
Kuldīga / Goldingen in Courland (Republic of Latvia) No 1658

1 Basic information

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Kuldīga / Goldingen in Courland

Location

Kurzeme (Courland)
Republic of Latvia

Brief description

Located in the western part of Latvia, the town of Kuldīga is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a traditional urban settlement, which developed from a small medieval hamlet into an important administrative centre of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia between the 16th and 18th centuries. The town structure of Kuldīga has largely retained the street layout of that period. The intersection of the Venta and Alekšupīte rivers is a defining element of the town's structure, contributing to its scenic character. The historic built fabric of Kuldīga includes structures of traditional log architecture as well as largely foreign-influenced techniques and styles of brick masonry and timber-framed houses that illustrate the rich exchange between local craftspeople and travelling craftsmen from other Hanse towns and centres around the Baltic Sea as well as Russia. The Duchy of Courland and Semigallia ceased to exist in 1795, when it was incorporated as a province of the Russian Empire. However, the architectural influences and craftsmanship traditions introduced during the period of the Duchy endured well into the 19th century. The harmonious townscape of Kuldīga, with clay tiles used as the predominant roofing material, is a representative example of traditional Latvian building techniques and traditions.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

Included in the Tentative List

28 February 2020 as "Kuldīga (Goldingen)"

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 18 to 22 August 2021.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 24 September 2021 requesting further information about the criteria, the history and development of the nominated property, and the comparative analysis.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 29 October 2021.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 20 December 2021 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the Interim Report including: justification for inscription, comparative analysis, boundaries of the nominated property, management plan, risk management, and watch tower.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 25 February 2022.

All additional information received has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

9 March 2022

2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report provides only a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

The beginnings of Kuldīga date back to the 13th century, when the Livonian Branch of the Teutonic Order built a castle there. Located at the confluence of the River Venta and the smaller Alekšupīte stream, in the central Kurzeme Region, about 150 kilometres west of Rīga, the area was strategically positioned between Livonia and Prussia. In the 14th century, whilst only a hamlet, Kuldīga joined the activities of the Hanseatic League and started to engage in international trade. During this time, the area north of the castle territory grew up and the first elements of the town were laid out (e.g. the market square and St. Catherine's Lutheran Church).

The 16th century was a time of great shocks. The Russian invasion of Livonia in 1558 set off a series of events that consequently led to the establishment of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, in 1561. Kuldīga was the primary residence and administrative centre of Courland's first ruler, Gotthard Kettler, after the establishment of the Duchy. However, Kettler moved his residence soon after, first to Rīga and then choosing Mitau (present day Jelgava) as his capital. However, his residence seems to have been mostly

in Kuldīga (or Goldingen, as the town was known at the time).

At this point, Kuldīga consisted of various districts with different functions, such as the castle area, the medieval Kalnamiests area and the new district developing around St. Catherine's Lutheran Church, which was the focal point of public functions within the town.

During the co-regency of Gotthard Kettler's heirs, Kuldīga continued to be the ducal residence and administrative centre of Duke Wilhelm Kettler, who had been given power over Courland in 1596 and ruled until 1616. Kuldīga maintained an important role in the administration of the Duchy during its entire existence and continued to grow as a result.

Under the reign of Duke Jacob Kettler (from 1642 to 1681), the Duchy reached the peak of its prosperity, engaging in international trade and acquiring several strong points in the estuary of the Gambia River in Africa (1651) and Tobago in the Caribbean (1654). Duke Jacob determined that Jelgava would be the sole capital of the Duchy, therefore Kuldīga lost its capital status. However, the Duke liked to stay there and the town generally benefited from the increased economic development of the Duchy throughout the 17th century. This led to further urban expansion of Kuldīga and numerous urban elements that developed during that period contribute to the image of the town today.

Sweden invaded the Duchy in 1658, as part of its military activities against Poland-Lithuania (and later Russia), leading to considerable destruction. Duke Jacob exerted great efforts to regain his colonies but the Duchy never again reached its former levels of prosperity. During the rule of his son, Friedrich Casimir Kettler, the last decades of the 17th century were a period of relative stability, without large-scale military conflict.

Access to new building materials and technologies in the late 17th and early 18th centuries led to considerable changes in the architectural styles. The roofing materials started changing from thatch and wooden shingles towards wooden roof boards and the more fire-resistant red clay tiles, now so characteristic of the roofscape of Kuldīga. While houses initially remained similar in their overall proportions, the size of windows increased significantly given the easy availability of glass. Decorated window shutters were introduced as a new architectural element.

In the 18th century, Kuldīga registered its fastest expansion by strengthening connections with other towns in the Duchy. The roads leading to Ventspils (in the north), Aizpute and Liepāja (in the west) and Skrunda and Jelgava (in the south) were paved and new roads constructed. In this period, the density of construction increased significantly along the main new streets.

The Duchy of Courland and Semigallia was dissolved and it became a Russian province in the course of the third partition of Poland in 1795. Kuldīga retained its town administration but with time it lost part of its importance. At

the beginning of the 19th century, the territory of the town was approximately the same size, but the coverage of buildings became denser. Throughout the century, different laws and regulations aimed at fire safety led to the progressive replacement of fire hazardous roofing materials. The proportion of masonry buildings also increased, replacing traditional wooden ones.

Waterways, which had previously dominated trade, were replaced by rail from the middle of the 19th century. However, Kuldīga did not benefit from the building of the railways. Therefore, the city's development slowed down considerably, which partly allowed the legacy from the period of the Duchy to be preserved. In the second half of the 19th century, the brick bridge over the Venta River was constructed, connecting Kuldīga to the east.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the scale of construction in the town changed; two- or three-storey masonry houses were built more often. During the period of the First World War, the population of Kuldīga decreased significantly but the town did not suffer any significant damage. In the mid-1920s, Kuldīga was still quite isolated from other settlements in Latvia due to poor roads and the lack of railways. During the Second World War, a part of the Jewish quarter was bombarded – the area is now a public park. After the war, Latvia was incorporated into the Soviet Union, leading to the construction of some buildings typical of modern Soviet-era architecture. Unlike most of the towns which had developed over the period of the Duchy of Courland, Kuldīga survived the two World Wars largely unscathed and modern urban development largely took place outside its historic centre.

The area of the nominated property, as submitted originally in the nomination dossier, was 64.32 ha with a buffer zone of 108.79 ha. In its Interim Report, ICOMOS expressed some concerns about the boundaries proposed, which the State Party responded to by submitting a new map as part of supplementary information received on 25 February 2022. However, figures for the revised total area of the nominated property and the buffer zone were not included and need to be provided at a later stage.

Overall, the nominated property encompasses the medieval castle mound plateau, the medieval area known as Kalnamiests (i.e. the oldest inhabited area of the town) and the urban areas which developed during the ducal period from the 16th until the 18th centuries but continued to organically evolve until the middle of the 20th century, when conservation efforts were put in place. In addition, large areas of the environmental setting of Kuldīga are also included in the nominated property. This includes the intersection of the Venta and Alekšupīte rivers, as well as the Ventas Rumba waterfall, which was essential for the growth of Kuldīga into a trading centre.

State of conservation

Regulations dating back to the 16th century made it illegal to build within the area around the market-place without the permission of the Town Council. Multiple fires over the centuries (and particularly in the 17th century) repeatedly destroyed significant numbers of the town's wooden buildings. In 1615, a severe flooding of the Venta River washed away the castle bridge as well as numerous buildings next to the river bank.

During its existence, the Duchy of Courland was at war (or involved in wars) with neighbouring powers for a total of eighty-one years. The castle of Kuldīga was destroyed during the Great Northern War (1700-1721); some of its ruins are still standing.

Fire remained a threat; therefore, in 1828, regulations were tightened and a decree was issued which required the complete elimination of thatched roofs and their replacement with clay tiles. In 1896, additional regulations required new residential buildings to be built from stone or brick only. In 1922, the Town Council of Kuldīga published regulations which prohibited acts of vandalism with regard to *“remnants from the past”*.

The biggest loss of buildings happened in the Second World War, when part of the Jewish quarter was bombarded. After the war, the first development plan for the town was issued in 1948. A review of this plan by the national Monument Protection Department determined that street widenings within the historical network be executed only *“where it is particularly required”* and that the Alekšupīte stream be preserved. In addition, it recommended to limit the demolition of buildings only where necessary. In 1969, Kuldīga was designated as a cultural monument at the national level.

In 1973, the third development plan required that new buildings should blend into the earlier composition of the town and that the common character of architectural forms and materials should be maintained. Building regulations issued in 1977 limited the maximum height of new centrally-located residential buildings to two storeys and defined guidelines concerning facades, roofs and doors, both with regards to material and design.

The Kuldīga Restoration Centre was established in 2010. The Centre has since implemented several conservation programmes for wooden buildings and elements of wood buildings. In 2014, the area of the “urban construction monument” of state importance was further expanded to include the part of the town located on the left bank of the Venta River, and especially along Ventspils, Liepājas and Jelgavas Streets. The designation covers the spatial environment of Kuldīga along with the urban layout and architectural elements.

A comparison between the urban layout in 1797 – based on the oldest existing map of the town – demonstrates that the urban structure of the 18th century of the whole historic centre as well as the axes of the main roads are largely preserved. The locations of the historical water crossings

over the Alekšupīte River remain largely unchanged. Some of the bridges that were originally built from wood were later replaced by masonry structures.

Whereas bridges over the Alekšupīte existed already in the ducal era, no permanent bridge spanned the Venta River at the time. The current brick bridge was built in 1874. ICOMOS notes that the river landscape has changed since the time of the Duchy. At that time, the river was navigable and the islands are a result of later development; the banks have created new habitats. Most of the territory of the former Order Castle is currently a landscaped park; the castle itself no longer exists.

Different wars over the centuries affected the town's historic built fabric, particularly that dating to the time of the Duchy of Courland. In addition, multiple fires destroyed significant numbers of the town's wooden buildings (e.g. in 1563, 1615, 1669, 1693 and 1704). Whilst the nomination dossier stated that much of the historical urban fabric of the 17th and 18th centuries still exists today, information included in the annexes submitted with the nomination dossier did not substantiate this claim. Therefore, in its Interim Report, ICOMOS asked if the State Party could submit maps illustrating the development of the built fabric over time and identifying the historic wooden buildings located within the nominated property. The map submitted shows that a large proportion of the existing buildings date from the 19th century and later, that is, after the period of the Duchy. Based on historic records referred to in publications submitted as annexes to the nomination dossier, in 1821 the town had 205 buildings; most of them were wooden buildings and only eighteen were masonry ones. More than half of the buildings had thatched, board or shingle roofs. Today, while some wooden buildings remain, the majority are stone buildings or mixed stone and wood buildings. And whereas the shift from thatched, board or shingle roofs to clay tile roofs started during the Ducal period, the transition largely occurred during the 19th century.

Overall, ICOMOS considers that the town and the castle area have changed very much as a whole since the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia ceased to exist in 1795. Today, it presents itself more as an historic town with multiple time layers and functions than as the castle town of the period. The 19th and early 20th century public and private buildings and additions to the street grid play a big role in the present townscape.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is generally good.

Factors affecting the nominated property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are development pressures, risk of fire and floods, and tourism pressures.

Development pressures derive mainly from increasing necessity of utilities or service infrastructure. A telecommunications tower, located in Putnu Street (in the buffer zone of the nominated property), is visible from the town centre as well as from the opposite bank of the Venta River. Based on information received through its technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS' Interim Report enquired about the possible construction of the new watch tower, if it could have potential visual impacts on the townscape of Kuldīga, and if a Heritage Impact Assessment was undertaken or planned. The State Party submitted visualisations of the project to be located within the buffer zone of the nominated property and the nature reserve "Venta Valley". The State Party explained that the project was assessed and approved in accordance with the procedures laid down in the legislation, and its potential visual impact was analysed by several bodies. The project was legally approved in 2017 but has not yet been implemented due to lack of funds.

The construction of high-rise buildings within the nominated property and the buffer zone is unlikely given that the town's general construction rules state that no more than three-storey buildings can be built within both areas. The municipality has also taken measures to reduce the effects of vibrations and pollution from traffic, which can affect traditional building materials.

In the past, fires destroyed substantial parts of the urban fabric and remain a risk to this day, since the town has many wooden buildings as well as buildings with important wooden elements. The conservation of the wooden buildings and elements is also challenging due to difficulties in securing adequate timber materials and changes in construction methods. Decreasing numbers of qualified craftspeople and resulting knowledge loss of traditional building techniques add to these problems. To counter these trends, the Restoration Centre educates specialists in the different fields necessary for the conservation of the nominated property.

Like fire, floods remain a threat to the nominated property. Floods damage the building foundations and the consequent humidity leads to the development of mould, even after the flooding event. Climate change can potentially increase the frequency of flood events in the future. High levels of humidity during winter along with relatively high variations of temperature throughout the year affect the foundations of the buildings and foster the growth of mould. In addition, the salt used to defrost the streets in winter adds to these problems: the combination of melting ice and salt used to defrost the streets gets spattered onto the building facades, accelerating the deterioration of traditional materials.

Visitor numbers have grown considerably over the years: from an estimated 35,640 people in 2014; to 135,198 in 2016; to 300,259 in 2019. Based on information provided in the nomination dossier, ICOMOS notes that accommodation available includes mainly apartments and holiday homes. The potential rise in the number of visitors, if the nominated property were to be inscribed on the World Heritage List, could lead to residential buildings being increasingly used as touristic accommodation and subsequent reduction in the number of permanent inhabitants within the nominated property. This is concerning, given that the nomination dossier mentions statistics that show the number of inhabitants in Kuldīga continues to gradually decrease – a trend experienced in other towns and cities in Latvia.

To understand in more detail what management responses are being taken to address some of the factors identified, ICOMOS' Interim Report requested further information regarding visitor management and risk management. Consequently, the State Party submitted an updated management plan which includes two additional annexes that deal with tourist flow management in Kuldīga Old Town and risk management.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is generally good and that the main factors affecting the nominated property are risks of fire and floods, tourism pressures and deterioration of traditional building materials.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- Kuldīga is one of the very few remaining, and the best-preserved, urban testimonies of a small yet important political empire, the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, which ruled the territory of modern Latvia from the 16th to 18th centuries.
- Kuldīga bears a unique testimony to a culture and civilisation which no longer exists (i.e. the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia) but continues to influence contemporary society.

Based on the nomination dossier, the main attributes of the Duchy's testimony can be grouped as follows: (a) the urban layout and streetscape which depict the spatial relations of the urban aspects at the time; (b) architectural remains of residential, public and religious buildings which illustrate the regional development and composition of architecture and townscapes in the 17th and 18th centuries; (c) the expression of specific craft skills that have been passed down from generation to generation and which continue to be used in the contemporary conservation of Kuldīga; and (d) landscape elements which preserve the

historic townscape and continue to stimulate the sense of belonging of locals with the nominated property.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis submitted in the nomination dossier has been developed around the importance of the nominated property as the best-preserved urban testimony of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia. Hence, the focus is on urban settlements presenting testimonies of international trade, political neutrality, migration and international cultural exchange.

The comparative analysis was developed based on a three-step approach. The first part focuses on properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and included on Tentative Lists. The use of criterion (iii) is a central parameter of this part of the comparative analysis. A total of six cities were considered but only those located in Europe are actually compared: Bryggen (Norway, 1979, criterion (iii)); the Old City of Berne (Switzerland, 1983, criterion (iii)) and San Marino Historic Centre and Mount Titano (San Marino, 2008, criterion (iii)). Regarding sites included on Tentative Lists, only Vila Viçosa, Renaissance ducal town in Portugal is seen as relevant since it refers to an urban centre of a duchy and the continuation of this heritage until today.

This part of the comparative analysis also considers towns associated with the Hanseatic League (e.g. Hanseatic City of Lübeck (Germany, 1987, criterion (iv)), Historic Centres of Stralsund and Wismar (Germany, 2002, criteria (ii) and (iv)), Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn (Estonia, 1997, criteria (ii) and (iv)) and Hanseatic Town of Visby (Sweden, 1995, criteria (iv) and (v)). However, the State Party considers that these towns relate to a different timeframe than the one represented by the nominated property. A few historical urban centres representing different political entities contemporary with the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia are also presented, namely the Naval Port of Karlskrona (Sweden, 1998, criteria (ii) and (iv)), the Historic Centre of Rīga (Latvia, 1997, criteria (i) and (ii)), the Historic Centre of Saint Petersburg and Related Groups of Monuments (Russian Federation, 1990, criteria (i), (ii), (iv) and (vi)) and Vilnius Historic Centre (Lithuania, 1994, criteria (ii) and (iv)).

Finally, this part of the comparative analysis compares the nominated property with Old Rauma (Finland, 1991, criteria (iv) and (v)). The State Party considers that Rauma is inscribed entirely based on its role for the typology of northern European towns, especially regarding vernacular wooden architecture, created in the late 18th and 19th centuries. In contrast, it is considered that Kuldīga does not focus on a typology of architecture but on an urban ensemble testifying to a historic society.

The second part of the comparative analysis focuses mainly on the importance of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia in comparison with other regional powers and duchies. This is justified on the grounds that in the European context, duchies were a common political system since medieval times. This part of the comparative

analysis asserts that Prussia is the only duchy which is comparable to that of Courland regarding its economic and political independence. However, Courland was considered more advanced regarding international trade.

The third and final part of the comparative analysis compares the nominated property with other administrative centres of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia. Seventeen towns are identified. Of these, Jelgava/Mitau, Liepāja/Libau and Ventspils/Windau are particularly relevant. Libau and Windau were two of the most important harbours in the Baltic region thus of particular value to the Duchy of Courland, but also later on to the Russian Empire. While Kuldīga was the initial residence for Duke Gotthard Kettler, in 1578 he selected Mitau as the main residence of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia. While Kuldīga still remained an important residential town during the reign of Duke Wilhelm Kettler (1596-1616), his exile firmly established Mitau as the primary residence of the Duchy. However, that town was massively damaged during the Second World War.

The State Party concludes that Kuldīga stands out not because it was historically more important than other towns of Courland but because of its exemplary state of preservation and its completeness – reflecting the era when the small Duchy's trade relations and colonial activities developed alongside the most powerful European nations.

The comparative analysis, as presented in the nomination dossier, largely revolved around the historical importance of the Duchy of Courland. Therefore, in its request for additional information sent on September 2021, ICOMOS asked the State Party to expand the comparative analysis to focus the comparisons on the four main types of attributes identified in the nomination dossier (i.e. the urban layout and streetscape, the architecture, the craft skills and the landscape elements). Consequently, the State Party expanded the comparative analysis to towns which developed largely in the 16th and 18th centuries, in the Baltic States, Poland and Belarus. However, the State Party acknowledged its limitations in undertaking the necessary research because of the COVID-19 pandemic health restrictions. Therefore, in its Interim Report, ICOMOS expressed its wish to receive further information to reinforce the expanded comparative analysis that had been provided. The additional information submitted on February 2022 builds on adequate archival research and is supported by photographs collected during site visits. The State Party noted that whilst the additional time spent on the *in situ* research provided valuable additional insights about the additional comparable sites that had been selected, it did not generate outcomes substantially different from those presented before.

As previously concluded, Viljandi (Estonia), Trakai (Lithuania) and Kazimierz (Poland) are considered the most relevant to compare the nominated property with, because of their engagement in international trade and their regional importance. However, the analysis found that those towns either lack authenticity or integrity, or do

not show the same level of integration of internationally inspired elements into local architectural traditions. In addition, in terms of the combination of attributes, the State Party considers that Viljandi (Estonia) does not express the development and continuity of crafts inspired by international encounters as in Kuldīga. For Pärnu (Estonia), the historical landscape setting and the urban layout of its centre can still be perceived today but destructions in 1944 largely affected the integrity of the old town. Trakai (Lithuania) was also compared more closely because of its similarities regarding its historical importance as a regional centre of the Duchy of Lithuania in the 14th and 15th centuries. The dwelling houses in this town are predominantly front-gabled wooden buildings with high gable roofs, often now made from corrugated iron, hence not preserving the historical materials. Therefore, the State Party concludes that the high levels of authenticity and integrity of the nominated property, its homogenous streetscape, and the continuity of local craftsmanship that developed during the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia cannot be matched by any other town in the relevant geo-cultural area.

ICOMOS considers that while Kuldīga was the primary residence of the Duchy's first ruler, the Duke soon after moved its capital to Jelgava/Mitau. Therefore, ICOMOS considers that Goldingen, as the nominated property was known at the time, was not the primary administrative centre of the Duchy throughout its existence from the 16th to the 18th centuries. As noted in the nomination dossier, Mitau was in fact the main residence of the Duchy and a centre of the ducal monumental building programmes. The historic, political and economic importance of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia is also deeply interrelated with the ports of Liepāja/Libau and Ventspils/Windau. ICOMOS also notes that the castle, as the physical residence of the rulers of Courland, was destroyed at the beginning of the 18th century. The critical reason why Kuldīga is considered today as the best testimony of the Duchy is its state of conservation.

ICOMOS considers that Kuldīga today presents itself more as an historic town with multiple layers from the 13th to the early 20th centuries. As the expanded comparative analysis shows, the nominated property stands out as an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, particularly when other historic towns in the region have not retained the same levels of integrity due to the effects of fires, wars or modern developments. The additional information provided by the State Party on the development of the urban structure and the built fabric of Kuldīga, from the 13th century to the present day, supports this conclusion.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criterion (iii).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Kuldīga bears a unique testimony to the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia and its era of growth, international trade and cultural exchanges, as both its first ducal residence and essential administrative centre. The nominated property is said to be the best-preserved and last remaining urban testimony of the Duchy's political power, displaying a street and plot layout with significant physical remains of architectural fabric and infrastructure dating back to the late 16th to 18th centuries.

ICOMOS considers that, while Kuldīga played an important role in the history of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, the political and economic importance of the Duchy, throughout its duration, was far more related to the towns of Jelgava/Mitau, Liepāja/Libau and Ventspils/Windau. Mitau is generally considered to have been the main administrative centre of the Duchy whereas the ports of Libau and Windau were critical to the Duchy's trade and colonial activities.

The nomination dossier emphasises the urban layout as a considerable tangible expression of the period of the Duchy. However, ICOMOS notes that the urban layout or town structure is not a direct result of the Duchy's power nor of particular planning needs associated with it. ICOMOS also considers that the tangible expression of the Duchy in the historic fabric of the nominated property is also weak. Many of the wooden buildings that existed at the time were destroyed in fires in the 17th century and others were replaced by masonry or combined stone and wood ones in later periods. The construction period of several buildings described in the nomination dossier as the architectural testimony of the Duchy is unclear; others had elements replaced or added in later centuries and some, like the Town Hall (built in 1806), were built anew after the Duchy no longer existed.

In its request for additional information sent on September 2021, ICOMOS asked the State Party to explain the rationale used for nominating the property under criterion (iii) only. The State Party replied that, initially, it also considered criteria (ii) and (iv). In relation to criterion (ii) and the interchange of influences, the State Party considered that Kuldīga was a hub for trade and cultural exchanges. Many foreign craftspeople and merchants settled in Kuldīga and integrated references to their cultural origins with the local architectural traditions, hence creating an architectural language specific to the Duchy of Courland in its integration of German and Latvian architectural traditions. However, it was felt that some of these aspects were covered under the justification for criterion (iii).

In relation to criterion (iv), the State Party considered that Kuldīga is one of very few historic urban centres of the 17th and 18th centuries which have survived in the Baltic region, a region heavily impacted by multiple wars. It adds that the town has not been intentionally constructed based on a unique or exceptional layout or form, rather it is its exceptional state of preservation that makes it stand out among other towns in the wider region.

ICOMOS considers that whilst the nominated property developed throughout the Ducal period as a whole, the town cannot be said to reflect in an outstanding way the political and economic power of Courland. Kuldīga mainly stands out as a well-preserved traditional urban settlement but one that reflects multiple historical periods – from the 13th to the early 20th centuries.

Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

While not initially nominated according to criterion (v), ICOMOS considers that Kuldīga is representative of traditional Baltic architecture, merging German and Latvian traditions, which, complemented by a well-preserved town structure, a harmonious townscape and scenic river valley landscape, acts as a witness to the history of traditional settlements in the region.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (iii) has not been demonstrated but that criterion (v) is justified.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The integrity of the nominated property should be analysed based on the evidence related to it being the primary residence and administrative centre of the Duchy of Courland. The nominated property includes the area of the town that existed during the period of the Duchy and the urban structure that developed at the time has been preserved. However, few attributes remain that convey the Duchy's political and economic power. Only ruins of the castle as the physical residence of the rulers of Courland exist today.

Few public buildings dating from the 16th to the 18th centuries remain. Of these, even fewer are a direct expression of the rulers' power as in the case of the Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church, built in 1641-1649 and renovated in 1746, at the request of the King of Poland in return for the approval of the succession rights of Duke Jacob. The Supreme Court House of the ducal period still exists but it no longer retains its original function.

The nomination dossier acknowledges that the nominated property includes a number of later houses which were built on the foundations of 17th and 18th century

constructions. However, it considers that those buildings contribute nevertheless to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property by further demonstrating the continuation of the urban layout and spatial relations of the Ducal period.

Based on the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, the nominated property does not suffer from the effects of development. Modern materials, like hard renderings, steel structures and exposed concrete are only visible here and there. Not all of the town buildings are in good condition. Conservation activities over the past twenty years have contributed to improved condition of the structures in around one hundred buildings; however there is still work to be done.

ICOMOS deemed that, if the justification for the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property were to be anchored in its role as the primary residence and administrative centre of the Duchy of Courland, the wholeness and intactness of the nominated property would have to be evaluated mainly on the tangible evidence dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. In that regard, ICOMOS concluded the conditions of integrity could not be considered to be demonstrated. However, Kuldīga's urban structure, developed from the 13th to 18th centuries, remains largely intact and its buildings, influenced by the architectural styles which emerged during the period of the Duchy but which persisted to a considerable degree until the early 20th century, contributes to a harmonious whole. ICOMOS therefore considers that, as a traditional human settlement – reflecting a broader timeframe than that of the Duchy of Courland – integrity has been demonstrated.

Authenticity

The location of the nominated property was a fundamental aspect for the development of the urban structure of the town, influenced by the intersection of the Venta and Alekšupīte rivers; this structure is retained. The river landscape has changed over time but not to the extent that it fundamentally changes the area of the setting of the nominated property.

The authenticity of the nominated property needs to be analysed largely in relation to the forms, design and materials of its built fabric, particularly since the State Party argues that local and foreign craftsmen jointly developed a new architectural language in the town, which was inspired by international encounters as well as the availability of new materials based on trade relations set up under ducal rule. Since the nomination dossier included little information on the detail of that new language, ICOMOS, in its request for additional information sent on September 2021, asked the State Party to provide more detail in this regard.

The State Party explained that, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the increase in foreign craftsmen and trade allowed access to new building materials and technologies, resulting in significant changes in the

architectural style. The roofing materials changed from thatch and wooden shingles towards wooden roof boards and the more fire-resistant, characteristic, red clay tiles. The overall proportions of the houses remained largely the same but the size of windows increased with the availability of glass. A specifically new architectural element was double-framed windows. Further changes were introduced towards the end of the 18th century. Tin covers and wind boards were added and wooden cornices became more elaborate; the same as for door and window decorations.

ICOMOS found that physical elements deriving from the Duchy period are rare and patchy, not only in the urban fabric but also in individual buildings. The subsequent changes have mainly kept the traditional morphology and created urban continuity. Contemporary conservation works respect and apply the use of the forms and materials of the relevant period.

The 20th century buildings, and especially reconstructions done in the 1970s, make it difficult to truly identify their main building period. After the protection measures set up for the old town in 1969, some twenty buildings were built mainly for visual reasons. Their façades resemble early 18th century houses but their structures are characterised by semi-modern techniques with available materials of the time, including concrete, cement and asbestos sheets.

The nomination dossier acknowledges that disagreements exist between residents and conservation specialists regarding the purpose and result of conservation works. Citizens often prefer the buildings to look perfect and modern.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property, on the basis of criterion (v), have been demonstrated.

Boundaries

The boundary of the nominated property includes most of the pre-19th century urban area of Kuldīga and part of its environmental setting, namely part of the Venta River. The definition of this area is largely influenced by the 1797 map of the town, which provides evidence that the town's street network at the time has largely been preserved.

The boundary of the property, as included in the nomination dossier, was also influenced by the legal protection of the "urban construction monument" – The Historic Centre of the Town of Kuldīga. On the one hand, the latter was smaller than that of the nominated property on its eastern part (because it does not include the Venta River area) but larger on its western part. The ruins of the ducal castle were only partly included in the nominated property.

The boundary of the buffer zone was largely based on the protection zone of the "urban construction monument", called "individual protection zone". As of 2020, a total of 1,680 people were officially registered as living in the nominated property and an additional 1,100 people within the buffer zone.

ICOMOS, in its Interim Report, noted that the ruins of the ducal castle/residence area were partly within the boundary of the nominated property and partly in the buffer zone. As such, it asked the State Party to consider revising the boundary of the nominated property in order to include all the archaeological remains of the ducal residence. ICOMOS also suggested including a larger part of the river scenery. In addition, ICOMOS asked the State Party to consider further alignments between the boundaries of the "urban construction monument" and its "individual protection zone" with those of the nominated property and the buffer zone respectively, to facilitate management.

Consequently, the State Party submitted a new map responding to the recommended adjustments. ICOMOS appreciates the work done by the State Party in such a short period of time to implement fully its suggestions. This is highly commended, particularly when the changes were legally approved. The boundary of the nominated property now largely coincides with that of the "urban construction monument"; exceptions are appropriately justified. With the adjustments provided, the boundary of the buffer zone coincides exactly with that of the "individual protection zone".

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

In summary, ICOMOS considers that, based on all the documentation provided, the nominated property justifies consideration for inscription on the World Heritage List, under criterion (v) and not criterion (iii) as proposed by the State Party. On this basis, the authenticity and integrity of the nominated property are demonstrated. The revisions made to the boundaries of the nominated property reinforce the integrity of the property in relation to criterion (v) as well as facilitating management.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Documentation

Several comprehensive inventories have been elaborated over the years. The inventory of monuments of state and local importance is updated by the national and local authorities annually. Several of these inventories are available online. When designing alterations or any work in a building, documentation with detailed descriptions of building parts, materials and styles is required by law. The nomination dossier builds on many historical records. The documentation provided as part of the additional information received on February 2022, particularly in relation to the evolution of the urban structure and the development of the built fabric over time, adds to the body of knowledge about the nominated property and can help inform the monitoring of its state of conservation in the future.

Conservation measures

In the recent past, the municipality has invested considerably in the conservation of the nominated property. Since 2014, the municipality has implemented a fifty percent co-funding programme to help the local community and property owners with the conservation of historic buildings. Based on the information provided in the nomination dossier, since many of the buildings have more than one owner, the municipality has delegated their management to the municipal company "Kuldīgas komunālie pakalpojumi". Based on the information gathered through the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission a total of 125 residential buildings are managed by this company. Each building is documented by its own file containing all information regarding its condition, repairs and improvements undertaken and the current issues to be addressed.

Established in 2010, Kuldīga's Restoration Centre plays an important role in the conservation of the town's built fabric. It provides information as well as practical support regarding the maintenance, conservation and renovation of historic buildings. Another essential aspect of the Centre's work is the early identification of necessary conservation works in order to avoid irreparable damage to unique building details, such as doors and windows. The role that the Centre plays in helping to safeguard traditional crafts and building techniques, including its training programmes, is critical for the effective conservation and management of the nominated property.

Monitoring

Based on the nomination dossier, the "Kuldīgas komunālie pakalpojumi" annually monitors the technical condition of each house under its authority. A monitoring programme consisting of twenty-one indicators, covering different types of attributes (e.g. buildings, streets and squares, historical landscapes and green spaces, and water bodies) is included as part of the nomination dossier. This programme establishes the frequency or regularity at which indicators will be monitored, the method to be used and the body responsible.

The monitoring programme is not yet in place; the nomination dossier states the monitoring indicators will be transferred into a geospatial system, should the nominated property be inscribed on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring programme proposed should be strengthened. Some of the indicators are too vague to act as measures (be they qualitative or quantitative) to assess the state of conservation of the property and look more like management objectives (e.g. preservation of historical water crossings; preservation of historic panoramas and views; or preservation of Ventas Rumba waterfall as a natural monument). In addition, some of the indicators look more like measures of productivity than related to the monitoring of the state of conservation of the property. While such indicators are important for the overall effective management of the nominated property, it is necessary that they do not divert resources from what is truly important to assess.

Furthermore, the high number of indicators proposed raises concerns about the feasibility of adequately collecting data for all the indicators and moreover how that data will be used to make better decisions about the management of the nominated property. This is particularly important given that several bodies will be responsible for monitoring those indicators. The nomination dossier states that the implementation of the monitoring programme will be under the responsibility of the site manager (i.e. a management team of 3-4 specialists) together with the Old Town Environment Commission. Therefore, ICOMOS recommends that the monitoring programme, from a state of conservation perspective, be revised to focus on a lower number of indicators, clearly connected to the main attributes of the nominated property. Such indicators should not only focus on the physical attributes but also on processes and traditional practices. In addition, the indicators should be defined taking into account the main factors affecting the property. Indicators related to the monitoring of the state of conservation of the attributes of the nominated property should also be distinguished from performance indicators of the management system.

ICOMOS considers that existing documentation and conservation measures are adequate. The monitoring programme should be revised and strengthened, and adapted for easy integration of its outcomes into the Periodic Reporting questionnaire.

5 Protection and management

Legal protection

Most of the area of the nominated property is designated as an "urban construction monument" of state importance, (i.e. "The Historic Centre of the Town of Kuldīga"). The Law "On Protection of Cultural Monuments" (with amendments) adopted in 1992 stipulates that it is prohibited to destroy cultural monuments; moving or alteration of a cultural monument can only be done with special permission. The execution of the Law is supported by three regulatory instruments: 1) Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 474 of August 2003 – "Regulations on registration, protection, use, restoration, state pre-emption rights and granting of environmental degrading object status"; 2) Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 473 of August 2003 – "Procedures by which cultural monuments shall be included in the list of state protected cultural monuments and shall be excluded from the list of state protected cultural monuments"; and 3) Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 534 of July 2011 – "Regulations regarding the procedures and terms for use of the priority rights of cultural monuments of state importance".

During the course of the evaluation process, based on ICOMOS' recommendations, the State Party adjusted the boundaries of the nominated property to align it closer with those of the "urban construction monument" of state importance. The "urban construction monument" is surrounded by an "individual protection zone", the boundaries of which now match those of the buffer zone of the nominated property. As a result of this process, the

State Party concluded that the “individual protection zone”, should have national cultural heritage status of its own. Therefore, on 24 February 2022, the Ministry of Culture issued an Order that approves the status of the urban construction monument No. 9320 “The Outskirts of the Historical Centre of Kuldīga with Venta Valley” as a monument of architecture (urban construction) of local importance in the list of state protected cultural monuments, hence granting it national cultural heritage protection status.

The nominated property and its buffer zone include part of the nature reserve “Venta Valley”, therefore the Law “On Specially Protected Nature Territories” also applies. The water bodies of the Venta River, Alekšupīte River and Māras Pond are also protected by the Protection Zone Law (1997, with amendments).

Management system

In terms of governance arrangements, Kuldīga Municipality acts as the main management agency for the nominated property and its buffer zone. There are seven municipal institutions that are part of the administration of Kuldīga Municipality and three municipal enterprises that are directly involved in the management system. These are: the Kuldīga Municipality Building Authority; the Kuldīga Development Agency; the Kuldīga Restoration Centre; the Kuldīga Main Library; the Kuldīga District Museum; the Kuldīga Active Recreation Centre; the Kuldīga Culture Centre; the SIA “Kuldīgas komunālie pakalpojumi”; the SIA “Kuldīgas siltumtīkli”; and the SIA “Kuldīgas ūdens”. Of these, the Kuldīga Municipality Building Authority, the Restoration Centre, and the SIA “Kuldīgas komunālie pakalpojumi” play central roles.

The Kuldīga Municipality Building Authority supervises and controls development and conservation activities. Within this multidisciplinary team there is an old town expert who organises the practical measures of management of the nominated property and the work of the Old Town Environment Commission. This Commission advises the Kuldīga Municipality Building Authority on planning and examines specific development plans that would affect the preservation of the old town environment. The Restoration Centre serves as a point of contact for the residents of the old town of Kuldīga, owners of buildings, local business people, builders, architects and craftspeople regarding issues related to the maintenance, renovation and conservation of historic buildings. The Centre is also responsible for the development of important educational and training programmes. It has four staff in total.

The SIA “Kuldīgas komunālie pakalpojumi” is a municipal enterprise that provides maintenance of buildings, regular maintenance of streets, care of pedestrian sidewalks and green areas, handling of waste, as well as road repairs, transportation, market administration, services to residents, companies, organisations and institutions. The municipality has delegated management of many historic buildings to this enterprise. However, ICOMOS notes that the team that forms this enterprise does not seem to have professional qualifications in heritage conservation but largely related to

economics, business management and real estate property management. Therefore, it would be important to reinforce their conservation competences.

ICOMOS considers that the role of the National Heritage Board, and in particular its Regional Board at Kurzeme, should be made clearer. Certain areas of the nominated property and buffer zone are part of the nature reserve “Venta Valley” and fall under the authority of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Regional Development and subsequently under the Nature Conservation Agency. Hence, it is also necessary to detail how these actors will be involved in the management of the nominated property. The roles and responsibilities of each actor in relation to the management should be further detailed and potential overlaps identified. Clearly defining how the different actors are to coordinate their actions and share information between them is critical, particularly since the nomination dossier highlights governance issues as one of the main factors affecting the property. ICOMOS considers that the governance structure for the nominated property and its buffer zone should be clearly documented and the roles and responsibilities of each actor with management responsibilities detailed.

The planning framework for the property includes different spatial planning instruments covering different scales. At the local level, at present, there are two main planning instruments: the Sustainable Development Strategy of Kuldīga Municipality (2014-2030) and the Spatial Plan of Kuldīga Municipality (2013-2025). In addition, the “Local plan for the old town of Kuldīga in Venta Valley that amends the spatial plan”, currently under elaboration, will include important provisions that contribute to the protection of the nominated property, such as preventing the construction of big shopping centres and promoting pedestrian flows. The Local plan (now in its third draft version, following public consultations) is being developed in integration with the provisions of the spatial plan and those of the management plan for the nominated property and its buffer zone.

Since the version of the management plan submitted with the nomination dossier was still a draft, ICOMOS enquired about the status of this plan in its Interim Report. Consequently, as part of the additional information sent on February 2022, the State Party shared the final version of the management plan, approved by a decision of Kuldīga Municipal Council on 27 January 2022.

The management plan includes a detailed plan of actions to be implemented between different actors or agencies. In addition, two important annexes were added to this final version; one is the “Kuldīga Old Town Visitor Flow Management Plan”, the other is a “Risk Management Plan”.

Visitor management

The “Kuldīga Old town Visitor Flow Management Plan” is included as annex 2 of the management plan. This plan complements and details the provisions of the Kuldīga Municipality Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy for 2028. Its content addresses three key areas: traffic intensity and traffic management related to travellers; guest

accommodation; and pedestrian flow management. Each area includes a series of detailed actions to be implemented.

Community involvement

The Restoration Centre offers strong community support to the conservation of private properties. The nomination dossier acknowledges the need to involve local communities in the development of tourism strategies, given that the potential rise in visitor numbers if the nominated property were to be inscribed on the World Heritage List could affect the existing strong sense of belonging.

Over the past decades, the Kuldīga Municipality has implemented a range of measures to foster the involvement of local residents in the conservation of the nominated property. A number of institutions (e.g. Kuldīga Municipality, Kuldīga Restoration Centre, Kuldīga District Museum, Kuldīga Main Library, Kuldīga Artists' Residence) work together to organise events to present and promote the values of Kuldīga, its rich history and valuable heritage.

Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

ICOMOS considers that there is a good understanding of the factors affecting the nominated property and that the State Party has developed adequate responses to address the current and potential impacts deriving from those factors. The inclusion of the Risk Management Plan as an annex of the management plan reinforces existing management responses.

Following the revisions to the boundaries sent on 25 February 2022, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property includes all the areas and attributes which are a direct tangible expression of its potential Outstanding Universal Value and is of adequate size.

The boundaries of the nominated property coincide, for the most part, with the national designation of the "urban construction monument" of state importance. The area of the Venta Valley is not included in that designation but is protected as a nature reserve. Therefore, ICOMOS considers that the legal protection of the nominated property is adequate. The buffer zone corresponds to the "individual protection zone" and has complementary legal provisions in order to give an added layer of protection to the nominated property.

The planning framework is comprehensive and the different plans that constitute it are well integrated. The management plan and its annexes are adequate and apply both to the nominated property and its buffer zone. The governance arrangements in place are clear and there seems to be a good coordination between the different actors.

ICOMOS considers that the sustainability of the financial resources available for the different actors involved deserves further attention. For instance, ICOMOS notes that the funding for the Restoration Centre seems to be

largely dependent on its ability to obtain grants. The financial incentives put in place by the municipality to support owners to undertake conservation works are commendable and should be maintained.

In summary, ICOMOS considers that protection and management mechanisms in place are adequate to address the current management challenges.

6 Conclusion

ICOMOS considers that the justification for inscription of the nominated property as a testimony to the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia is insufficiently demonstrated, directly and tangibly, by the physical elements that remain of that period. Kuldīga was an important administrative centre of the Duchy in its early days. However, throughout its duration, the political and economic importance of the Duchy was far more related to other towns (i.e. Jelgava/Mitau, Liepāja/Libau and Ventspils/Windau). Kuldīga is considered today as the best testimony of the Duchy because those other towns were significantly destroyed by wars, fire and lack of conservation efforts, as pointed out in the nomination dossier. The evidence provided by the State Party shows that the architectural remains of the 16th to 18th centuries are scarce within the overall present-day built fabric of Kuldīga.

Based on the information from the expanded comparative analysis, the nomination dossier (and the annexes submitted with it) and the additional information provided, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property stands out as an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, reflecting multiple layers from the 13th to the early 20th centuries. While Kuldīga's importance in relation to the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia merits emphasis, it should be understood in relation to the town's development prior to and after that period. ICOMOS considers that the interpretation of the nominated property should reflect this broader timeframe. ICOMOS also recommends that the name of the property be changed to become "Old town of Kuldīga"

The delineation of the boundaries, as adjusted and submitted with the additional information sent on February 2022, ensures that all elements that express its potential Outstanding Universal Value, on the basis of criterion (v), are included within the area of the nominated property. The buffer zone is recognised legally and adequately gives an added layer of protection to the nominated property. The state of conservation of the nominated property is generally good and the main factors affecting it (i.e. risks of fire and floods, tourism pressures and deterioration of traditional building materials) are effectively being addressed. The inclusion of two annexes to the management plan addressing risk management and tourism management, reinforces existing management responses being implemented by the State Party.

The craft skills that have been passed down from generation to generation continue to be used in the

contemporary conservation of Kuldīga. The nominated property also meets the conditions of authenticity in terms of location and setting; its urban structure, influenced by the intersection of the Venta and Alekšupīte rivers, is also retained.

Protection and management arrangements are adequate but the monitoring system should be revised and strengthened. Regarding the watch tower project, ICOMOS notes that the revised management plan submitted as part of the additional information of February 2022, includes a provision to carry out a Heritage Impact Assessment, in case the municipality attracts funds for its construction in the buffer zone of the nominated property. Therefore, ICOMOS considers that this approach is in line with the provisions of paragraph 118bis of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and should be followed if the construction of the project were to go ahead.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Kuldīga / Goldingen in Courland, Republic of Latvia, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criterion (v)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

Located in the western part of Latvia, in the central Kurzeme (Courland) region, the town of Kuldīga is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a traditional urban settlement. At the confluence of the Venta River and the smaller Alekšupīte stream, the beginnings of Kuldīga, which was called Goldingen at the time, date back to the 13th century. The rivers' intersection is a defining element of the town's structure, contributing to its scenic character. The medieval area of Kalnamiests, located on a hill, is clearly distinguishable in the townscape, given its oval shape.

A significant part of Kuldīga's history and development is linked to the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, which governed a significant part of the Baltics between 1561 and 1795. The town was the primary residence and administrative centre of the Duchy's first ruler and maintained an important role afterwards. As a result, the town developed into a prosperous trading hub. The international orientation of the Duchy led to a rising number of foreign merchants and craftsmen settling in Kuldīga, who left their mark on the architectural language and building decoration of the region. The town's structure has largely retained the street layout which developed during the period of the Duchy.

The architectural influences and craftsmanship traditions introduced during the era of the Duchy endured well into the 19th century. However, different laws and regulations,

aimed at fire safety, led to the progressive replacement of fire hazardous roofing materials. The proportion of masonry buildings also increased, replacing traditional wooden ones. In the second half of the 19th century, the brick bridge over the Venta River was constructed, connecting Kuldīga to the east.

Unlike other towns in the Baltic region, Kuldīga survived the great wars of the 20th century largely unscathed and modern urban developments were largely implemented far outside its historic centre.

Criterion (v): The old town of Kuldīga is an outstanding example of a well-preserved urban settlement, representative of traditional Baltic architecture and urbanism and of multiple historical periods – from the 13th to the early 20th centuries. Its historic urban fabric includes structures of traditional local log architecture as well as largely foreign-influenced techniques and styles of brick masonry and timber-framed houses that illustrate the integration of local craftsmanship with foreign influences from other Hanse towns and centres around the Baltic Sea as well as Russia. The craft skills are prominent in functional and ornamental building details throughout the town and continue to be employed by craftspeople today. The predominance of clay tiles as a roofing material contributes to the harmonious townscape of Kuldīga.

Integrity

The property encompasses the medieval castle mound plateau, the medieval area known as Kalnamiests, and the urban areas which developed during the ducal period from the 16th until the 18th centuries but continued to organically evolve afterwards. In addition, large areas of the environmental setting of Kuldīga are also included, namely the intersection of the Venta and Alekšupīte rivers, as well as the Ventas Rumba waterfall, which was essential for the growth of Kuldīga into a trading centre.

In the past, fires destroyed substantial parts of the urban fabric and remain a risk to this day, since the town has many wooden buildings as well as buildings with important wooden elements. Floods are another important factor that can potentially affect the property, particularly in view of climate change. To maintain the harmonious townscape, the town's general construction rules stipulate maximum building heights within the property and its buffer zone.

The boundaries of the property coincide, for the most part, with the national designation of the "urban construction monument" of state importance. The area of the Venta Valley is not included in that designation but is protected as a nature reserve. The buffer zone corresponds to the "individual protection zone" and has complementary legal provisions in order to give an added layer of protection to the property.

Authenticity

Kuldīga's urban and architectural heritage is well retained in terms of material, design and craftsmanship. It illustrates continuity in function and use as residences, auxiliary structures and religious spaces for the resident community. The old town further preserves its authenticity in setting and location, which was a fundamental aspect for the development of the urban structure of the town, influenced by the intersection of the Venta and Alekšupīte rivers. The river landscape has changed over time but not to the extent that it fundamentally alters the environmental setting of the property.

Management and protection requirements

The property was first nationally recognised in 1969 and received the highest level of national protection as a cultural monument under the national Law "On the Protection of Cultural Monuments". The landscape elements of the Venta Valley have been protected since 1957 and were recognised in 2004 as part of the NATURA 2000 network. The buffer zone also has legal status as a monument of architecture (urban construction) of local importance in the list of state protected cultural monuments.

On a local level, multiple planning documents, such as a local territorial development plan, define strict legal mechanisms that contribute to the protection of the historic urban settlement and further prevent development pressures that might affect the property's significance.

Kuldīga Municipality acts as the main management authority for the property and its buffer zone. With regards to the conservation of historic buildings, the Kuldīga Restoration Centre is an essential partner of the municipality. The day-to-day management of the World Heritage property is guided by a management plan, which is complemented by subsidiary plans related to risk management and tourism management.

Additional recommendations

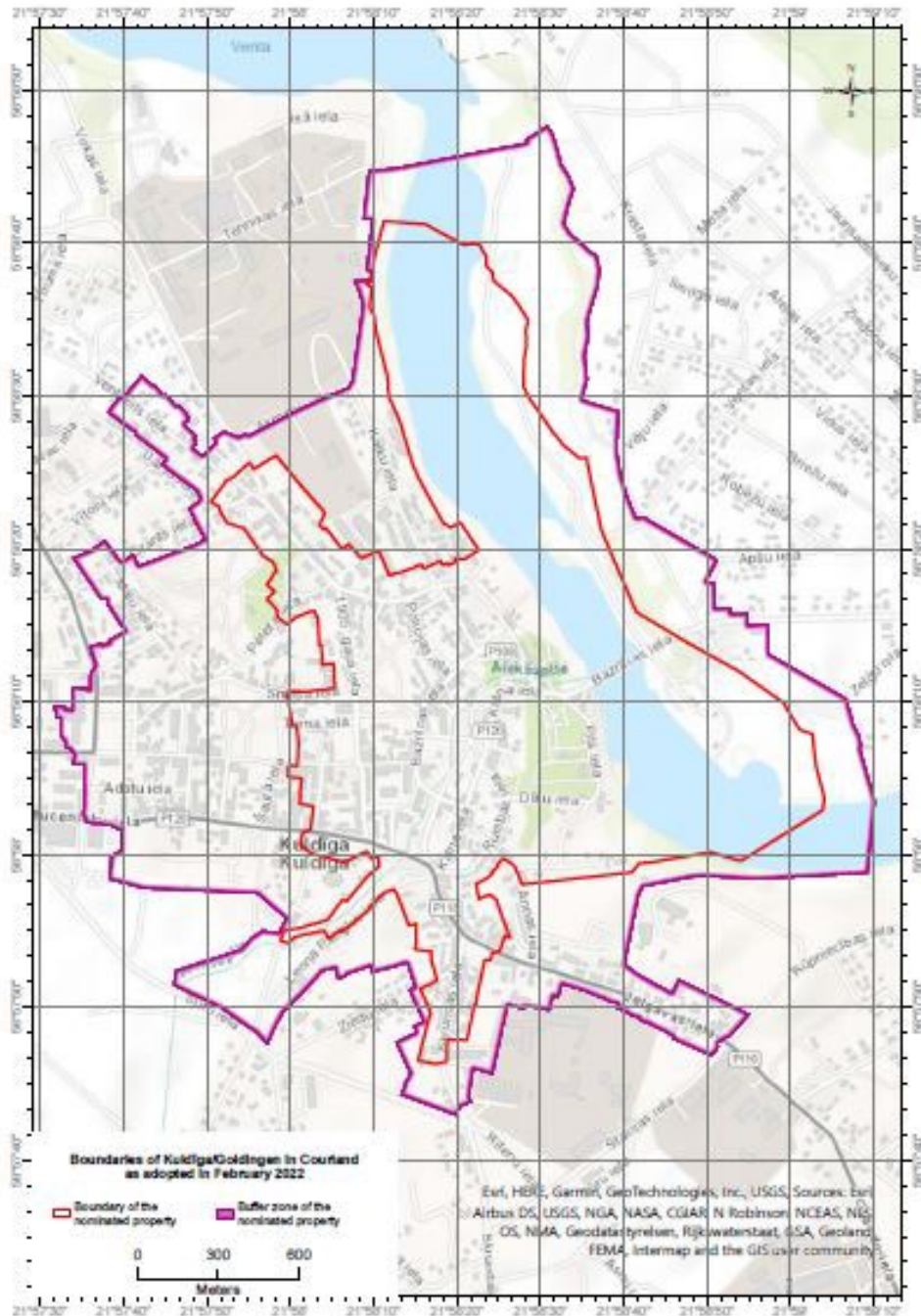
ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Revising the monitoring programme to focus on a set of indicators clearly connected to the main attributes of the property and taking into account the main factors affecting the property,
- b) Ensuring that the interpretation of the property reflects its significance as an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, reflecting multiple layers from the 13th to the early 20th centuries. While Kuldīga's importance in relation to the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia merits emphasis, it should be understood in relation to the town's development prior to and after that historical period,
- c) Conducting a heritage impact assessment, if the watch tower project were to go ahead, in line with the provisions included in the management plan

and with paragraph 118bis of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*,

- d) Providing updated figures of the areas of the revised boundaries of the property and of its buffer zone;

Based on the recommendation to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of criterion (v), ICOMOS also recommends that the name of the property be changed to become "Old town of Kuldīga".



Revised map showing the boundaries of the nominated property (February 2022)