



COUNCIL OF EUROPE LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
LANDSCAPE AWARD OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

8th Session – 2022-2023

APPLICATION FORM

Presentation

The Council of Europe Landscape Convention is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all aspects of landscape: natural, rural, urban and peri-urban. It represents an important contribution to the implementation of the Council of Europe's objectives. By taking into account the value of landscapes, with their natural and human components, the Council of Europe acknowledges that the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.

Article 11 of the Convention establishes the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe. The Resolution [CM/Res\(2008\)3](#) on the rules governing the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008 at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, draws attention to the fact that Article 11 of the Convention institutes the Award and that it is in keeping with the work carried out by the Council of Europe concerning human rights, democracy and sustainable development.

Opened to the Parties to the Convention, the Award is intended to raise civil society's awareness of the value of landscapes, of their role and of changes to them. Its objective is to reward exemplary practical initiatives aimed at successful landscape quality objectives on the territories of the Parties to the Convention. The Award is conferred every two years and the files presenting applications must reach the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe.

At its meeting held in Strasbourg on 28-29 April 2008, the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP) decided that applications should be submitted to the Council of Europe Secretariat through the Permanent Representations of the Parties to the Convention.

Each State Party to the Convention is thus invited to send by post to the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe Landscape Convention), before 31 January 2023, via its Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe, a completed application form in paper format, together with a digital copy on a USB key of the form and additional material.

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Please note that:

- participation to the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe is only open to local and regional authorities and their groupings and non-governmental organisations, as stated in the Resolution CM/Res (2008)3, Appendix, Article 2;*
- the application form must be completed in all its parts, in one of the two official languages of the Council of Europe (English or French);*
- the materials submitted must be copyright-free, for use by the Council of Europe in communications aimed at promoting the Award or any other publications or activities relating to the Convention. The Council of Europe undertakes to cite the authors' names;*
- files that are incomplete or fail to comply with the rules will not be taken into consideration.*

For further information please visit the Landscape Award section of the Council of Europe website:

[Convention du Conseil de l'Europe sur le paysage / Site web officiel \(coe.int\)](#)
[Council of Europe Landscape Convention / Official website \(coe.int\)](#)

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I. STATE CONCERNED AND APPLICANT

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II. PRESENTATION OF THE PROJET

3. Name of the Project

The heritage of the Southern Kurzeme coast through the centuries. Creation of the Alande river recreation complex

4. Location of the Project

Grobina,
Dienvidkurzemes novads, Latvia
(cadastre nr. 6409 006 0109)

5. Summary of the Project (10-12 lines)

Grobina is the first settlement in the Baltics that is mentioned in writings. It is named after “hornbeam forest” (from Curonian *gruobīn*). In the 7th century Viking merchants and artisans settled in Grobina, choosing Grobina (originally - Seeburg) because of its advantageous location - the Alande river which is less than 24km long and flows through Grobina, has a historical and strategic importance in the history of the settlement of North-Western Europe, as it served as one of key connections/hubs of the Baltic Sea Region. Now Grobina is a small town with 3500 inhabitants and with an area of 5,1 km². The fact that third largest city of Latvia - Liepaja is only 11km away, equated Grobina to the status of a suburb during the Soviet time. After the regaining of Latvia’s independence, the rich presence of historical evidence, international interest and contacts stimulated discovery and development of the historical identities of Grobina, which is very important for both local residents and visitors. This has resulted in the inclusion of culturally significant objects in the national list of UNESCO heritage, emphasizing the unique, historically preserved values - Couronians mounds and ancient settlement places, ancient graves, Viking traditional culture, Middle age castle ruins and the importance of Alande river in shaping the character of the place. The highlighted identity has served as the basis for the idea and realization of the project.

The the project aims to preserve, restore and develop Grobina’s cultural - historical and nature heritage by creating a recreation complex of Alande river, which includes and unites cultural monuments - Grobina archaeological ensemble, the Middle age castle with bastions, Skabarzkalns, ancient town and Priediens ancient burial ground. The project contributes to the conservation, protection and restoration of natural and cultural-historical objects by cleaning up the banks and highlighting important local values. It improves the accessibility of the environment, promotes the organization of new events by creating a wide stage and a place for activities in the central part of the castle ruins. Additionally, it provides recreation areas - an oak cascade on the slope and a viewing platform opening up views of scenically valuable natural areas, thus opening the identity of Grobina to visitors and locals, as well as highlighting the historical shipping motifs in landscaping elements.

6. **Photo representing the Project** (*high definition – JPEG 350 dpi*) and *name of the author of the photo please*



Photo: The Central Finance and Contracting Agency Republic of Latvia, 2022

7. **Website of the Project** (*if exists*)

Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJfrZn4FQvg>

III. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

8. **Start of the Project** month year
The project must have been completed at least three years previously

9. **Partners**

Grobina municipality participated in the project cycle "The heritage of the Southern Kurzeme coast through the centuries" implemented by five cooperation partners with the leading partner Liepaja city. Within this cycle Grobina developed its project idea "Creation of the Alande river recreation complex". A decisive role in the development of the idea was also played by local businesses, entrepreneurs and activists who have been strengthening the identity of Grobina for many years. One of them is the Active Tourism Center "Curonian Viking Settlement", a business that has participated in the

development of Grobiņa's identity substantively and practically.

10. Financing bodies

The project "Creation of the Alande river recreation complex" is implemented with European Regional Development Fund attracted by Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia and Ministry of Culture Republic of Latvia. The project also received municipal and state funding.

In order to promote the development of the territory, financial instruments were attracted even before implementation of the project "Alande River recreation complex", for example, information boards installed with the support of LEADER for the objects included in the national list of UNESCO heritage. The promotion of the development of the territory continues after the implementation of the project. New funding is being attracted for placement of new landscaping elements that complement the complex. For example, outdoor musical instruments were installed with financial support of Society Integration Foundation (SIF).

11. Central aims of the Project

The main goal of the project implementation is to highlight the key elements of Grobina's historical identity among residents and the visitors of the area, which can be achieved by:

- conducting construction work and construction supervision in accordance with developed construction projects for the entrance junction of the Alande river recreation complex and the creation of a walking trail;
- improving the functional and visual condition of the Grobina Middle age castle bastions, to ensure the preservation of the castle walls;
- providing access to the banks of the Alande river by creating a suitable walking route;
- creating landscaping that corresponds to the overall image of Grobina, to ensure the creation of well-thought-out recreation places that highlight natural and cultural-historical values;
- improving the quality of Alande river environment, to ensure the most effective river management options;
- informing the society about the goals set by the project, and involve the society to achieve the entire results.

12. Outcome

- The main project outcome is the creation of a common structure of significant local landscapes. There are combined monuments of the Grobina archaeological ensemble included in the Latvian national list of UNESCO World Heritage - Grobina castle hill and old town, the middle age castle with bastions, Skabarzkalns, ancient town and Priediens, Atkalnu, Smukums and Porans ancient burial ground.
- The created Alande river park trail is approximately 2,6 km long (one way) that stretches along the Alande River. There are a number of information signs along the route, each telling the history of Grobina. The park and the trail are suitable for walking, cycling, and is accessible for parents with baby-strollers and for people in wheelchairs with an assistant. Alande River Park may also be enjoyed and accessed by boat.
- Preservation of endangered elements. There is a gabion wall created that fulfils several functions - it protects the spectators from wind and other adverse weather conditions during events and protects the remaining walls from damage caused by various conditions.
- The historical identity of Grobina is emphasized by creating different motives of shipping and Viking period in landscaping elements (benches with boat elements, market roof as an overturned boat, playground elements inspired by ancient design motifs etc.), events (Viking festival, live history festival with creative workshops, performances about inhabitants of Courland, etc), information materials.

IV. RESPECT OF THE CRITERIA OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE AWARD

13. Sustainable territorial development

Is the project part of a sustainable development policy?

Does it contribute to the enhancement of environmental, social, economic, cultural or aesthetic values of the landscape? How?

Has it successfully countered or posed a remedy to any pre-existing environmental damage or urban blight? How?

The project is related to the Activity and Development Strategy of the Grobina archaeological ensemble, the activities are also included in the Grobina Town Landscape Development and Management Plan, that outlines activities that would contribute to the improvement of local ecosystems, the creation of infrastructure for the improvement of the territory and public awareness. The plan contains solutions that affect the strengthening and maintenance of the river banks, the placement of walking paths and landscaping elements, which were later reflected in the implemented project results.

The project's activities are connected with the goals of Sustainable Development Strategy 2014-2030 of the former Grobina Municipality, that promote looking for new opportunities to preserve and maintain special natural and cultural heritage values and places.

In the long term the social and economic aspects are improved, because currently the territory serves as a sightseeing point for tourists and a place for walking, recreation for local residents as a walking route along the Alande river is now created.

There were 113,581 visits in 2020 when the project was first open to visitors after completion, according to automatic counter measurements. Alande river recreation complex was very popular during the Covid-19 pandemic when it was also visited by residents of other towns. There were 105,253 visits in 2022 (there were periods of time when the counting equipment did not work for technical reasons, so the number of visitors may have been underestimated), thus indicating that the object has not lost its original relevance. It continues to be a place for people to spend their free time, its design encouraging visitors to be active and get to know local history, natural values, stories and traditional and cultural-historical heritage.

The created Alande River walking path and the complex of castle ruins is perfectly complemented by the Active Tourism Center "Kuršu Vikingu Apmetne" created by the Tourism Center "Oga", which provides boating and other types of active recreation opportunities on the Alande River. The Tourism Center organizes various types of events related to the historical image of Grobina. Events such as the Balts days, provide opportunities to explore own skills in various types of Viking era activities, such as archery, spear throwing, and use of other fighting paraphernalia, these events usually also offer the opportunity to taste traditional foods.

The walking path is easily accessible from the nearby kindergarten, thus the implementation of the project has also had a positive impact on the smaller residents of Grobina, giving them the opportunity to meaningfully spend time in the fresh air, going for walks, learning and finding out about the history of Grobina, natural and cultural features, and discovering new territories that were not available until the project was implemented. Castle ruins and the territory of the Alande River are also actively used by school-aged children, providing an opportunity to spend part of the learning process outdoors.

The project has promoted the improvement of the spatial structure of the landscape by combining several archaeological monuments, forming a single complex and improving the visual and functional condition of the castle ruins. In accordance with the project of architect

Ugis Senbergs, a complex of castle ruins was created with a central stage, a convenient access road and access to the venue for disabled people or mothers with strollers, an observation tower and gabion walls instead of the lost walls. The preservation of the spatial structure and the formation of the overall image is ensured by added bastion walls in places where there castle walls do not continue.

In the restoration project of the castle ruins, the restored natural element – the central big tree – has been integrated into the project design to become a focal part of the complex.

On the slope, in front of the Dzirnavu pond, a wooden stage was built, which provides an access point to the water area and the interconnected area of the castle ruins from the walking path of the Alande River.

The environmental conditions are also improved by using ecological, nature-friendly materials in the newly added elements and for the creation of the walking path, which embody the local natural values and fit into the surrounding landscape. The created landscaping is based on environmental protection and preservation principles, the solutions for the creation of the walking path are adapted to the unique local situation, creating solutions suitable for the steep bank and harmless to the quality of nature.

Earlier threats are also prevented - overgrowth of the river, uncontrolled waste reaching the water and the coastal zone. The banks of Alande River are currently regularly managed, the banks are strengthened and safe access to the river is ensured.

14. Exemplary value

Can the project be considered of exemplary value? Why?

Which are the good practices that it implemented?

The project can be evaluated as exemplary because it was able to combine elements characterizing the image of the place, emphasizing contemporary features and historically significant motifs in the historical identity of the overall urban environment. Proposed solutions echo the general goal of preserving and protecting local unique values, creating an opportunity to develop different types of territories that serve as a basis for strengthening the historical identity of the place.

It is possible to implement the project's ideas on a large scale, as it includes solutions for different types of territories:

- for ensuring the accessibility of river banks, providing an opportunity to highlight natural values;
- preservation and adjustment of cultural and historical objects to the needs of contemporary people without losing historical identity;
- for the creation of thought-out relaxation and active recreation places in the urban environment;
- in creating the image of the town, based on historical aspects;
- solutions in slopes - ensuring environmental accessibility;
- for the creation of visually aesthetic objects, walking routes, creating separate viewpoints along the trail, and for the development of a viewer tower, updating natural values and cultural - historical objects on the tourist route.

The included solutions allow them to use both - in territories with water bodies and in places with distinct terrain, in cultural and historical areas, in the outdoor space of the town or in intensively used public places.

15. Public participation

Does the project actively encourage the public's participation in the decision-making process? How?

Is the project in line with the wider policies implemented by national, regional or local authorities?

The public was involved in the process of developing the object technical documentation (before the construction and construction supervision works) - public discussions were held on the issue of cutting down trees in the territory of the castle ruins. Initially, the project documentation envisaged cutting down the linden tree in the central part of the castle ruins. After the public discussions and inspection by the head of the National Heritage Board of Latvia the linden was included in the project design, thus preserving a unique natural value in Grobina.

Currently, the society is actively involved in the process of maintaining the project result-actively using the facilities provided by the object, which is proved by the visitor counter indicators. Locals and visitors are also popularizing the Alande river and castle ruins complex among family, friends and like-minded people, actively sharing impressions on social networks that ensures the sustainability of the project in the future.

Visitors are additionally attracted by organizing the "Seeburg" Live History Festival, introducing people with Viking and Curonian crafts, cultural features, customs. They conjure up scenes and allow contemporary people to experience Viking life practically in reality. The created stage in the central part of the castle ruins hosts events for people of different age groups, such as the opening concert of the South Kurzeme festival "Rimbenieks", where the string band of the Liepaja Symphony Orchestra provided musical enjoyment surrounded by the Alande River and historical heritage.

At the end of last year a sensory adventure in the form of a light festival in the castle ruins and near the Dzirnavu pond was organized, encouraging both children and adults to visit the area even in the dark. Additionally, the annual "Seeburg Bikerland" motorcycle festival brought together like-minded people in Grobina once again, continuing the promotion of the story of the beginnings of Grobina.

16. Awareness-raising

Is the project effectively increasing public awareness of the importance of landscape in terms of human development, consolidation of identity, or individual and collective well-being? How?

The intention of the project is closely related to the unique nature and cultural history of Grobina, creating a walking path along the river, uncovering hitherto inaccessible views of the water area and carrying out improvement works in the castle ruins, highlighting especially important, natural monuments that until now visitors may have been completely unaware of. Access to the Alande river complex is ensured with modern and site-appropriate solutions, promoting local resident awareness of Grobina's scenic values, which they have lived next to all this time, but could not fully appreciate, due to inaccessibility. The implementation of the project has also attracted Latvian and foreign temporary users of the territory, using various methods to inform tourists about the importance of the river and the surrounding landscape in the context of the history and development of Grobina.

Cooperation with the University of Latvia, which ensures the archaeological research and popularization of the monuments included in the Grobiņa archaeological ensemble, continues. The aim is to obtain information about hitherto unregistered archaeological objects in Grobina, its surroundings and the oldest archaeological research places, which can be reflected in strengthening the historical identity of the place and educating the public, informing about unique values characterizing the place.

V. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Together with the printed version of the Application form, additional material in digital format should be included in one USB key, and returned by post to:

Secretariat General of the Council of Europe

Council of Europe Landscape Convention

8th Session of the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe

F-67075 STRASBOURG, Cedex

- Text: 1pages

- Photos:10

- Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJfrZn4FQvg>

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