

The Ancient Cult Sites for
Common Identity on the Baltic Sea Coast



MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES FOR ANCIENT SACRED SITES

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Introduction


Importance and Meaning of Ancient Sacred Sites

Sacred forests, stones, springs and other natural sacred sites have formed an inseparable part of the landscapes and culture of people around the Baltic Sea for thousands of years. Sensing that nature is animated and regarding parts of nature as sacred and untouchable characterizes many indigenous peoples of the world and is part of the world's cultural heritage. According to the International Union of Nature Conservation (IUCN) natural sacred sites are the oldest nature conservation areas of mankind, and their importance lies in preserving both biodiversity and cultural heritage. The knowledge, values and mental experience connected to sacred sites form an inseparable part of the services provided by the ecosystem (Dudley 2010).

Rapid economic development and the changes in lifestyle accompanied by it are alienating people more and more from nature and ancient cultural heritage. Such trends have considerably reduced people's awareness of the non-material values of the landscape. Ancient sacred sites are becoming increasingly damaged, and in some areas they have become the most endangered cultural and natural monuments.

The needs of local communities for new sources of income and developing their tourism industries have already incorporated many remarkable sites into development activities. As a result of developers' lack of awareness, ill-considered tourism has often had a devastating effect on the natural and cultural heritage of sacred sites. Custodians who are connected to such sites via indigenous culture and historic religious traditions have either disappeared or been crowded out.

In order to be able to manage and use sacred sites in a considerate and sustainable way, it is important to learn about them and value them. Action plans focused on the developments of sacred sites are also of the utmost importance.



The Ancient Cult Sites for
Common Identity on the Baltic Sea Coast



This document has been produced in the framework of the ‘Ancient Cult Sites for Common Identity on the Baltic Sea Coast’ project (CB 35 Cult Identity) financed by the Central Baltic programme. The objectives of the project are to **raise awareness of sacred sites and to develop protection and management principles for sacred sites and a sustainable model for opening sacred sites up to tourism in cooperation with local people, municipalities and tourism developers**. The lead partner in the project is the Riga Planning Region; other partners are the Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Zemgale Planning Regions in Latvia, the County Museum of Gävleborg in Sweden and the Hiite Maja Foundation in Estonia.

One of the objectives of the project is to compile **guidelines for the sustainable management and development of ancient sacred sites**. In order to do this, it is necessary to define the possibilities and main activities that help to include natural sacred sites as tourism objects in the development of local communities. The keyword of the strategy is sustainability. This means that management and use of sacred sites may not damage existing values but, on the contrary, help to create new values. Sustainability also means activities that will remain viable for 5 or 10 years or even longer.

In order to **guarantee sustainable management and development of sacred sites**, all activities must be based on well-defined principles and organized according to a well-prepared action plan. Before being able to offer tourism services, it is necessary to carry out research, map the situation, develop measures to manage sites, evaluate the sites’ tourism potential and plan concrete action.

Within the framework of the project, 100 ancient sacred sites were mapped in each partner region with the objective of creating tourist routes including at least five ancient sacred sites in each region. The strategy was compiled as a tool to manage and develop sites that have already been mapped, but also for further use in the participating countries. It can be successfully implemented for single sacred sites as well as sites that are situated in different locations (e.g. on a tourist route) as well as for sacred sites in larger regions.



In the ‘Cult Identity’ project the following definition is used: **ancient sacred sites are sites in a landscape that are connected to sacred activities, mythical beings and/or burial mounds¹.**

This document has a number of target groups, including land owners who have sacred sites situated on their property, local municipalities, tourism developers, local communities, custodians and all others who in one way or other are connected to the protection and management of ancient sacred sites.

1 In Estonia a natural sacred site is defined as an area on land or in water connected to historic religious beliefs and rites.

1. Overview of Sacred Sites

1.1. Sacred Sites in Estonia

In Estonia, natural sacred sites are defined as natural sites on land or in water that have evidently been regarded as and/or used for religious purposes. Mainly based on historical sources, Estonian researchers have gathered data about *ca* 2500 such sites. Nearly one-fifth of them have been mapped and are protected by the state. Most of the sites are in poor condition or occupied by other kinds of human activity. In addition, 700 cross trees – which are connected to ancient funerary traditions – have been mapped, but only a few of them are protected. It is noteworthy in the European context that many of Estonia's sacred groves, stones, springs and trees continue to be used for praying, sacrificing, healing and other historic religious traditions. Natural sacred sites play an important role in ancient Estonian culture and identity, and sacred groves have been called 'the preserves of the Estonian nation' (Vaher 2003).

Typology

There are several ancient language and cultural regions in Estonia. Therefore, the types and names of sacred sites differ according to their location. For example, healing stones and trees are common in western Estonia. Sacred groves which were used by local communities are common in northern, central and western Estonia. The tradition of cross trees connected to funeral services has been preserved in the south-east of the country.

Defining sacred sites according to their characteristics helps us grasp their historical meaning and differences. According to their appearance, sacred sites can be divided into combined monuments (such as sacred groves, with an area 1-100 ha) and single monuments (single sacred sites, stones, springs etc.) They can also be divided into groups according to other categories:

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- users: communities (sacred groves, healing sites and cross trees) or families (sacred stone, tree and site of sacrifice);
- time of use: holidays (sacred groves and Miikse Jaani Stone) or based on need (most healing sites, cross trees etc.);
- manner of use: healing, praying, sacrificing and funerary and other traditions; and
- location: on or close to historic farms or settlements or on landscapes far from historic settlements and close to historic roads (Kaasik 2011).

Cup-marked stones (more than 1500 of which are protected) and burial mounds (more than 1900 of which are protected) are not regarded as natural sacred sites in Estonia. A few cup-marked stones that are described in folk stories as having been sacred – as well as burial mounds that are situated on larger sacred sites or where a sacred tree or stone is located – are exceptions here.

Research

Researchers have gathered data about natural sacred sites in Estonia for more than a century, but its content and scope varies greatly and it is difficult to find from different databases. In 2008 the Minister of Culture of Estonia signed a National Development Plan for natural sacred sites. The main objective of the document is to map, make inventories of and place under protection all natural sacred sites in Estonia. Most fieldwork remains in the initial phase due to a lack of finances (Kaasik 2007).

Compilation of a database of natural sacred sites (www.andmekogu.hiis.ee) which will provide information about the location and type of sacred sites in the country is underway.

Protection

As a result of limited and often inappropriate protection, the majority of natural sacred sites in Estonia are in danger of being destroyed.

450 sacred sites (fewer than one-fifth of those mapped) are **protected by the state as archaeological monuments** (in the registry of cultural monuments at <http://register.muinas.ee/>). In addition, as protection concentrates solely on archaeological values, not all sacred sites have been placed under protection. Natural and non-material aspects of sacred sites and issues regarding freedom of religion have not been given adequate consideration.

Sacred trees, groves, springs and stones have been placed under protection as part of **nature conservation** as single objects and are also located on the landscape and in nature and other reserves and national parks. At least 100 sacred sites that have been placed under conservation can be found in the national environment database (<http://register.keskkonnainfo.ee/>). Due to insufficient inventories and lists, the exact number of sites is unknown. Only natural values are protected; cultural and non-material values tend not to be considered.

So far, there have not been any specific directions on organising the protection of sacred sites. In 2011, the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Guidelines for the Management of Sacred Sites were translated into Estonian. According to these guidelines, sacred sites are the oldest nature preserves of humankind that must be preserved according to the traditions of indigenous people (IUCN 2008). The Republic of Estonia approved the guidelines in 2008.

Protection by customary law. Protection of sacred sites is an important issue for the people of Estonia. According to a public opinion poll held in 2011, 70% of all Estonians think that protection of sacred groves and other such natural sites is important or very important (Faktum Ariko 2011). This stance is deep-rooted: based on various surveys, 65% of all Estonians believe that plants or trees have souls (Moor 1998: 104; Altnurme 2011). Additionally, 51% of Estonians identify themselves with Estonia's native religion: "For me, our ancestors' heritage and nature are sacred and I follow the traditions of native religion whenever possible" (Altnurme 2011).

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Native Estonians who follow these traditions respect and have a need for natural sacred sites and are ready to act to protect them. Maavalla koda², the organisation representing nature worshippers, has become the most important spokesperson for sacred sites in Estonia. It has also been recognised at the international level and has been included in the work of Delos Initiative³ (an IUCN working group charged with protecting sacred sites).

Use

Many historic natural sacred sites are still in use today. They are used for healing, sacrificing, praying, remembering the dead and practising other indigenous traditions.

In Estonia, freedom of religion is directly related to sacred sites. For indigenous people a sacred site differs from the landscape around it because it offers them an opportunity to practise their ancestors' rituals in the same place that the rituals were carried out for hundreds (if not thousands) of years. A sacred site is a place of connection with the generations before us, of maintaining continuity, as well as being a conservation area of nature and non-material heritage.

Some sacred sites are included in tourist routes, but in general there is little or no information or infrastructure. Attractive sites such as Taevaskoda (Heaven's Hall) in Põlva County and the Panga cliffs in Saare County have already become destinations of mass tourism. However, as a result of inept tourism development the environment on such sites has become considerably less attractive, tourists are not being given enough information about the sites and the regulations that apply to them, and ultimately the visitors are more of a burden than a benefit to local communities.

² <http://maavald.ee/eng/>

³ <http://www.med-ina.org/delos/index.htm>

1.2. Sacred Sites in Latvia

The public administration of cultural heritage preservation in the Republic of Latvia stands apart from the proper protection and development of sacred sites. There is no national development plan or any other state initiative in order to protect, save and promote these places. Neither has there been any state-funded research into their potential as cultural and tourism sites for local and foreign visitors, not to mention the ignoring of the fact that these places are considered sacred by a lot of people because they connect them to their national identity. Moreover, a number of sites have fallen into ruin quite recently. The responsibility of protection and promotion of these sites lies with their owners and their understanding of and interest in the situation. Local initiatives are very much needed and important in improving, maintaining and developing the sites. There are initiatives from grassroots organisations and enthusiasts to do so, but in many cases they contradict the interests of owners. These facts make the future of sacred natural sites in Latvia very uncertain.

The more detailed overview of sacred sites in Latvia that follows is divided into four parts according to the partner regions in the project: the Riga Planning Region; the Kurzeme Planning Region; the Vidzeme Planning Region; and the Zemgale Planning Region.

1.2.1. Riga Planning Region

The Riga Planning Region (RPR) is centred on Riga and its urban surroundings, where ancient sacred sites are generally not preserved. Due to this, the recorded sites in the RPR are situated at a distance from the city.

The territory of the RPR in historical respects is varied. From the 13th -18th centuries the territory belonged to different states. Great differences can also be noted in ethnic composition. The eastern part of the RPR belonged to the Livs, Livones (*lībieši*), Latgallians (*latgaļi*) and Semigallians (*zemgaļi*) whereas the western part belonged to the Curonians, Curs (*kurši*) and Semigallians. It

seems that the pre-Christian beliefs connected with ancient sacred sites were later replaced by ‘folk-Christianity’ beliefs. The remains of both ancient beliefs have been preserved in folklore and narratives. Many ancient sacred sites are connected with legends about the Devil (*Velns*). A large number of ancient sacred sites are connected with folklore and place names related to ancient churches. It is possible that some of these sites were connected with medieval chapels, but others hold older layers of tradition.

In the course of fieldwork, 97 ancient sacred sites were recorded in the RPR. Around two-thirds of them are protected by the state as objects of heritage and nature. Around a third of all the recorded sites have more or less developed infrastructure for visitors. At the same time, another third have no infrastructure, and not all of them are necessarily of interest for tourism activities. Some of the sites are connected to current involvement in cult activities, but these seem not to be linked to old traditions. For example, these activities take place at the sites of ‘cup-mark’ stones, but these stones as a rule are not connected with old traditions. Around half of the recorded sites are supplemented by old and traditional folk narratives, although most of these narratives have fallen out of use in everyday life.

The level of preservation of ancient sacred sites in the RPR is not bad. Only in one case was a large amount of waste and uncut grass recorded close to an old cult stone. Access to sites that are not equipped with information boards and tourism infrastructure is usually not good and a lot of effort and time is needed here. The sensitivity of ancient sacred sites is an issue if they are situated close to houses or influenced by other types of activity, such as skiing. Only in some cases have local people expressed a negative attitude towards visitors.

1.2.2. Kurzeme Planning Region

In the Kurzeme Planning Region (KPR) there are eight types of natural sacred sites. The most common are sacred stones, 49 of which are located around the region. The stones can be divided into three groups: cup-marked stones; large stones; and stones with specific drawings. Also widespread are sacred trees – 16 oaks and lindens can be found in the region – and there are 13 sacred hills and 12 sacred springs. The peculiarity of the KPR is its two sacred groves, which are part of former sacred forests. There are also three sacred caves in the area, as well as a sacred settlement and a sacred lake.

Only on a few of the sacred sites in the KPR is it still possible to find signs of the presence of followers of traditional religion. Near some springs colourful ribbons are tied to trees and other gifts (e.g. coins) are left behind for the forest, as traditional beliefs state that if something is taken from nature, something must be left in return. One more place in active use today is a picturesque hill (*Vanagkalns*) where followers of traditional beliefs perform traditional ancient rituals – for example, celebrating Midsummer.

Approximately 40% of the sacred sites are protected by law as archaeological monuments or nature monuments; some are also located in protected areas (e.g. nature parks and reserves). Around 20% of the sites are included in tourism flows and have information boards and other infrastructure. An additional 20% have tourism potential – they are attractive, accessible and not overly sensitive and can be promoted to people interested in sacred site tourism.

1.2.3. Vidzeme Planning Region

Attractive and well-known sacred sites in the Vidzeme Planning Region (VPR) are already popular among tourists and those seeking spiritual experiences. These sites constitute the minority, and while most of them are still admired as natural objects, they bear little or no information about their sacredness. The majority of sacred sites are not yet included in any activity; moreover, they are

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located far from inhabited places and local people know nothing of their existence. Most of the sites are very difficult to access. Quite a lot of places are in bad condition and, as a consequence, do not look attractive. The sites are usually not marked with information about their cultural and historic importance, and they are suitable only for visits by individuals or small groups.

Around 10% of the sites are very sensitive: either they are located on private property and the owners do not welcome visitors or they are in danger of being ruined by frequent visits. Of the 100 sites in the VPR observed in the project, 73 belong to private owners. Some of the sites are located on reserves or in restricted areas.

Taking into consideration the condition of the sacred sites in the VPR at present, it is clear that tourism development should be planned with caution. It is a fact that Neo-Pagan pilgrimages to sacred natural sites have become popular in Europe and all over the world as part of modern tourism. Zilais kalns (Blue Hill) close to Valmiera is a natural sacred site that holds the same kind of national importance to some people as the most important Catholic monument in Latvia, the Aglona basilica.

It is too soon to talk of the active inclusion of Latvian sites into these activities. Around 45% of the sacred sites in the VPR have the potential to be included in tourism activities. In order to achieve this, the sites require a high quality interpretation (i.e. a story) based on scientific research and local tradition and strongly linked to authentic ritual practices. Visitors' participation and the continuity of the story and connection with other places should also be considered. Proper infrastructure must be provided, and last but not least, specially trained guides are needed. Nevertheless, sacred natural sites have tourism potential and, as mentioned above, they are used for the activities of the followers of traditional religions and other groups of people seeking spiritual adventure.

1.2.4. Zemgale Planning Region

A list of 100 different kinds of ancient cult sites with detailed additional information and descriptions of location, condition of object et al. was made in the Zemgale Planning Region (ZPR) as part of the project. Most of the sacred objects in the region are stones (55), but there are also sacred mounds (23) and trees (9). Less populous objects are springs, lakes, ravines, peninsulas and rivers.

The sacred stones in the ZPR are of special value to Latvia as a whole. There are only nine cup-marked stones in Latvia and all of them are found in the ZPR. (Compare this to Lithuania, where more than 600 such stones have been identified.) Cup-marked stones are interesting and mystic objects at the same time. It is known that the little cup holes were made by humans, but their purpose is not known. There are theories about their practical meaning, too: for example, for cooking, craft-making, astronomical observations and more. In the past, researchers assumed that the holes were connected to sacrifices and worship. Research carried out in Estonia, where more than 1700 cup-marked stones have been identified, have found no proof of religious use. At the same time, there are clear connections between cup-marked stones and the cultivation of the land (Tvauri 1999).

In Selia in the eastern part of Zemgale there are beautiful sacred mounds. Because of the proximity of Lithuanian tribes, which were rather belligerent, the Selian tribes lived in fortresses, close to which there was usually at least one sacred mound for prayers and sacrifice. During fieldwork, the project team found footprints left in the sacred mounds by treasure-seekers looking for artefacts several hundred years ago.

The mid-section of the ZPR – running across the Jelgava district – is poor in sacred sites. There are only a few cup-marked stones and ancient trees and one insignificant mound located close to the

local dump. However, this does not mean that other notable sacred sites will not be identified in future. Across the Bauska district at least two cup-marked stones have been lost to theft or earthworks. The locals do not know the history of these sacred sites; not even museums show an interest in inspecting and preserving movable objects with historically sacred meaning. Such a situation may lead to other objects being lost.

Most of the sites in the ZPR are natural objects and form part of the landscape. Some are located in well-known nature parks like Tervete, Mezotne and Daugava. On the other hand, there are some sacred sites that can only be found using co-ordinates. Some are concealed in wild forests or timber-felling areas.

Some objects are popular and interesting for tourism or practical purposes, such as the Karalavots spring, which is a frequently visited site boasting good infrastructure. Locals and even Lithuanians believe that the water from the spring is both pure and healing. People come here with empty containers and take sacred water home for cooking, drinking and medicinal purposes. Near the spring, entrepreneurs fill bottles with the water and sell it in stores.

In general, the preservation of the sacred sites in the ZPR is precarious. Many are located on private property, with land owners using them without any sense of conservation. Some stones form garden features; others are merely obstacles. Sacred trees tend to be old, and natural phenomena like lightning, rain, the sun and insects are slowly destroying them.

1.3. Sacred Sites in Sweden

Sacred sites in Sweden are protected by the Swedish Cultural Memory Law. As such, they have some protection against being destroyed. The biggest threat is the timber industry. A lot of sites are destroyed every year in spite of regulations and awareness-raising activities. Moreover, they become overgrown with trees, and there are insufficient resources to keep all of the sites clear of vegetation. In many cases, the condition of the sites depends on local interest groups and the County

Administrative Board to help clear them. Nevertheless, most sites seem to be in decent condition. They are often taken care of by local clubs and people that live nearby. Most people seem to respect the sites, and the majority certainly respect the County Administrative Board and the threat of fines and other punishments.

Fornsök, the database of the Swedish National Heritage Board (www.raa.se/fornsok), lists 9028 sites that are directly connected to folklore and cult practices. If you broaden the perspective and also look at ancient pagan graves, grave fields and burial sites, there are a further 190,498 sites. If you also add sites connected with iron production and cult activities, you will find an additional 9967 sites.

Sacred sites in Sweden can be divided into the following groups:

- bear graves (a Sami type of site);
- springs with ancient traditions;
- labyrinths;
- sacrificial sites;
- cult deposits; and
- places with ancient traditions.

In the project database, different types of pagan or non-clerical burial sites (such as grave fields) are also included.

In the north of Sweden there are a lot of sites connected with Sami culture. Many of these are places with traditions or sacred places. In Gävleborg, no such sites remain, as the Sami people have not lived there for a long time.

According to Fornsök, Gävleborg has 381 bear graves, springs with ancient traditions, labyrinths, sacrificial sites and places with ancient traditions; 3557 grave fields, graves and pagan burial sites; 1023 iron production and forging sites on which rituals were performed; and also metal deposits.

2. Legislation Concerning Sacred Sites in Partner Countries

2.1. International Legislation

The **UN Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage**⁴ is the main international legal instrument providing a definition of cultural and natural heritage and establishing the responsibility of states to protect heritage. The convention defines sites of cultural heritage (Article 1) as “works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.” The convention says that State Parties to the Convention are responsible for the identification, protection and conservation of such sites to secure their transmission to future generations (Article 4). States should have a specific policy to give the heritage sites a function in society, to include heritage in planning programmes and to set up services for the protection, conservation and presentation of heritage.

Traditions and rituals connected to sacred sites can be considered non-material cultural heritage in the context of the **Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage**⁵. At the same time, the convention does not require the protection of physical objects connected to intangible cultural heritage. However, the compilers of the analyses are of the opinion that when the protection of intangible heritage is inevitably related to a site (such as a sacred site) or funerary traditions, it is not possible to efficiently protect intangible heritage without protecting its physical aspect as well. Therefore, in order to properly fulfil the obligations arising from the convention, it would be advisable to protect natural sacred sites in a way that guarantees the possibility to practise historic rituals and the endurance of the intangible heritage.

In order to evaluate the obligations that arise from the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights**

4 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

5 http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17716&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

of Indigenous Peoples⁶, it is necessary to evaluate whether certain communities in Estonia can be considered indigenous. In general international practice, one of the conditions of defining indigenous people is that they differ from other people who have occupied or colonised their territory or who wield political power. If the only difference between indigenous people and others is their religion (e.g. nature worshippers in Estonia), this cannot be used as a criterion in defining the community as indigenous. At the same time, the definition of indigenous peoples in Estonia is not so much a legal issue as a subject of social science or other similar fields; in addition, the declaration itself is not binding. Therefore, no direct obligations arise from it.

The IUCN guidelines entitled ‘Sacred Natural Sites. Guidelines for Protected Area Managers’⁷ provides suggestions only and is not obligatory. Evaluating the potential of fulfilling the suggestions given in the guidelines within the framework of Estonian law, we conclude that it is only partly possible. The protection of sacred sites situated in areas under nature protection is already limited; there is no obligation to include interest groups or custodians (whose function and definition are not mentioned in Estonian law) in the protection management process; accessibility to sacred sites is not always guaranteed; and there is no way of closing such sites for periods of ceremonies, or classifying their locations.

2.2. National Legislation

2.2.1. Estonia

In the framework of the ‘Ancient Cult Sites for Common Identity on the Baltic Sea Coast’ project (CB 35 Cult Identity), an analysis of sacred site-related legislation in Estonia was commissioned from SA Keskkonnaõiguse Keskus (Estonian Environmental Law Center)⁸. As one of the main

6 http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

7 <http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-016.pdf>

8 <http://k6k.ee/en>

objectives of the project is to plan and organise sustainable tourism⁹ on sacred sites, the aim of the analysis was defined in the following way:

- to identify regulations that apply to historic natural sacred sites;
- to determine how natural and cultural (i.e. material and non-material cultural heritage) values are studied, protected, managed and used in Estonia; and
- to investigate how rituals derived from historic nature worshipping and principles of equal treatment are respected.

The analysis showed that Estonian legislation does not include the term ‘natural sacred sites’ and that to date all matters related to them have been arranged in other fields. For example, the National Heritage Board considers natural sacred sites as archaeological monuments under the National Heritage Act; sacred sites can also fall within the jurisdiction of the Nature Protection Act as single objects of nature, ecological reserve or other protected area/species; and the Constitution of Estonia touches upon sacred sites by guaranteeing freedom of religion and equal treatment for all.

The only document that directly mentions natural sacred sites is the national development plan for such sites. In addition, the Republic of Estonia has also approved the IUCN Guidelines for the Management of Sacred Sites. Although they do not have any power in law, the guidelines create a basis for the interpretation and planning of laws about sacred sites.

I Protection of sacred sites in national regulations

There are various ways of protecting natural sacred sites within the framework of current legislation:

- according to the **National Heritage Act**, a sacred site can be placed under protection as a

⁹ 'Sustainability' is also the keyword of the article „Conservation of Natural Sacred Sites' Natural and Cultural Heritage: Preconditions for Sustainability“ about the legislation connected to natural sacred sites published by Aare Kasemets (English summary can be found at <http://hiis.ee/sacred-sites/sns2007/aare-kasemets>)

monument if its characteristics correspond to the criteria of protected monuments (which in practice are made by the managing authority);

- according to the **Nature Protection Act** it is possible to protect sacred sites as part of national parks, single objects of nature, landscape preserves (if the site can be regarded as a landscape) or objects protected by local municipalities; legal protection can also apply to sacred sites if they are located within the boundaries of another object protected by the act;
- according to the **Planning Act**, sacred sites can be defined as objects of cultural and environmental value in local plans;
- according to the **Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management System Act**, impact on cultural heritage (including natural sacred sites) must be taken into account in assessments of environmental impact, and in the case of significant impact it must be minimised or avoided in accordance with the requirements set out in the activity licence;
- **forest management regulations** oblige people to avoid damaging national heritage objects wherever possible;
- according to the **rules for signposting monuments**, the monuments must be placed and fixed in a way that does not damage them or limit the extent to which they can be viewed;
- the **Constitution of the Republic of Estonia**¹⁰ guarantees freedom of religion and equal treatment for all. In terms of freedom of religion, it must be noted that, based on practice, the opportunity to perform religious rituals is not always guaranteed for nature worshippers in Estonia; in addition, the obligation to take the protection of freedom of religion into consideration is not fulfilled in all cases that might violate it, especially in the case of activities that do not require permission. The principle of equal treatment has been violated, since the implementation of the 'Conservation and Development of Places of Worship' programme has been financed to a much greater extent than the national development plan for natural sacred sites, and the state should change its practices. The principle of equal treatment is also violated by the **Land Tax Act**, which *exempts the land under churches and*

¹⁰ <http://www.legaltext.ee/text/en/X0000K1.htm>

other temples of different congregations from land tax but does not apply to natural sacred sites. As this contradicts the principle of equal treatment, freedom of religion is not guaranteed in Estonia. Such a legal position stimulates economic use and damage to natural sacred sites and causes widespread violation of religious freedom; and

- the **national development plan entitled ‘Natural Sacred Sites in Estonia. Research and Protection 2008-2012’**¹¹ describes sacred sites as natural or cultural monuments whose protection must take into consideration the principles of freedom of religion. The required activities listed in the plan include the creation of a sacred sites database, inventories of sacred sites throughout Estonia, placing all preserved sacred sites under protection and raising awareness in society. In order to fulfil these measures, current legislation should be clarified or laws about natural sacred sites introduced. The objectives listed in the development plan are on hold because only 16% of the financing needed to fulfil them has been allocated by the state.

The use and efficiency of means of protecting natural sacred sites largely depends on management practices, which does not always consider the need for protecting sacred sites, as seen from the number of problems connected to them. As **the protection of non-material cultural heritage has not been defined clearly**, it is also up to management authorities.

One of the key problems affecting the management practices of the National Heritage Board is the **vagueness of the National Heritage Act and generalised regulations**. Although decisions to place sites under protection require a lot of consideration, the law should provide more detailed criteria about types of monuments and the cases in which they should be protected.

At the same time, protection does not depend solely on management practices because total protection of natural sacred sites cannot solely be guaranteed by the laws and regulations that apply to them. This is so because the possibilities granted by the law to limit actions are also limited. For

11 <http://www.fl.ut.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=545096/Arengukava.pdf>

example, it is not possible to take into account the need to consider non-material cultural heritage in the vicinity of a monument that is protected by the National Heritage Act. Also, it is not possible by law to set total limits to protect the peace and quiet of a sacred site.

2.2.2. Latvia

An analysis of the legal and planning context of ancient sacred sites in Latvia has been carried out in order to assess the framework of agreed local, national and international rules for the conservation and management of sacred sites.

General conclusions

Latvia does not have specialist legislation for the protection and management of ancient sacred sites. All questions related to them are dealt with in the framework of other legislation and the monuments are protected as cultural or natural heritage.

Some sacred sites are located in specially protected natural areas. Environmental legislation is more complex and fragmented than legislation for the protection of cultural heritage and should be thoroughly analysed for each site.

Sustainable management of sacred sites corresponds to the priorities of national and international planning documents and is required by legislation. Legislation and planning systems do not require management rules to be developed for separate categories of cultural heritage and for individual cultural monuments but recommends such activity. It is necessary to agree on a sacred site management strategy and management rules for each site with the relevant state authorities. Legislation does not prohibit the development of economic activities around cultural monuments (e.g. tourism activities) but this should also be agreed on with state authorities.

For the efficient continuation of sacred site management it is necessary to supply municipalities with a management strategy and rules for their further inclusion in spatial development plans.

International legislation

The **Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage** is the main international legal instrument providing a definition of cultural and natural heritage and establishing the responsibility of states in protecting heritage.

The State Parties to the Convention (of which Latvia has been one since 1991) are responsible for the identification, protection and conservation of sites of cultural and natural heritage so as to secure their transmission to future generations. States should have a specific policy to give heritage sites a function in society, to include heritage in planning programmes and to set up services for the protection, conservation and presentation of heritage.

National legislation

Cultural heritage legislation

The law entitled ‘**On the Protection of Cultural Monuments**’ sets out principles for the preservation of cultural and historical heritage in Latvia, including all sacred sites. It outlines the system for the registration, research, practical preservation, use and popularisation of cultural monuments. It gives the definition of cultural monuments as “...part of cultural and historical heritage – cultural and historical landscapes and individual territories (ancient burial sites, cemeteries, parks, places of historical events and the activities of famous persons), as well as individual graves, groups of buildings and individual buildings, works of art, facilities and articles with historical, scientific, artistic or other cultural value and the preservation of which for future generations is in conformity with the interests of the State and people of Latvia, as well as international interests.” All sacred sites fit this definition.

The law states that: “State policy and liabilities regarding cultural monuments are implemented by a special institution – the State Inspectorate for Heritage Protection. The instructions of the inspectorate are binding on the owners of cultural monuments.” Any modifications, restoration, conservation and research must be agreed in writing with the inspectorate, with whom all cultural monuments must be registered. Monuments are listed by a decree of the Minister of Culture, based on the proposals of the inspectorate. The consent of the owner is not obligatory, but he or she must be informed.

Cultural monuments have a protection belt around them – 50 m in rural areas and 10 m in cities and towns. Economic activities in this zone should be agreed with the inspectorate. It is an obligation of the owners of cultural monuments to preserve them according to the requirements of legislation and the inspectorate and to inform the inspectorate of any damage to them. It is prohibited to destroy, move or modify cultural monuments; modifications are only allowed if they are the only way to save a monument.

Any activity in an area with a cultural monument is allowed only with the permission of its owner. Cultural monuments should be used primarily for scientific, educational and cultural needs. They can only be used for economic needs if this does not degrade their value.

Environmental legislation

The law entitled ‘**On Specially Protected Nature Territories**’ sets the principles of the system of these territories in Latvia. The system also includes natural monuments. Numerous sacred sites are located on such territories and are protected natural monuments. The law establishes the following rules which apply to sacred sites as natural monuments: “In order to ensure the preservation of protected trees and stones and the possibility of visiting such objects, the territory within a radius of ten metres around the stones and the territory under the crowns of trees, as well as within a radius of ten metres around them counting from the projection of the crown of the tree shall also be

protected”.

Protected territories may have such planning instruments as general regulations, individual regulations and nature protection plans. A nature protection plan may set individual rules for each value within a protected territory. These planning instruments regulate orders for visiting a protected territory and the prevalence of regulations on the protection and use of protected territories over planning documents.

The Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers entitled ‘**General regulations on the protection and use of specially protected nature territories**’ sets out the overall rules for the protection and use of protected territories and the rules for their marking. These rules are important for sacred sites which are nature monuments and/or located in protected areas. The decree applies to protected areas (including nature monuments) which do not have individual regulations for protection and use. It states the following: “Land owners may not restrict the movement of visitors along routes which are set out in a nature conservation plan. Any advertising, including signage for sacred sites, should be agreed with the administration of the protected area or regional environmental board. Information about specially protected species and biotopes in protected areas has restricted use and its dissemination should be agreed with the administration of the protected area or regional environmental board. Specific rules for each category of protected area must be taken into account in the management plans of sacred sites. Any plans for tourism development and other economic activities in the area of nature monuments and 10 m from the crown of protected trees and 10 m from protected stones should be agreed with the administration of the protected area or regional environmental board.”

The Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers entitled ‘**Regulations on protected geological and geomorphological nature monuments**’ lists these monuments and outlines the rules for their management and protection. 28 sacred sites are located within the borders of such monuments.

Other legislation

Several other legislative acts should be taken into account when planning the management of sacred sites, such as the Law on Tourism (which requires municipalities to preserve tourism objects and provide opportunities for their use as such) and the Law on Municipalities (obliging municipalities to facilitate the preservation of traditional cultural values, including the preservation of cultural monuments).

National, regional and municipal planning documents

Figure 1 outlines the current system of main territorial planning documents, as divided by time (short term, medium term and long term) and level of administrative division (municipality, planning region or state).

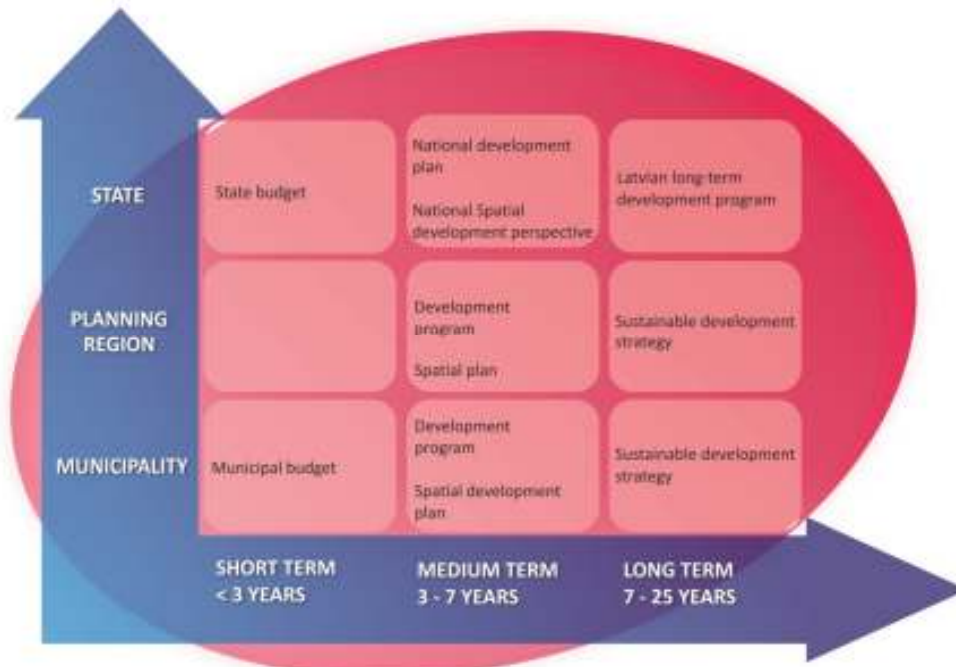


Figure 1. System of territorial planning in Latvia, March 2012. G.P?vils, based on the Regional Development Law, Territorial Development Planning Law, Law on the Development Planning System and Law on the Budget and Financial Management

Some of the most important planning documents for the development of sacred site management strategy are the long-term development programme 'Latvija2030', the national development plan and municipal spatial development plans.

The 'Latvija2030' programme sets the development of the cultural space of Latvia as its top priority. It states that cultural space should be based on the identity of the nation. Creative tourism is seen as one of the ways in which Latvia can use its tangible and intangible cultural heritage and cultural landscape.

The **national development plan for 2007-2013** stresses the importance of preserved and accessible cultural heritage in maintaining national identity and for sustainable development. It sets such tasks as fostering and developing studies of local history; developing local tourism by creating tourism sites where people can learn about Latvia's history, culture and nature; and creating a high-quality urban and rural cultural landscape by harmoniously combining cultural and historical objects, nature sites and newly created contemporary values.

Municipal spatial development plans reflect present and planned use of space. They should include a list of natural and cultural monuments and rules on protected culture monuments.

2.2.3 Sweden

Ancient monuments in Sweden are protected by the **Swedish Heritage Conservation Act**. This law states that the care and preservation of the cultural environment is a matter of national concern, and that the responsibility for it is shared by all. Both individuals and public authorities must show consideration and care towards the cultural environment. Anyone who plans or carries out work must ensure that damage to it is, as far as possible, avoided or limited.

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The act calls for special heritage protection in the following areas:

- Place Name Practice. Neither national nor local agencies can change established place names without compelling reason;
- Ancient Monuments and Remains. These are protected by the act and may not be damaged. The act defines the concept of permanent ancient remains. It also regulates the handling of archaeological finds and procedures for obtaining permits to remove such finds;
- Historic Buildings. The act establishes the criteria for classifying a structure or development that is not owned by the government as an historic building, describes the scope and implications of the protection afforded and specifies procedures for obtaining such protection. County administrative boards are the decision-making bodies;
- Ecclesiastical Monuments. The act regulates the protection and maintenance of churches, fittings, fixtures and churchyards in order to preserve their heritage value. The county administrative board must approve any changes; and
- Protection Against Export of Certain Older Artefacts. The act governs the exporting of older artefacts, identifies the objects covered and specifies procedures for obtaining permits. The act also regulates the return of specified artefacts that have been illegally removed from a country in the European Economic Area (EEA).

Ancient sacred sites are usually protected by the Swedish Heritage Conservation Act as ancient monuments and remains.

Ancient monuments and remains are traces of past human activity that have resulted from use in previous times and have since been permanently abandoned. They can be divided into the following groups:

- Graves, funeral buildings and burial grounds, also churchyards and other cemeteries;
- Raised stones and also stones and rock bases with inscriptions, symbols, marks and pictures,

as well as other carvings or paintings;

- Crosses and memorials;
- Places of assembly for the administration of justice, cult activities, commerce and other common purposes;
- Remains of homes, settlements and workplaces and cultural layers resulting from the use of such homes or places, and similarly remains from working life and economic activity;
- Ruins of fortresses, castles, monasteries, church buildings and defence works, and also of other remarkable buildings and building works;
- Routes and bridges, harbour facilities, beacons, road markings, navigation marks and similar transport arrangements, as well as boundary markings and labyrinths;
- Shipwrecks, if at least one hundred years has (presumably) elapsed since the ship was wrecked.

Ancient monuments and remains also include natural formations associated with ancient customs, legends or noteworthy historic events, as well as traces of ancient popular cults.

An ancient monument or remain includes a large enough area of ground or seabed to preserve the remains and to afford them adequate scope with regard to their nature and significance. This area is termed an 'ancient remains area'.

Ancient finds are objects that have no owner when found. The finds are discovered in or near ancient monuments and remains and are connected with them. They can also be found in other circumstances and are (presumably) at least one hundred years old.

According to the Heritage Conservation Act, it is prohibited to disturb, remove, cover or – through building development, planting or in any other way – alter or damage ancient monuments and remains. It is also forbidden to excavate an ancient monument or remain without the permission of the County Administrative Board. The penalty for grave archaeological heritage crime is imprisonment of up to four years.

Other Laws and Regulations

The **Swedish Forestry Act** protects “other cultural historic remains”. According to the law, forest production must avoid damaging sensitive habitats and valuable historical sites. Biological diversity in forests must also be preserved. At the same time, cultural heritage must be safeguarded and social aspects must also be taken into account. Therefore, it is important that due care and attention be paid to all forestry measures. The conservation requirements must not be so far-reaching that they make on-going forestry activities significantly more difficult.


The **Planning and Building Act** and other laws also charge municipalities with the task of preserving the historic environment. The act governs the use of land and catchment areas, as well as development and preservation of the built-up environment.

The **Swedish Environmental Code** plays a major role in heritage preservation. The code mandates the protection and preservation of valuable natural and historic environments. It also allows for the establishment of historic preserves on the same terms as natural preserves.

2.3. Legislation Analyses of Partner Countries

In addition to good practice, the legal acts and guidelines set by local municipalities and state and international organisations must be considered when managing natural sacred sites and developing tourism connected to them.

International agreements and the IUCN Guidelines establish a solid basis for the valuing of natural sacred sites and the creation of appropriate conservation measures for them. From these also derive clear instructions on amending national legislation concerning natural sacred sites.



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Estonian and Latvian legislation provides effective ways of protecting *material* natural and cultural heritage, but fails to do so in the case of *non-material* heritage. As a result, the conservation of natural sacred sites in these countries is not guaranteed by national legislation. This means that responsibility for preserving sacred sites is largely placed on the shoulders of custodians, landowners, communities and developers. It must be said that the Latvian National Heritage Board's requirement to allow mainly scientific and cultural activities to take place in and around monuments establishes much better preconditions for protecting sacred sites than the corresponding law in Estonia. Swedish legal acts set good preconditions for valuing sacred sites and creating appropriate measures to protect them. Of the three partner countries in the project, Sweden has the most comprehensive legislation for the protection of natural sacred sites. The Swedish National Heritage Act also applies to sites and phenomena connected to folk tales and native religion, amongst others.

The legal systems of the three partner countries do not require total fulfilment of all conditions to develop sustainable tourism, but does not prevent it either. Therefore, the principles described in this strategy coincide with the legal acts of the partner countries and complement it with good practice.

3. Management and Development of Natural Sacred Sites

One of the goals of the ‘Ancient Cult Sites for Common Identity on the Baltic Sea Coast’ project (CB 35 Cult Identity) is to compile a strategy or long-term action plan for the sustainable management of and tourism development on natural sacred sites. In order to do this, it is necessary to define possibilities and activities to include natural sacred sites as tourism objects in local community development. ‘Sustainability’ is the keyword of the strategy, meaning that the management and development of sacred sites must be organised in a way that does not damage existing values but contributes to creating new ones instead. Sustainability also means that the activities listed in the strategy must have the potential to continue after five, ten or even more years.

In order to guarantee sustainable management and tourism development on natural sacred sites, all activities must be based on certain principles and arranged according to an explicit action plan. Before providing tourism services that support the development of local communities, the following activities must be carried out:

- research into sacred sites;
- description of the situation;
- evaluation of sites’ tourism potential;
- planning of measures to manage sacred sites as well as concrete activities to develop them;
- informing stakeholders of the management of natural sacred sites; and
- marketing activities (where applicable).

The action plan described below can be successfully implemented in all cases, starting with a single sacred site and ending with sacred sites situated in different locations (as in the case of a tourism route, for example) as well as sacred sites in larger regions.

3.1 Research

Methodically and meticulously gathered data is a precondition for the sustainability of the planned activities. The objective of the research is to determine the exact location and borders, natural and cultural values, custodians, land owners and administrative limitations on economic activities on a sacred site. The data gathered during the research must help evaluate the management needs and tourism potential of a site.

In Estonia, research into sacred sites is carried out according to a research manual prepared by the Hiite Maja Foundation in cooperation with the Centre for Natural Sacred Sites of the University of Tartu.

In Latvia, research is carried out according to a manual developed by local experts. During the research the following information is gathered and sorted: type of object; location; instructions on how to access site; GPS coordinates; description of site; narrative; evaluation of attractiveness; accessibility; infrastructure; information available; capacity and publicity of site; and determination of status of site.

3.2 Description of condition

- Location. Where and within what boundaries is the sacred site situated? What is the surrounding environment and access roads and main views/sights like?
- Natural values. What kind of natural values are there (landscape, geomorphological, water bodies, habitats, species etc.)?
- Cultural values. What kind of material cultural values are there (cultural layer, buildings and objects, ethnological objects and buildings) and how is the site being used as a sacred site (considering the site as sacred, its use following historical traditions)?
- Custodians. Who are the custodians of the site (individual people, communities and

organizations that keep and use the site according to historical traditions)?

- Land ownership. Who is the owner of the land?
- Land use. How is the land on the site being used? Who are the interested parties and/or interest groups? What kind of plans does the village, municipality or region have for the site according to its development plan?
- Legal situation and protection. What is the declared land use status? What kind of limitations have been set by planning and other acts (cultural heritage, nature conservation, diverse protection belts, statutory and thematic plans e.g. network of protected areas etc.)?

3.3 Planning management

The objective of the management of sacred sites (including setting limitations) is to preserve, restore, recover, research and use existing values. The following questions must be answered when planning the necessary measures:

- What kind of complementary limitations should be set to protect the natural and cultural values of a site?
- Is it necessary to change the intended land use purpose, planning and other valid legal acts?
- What are the interests, plans, conditions and options of custodians in managing sacred sites?
- What are the interests, plans and conditions of land owners and other interest groups in relation to sacred sites?
- Is it necessary to carry out an additional geobotanic inventory and prognosis of the development of vegetation because of human activities that are already underway or planned in the future?
- Is it necessary to draw up a maintenance schedule for the land (removal of extraneous buildings, tidying sacred sites, speeding up the recovery of natural vegetation, restoration of traditional structures e.g. fences, gates, campfire sites, swings)?

According to the IUCN guidelines for the management of sacred sites, custodians have the final say

in planning and organising the management and use of sacred sites. Therefore, all state authorities as well as other interest groups (including tourism developers) that plan and organise the management and use of sacred sites should include custodians in their discussions and seek their approval for their plans.

Once the condition of a sacred site has been described and the necessary maintenance measures planned, the site's suitability for tourism development can be assessed. The following questionnaire was compiled to simplify this procedure.

3.4 Evaluation of tourism potential

- Environmental tolerance (natural). What is the viable flow of visitors to the site? How will an increasing flow of visitors influence the vegetation and soil? Are there any protected values (species, biotopes, relief etc.) on the site itself and/or around it? If so, how will an increasing flow of visitors influence the condition of the values?
- Environmental tolerance (cultural). How will an increasing flow of visitors influence the condition of the cultural monument? If the site is not covered by heritage protection acts, could there be a material cultural layer that could be illegally damaged by treasure-seekers or simply by cleaning up the site e.g. pulling out shrubs?
- Social tolerance (custodians & their freedom of religion). Is there any proof (visual or information-based) of the sacred site still being in traditional use? If so, on what conditions do the custodians agree to open the site up to the public?
- Social tolerance (community). On what conditions does the community agree to the increasing flow of visitors?
- Ownership (state/municipality). What kind of limitations have been set by plans and other legal acts?
- Ownership (private owner). Is the site located on private property? If so, on what conditions does the owner agree to an increasing flow of visitors?

- Attractiveness (non-material). Are there any folk and/or historical narratives about the site? If so, to which groups in society would they be of interest? Is the site unique or rare in the country, in the Baltic Sea region, in Europe and on a global scale?
- Attractiveness (appearance). How attractive is the place? How well can it be viewed? Are there openings to fine views from it?
- Attractiveness (surroundings). How attractive is the areas surrounding the site?
- Accessibility. What is the accessibility of the site by bus, car and bicycle and on foot?
- Location in relation to other sites. How far is the site from other possible tourism destinations?
- Infrastructure. Is there infrastructure for the provision of services to visitors near the site? Should investments be made in infrastructure in relation to the increasing flow of visitors? How much?

3.5 Suggestions for tourism development on sacred sites

Some suggestions about how to develop and manage natural sacred sites have been made. They are divided into five groups.

Visitor load

Environmental and other conditions of sacred sites can vary. Therefore, their environmental tolerance is also different. The natural and cultural values of some sites can be so sensitive that their locations may not be revealed and tourism cannot be developed on them.

Most sacred sites are located on natural landscapes that do not tolerate large numbers of visitors. Therefore, these sites cannot be opened up to all kinds of tourism, but are suitable for single visitors and families or small groups.

Most sacred sites are not visually exciting and are therefore not of interest to ordinary tourists.

Guided visits to such sites could be organised for those who are interested in the meaning and intangible value of sacred sites and who wish to focus on them.

It is assumed that in general small groups of visitors with higher environmental and cultural awareness are more likely and more suitable visitors to sacred sites than mass tourism. Mass tourism inevitably causes excessive treading of the ground and loss of biodiversity, littering and disturbed peace. Uninterested visitors leave the site and the region quickly, without creating positive input for the local economy. Small groups of highly aware visitors have a low impact on the environment, take time to learn about sacred sites and more often include potential users of local accommodation, catering and other services.

In the event that the current visitor load exceeds the natural, cultural or social tolerance of a sacred site, the frequency of its attendance must be limited. Moderate measures include prohibition of access for motor vehicles, construction of a parking lot further away from the monument, removal of bonfire and recreation sites and forwarding of tourism information to smaller and more aware groups. The requirement to ask for the permission of the owner, custodian or responsible authority to visit the site may also be applied as a stronger measure. It is possible to prohibit all visits to a sacred site as well.

Original environment

The historical appearance of a monument forms an inseparable part of it. Visitors do not wish to see plastic windows in historical churches; those enjoying the peace and quiet of a bog are disturbed by the sound of ATVs. For the same reasons, unsuitable buildings, materials and activities should not be allowed on sacred sites.

When renovating or planning the restoration of historical appearance, the peculiarities of each type of object must be taken into account. In Estonia, the following rules apply:

- trees may not be felled and objects may not be taken away from burial mounds;

- grass, branches (including dried branches) and trees may not be cut, broken up or felled, the land may not be cultivated and objects that belong there may not be taken away from sacred groves;
- trees may not be felled and cattle may not be herded around cross trees;
- grass and trees may not be cut or felled and land may not be cultivated around sacred springs and other sacred bodies of water;
- trees may not be felled and land may not be cultivated around sacred stones;
- there is no proof of cup-marked stones being sacred. Therefore, no historical limitations apply to them. However, there are some exceptions; and
- sites connected to mythical beings that are not considered sacred do not have special requirements.

Artificial objects

When preserving or renovating the original environment of a sacred site, exceptions can be made for the following objects (if needed):

- Information stands and signs must be placed by the road leading to a sacred site and at a distance that does not spoil the view to the site nor hinder historical traditions. The content of the signs is advised to be coordinated with the custodians in order to provide the most accurate information possible.
- Rubbish bins may be placed on a sacred site only if there is an arrangement to empty them. Rubbish bins must not spoil views to the site nor hinder its use. A common understanding should be taking away one's own rubbish, because emptying rubbish bins is often problematic and any rubbish disturbs the spiritual experience that visitors seek at sacred sites.
- Toilets. If it is decided to build a toilet for visitors, it must be situated beyond the boundaries of the sacred site. It is not allowed to defecate on a sacred site.

- Benches must be made of local natural material and placed so that they do not spoil the view to the site nor hinder its use.

Raising awareness and setting mood

Folk traditions and behavioural norms connected to sacred sites are no longer known to all, but understanding the sacredness of a site and observing historical traditions substantially boost the experience of visiting a sacred site.

For this reason sacred sites which are open to the public must be equipped with information stands that outline the story and meaning of the place as well as respected behavioural norms. Historical behavioural norms must also be outlined in tourism brochures.

A journey to sacred site is a pilgrimage

Visiting a sacred site located on a natural landscape is always a journey. The journey to the site and its surroundings sets the mood and boosts the experience. The view to the site and the way to it should be unspoilt by other objects and activities. Sacred sites should be entered on foot. Gates and fences distinguish sacred sites from the landscape around them and increase the feeling of sacredness.

Valid interpretations provided by locals or guides may help visitors better understand the sacredness and extraordinary nature of a site. Interpretations must be based on the best interpretation principles.

3.6 Informing people about management of ancient sacred sites

In order to use and implement the results of the abovementioned activities it is very important to distribute the information obtained to stakeholders. The basic activities are:

1) Identification of interested parties. Ancient sites may have the following interested parties:

- Custodians
- Land owner(s)
- Municipality
- Heritage protection authorities
- Nature protection authorities
- Tourism management authorities and interested tourism companies
- Interested non-governmental organisations, local schools and mass media

2) Preparation and deliverance of individual information materials for interested parties

- Custodians and land owners should receive as full a set of information as possible about natural sacred sites, but most important are recommendations for their management.
- Similar to custodians and land owners, municipalities should receive as full a set of information as possible, with an emphasis on recommendations for management and tourism potential.
- Non-governmental organisations, educational institutions and mass media should receive information that raises awareness of the values of natural sacred sites and informs people about recommendations for their management.
- Information about sites under protection should only be published with the approval of nature and heritage protection authorities.
- Research and development of management rules should be coordinated with heritage and nature protection authorities.

- Management rules, including rules for tourism development, should be developed in cooperation with custodians, land owners, municipalities and tourism management authorities. Land owners should receive the contact details of other stakeholders. Interested tourism companies should receive popular information and management rules for sites selected for future tourism development.

3.7 Marketing of Ancient Sacred Sites

Due to the degree of sensitivity of an object's tangible and intangible dimensions, it is challenging to discuss marketing opportunities – stakeholder groups have marginally opposed views on the topic. At the same time, potential development in the tourism context requires specific action on the basic principle that the **tourism industry should use publicity, information and marketing to deepen visitors' appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of and concern for ancient sacred sites**. Tourism can be an alternative source of income as well as a way of maintaining ancient values, of course, balanced with protection. However, most ancient sacred sites in the Baltic Sea region are not equipped for crowds of visitors due to their remote location and lack of information and infrastructure.

Well managed, responsible tourism provides the potential for economic, social and environmental benefits to local communities, but tourism activities must be culturally appropriate, respectful and guided by the value systems of custodian communities.

All sites inspected as part of the project can be divided into four groups (see Table 1):

Involvement in tourism	Description	Needs in marketing context
Tourism is evident	The site is popular, part of the tourism system and logically integrated into tourism flows, routes and products. The site is appropriately managed. Its sensitivity level is low.	No need for specific marketing actions, possibly amendments and updates to information, giving more emphasis to cultural values and sacredness. If needed, set limits on visitor load by restricting the accessibility of motor vehicles and giving

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		information to target groups interested in ecological tourism.
Tourist flow is needed	The object's location and attraction level is good, close to existing tourism flows, but due to a lack of management or appropriate information the site is not used in a tourism context. A tourism flow could help to raise interest and create awareness of and appreciation for the site and its surroundings. Sensitivity level is low or average.	Correct information and inclusion in tourism flows and products. Promotion for tourism professionals through municipalities and tourist information centres.
Tourist flow could be accepted within certain limits	Due to the location on gated territory (private property or nature park or reserve) or its sensitivity, capacity or owners' or managers' will, certain limitations apply: time, number of visitors, nature requirement of only guided or pre-booked visit permits of site manager or owner (fees). Sensitivity level is average or high.	All of the information that is provided must be highly related to the managers' or owners' will. Information about all type of limits must be clear and also provided on site.
Only protection, visits to the site for scientific reasons only, local people and custodians	Sites that match such criteria: 1. Owners, managers and custodians reject any public promotion and visitors (the site is used privately). 2. The promotion of the object or site could lead to significant physical or moral damage to the site, its surroundings and the local people. 3. The site is located on land with the highest level of protection, or experts, owners or custodians do not agree to its inclusion in tourism activities. Sensitivity level is high.	No public marketing activities.

Table 1. Analysis of possible tourism and marketing activities on ancient sacred sites

As seen from the table, there is a need for marketing activities for the first three groups of objects.

Before the creation of any product, the **customers and their needs should be considered**, and in the case of ancient sacred sites also with high respect to the site itself. Knowledge of visitors allows for the tailoring of suitable tourism products for which there is demand. As part of the Cult Identity project, a voluntary initiative of project tourism experts saw pilot research into potential ancient sacred site visitors carried out. The survey was done using a web-based questionnaire. The total number of respondents was 233, the majority of whom were Latvian. The period of research was from February-April 2012.

Conclusions of research

86% of respondents said they would possibly visit ancient sacred sites during a trip; 40% said they would definitely visit such sites in addition to other reasons for their trip. This means that sites could be included in other tourism products (e.g. routes with more success) rather than promoted separately.

Potential visitor profile

Age: 26-45

Income: €300-400/month

Education: higher (Bachelor's or Master's)

Type of preferred travel: in nature (also cultural and event-based)

Additional activities as part of trip: hiking, being in nature, cycling and city excursions

Vehicle: privately owned car

Travelling companions: family

Frequency of travel: 2-3 times per year

Most of the respondents agreed that ancient sacred sites:

- represent a cognitive addition to culture and lifestyle (61%);
- are a unique experience when part of ancient traditional festivities and ancestral rites (51%);
- invoke curiosity when exploring the countryside (45%);
- are interesting when coupled with a good story (told by locals or guides) (44%);
- represent a cognitive-based activity in raising children (38%); and
- provide individual and emotionally vivid experiences alongside other major tourism sites and events (36%).

The most significant amenities are **signs**, followed by **information stands** and the **chance to take a guided tour**. The option of obtaining information on a mobile phone was not assessed as significant. Attitudes involving a great deal of respect for sites are also characteristic of potential visitors.

This information could provide a better understanding of visitors and ease the doubts and concerns of managers, owners and custodians regarding a lack of respect or misunderstanding of cultural, social and other dimensions of the value of ancient sacred sites.

General tips for tourist information

A lot of sites included in tourism are promoted as nature objects; cultural and historical value remains in the background. The following tips should help provide target groups with accurate and reliable information:

- information should be correct and regularly updated; and
- the following sequence of information should be used: the **heart of the matter** (i.e. the object's meaning within the context of ancient sacred sites and in comparison with similar sites); basic facts that illustrate its meaning (size etc.); **additional information** (events, legends, stories and live experiences); **related topics** (what else can be seen in the surroundings etc.); **other specific facts**;
- information about rules and limits on visits to sites should be clear (time, fees, permits etc.);
- any information that could lead to physical or moral damage to the site should be excluded (information about specific species, events from history etc.).

Potential marketing and promotion activities

- Supportive communication, education and public awareness programmes with integration of different methods of interpretation

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- Events maintaining and revitalizing sacred sites (including tangible and intangible heritage)
- Extra support for local communities to ensure their economic, social and environmental benefits (promotion of locally sold services, guides etc.)
- Open public debate with respect to different stakeholders
- Tourist brochures and information materials that accurately explain local cultural values to help enforce appropriate behaviour and restrictions
- Use of media (all types)
- Experts giving talks to different stakeholder groups
- If the site is located in a national park or similar, marketing activities should be carried out as part of the common plan for the area
- Clearly defined marketing activities targeted at groups who are especially interested in natural sacred sites as part of culture tourism
- Evaluation of a site's attractiveness to foreigners and importance at the local, regional and national levels
- Use of new types of promotion tools (digital and mobile)
- Organisation of an introductory tour of sites for tourism companies, development managers of municipalities etc.


Conclusion

Natural sacred sites may be a source of spiritual living force for communities and nations and a store of biodiversity for regions. They are often repositories of the oldest part of the cultural heritage of mankind, and the part that is closest to nature, and at the same time are nature conservation areas of indigenous people. The cultures and religions of indigenous populations are sensitive to the developments of the world today in the same way as their sacred sites. Only native people who act as custodians of sacred sites are able to properly evaluate their sensitivity and vulnerability. If there are no longer any custodians, the responsibility for explaining the meaning of and taking appropriate care of such sites lies with experts and organisations of cultural heritage.

At the same time, some sacred sites enable us to introduce to the world rare spiritual natural sites of the peoples who live around the Baltic Sea, as well as the ecological heritage connected to them. Tourism development on sacred sites is not an objective in itself but must be acceptable and useful to the local community and sustainable in other ways.

Natural sacred sites exist because of indigenous people and live on with their custodians. Therefore, before planning any management and development activities it is essential to find out whether the site in question has custodians, and to consider their wishes. Activities connected to well-organised and sustainable tourism must be culturally appropriate, respectful and follow the values of the communities of the custodians.

In order to guarantee the sustainable management and tourism development of sacred sites, all activities connected to it must originate from well-defined principles and be organised according to a specific action plan. Before an intention can be developed into a tourism service supporting the local community, research about the site must be carried out, the current situation must be mapped, measures to manage the site must be planned, tourism potential must be evaluated and concrete development activities must be planned.



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Management of natural sacred sites and the tourism development connected to them must be organised in accordance with good practice, legal acts and the guidelines of local municipalities and the state and those at the international level.

The legal systems of the three partner countries do not require total fulfilment of all conditions to develop sustainable tourism, but do not prevent it either. Therefore, the principles described in this strategy coincide with the legal acts of the partner countries and complement it with good practice.

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Additional materials

About Estonian sites (mostly in Estonian)

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