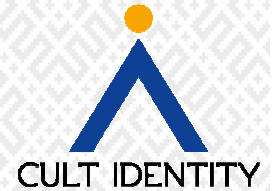


PROJECT „ANCIENT CULT PLACES FOR COMMON IDENTITY ON THE BALTIC SEA COAST ”



Riga Planning Region

The project work team has successfully started the fourth implementation milestone during which it is envisaged to evaluate the sacred sites selected by experts in order to develop common strategy and a database. Several expert workshops and project management meetings were organized by project partners to discuss organizational, theoretical and practical issues in order to successfully achieve the main result of the project - creation of a virtual museum.

Ancient sacred sites are very important element of cultural heritage. However, they have been very little researched, tended as well as published until now. It is the main reason why most of these objects have not been identified as cultural-historical value characterizing the region, and they are not being used for raising environmental, cultural and historical awareness, for developing interesting tourist destinations and local business environment of various services. Therefore, the international project was developed in order to identify and perform inventory of sacred sites, assess tourism flow, finding out common identity among different Baltic Sea Region countries.

The project "Cult Identity"

started in January 2011, and it is planned to implement the project by August 2013. The main objectives of the project are as follows:

- provide accessibility to information and knowledge (including legends, folklore) about ancient sacred sites, promote environmental activities and increase interest of communities in ancient sacred sites as valuable heritage of culture and traditions;

- promote ancient sacred sites by attracting tourists and other interested persons as well as representatives of tourism business, develop marketing of new tourism destinations;

sis of common historical formation of ancient sacred sites, assessment of objects' usability and condition in the Baltic Sea region, a study on common historical identity;

- a common development and management strategy elaborated for ancient sacred sites in the Baltic Sea region in compliance with the Baltic Sea region strategy;

- tourism routes developed in the project regions;

- brochures with description of the sacred sites, maps etc. published;

- a virtual museum developed including a digital map and summarized information about the selected objects,

- promoting recognition of tourism routes and sacred sites;

- a new common tradition – Festival of the Baltic Sea Region Identity established.

You can find more information about the project activities and events on the project partners' webpages, on twitter and facebook.



Prof. J. Urtāns inspecting sacred sites. Dzelzsāmura dižakmens. Photo: Gatis Skrabe.

- provide long-term development of business environment and make objects attractive for the local people and guests.

Several results will be achieved within the project "Cult identity":

- documents providing summarized information about selected objects (location, condition, availability etc) in the project regions, a digital map, publications about common identity of the Baltic Sea region, summarized information about objects (historical data about each object, folklore, rituals, symbols) and their surroundings, analy-

Project Partners:

Latvia:

Riga Planning Region
Zemgale Planning Region
Vidzeme Planning Region
Kurzeme Planning Region

Estonia:

Hiite Maja Foundation

Sweden:

County Museum of Gävleborg

Project total budget:

1 088 240 EUR

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A lot of people visit Zilaiskalns to get peace of mind and healing of body.
Photo: Vidzeme Planning Region

Natural sacred sites exist in different parts of the world and have generally much in common (Bradley 2000). The concept of sacredness can be connected with different natural objects: single standing trees, groves, forests, boulders, stones, caves, springs, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, etc., depending on the local natural conditions. Stones, and especially the arrangement of large stones in relation to one another, have long been the focus of attention in various studies all over Europe.

With this presentation the author would like to attract more attention to stone arrangements

About 50 km east of Zilaiskalns there is another hill called Holy among the local people – Bitarinkalns hill. The hill has all the characteristic features of a sacred complex. On top of the hill there are several stone arrangements (small circles and lines, see Figure 2), large boulders with engraved signs (some of them have typical features of offering stones), and old single standing trees. There is a spring and a river near the hill and the owner of the hill tells about an extremely large boulder on his farmland which he had to bury deep in the ground because of transportation difficulties. The local treasure hunters find human remains and broken jewelry.

In 2010 a half-cremated horse was discovered at Bitarinkalns (see Figures 3 and 4). Remains of rites connected with fire as well as some offerings were also discovered at the stones on

The author supports the idea of the place for observation of the celestial bodies. The resulting photographic data with computer surveys done by the University of Edinburg, for example, give strong support to theories on the existence of the Megalithic calendars and Lunar Standstill programs all over prehistoric Britain. Pre-historic sites in different parts of Scotland were aligned to the rising Sun and Moon. The worship of the Sun was clearly a part of the mythological worldview of the Baltic tribes (Mägi 2004; Gimbutas 1994). However, most researchers in Latvia do not support this idea.

Since archaeological excavations have not been conducted at Bitarinkalns and most of the other Holy hills in the region, it is early to make conclusions. Natural Sacred Sites are becoming more and more popular all over the world. Understanding



Stone lines on the top of Bitarinkalns. Photo: Vidzeme Planning Region



Part of the ruined stone circle at Bitarinkalns where the remains of the horse were found. Photo: Vidzeme Planning Region

(in circles, lines, heaps, etc.) at places in Latvia called by the local people Holy hills. By giving an example of Bitarinkalns hill, in the north east of Latvia, the author examines the condition, studies, and attitude towards respective places in Latvia.

The concept of sacredness in present day Latvia is mainly associated with single objects (trees, stones, caves and springs). The concept of sacred complexes is rare, if at all. Zilaiskalns hill in the north of Latvia (Figure 1) – one of the few sites mentioned in written texts as a pagan cult site – is one of the examples of sacred complexes which included the hill, stones, trees, a grove, a spring and a graveyard (Urtans 1993). There are a lot of legends and beliefs supporting the sacredness and popularity of Zilaiskalns through the centuries.

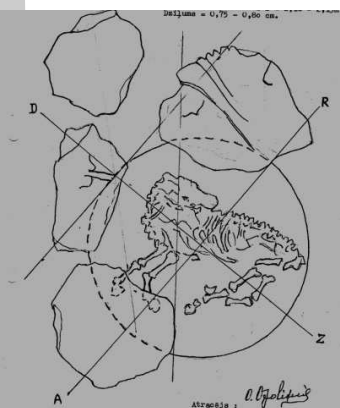
The hilltop. The radiocarbon dating analyses were made by Beta Analytic Inc., the USA. The age of the horse and the other remains dates back to 780 – 950 AD.

The stone alignments on the hilltop are of special interest. Author's studies of analogous information of the neighbouring regions (Estonia, Lithuania, etc.) reveal that these lines might represent:

1. Glacier made formations;
2. Burial places of noble men;
3. Borders between agricultural lands;
4. Borders between territories of different tribes;
5. A cult site used in religious and ritual practices;
6. A place for healing;
7. A place for observation of the celestial bodies.

them requires a transnational approach, especially in common border areas (Valk 2009). Comparative research must be conducted into the topic and the landscape approach should be applied. Archaeological findings should be combined with other sciences, such as anthropology, astronomy, archaeoastronomy, etc. Moreover, advanced technology must be used to investigate these sites.

In the context of globalization Natural Sacred Sites become a mental symbol of national identity, as it already happens in Estonia (Valk 2009). So the question whether these places are natural or manmade becomes of secondary importance. Natural or manmade, it is certain that they are of great cultural significance.



Location and orientation of the horse among the stones at Bitarinkalns.
Photo: Vidzeme Planning Region

Andris Klepers

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Cultural tourism has always been one of the most popular kinds of tourism. It gives both – awareness about cultural heritage and processes of the modern society in particular area. Nowadays there is a tendency to highlight own cultural differences or search for common values and common identity. This is one of the reasons why there is a growing interest in spiritual life of ancestors, ritual practices linked with it and, as consequence, in authentic places where these ritual practices were held – sacred natural sites.

Sacred natural sites are places which need respectful attitude.

In modern tourism there is a growing tendency to search for a living experience with a lot of personal involvement. Passive visual admiration of some object

newly made sacred sites. These places lack scientific justification. Nonetheless – living experience; local people's initiative and belief have made these places popular



Midsummer bonfire in an ancient natural sacred site with people around who arrived for special experience . Photo: A. Klepers.



Is holiness perhaps sold? Fear of commercialization of sacred belonging co-exists in the society in parallel with the concern that these sites can be damaged due to ignorance. Photo: I. Kucina

is of much less importance. This gives much potential to link authentic sacred natural sites with living tradition based on folklore and research as well as promote other ritual practices during various times of the year (solstices, equinoxes, etc). In Latvia, there are also quite a few examples of

thus giving alternative experience to tourists. The project Cult Identity can provide a good opportunity to find balance between the two tendencies with a mission to promote well-planned tourism in order to preserve national cultural heritage and strengthen regional identity.

Good though unobtrusive interpretation of the sites and activities linked with them can provide more understanding. The latter will not allow people continue being indifferent to destroying these places and step by step will form dignity and respect towards the ancient cultural values. Most of the sacred natural sites already involved in tourism in Latvia are admired as natural objects and have little or no information about their sacredness. One of the most important project outcomes could be in the field of interpretation, thus enhancing the meaning and significance of the sites in comparison with others, and providing information and explanation about the special role these places played in our ancestors' perception of the world.



The information stand near the cave explains the geological origin of the rock and engravings, especially emphasizes the tragic love story of Turaida Rose. The fact that there has been an ancient site of worship is hardly mentioned. Guides often only mention that story of Turaida Rose and the engraved walls. Photo: A. Klepers.

In Estonia

Hiite Maja Foundation

Attractive looking sacred sites are already popular among tourists as all other attractive sights. As they are usually not equipped with any informative material about their cultural and historic importance, their sacredness does not play any

role in their popularity. Most of the sacred sites, however, do not look attractive, and hold a mental value mostly to those whose ancestors have frequented them or been buried there. Even in these cases, there is a lack of information. Taking into consideration the condition of our sacred sites at the

moment, it is clear that tourism development should consider all the existing values (in addition to beauty also historic and cultural values) in order to be orientated at providing knowledge and experience, not only gaining profit. Only in this case we will be able to ensure its sustainability.

In Sweden

County Museum of Gavleborg

Tourism regarding sacred sites in our region is not at all common or very elaborated. There we have an important task to perform. The only actor that uses these places more regularly is the local history clubs. Prehistoric graves and grave fields

attract visitors, but more as historic places than cult places. Most people are not aware of the sacred aspects of the grave fields. Beside the elaboration and promotion of a cult place route, we believe it is necessary to reach the media and get real attention to this subject. The most important

part of the information package is to explain the sites to people in an inspiring and attractive way. We are planning to perform lectures, media drives, brochures, collaboration with the Tourist Information offices, the Tourist board, schools and the local authorities.

SITUATION AND CONDITION OF SACRED SITES

Zemgale Planning Region

Zemgale Planning Region

ZPR project team have gathered information about 90% of all sites in Zemgale region, namely 89 objects.

From the end of June till beginning of September, 7 expeditions have been organized embracing all Zemgale areas.

The most common type of object in Zemgale is a stone – about half of all objects are exactly stones. Zemgale's stones with dimples as well as cup-marked stones are very unique.

During the expeditions, new, previously unknown objects had been found.



Meļķitāru stone. Photo: Zemgale Planning Region



Skroderu stone. Photo: Zemgale Planning Region



Lielspicēnu kausakmens. Photo: Zemgale Planning Region

SITUATION AND CONDITION OF SACRED SITES

Kurzeme Planning Region



Kurzeme Planning Region

Summer 2011 was an active expedition period - project experts had organized 9 expeditions and visited 60 objects in Kurzeme region. All expeditions were organized in close cooperation with local tourism and history experts who also participated.

Expeditions were very different and exciting- in hot sun, in rain, deep in forests, fields and town centers. It was a great possibility to talk to locals and collect their stories, to find picturesque and interesting places which had not been discovered before.



Caves in the Abava valley. Photo: Kurzeme Planning Region



Inventory of objects - Kurmāles holy spring. Photo: Kurzeme Planning Region



Allažu holy linden. Photo: Kurzeme Planning Region

County Museum of Gävleborg

County Museum of Gävleborg

The sacred sites in the county of Gävleborg that are known and registered in the National Heritage database are mostly holy wells, Trinity wells, healing trees and places where rocks, twigs and brushwood have been sacrificed. There may be sacred sites that still haven't been found and registered. The layer of natural holy sites that contains pure nature elements such as creeks, forests, trees and so on, that most likely were worshipped be-

fore the industrial revolution, sadly to say, has been forgotten, and hardly any of those places are known today.

At the moment, the places are not visited so often to be in danger of being worn down. In the opposite, they are often so rarely visited that they have grown over and are difficult to see. In some cases, the local history clubs take care of them and keep the area open, but that is the case with only one or two sites in every parish.

At the excavation site near the church of Hög, outside the town Hudiksvall in Hälsingland, we searched for a Viking Age cult place. We did not find that, but we found the remains of a hall from the Early Iron Age instead. The house was functioning as a fertility ritual place, as well as a house to live and work in. Beside the house, large grave mounds had been set up and worshipped. The excavation of the house will continue in October 2011.

Hiite Maja Foundation

Hiite Maja Foundation

Based on fieldworks carried out so far, the estimated number of sacred sites in Estonia reaches 7.000. Of these, only ca 2.500 have been mapped, and only ca 500 are under protection. Most of the sacred sites are in bad or very bad condition due to foreign occupations (ideology, religion), economic (cultivation of land, breeding cattle,

cutting wood, etc.) reasons or simply lack of awareness (people moving from place to place lacked knowledge about the new place's traditions and beliefs and, therefore, sometimes destroyed a sacred site without being aware of it). The condition of the most attractive looking sacred sites is getting worse, because tourism to these places is not organized or is organized poorly.

During the project implementation:

- 1) we have compiled a thorough research methodology;
- 2) analysis of sacred sites related legislation is in process;
- 3) fieldworks are in process;
- 4) preparation of the strategy of sacred sites management and tourism development is in process.

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At the time being a little more than 100 sacred natural sites have been visited and observed in Vidzeme region. Their mapping has been done and photos of the places have been taken. First evaluation of the tourism potential of the sites has been done on the spot. Several conclusions can be given after visiting the sites:

most of the objects are not yet involved in tourism at all;

most of the objects are located far from inhabited places (villages, houses, towns) and local people know nothing about the existence of such places in their vicinity;

most of the objects are very difficult to access;

quite a lot of objects (even already involved in tourism routes) are in very bad condition;

local initiative is extremely important in tidying up, maintenance and development of the sites;

most of the objects are suitable for individuals or small group visits;

objects that are close to existing tourist routes have more potential to be involved in tourism;

to enhance the potential most of the objects need a good interpretation (a story, a ritual), based on research and local tradition. Provision of specific infrastructure is of secondary importance.



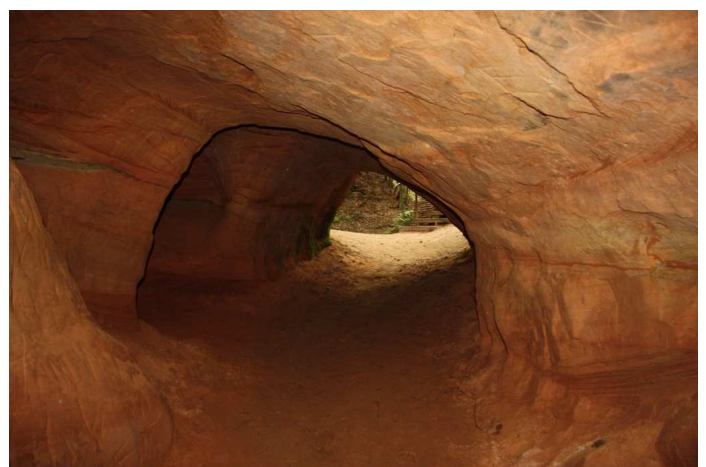
Jaunutēnu bedrīšakmens. Photo: I.Grīnfelde.



Vītoleni Devils' Clock. Photo: B.Baika.



Jēču bļodakmens. Summer 2011. Photo: I.Grīnfelde.



Mazsalacas Devils' cellar. Photo: I.Grīnfelde.

CALENDAR OF IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS 2011—2013
IN
LATVIA, SWEDEN, ESTONIA



Event/activity	Place	Time
Field work selecting ancient cult places for the database	Route area	September-October 2011
Excavations of the hall house from the Iron Age in Hög continued	Hög, Hudiksvall, Sweden	3-14 October 2011
Workshop and PMT/PSG meeting, Gävleborg, Sweden	Gävle and Hudiksvall, Sweden	29-30 September 2011
Finalization of the objects / selection and summarization of information (historical data about each object, folklore, rituals, symbols); mapping, photography, survey of the objects in nature	Sweden, Estonia, Latvia	October 2011
Excavation works and research of the cult site in the central part of Hög parish	Hög parish, Sweden	May 2011 – August 2012
Workshop of experts	Gävleborg, Sweden	September 2011
Workshop to analyze the results of mapping; analysis and strategy of planning ancient cult sites Discussion about common identity of the Baltic Sea region	Valmiera, Latvia	January 2012
Workshop to exchange experience among the partners regarding nature protection, preservation of cultural/ historical heritage, management issues, etc.	Jelgava, Latvia	May 2012
Development of regional pilot-routes in each project region (including information about additional services – accommodation, treatments., etc.), linking of pilot-routes; local meetings for pilot-route development with local tourism operators	Sweden, Estonia, Latvia	May 2011 – February 2012
Marking pilot-routes in the nature (development and installation of information signs, information stands) Producing and installing signs	Sweden, Estonia, Latvia	January – April 2012
Brochure (with pilot-roads, information etc.)	Zemgale region, Latvia	August 2012
Web-site / virtual museum	Internet	Demo - January 2012, Final - August 2012
Introduction tours	Gävleborg, Sweden Riga and Vidzeme regions, Latvia Tartu, Estonia Kurzeme and Zemgale regions, Latvia	September 2012 October 2012
Participation in tourism fairs "Balttour", "Tur", "Tourest"	Göteborg, Sweden Riga, Latvia Tallin, Estonia	January 2013 February 2013 March 2013
Festival of Baltic Sea Region Identity as a beginning of new international tradition	Tervete, Latvia	August 2013

Read more about events and activities on Riga Planning Region website www.rpr.gov.lv

[twitter](#), [facebook](#) - cult identity

PROJECT PARTNERS

Riga Planning Region



Riga Planning Region (RPR) is the lead partner of the project "Cult Identity" being also responsible for overall project administration, financial coordination and control, as well as publicity events. While the project webpage is in elaboration process (demo from 2012), information on the project and implemented/planned activities is available on RPR website www.rpr.gov.lv.

In addition to the administrative functions, RPR is also responsible

for the implementation of the project activities in Riga planning region.

RPR employs eight specialists who inspect project sites and evaluate the situation and condition of sacred sites in Latvia. While one of the leading experts in the field of sacred sites professor., Hist., Dr. habil. art. Juris Urtāns is performing object inventory, tourism expert Gatis Skrabe is assessing the potential of the sacred sites from the tourism aspect, development planning specialist Gatis Pāvils is elaborating a management strategy and IT specialist Aivars Muhins is working on creation and maintenance

of the project website, virtual museum.

The main beneficiary of the project "Cult Identity" is the society in general, but the project results can be used by tourism information centres, municipalities and planning regions.

The main positive project aspects are as follows:

- tourist attraction to objects;
- infrastructure arrangement;
- service development around the objects;
- management strategy as guidelines to object owners.

Vidzeme Planning Region



VPR works as the second level governmental institution and represents 25 local municipalities and the city of Valmiera. Its mission is coordination and promotion of long-term and well-balanced development of the Vidzeme region. As a partner in various cross-border cooperation projects VPR emphasizes and looks for the solutions of challenges in

various sectors. Tourism and its development is one of the sectors often represented in the projects. At the moment VPR takes part in three projects related to tourism: the project "Transforming rural regions by launching scenarios, new narratives and attractive urban design" (the project "Trans in Form" aims at introducing competitive development concepts for rural regions, smaller towns and cities. It will raise awareness among both policy makers and citizens about regional attractiveness and potential); the project "Waterways Forward" (Its objec-

tive is to improve the management of regional inland waterways and the regions adjacent to these waterways by promoting an integrated, sustainable and participatory approach); the project "The Ancient Cult Sites for Common Identity on the Baltic Sea Coast". VPR believes that the project "Cult identity" will improve not only tourism in the regions, but will also contribute to environmental concerns and public awareness and understanding of the sacred sites, so the sacred sites would not disappear in the environment and human minds.

Kurzeme Planning Region



The main aim for Kurzeme Planning Region in the project is to collect information

about sacred sites in the region and in cooperation with local tourism information centers and re-

gional State Inspection for Heritage Protection to identify and promote sacred sites for tourists; to develop policy for preservation and management of these objects and also to establish new partnerships for future cooperation and project development.

It is important to gather actual information about cult sites in the region and make it public in an

attractive way- the tales, traditions and historical information collected will be a great source for locals and tourists to better understand our country's specific history, beliefs, traditions and relationships with nature.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Zemgale Planning Region



Zemgale region is unique with its richness of nature, well-preserved cultivated area, a peculiar natural landscape, green castle mounds and wild meadows and karst sinkholes in

the river basin of Lielupe.

In order to improve efficiency of the natural resources management and exploitation, Zemgale Planning Region (ZPR) have participated in various projects aimed at sustainable exploitation of natural resources. The region has also participated in several projects supporting and

activating tourism in Zemgale.

The project „Cult identity” links those two directions - management and preservation of natural resources with development of tourism. Therefore, participation in this project for ZPR is a sequential step continuing activities in the region.

Hiite Maja Foundation

HIITE MAJA FOUNDATION

Hiite Maja* Foundation (HMF) was established in 2008 to explore, present and support the natural sacred sites – sacred groves, trees, stones, springs, etc. – as well as the broader indigenous heritage of Estonia, thus maintaining diversity in Estonian culture, landscapes and nature. The main activities of HMF include finding resources for the maintenance and studying of Estonian natural sacred sites, publishing information about the sacred sites, organizing events, introducing people to sacred sites and international cooperation in the field of natural sacred sites.

The objective of the project Cult Identity – to ensure sustainable management of sacred sites and open them for tourists – relates

directly to the aims of HMF, especially to those touching upon the sustainability of managing sacred sites. „Sustainable“ is the keyword for HMF in the project, meaning that sacred sites must be investigated in detail (in addition to gathering folk tales also scientific inventories must be made) before publishing their locations. HMF regards this part of the project as especially important enabling us to open for tourism only the sites that support bigger flows of tourists without remarkable damage being caused to them. This way we hope to maintain our common cultural heritage also for future generations.

* “Hiite Maja” means literally “house of sacred groves” in Estonian

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Historic Võru and Tartu County may be the only region in the world where the funeral-related tradition of cross-signing trees has been preserved. It is believed that the action of cutting the cross attaches the soul of the deceased to the tree and does not let it come home during the times between different feasts. Cross-signed tree by a village road. Vana-Võromaa Special Prize at the Võrumaa, Varstu Borough, Matsi Village. Photo: Liis Keerberg

County Museum of Gävleborg



LÄNSMUSEET GÄVLEBORG

The County Museum of Gävleborg is the regional museum for the Swedish county Gävleborg. The county contains two provinces of Gästrikland and Hälsingland. The museum has been working with the cultural history of the county since it was formed in 1940. It has departments of art, cultural environment (archaeology, old buildings preservations), ethnology, collections of artefacts, both

archaeological findings and other items, such as furniture, textiles and so on. The museum also has one of the finest art collections in Sweden, mostly Swedish art. Some of the large projects we are working with besides Cult Identity at the moment are: 1. Making typical old farmsteads in Hälsingland a National heritage. 2. A project that combines preservation of old historic farms with producing more jobs in the area. 3. An underwater historic park (www.axmarbluepark.se) and a

cultural reservation where you can visit a number of old ship wrecks. The Archaeology and Building preservation department also works with assignments of all kinds. We have a website: www.lansmuseetgavleborg.se, and we run three blogs, one on archaeology (www.arkeologigavelborg.blogs.pot.com), one on building preservation and one about our collections.

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

Explore Your Past

Virtual museum
Tourism Routes
Festivals

www.ancientsites.eu

Project partners:

-  RĪGAS PLĀNOTAIS REĢIONS
-  LÄNSMUSEET GÄVLEBORG
-  HIITE MAJA FOUNDATION
-  VIDZEME
-  KURZEMES PLĀNOTAIS REĢIONS
-  ZEMGALES PLĀNOTAIS REĢIONS
-  EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT FUND
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE
-  CENTRAL BALTIC
INTERREG IV A
PROGRAMME
2007-2013