and educational engagement – interactive, sensory and digital experiences (e.g., smelling baked bread, hearing crust cracking), gamified or virtual components. *Examples: Plungė Smart Park; animal tour; virtual-physical integration.*
- Communication – formats, tools, visual coherence, recognisable branding; interpretive presentation (object descriptions, augmented reality). *Examples: 3D reconstruction of Bardeliškiai Hillfort in Dūkštos Trail, Neris Regional Park; QR codes in Gražutė Regional Park.*

<sup>7</sup> Stulpinaitė J. (2021). Kultūros kelio „baltų kelias“ subjektų veiklos kokybė. Darnų kultūros kelio vystymąsi ir lankytojų kokybišką aptarnavimą skatinančių kriterijų sistemos kūrimas.

- Interpretation – meaning-making through: informational infrastructure (signs, panels, tactile and audio tools, digital solutions), textual interpretation (print materials, descriptions, screens, audio recordings, digitised texts), facilitated interpretation (guided tours combining narration, visuals, physical movement, exploration). *Interpreters include guides, information providers, heritage custodians, organisations.*

#### 4. Visitor value (creating perceived value through combined measures)

- Heritage is presented as an object of discovery – something to be viewed, explored or learned from.
- The discovery object is enhanced with interpretive tools, improving understanding and engagement.
- The informative and interpretive object is complemented by user-friendly features that enhance comfort and experience.
- Individually perceived value – the visitor’s personal understanding of what heritage offers: “*What does this heritage give me, change in me, help me discover, or contribute to my development?*”

#### 5. Sustainable development of heritage actors: culture, partnership, cooperation

- Sustainable use of Balts cultural heritage (past and present spiritual and material culture, tangible and intangible heritage, cultural expressions) and associated natural resources (landscapes, natural monuments, vegetation, wildlife, waters, etc.).
- Joint activities and partnerships in areas essential for developing the cultural route – shared projects, programmes, continuity, systematic collaboration, clustering.
- Coordinated communication, joint promotional measures, and maintenance of a coherent and recognisable identity.
- Collaborative work with education, research, community, NGOs and other organisations important for the cultural route.
- Maintaining sustainability through partnership – alignment between the authentic nature of resources and the activities developed; ensuring safe and sustainable resource use and managing visitor flows responsibly.

### Annex 3. Evaluation Questionnaire for a Single Economic Activity Operator (VS1 and VS2)<sup>8</sup>

VS1 – activities related to the presentation, exhibition and interpretation of resources and heritage (sites, monuments, museums, galleries, workshops, guides, regional parks, etc.). VS2 – accommodation, catering, recreation, hygiene, visitor amenities and related services, activities and businesses. The questionnaire is applied to one active economic operator. Additional (new or emerging) characteristics and criteria will be identified through the observation of good practice.

Quality Indicators and Criteria for the Activities of a “Balts’ Road” Operator	Score	Additional score
Type of activity: VS1 / VS2 (specify the activity; mark one or more characteristics applicable to your activity); Nature of activity: core, supplementary, related, or a combination thereof; Activity processes: service provision, production, educational activity, craft, etc.; Activity resources: heritage, tools, environment, other resources; Activity outputs: service, object, product, exhibition, infrastructure, etc.		
Resources / Heritage: used for core activity, supplementary activity, or related activity.		
<b>1. Presentation of the Theme / Resources in Practical Activity</b> <i>Heritage resources; other resources, tools, and activity environment; supplementary elements (taste, smell, sight, sound, touch); courtyard, outdoor furniture, fencing; flowerbeds, garden, vegetable patch; animals and their care; shutters, building details; table textiles, bedding; rooms, furniture, tableware, lighting; sanitary facilities.</i> 1.1. The theme is presented through the use (application, exhibition) of resources (activities, processes, tools, etc.) characteristic of the activity. 1.2. The current activity, processes or tools can be expanded or upgraded (in connection with the existing activity). 1.3. A new supplementary activity can be introduced (how, what).	1 point – for 1–2 features	1 additional point – for a complex of features
<b>2. Reflection of the Authenticity and “Local Character” of the Theme / Resources</b> <i>Local raw materials, local technologies, local products, local methods of use; the uniqueness of resources, objects, services, environment, goods, food (taste, smell), visual and sound elements; unique events, local traditions, customs, distinctive lifestyles; uniqueness in partnership, cooperation environment and within the cultural route territory.</i>	1 point – for 1–2 features	1 additional point – for a complex of features

<sup>8</sup> Stulpinaitė J. (2021). Kultūros kelio „baltų kelias“ subjektų veiklos kokybė. Darnų kultūros kelio vystymąsi ir lankytojų kokybišką aptarnavimą skatinančių kriterijų sistemos kūrimas.

<p>2.1. Distinctiveness of the current activity within the local environment. 2.2. Distinctiveness of the current activity in relation to partner activities. 2.3. The current activity allows for greater thematic/resource expression. 2.4. The current activity can be renewed through the introduction of additional new tools.</p>		
<p><b>3. Interpretation and Explanation of the Theme / Resources</b> <i>Through the operator's means (efforts, actions, objects, programmes, etc.), the nature, characteristics, development, current condition and symbolism of the theme/resources are revealed; traditional heritage harmonises with contemporary culture (art, crafts, music, other creative forms, etc.).</i> 3.1. Tools and methods used for interpretation; applied independently or with intermediaries. 3.2. In interpretation, the old and the new merge, revealing the intrinsic essence of the theme/resources. 3.3. The interpretation represents not only the theme/resources and objects but also the locality as a whole. 3.4. Additional new tools can be applied independently or in cooperation with partners.</p>	1 point – for 1–2 features	1 additional point – for achieving higher cultural value
<p><b>4. Promotion and Dissemination of the Theme / Resources (Related to the Core Activity)</b> <i>Active information and communication (channels, tools, content), events, publicity, self-organised activities, education, demonstrations.</i> 4.1. Independent tools used for active promotion of the theme/resources. 4.2. The theme/resources are promoted at partners' events through practical contribution. 4.3. Independent dissemination activities related to the theme/resources (education, self-organised initiatives, etc.). 4.4. New promotion tools can be introduced independently or with partners.</p>	1 point – for 1–2 features	1 additional point – for a complex of features
<p><b>5. Maintenance of the Theme / Resources in the Operator's Local Area (Not Directly Related to the Core Activity)</b> <i>Signage, ornamental and colour solutions, information, infrastructure; theme maintenance through characteristic objects, products, processes, sensory elements; opportunities for observation, engagement and independent visitor activities; use of dialect, wearing of traditional clothing in neutral environments (e.g., wrist warmers, mittens); authentic expression of objects/resources (e.g., bast boxes); natural environment and materials.</i> 5.1. Practical or environmental management episodes that support promotion of the theme/resources/local features. 5.2. Community-based activities and volunteering promoting the theme/resources/local features, not directly related to the core activity. 5.3. Joint promotion of the theme/resources/local features with partners.</p>	1 point – for 1–2 features	1 additional point – for a complex of features
<p><b>6. Partnership Supporting the Theme / Resources / Local Characteristics (Episodic and Long-Term)</b> <i>Joint activities (services, production, communication), sharing of resources and equipment, coordinated image maintenance; joint communication and cooperative promotion tools; projects and programmes of varying duration; similar or diverse business/service activities; cooperation with communities, NGOs, education, science and public organisations; systematic operation, continuity, clustering</i> 6.1. Current activity areas where partnership contributes to local and cultural route development. 6.2. Potential new partnerships in the interest of local and cultural route development. 6.3. Cooperation with civic organisations significant for local and cultural route development. 6.4. Integration of current activities into networking, clusters, etc.</p>	1 point – for 1–2 features	1 additional point – for joint activity, networking and complexity
<p><b>7. Support for Sustainable Development and Cultural Sustainability</b> <i>Preservation of resource authenticity, efficient and safe use of resources, balance between resource capacity and activity scale, waste recycling and safe disposal, moderate visitor flows, litter prevention; sustainability supported through partnership.</i> 7.1. The current activity supports (restores, compensates for) the natural character and authenticity of resources. 7.2. The current scale of activity (visitor flow, volume) is regulated in line with resource capacity. 7.3. Principles of efficient resource use are applied in practice. 7.4. Partnership fostering sustainable development and cultural sustainability is maintained.</p>	1 point – for 1–2 features	1 additional point – for measures implemented through partnership

## Appendix 4. Sites of Interest and Their Contacts

### THE BALTS' ROAD. FROM SEMIGALLIANS TO YOTVINGIANS

1. **Balts' Culture Education Centre "Balts' Road"**  
Vilniaus g. 213, Šiauliai  
[www.baltukelias.lt](http://www.baltukelias.lt)
2. **Sundial Square**  
Ežero g. 64, Šiauliai
3. **Šiauliai History Museum**  
Aušros al. 47, Šiauliai  
[www.ausrosmuziejus.lt](http://www.ausrosmuziejus.lt)
4. **Bubiai Castle Mound**  
Bubiai, Šiaulių r. sav.  
55.86194052862633, 23.129827398129123
5. **The Museum of Sticks**  
Kooperacijos g. 33, Kelmė
6. **Kelmė Regional Museum**  
Dvaro str. 15, Kelmė  
[www.kelmesmuziejus.lt](http://www.kelmesmuziejus.lt)
7. **Kubiliai Mound**  
Kelmės r. sav.  
55.61428708386983, 23.085516655790563
8. **Pagryžuvys Mound**  
Kelmės r. sav.  
55.604560023394704, 23.134797926955336
9. **Visitor Centre of Tytuvėnai Regional Park**  
Miško g. 3, Tytuvėnai
10. **Raseiniai Regional History Museum**  
Muziejaus g. 3, Raseiniai  
[www.raseiniumuziejus.lt](http://www.raseiniumuziejus.lt)
11. **Veliuona Mound Complex**  
Veliuona, Jurbarko r. sav.  
55.07822811973765, 23.28096034109898
12. **Visitor Centre of Panemuniai Regional Park**  
Raseinių g. 2, Šilinės km., Jurbarko r. sav.
13. **Sudargas Mound Complex**  
Grinaičiai, Šakių r. sav.  
55.04759912567706, 22.646517593294867
14. **Ethnographic Suvalkietis Homestead**  
Miško g. 4, Pervazninkų k., Šakių r. sav.
15. **Suvalkija (Sūduva) Cultural Centre–Museum (Paežeriai Manor)**

Dvaro g. 6, Paežeriai, Šeimenos sen., Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
[www.paezeriai.info](http://www.paezeriai.info)

**16. Old Crafts Centre “Virbalis Gates”**

Vilniaus g. 13, Virbalis, Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
[www.virbaliovertai.lt](http://www.virbaliovertai.lt)

**17. Kunigiškiai (Pajevonys) Mound**

Trilaukio g., Pajevonys, Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
54.5234135147112, 22.836610081804274

**18. Pajevonys**

Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
54.52822060540075, 22.82668438893122

**19. Jonas Basanavičius Birthplace and the Oak Grove of Lithuanian National Revival**

Gimtinės g. 17, Ožkabalių I k., Vilkaviškio r. sav.

**20. Piliakalniai Mound**

Bartninkų sen., Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
54.46588523368686, 23.04765321808321

**21. Jegliniec hillfort**

54.308559882795805, 23.13752808408298

**22. District Museum in Suwałki**

Tadeusza Kościuszki 81, Suwałki  
[www.muzeum.suwalki.pl](http://www.muzeum.suwalki.pl)

**23. Castle Hill in Szurpily**

54.23423838702687, 22.88408025524284

**24. Bridges in Stańczyki and Path “To the Emperor’s Stone”**

Dziatka 150/5, Stańczyki

**25. Masurian graduation towers in Goldap**

Promenada Zdrojowa 20, Gołdap  
[www.uzdrowiskogoldap.pl](http://www.uzdrowiskogoldap.pl)

**26. Hillfort in Konikowo (Piekná Gora near Gołdap)**

54.028438007195334, 21.721135007479027

**27. Ściborki Republic**

54.28990370597921, 22.029051042712723

**28. Mill in Budry**

Aleja Wojska Polskiego 37, Budry  
[www.mlynbudry.pl](http://www.mlynbudry.pl)

**29. Borecka Forest**

Kowale Oleckie  
54.14498624650933, 22.16227871786181

**30. Hillfort in Szwalk**

Kowale Oleckie  
54.10892521163593, 22.241488255018982

- 31. The Yotvingian sacrificial altar in Stare Juchy**  
53.92388980617116, 22.18385828406088
- 32. Observation tower in Stare Juchy**  
53.91797425823502, 22.164539455224755
- 33. Hillfort in Rogala**  
53.851050192607715, 22.16301591844468
- 34. Hillfort in Bajtkowo**  
53.74535866505885, 22.254828715232964
- 35. Elk History Museum**  
Wąski Tor 1, Elk  
[www.muzeum.elk.pl](http://www.muzeum.elk.pl)
- 36. Elk Narrow-Gauge Railway**  
Wąski Tor 1, Elk

#### **THE BALTS' ROAD. TIME MIST OVER MOUNDS**

- 37. Rudamina Mound**  
Rudamina, Lazdijų r. sav.  
54.282099513168234, 23.441220016434247
- 38. Prelomčiškė Mound**  
Prelomčiškės vill., Lazdijai dis. mun.  
54.31262811335442, 23.65508756864334
- 39. Radžiūnai Mound**  
Alytus  
54.37430676203923, 24.00529943725972
- 40. Alytus Mound**  
Alytus  
54.39645462506871, 24.07955729933742
- 41. Memorial Museum of Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius**  
Krėvės g. 3, Subartonių k, Varėnos r. sav.  
[www.merkinesmuziejus.lt](http://www.merkinesmuziejus.lt)
- 42. Merkinė Mound**  
Merkinė, Varėnos r. sav.  
54.15826703046601, 24.1833117686349
- 43. Gaidžiai Dune of Kloniai Hill**  
Marcinkonių km., Varėnos r. sav.  
54.06969875084855, 24.397272464923454
- 44. Šaudzykla hill**  
Varėnos r. sav.  
54.063146339257344, 24.377209010957316

- 45. Visitor Centre of Dzūkija National Park in Marcinkonys**  
Miškininkų g. 61, Marcinkonių km., Varėnos r. sav.
- 46. Exhibition of Hollow-Tree Beekeeping Apiary**  
Ažuolo g. 1A, Musteikos km., Varėnos r. sav.
- 47. Margionys**  
Margionių km., Varėnos r. sav.  
53.998514556939014, 24.2858457053014
- 48. Information Centre *Girios Aidai***  
M. K. Čiurlionio g. 116, Druskininkai
- 49. Švendubrė Village with the Great Stone and Views of Raigardas Valley**  
Švendubrės km., Druskininkų sav.  
53.97971377540838, 23.936533593848925
- 50. Leipalingis**  
Alėjos g. 30, Leipalingis, Druskininkų sav.

#### **THE BALTS' ROAD. ON THE BORDER OF YOTVINGIANS AND HIGHLANDERS**

- 51. Kazlų Rūda Regional Museum Exhibition**  
Atgimimo g. 5, Kazlų Rūda
- 52. Višakio Rūda Household Museum of Valdas Arbašauskas**  
Ažuolo g. 10, Višakio Rūda, Kazlų Rūdos sen.
- 53. Spring in Višakio Rūda**  
Višakio Rūda, Kazlų Rūda mun.  
54.825676613922546, 23.44212547990877
- 54. Homestead “Gervių Giesmė”**  
Pušyno g. 13, Viliūšių k., Jankų sen., Kazlų Rūdos sav.  
[www.gerviugiesme.lt](http://www.gerviugiesme.lt)
- 55. Samanojus**  
Garankščių km. 4 A, Kazlų Rūdos sav.  
[www.samanojus.lt](http://www.samanojus.lt)
- 56. Bird Watching Tower in Novaraistis Ornithological Reserve**  
Novaraistis, Kazlų Rūdos sen.  
54.94286602554433, 23.416481295780077
- 57. Lekėčiai Great Spring**  
Šakių r. sav.  
54.99662363084997, 23.510760305205487
- 58. Vaiguva River-Street**  
Vaiguvos g., Plokščiai, Šakių r. sav.  
55.08322835218452, 23.17778852082056
- 59. Gelgaudiškis Educational Trail**  
Parko g. 5, Gelgaudiškis, Šakių r. sav.

**60. Miestlaukis Mound**

Kybartų sen., Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
54.76696919373558, 22.8401109400231

**61. Kubiliai Family Apiary**

Nepriklausomybės g. 63 B, Vilkaviškis  
[www.devynbite.lt](http://www.devynbite.lt)

**62. Hammer Museum in Degučiai**

Penkinių g. 11, Degučių k., Keturvalakių sen., Vilkaviškio r. sav.

**63. Marijampolė Regional Museum**

Vytauto g. 29, Marijampolė  
[www.marijampolesmuziejus.lt](http://www.marijampolesmuziejus.lt)

**64. Amalva Swamp Educational Trail**

Marijampolės sav.  
54.51045228958342, 23.53025456386405

**THE BALTS' ROAD. THE GREAT YOTVINGIAN PATH IN LITHUANIA**

**65. Šilelis Educational Trail**

Čižiškiai, Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
54.4077055193479, 22.763762406057047

**66. Holy Spring**

54.399305937392285, 22.7699240993375

**67. Pavištytis Mound**

Pavištyčio km., Vilkaviškis r. sav.  
54.41499458349828, 22.781347132992323

**68. Visitor Centre of Vištytis Regional Park**

Vytauto g. 8, Vištytis, Vilkaviškis r. sav.  
[www.vistytis.lt](http://www.vistytis.lt)

**69. Vištytis Stone**

Vištyčio sen., Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
54.47019400362492, 22.705257305764935

**70. Tadarinė Pedestrian Path “Let’s Travel Ancestors’ Paths”**

Skardupių km. Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
54.481071971457176, 22.81989598214403

**71. “Dobilynė” Homestead**

Kalvarijos g. 2, Dotamų km., Vilkaviškio r. sav.  
[www.dobilyne.lt](http://www.dobilyne.lt)

**72. Kačergos Hill**

Kalvarijos sav.  
54.35698312864146, 23.02375442446478

**73. Kalvarija Regional Museum. Information Centre**

Dariaus ir Girėno g. 45B, Kalvarija

- 74. Ethnographic Pranas Dzūkas Homestead**  
Delnicos k., Šeštokų sen., Lazdijų r. sav.  
[www.lazdijumuziejus.lt](http://www.lazdijumuziejus.lt)
- 75. Exposition in Žuvintas Reserve Visitor Centre**  
Kampelių g. 10, Aleknonys, Alytaus r. sav.  
[www.zuvintas.lt](http://www.zuvintas.lt)
- 76. Archaeological Museum, Alytus Regional Museum Branch**  
Jiezno g. 2, Alytus  
[www.alytausmuziejus.lt](http://www.alytausmuziejus.lt)
- 77. Ceramic Workshop “Vienaragių Šilas”**  
Kauno g. 29, Merkinė  
[www.vienaragiusilas.lt](http://www.vienaragiusilas.lt)
- 78. Liškiava with the Mound Complex by the Nemunas**  
Liškiava, Varėnos r. sav.  
54.081624964152645, 24.043823127742744
- 79. Salt Studio**  
Smiltynų g. 9, Druskininkai  
[www.druskosstudija.lt](http://www.druskosstudija.lt)
- 80. Banda Baking**  
Rima’s Chamber, Lakštingalų g. 6, Varnėnų k., Lazdijų r. sav.
- 81. Snaigynas (Veisiejai) Observation Tower**  
Veisiejų sen., Lazdijų r. sav.  
54.101453608261785, 23.722025466778373
- 82. Lazdijai Regional Museum**  
Seinų g. 29, Lazdijai  
[www.lazdijumuziejus.lt](http://www.lazdijumuziejus.lt)
- 83. Stone Museum Yotvingian Yard**  
Kybartų km. 5, Būdviečio sen., Lazdijų r. sav.

## THE STONES, SKY AND GODS ROUTE

- 22. District Museum in Suwałki (objektas kartojasi)**  
Tadeusza Kościuszki str. 81, Suwałki  
[www.muzeum.suwalki.pl](http://www.muzeum.suwalki.pl)
- 84. Yotvingian cemetery in Switzerland**  
54.15089359927709, 22.960769198149283
- 85. Viewpoint in Roweles**  
54.33148841515239, 22.928381797576865
- 86. Tripoint Poland - Lithuania - Russia (Kaliningrad)**  
54.36336013452493, 22.791994311982737

- 87. Romincka Forest Landscape Park**  
Szkolna str. 1, Żytkiejmy  
[www.pkpr.warmia.mazury.pl](http://www.pkpr.warmia.mazury.pl)
- 88. Tree Cake Monument in Żytkiejmy**  
Maja str. 1, Żytkiejmy
- 89. Observation tower in Stańczyki**  
54.29592109953254, 22.64948794175391  
[www.stanczyki.com](http://www.stanczyki.com)
- 90. Yotvingian Mound in Stańczyki**  
54.30179892351941, 22.664251797575144
- 91. William's Trail in the Romincka Forest**  
54.307313885359136, 22.670283521386068
- 92. Monument to Immanuel Kant in Goldap**  
Lipowa 2, Goldap
- 93. Stone rotunda in Olecko**  
Park 1, Olecko
- 94. Market Square in Olecko**  
54.03249920605479, 22.50347676532187
- 95. Rospuda River Valley – Raczki**  
53.955153614627, 22.88499681827582
- 96. The Holy Place on Rospuda**  
53.94899907956536, 22.874331423681422  
[www.suwalszczyzna.com.pl](http://www.suwalszczyzna.com.pl)
- 97. Hillfort in Rajgród**  
Szkolna 32, Rajgród

#### AMONG THE HILLS AND LAKES OF THE YOTVINGIANS

- 98. Wigry National Park**  
Krzywe str. 82, Suwałki  
[www.wigpn.gov.pl](http://www.wigpn.gov.pl)
- 99. Yew Mountain – “Suwalki's Fujiyama”**  
54.251479466522134, 22.909730584079707
- 100. The Yotvingian Memorial Room in Szurpily**  
Szurpily 32, Szurpily
- 23. Castle Hill in Szurpily**  
54.23423838702687, 22.88408025524284
- 101. Suwalki Landscape Park – Turtulu**  
Malesowizna 24, Malesowizna  
[www.spk.org.pl](http://www.spk.org.pl)

- 102. Bachanowo Boulder Field Nature Reserve**  
54.23604208154641, 22.791364011063898  
[www.spk.org.pl](http://www.spk.org.pl)
- 103. Observation Tower on Leszczynowa Hill in Przelomka**  
54.257002529270515, 22.802594342328373
- 25. Masurian graduation towers in Gołdap**  
Promenada Zdrojowa 20, Gołdap  
[www.uzdrowiskogoldap.pl](http://www.uzdrowiskogoldap.pl)
- 104. Water Tower in Gołdap**  
Paderewskiego str. 35, Gołdap
- 26. The hill fort in Konikowo (Piekna Gora near Gołdap)**  
54.028438007195334, 21.721135007479027
- 105. Cisowy Jar Nature Reserve**  
54.16216486088971, 22.353641166880585
- 106. Bison enclosure in Wolisko**  
Dworcowa str. 8A, Kruklanki  
[www.borki.bialystok.lasy.gov.pl/](http://www.borki.bialystok.lasy.gov.pl/)
- 107. Lake Goldapivo (Kruglankės)**  
54.096890909173965, 21.948545447278658
- 32. Observation tower in Stare Juchy**  
53.91797425823502, 22.164539455224755
- 33. Hillfort in Rogala**  
53.851050192607715, 22.16301591844468
- 108. Water tower in Elk**  
Listopada 11, Elk
- 109. Lakeside boulevard in Elk**  
Nadjeziorna 2E, Elk