

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

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SUMMARY

Relevance of the Assessment

UNESCO's World Heritage mission is to encourage countries to sign the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, to identify sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage List, to draw up management plans and monitoring systems for their state of conservation, to promote international cooperation and the participation of local populations, to support national awareness-raising activities, and to provide assistance to sites in danger¹. The cultural and natural heritage is an invaluable asset for every nation and for humanity as a whole, revealing its identity. The properties inscribed on the List are of outstanding universal value and belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory in which they are located².

Lithuania was the first of the Baltic States that regained statehood³ to accede to the Convention⁴ in 1992 and undertook to ensure the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations⁵ of the cultural and natural heritage on its territory. The UNESCO World Heritage List includes 5 sites in Lithuania: the Historical Centre of Vilnius (1994), the Curonian Spit (2000), the Kernavė Archaeological Site (2004), the Struve Geodetic Arc (2005) and Modernist Kaunas: Optimist Architecture, 1919-1939 (2023).

¹ Information from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, available online at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/about>, accessed 2024-11-20.

² Information from the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO, available at: <https://www.unesco.lt/kultura/pasaulio-paveldas>, accessed 2024-11-20.

³ Information from the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO, available at: <https://www.unesco.lt/apie/unesco-ir-lietuva/pasaulio-paveldas-lietuvoje>, accessed 2024-11-20.

⁴ Adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its seventeenth session in Paris on 16 October 1972.

⁵ Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Article 4.

The list includes a total of 1 223 properties in 168 countries worldwide⁶. Italy has the highest number of properties - 606⁷. Three properties have been removed from the list⁸ because they have not retained their outstanding universal value: the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman in 2007, the Elbe Valley in Dresden, Germany in 2009, and the city of Liverpool in the UK in 2021. The List of Heritage in Danger includes 56 properties⁹.

The objective of the assessment is to provide structured information on the management, monitoring and benefits to the country of the Lithuanian UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The main assessment questions are:

- ✓ whether the UNESCO World Heritage status of Lithuanian sites creates added value;
- ✓ whether the UNESCO World Heritage Site Management System has been adopted;
- ✓ whether monitoring of UNESCO World Heritage Sites is carried out

The assessment entities are the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Environment, the Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture and the State Service for Protected Territories under the Ministry of Environment.

We assessed the information provided by the ministries and other bodies and publicly available information, as well as information from the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. We would like to express our gratitude to the following persons for their expert insights, opinions and information provided during the meetings: the former Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Lithuania to UNESCO, the Secretariat of the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO, the State Commission for Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Lithuania, the Ministry of Economy and Innovation, the NGO "Travel Lithuania", the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Directorate of the Vilnius Castles State Cultural Reserve, ICOMOS Lithuania, representatives of the municipalities of Neringa and the City of Vilnius, and the local administrators of the sites of the World Heritage sites: Vilnius Old Town Renovation Agency, Curonian Spit National Park Authority, Kernavė State Cultural Reserve Authority, Kaunas City Municipality Administration.

The period covered by the assessment is 2021-2023. To assess changes, we have used data from the previous year and 2024.

The scope of the assessment and the methods used are described in Annex 2, "Assessment scope and methods" (page 47).

Key Assessment Results

The benefits to the country of the UNESCO World Heritage status for Lithuania's properties have not been assessed, the management system for 4 out of 5 properties has not yet

⁶ World Heritage List. Information from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, available online at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>, accessed 30-10-2024.

⁷ Information from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, available online at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat/#s2>, accessed 2024-11-20.

⁸ Information from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, available online at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/?&delisted=1>, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/362/>, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/522/>, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2314/>, accessed 2024-11-20.

⁹ Information from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, available online at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/?&danger=1>, accessed 2024-11-20.

been adopted, and monitoring does not reveal the state of the properties' outstanding universal value.

The benefits of UNESCO World Heritage status are undoubted, but not measured

UNESCO status gives a country recognition, image and visibility to attract tourists, but its economic benefits or added value are not calculated. In Lithuania, there are no aggregated data on visitors and/or tourists to UNESCO sites or their attractions. The extent to which foreign tourists have been influenced by UNESCO sites in their decision to visit the country is not known or studied. Tourism accounted for 2.9% of gross value added in Lithuania (2022), which is lower than Estonia and Latvia, each with 4.8%, and in 2023 Lithuania was visited by 1.2 times fewer foreign tourists than Estonia. The UNESCO World Heritage status of the sites did not affect the number of tourists: Lithuania has more UNESCO sites - 4 - than Estonia and Latvia - 2 each. Without statistical data (tourism, real estate prices, infrastructure, etc.) and research methodology, the benefits of the UNESCO status, the added value for the country are not being assessed, and the opportunities for enhancing the attractiveness of the country and generating more benefits are not being sufficiently exploited (Section 1, p. 11)..

UNESCO properties must be protected in accordance with higher international requirements, but not all of them are met: in 2021, the State Commission for Cultural Heritage stated that Lithuania had not adopted a national policy and general principles to ensure the protection, conservation and presentation of the World Heritage, including impact assessment, management plans, and monitoring of developments. One of the higher requirements for UNESCO properties is a heritage impact assessment for restoration or new construction works that could affect the property's outstanding universal value. In Lithuania, there is no regulation and no provision on who and when should initiate and carry out such impact assessments. In Lithuania, no such assessment has been carried out after 2014, except in one case concerning the impact of the decisions taken to amend the Vilnius City Master Plan. Compliance with the higher requirements for the protection of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, and an assessment of the impact on the heritage, would help to find the best solutions to both meet the needs of development and ensure that the outstanding universal value of the property is preserved for future generations (Section 1, pages 15 and 16).

One of the commitments for UNESCO heritage is to take financial measures to help protect the heritage, but UNESCO status does not have a significant impact on the selection of heritage management projects, with an additional 3 out of 80 points (3.8%). The financial contribution of the manager has the greatest impact on the selection of projects, up to 50 points. There is no precise data on the structures (including cultural heritage sites) located in urbanised World Heritage sites (the historic centre of Vilnius, the Modernist Kaunas, the Curonian Spit - about 3% of its territory) and their condition, and therefore the need for funding is unknown. Between 2021 and 2024, 32 eligible projects were submitted, of which 30 were funded; between 2021 and 2023, 22 projects were reimbursed. Of the 18 sites receiving funding, 10 have not been inspected in the last 5 years. The funding and reimbursement mechanisms are unattractive for managers due to the necessary financial contribution from them (20-70% for design and works), the limited amounts of funded surveys (up to EUR 100,000) and design and works (up to EUR 600,000). Without data on the state of cultural heritage sites in urbanised areas and the need for funding for their management, without an attractive mechanism for such funding and without greater involvement of managers, it may be difficult to preserve the value of the UNESCO sites and the objects located in their territory (Section 1, page 19).

There is a lack of communication about the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage: there are no presentation and information centres in Modernist Kaunas and the Historic Centre of Vilnius, and there is a lack of coordinated presentation of the value of the properties. A new attractive visitor centre focusing on the presentation of the value of the site will open in Curonian Spit in 2024. The value of the Kernavė archaeological site is presented in events organised by the Directorate, with interactive and outdoor exhibitions, but insufficient community involvement is identified. Appropriate and comprehensible presentation and an attractive environment are important in communicating the scientific value of the Struve Geodetic Arc, which is lacking in 2 out of 3 items. An example of an attractive presentation of the value is the non-UNESCO site, where its history and measurement methods can be explored and tested. Targeted communication about the outstanding universal value of World Heritage would contribute to better protection and management of the property (Section 1, page 23).

Changes needed to preserve properties in line with UNESCO requirements

The countries are committed to preparing management plans for World Heritage properties, and four properties in Lithuania have not yet had their plans approved: the draft management plan for the Vilnius Historical Centre is being coordinated between the institutions; the project for the Curonian Spit is under preparation; the project for the Modernist Kaunas is to be updated in accordance with UNESCO's comments and the approved national legislation; and the Struve site has not yet been started, pending the development of a model plan (guidelines) prepared by the international coordinating committee. The Kernavė Archaeological Site Plan was approved in July 2024. The main reasons for the delay are protracted discussions between the responsible and interested parties, the complex process of reconciling different interests, and changes in the geopolitical situation. In Lithuania, as many as 39 responsible (21) and advisory (18) bodies are involved in the management of the 5 UNESCO properties, without a common approach to the protection of the World Heritage. The managers of the Lithuanian sites identified to UNESCO, are not appointed by law, and have no responsibility for the protection, administration, management, monitoring and presentation of the site of outstanding universal value, except for the Curonian Spit. Properly developed and implemented management plans would help to address the coordination, cooperation and monitoring of protection and actualisation activities (Section 2.1, page 27).

The specific plans for the Vilnius Historical Centre and the Modernist Kaunas Lithuanian World Heritage Sites have not been prepared; the specific plan for the Kernavė archaeological site needs to be updated. The lack of specific plans threatens the preservation of the outstanding universal value of the sites, as it does not identify the requirements for heritage protection, the priority management directions and protection measures, and the coordination of development solutions for heritage protection and sustainable development (Section 2.1, p. 30).

Monitoring of UNESCO sites is carried out through the assessment of nationally identified values but does not include an assessment of the state of conservation of the sites in terms of their integrity and authenticity in relation to their defined outstanding universal value, the lack of criteria for assessing the state of conservation, and the lack of comprehensive summary and forecasting of the results of monitoring of sites. This does not reveal the state of the sites and their evolution. The shortcomings of the monitoring system have been identified by the monitoring bodies, other responsible and advisory Lithuanian institutions

and UNESCO. Monitoring data are insufficient for the preparation and submission of periodic reports to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee on the implementation of the Convention and the state of conservation of properties. The absence of a monitoring system and indicators based on the specific nature of the property to assess the state of the property's outstanding universal value does not allow for the assessment of the property's state of conservation, the identification of the factors affecting the property and the selection of appropriate conservation measures, and the preparation of periodic reports to UNESCO based on the monitoring data, which may not reveal the true state of conservation of the property (Section 2.2, page 33).

The legislation does not single out the monitoring of immovable cultural heritage sites in the protected areas of the Vilnius Historical Centre, the Curonian Spit and the Kernavė archaeological site. This may leave sites in these areas unmonitored, as the directorates of protected areas are only responsible for monitoring UNESCO sites. 1 355 or 11% of the registered immovable cultural heritage sites monitored by the Department of Cultural Heritage have not been monitored at least once in 5 years (as of 18.11.2024), the proportion of state and municipal protected sites not monitored by municipalities is unknown, as no records are kept. The monitoring of the registered properties does not reveal the true state of the cultural heritage: 88% (7 109 out of 8 111, of which the number in UNESCO sites is unknown) of the properties have been assessed as being in an unchanged physical state between 2021 and 2024 (by 31 October), which means that it is not known which properties are in a state of disrepair or in a state of distress and which need to be remedied. Without accurate data on the sites within the UNESCO site, without monitoring all sites at the prescribed frequency and without revealing their true condition, timely management measures may not be taken for the management of the sites in the UNESCO site, which could have a negative impact on the overall condition of the site, the preservation of its value, its aesthetic image and its attractiveness for visitors (Section 2.2, page 39).

Changes during the Assessment

The draft Law on the Protection of the Real Cultural Heritage¹⁰ was registered on 8 October 2024, establishing the protection of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

¹⁰ Law amending the Law No. I-733 on the Protection of the Real Cultural Heritage, reg. 2024-10-08, No. 23-14396(6).