

# LAKE MANAGEMENT IN THE PIEBALGA REGION: CLIMATE, NATURE AND CULTURE FROM THE 1890S TO NOW

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**Abstract:** There are many regions in Latvia with a long history and beautiful landscapes. However, of all the regions, the most beautiful landscapes and the richest culture are in the Piebalga region. Piebalga is located in the Vidzeme highlands, where the longest domestic river in Latvia, the Gauja, has its source. There are several counties in the Piebalga region, the most famous of which is Vecpiebalga, where two of the first Latvian writers were born, the Kaudzites brothers, who are well-known for their novel *The Surveyors' Time*, one of the first books written by Latvians. In this study, the culture, religion and environmental management practices of Piebalga during the 19th century were studied using an extensive analysis of historical literature about the region, and compared to Piebalga in the present, which was studied using case study research. During the research it was discovered that the main influences on Piebalga culture and environmental management practices have been the Hernhutian congregations who influences had shaped the local culture and continues to do so even after being effectively disbanded. It was also discovered that the municipalities in the region are less effective at monitoring lakes than they were during the 19th century due to lacking resources.

**Keywords:** Piebalga region, culture, Hernhutian congregations, lake governance, environment protection, history, folklore.

## Introduction

There are many regions in Latvia with a long history and beautiful landscapes. However, of all the regions, the most beautiful landscapes and the richest culture are in the Piebalga region. Piebalga is located in the Vidzeme highlands, where the longest domestic river in Latvia, the Gauja, has its source. There are several counties in the Piebalga region, the most famous of which is Vecpiebalga, where two of the first Latvian writers were born: the Kaudzītes brothers, well-known for their novel *The Surveyors' Time*, one of the first books written by Latvians.

The Piebalga region of Latvia is one of the most beautiful and economically strongest regions in the country. Piebalga is located close to the central part of the Vidzeme Highlands. The region has a rugged, undulating terrain, as well as a significant number of streams, rivers and lakes. In total, the region has more than a hundred lakes (Lakes of Latvia 2015; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga 2021; Country Traveler 2013; Celotajs 2012). The forests in the area consist mainly of pines, spruces and birches (Celotajs.lv 2012). Due to its terrain and climate, Piebalga often has fog in the mornings and snow in winter. The region is popular with skiers as a result of regular snow and natural ski runs. Although Piebalga has certainly changed since the nineteenth century, much of the region's culture and identity has survived due to its people's efforts (Country Traveler 2013).

Although Piebalga is one of the most beautiful regions in Latvia and is well known for its culture, it is one of the least populated and resource-poor regions of Latvia, which today poses significant difficulties for the operation of its municipal infrastructure (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga 2021). Travel to the region is also a challenge, as bus services are not very regular, and most of the region's railway stations have been closed (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021).

This paper examines the Piebalga region's culture, the environmental policy of its component municipalities today and the historical methods of their environmental governance, as well as works on Piebalga folklore, folk songs and local writers. This enables the region to be explored in more detail in relation to lake management and its influential characteristics in the region. This research also investigates cultural and religious beliefs during the nineteenth

century, how they have changed since then, and what were the main influences on Piebalga's distinct cultural identity, for which the region is known today.

## The Piebalga region

The Piebalga region consists of two small municipalities – Jaunpiebalga (New Piebalga) and Vecpiebalga (Old Piebalga), as well as many other, smaller ones such as Dzērbene, Taurene, Ineši and Rauna (Figure 1; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021). The municipalities were independent until administrative reforms during 2021, after which they were added to the Cesis region, and most of their management was taken over by the Cesis municipality. Piebalga had already been part of the Cesis municipality until the administrative re-



Figure 1. Map of Piebalga cultural region. From Jaņu seta 2015.

forms of 2009 split many of the larger municipalities into smaller ones. Now the Piebalga region is part of Cesis municipality again (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021).

The Piebalga region's municipalities are well-known for their scenery, the large numbers of lakes (more than thirty in Vecpiebalga alone) and their rich culture (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Lauku Celotajs 2013). Piebalga is one of Latvia's more productive rural regions, due to its large areas of natural pastures useful in ranching. Many local farmers are involved in raising deer and sheep, but the region's cold weather and long winters prevent intensive agriculture or growing rapeseed (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021). Piebalga is a popular travel destination for tourists and contains hundreds of national heritage sites (IS „Mantojums’ 2016; ‘Jāņa sēta’ 2015). However, the municipality suffers greatly from emigration and depopulation, which has caused entire villages to be abandoned (Lauku Celotajs 2013). The Piebalga region was the site of many battles during the Second World War, but German and Russian soldiers spared most of the historical architecture and cultural sites, something that ensured that Piebalga has more UNESCO heritage sites than most other regions in Vidzeme, and indeed in Latvia in general (IS ‘Mantojums’ 2016).

However, many historical buildings in the countryside have been abandoned due to depopulation in the region (Table 1, Figure 2; Lauku Celotajs 2013). In some cases, their legitimate owners are no longer in Latvia and are leaving these buildings to decay, rather than selling them or handing them over to the municipalities. Several such abandoned buildings are found near the shores of Lake Juveris, and Lake Raunais also has an abandoned village in its area (Country Traveler 2013; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021). The region also had several railway stations, which are now in ruins. It is possible to see abandoned farm buildings, including barns and grain silos, which belonged to the collective farms that existed during the Soviet era but are now abandoned. It is also possible to find old bunkers and trenches that have survived World War II and sometimes date back to the period of the national partisans who were active in the area (Lauku Celotajs 2013; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebala.lv 2021).

Large tracts of forests cover the region of Piebalga, more than half of which is taken up by forests. Forests are managed partially by Latvian State Forests, Latvia's national forestry company, while the local municipalities manage forest areas near settlements (Kalvite Libiete Bardule 2017; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021). The forests around many lakes are also managed by

Latvian State Forests, as are some public swimming areas. Pine and spruce are the most common trees found in the region, other types of trees being rarer. Swamps can also be found within the forests as a result of the regions relief – swamps and marshlands in Piebalga are often found in any depressions deep enough if the area is sufficiently moist, or groundwater is close to the surface (Kalvite Libiete Bardule 2017).

Agricultural land takes a smaller area and is mostly found in the form of pastures, as the climate and terrain make it challenging to grow bulk crops in most parts of the region. Farmland, which is located closer to lakes and streams or in depressions, is regularly flooded, giving small areas of land in Piebalga a significant diversity of plants (Kalvite Libiete Bardule 2017).

Piebalga has a considerable number of lakes: Vecpiebalga alone has more than 30 lakes, including one of Latvia's largest lakes, Alauksts. Most other lakes are smaller, many of them more remote than Alauksts (Vecpiebalga. lv 2020). Several lakes are near villages, but many lakes do not have access roads, while others are located deep in the woods or are surrounded by swamps, making it difficult to reach them. Piebalga also the source of the Gauja River, one of Latvia's longest rivers and its longest native river, as the Daugava River starts in Russia. All lakes in the Piebalga region are regarded either as public lakes: those owned by the municipalities are subject to management and monitoring, while most other lakes are public lakes (Latvian Civil law; Lauku Celotajs 2021; Urtans et al. 2012; Benders 2021; Veidemane 2020; Zacharias et al. 2020). Most lakes in the Piebalga region are considered to be of good environmental quality (Veidemane 2020; Zacharias et al. 2020).

Piebalga is the site of many manors (at least one in every parish), a porcelain factory and various food and beverage companies (Ceļotājs. lv 2012; Country Traveler 2013). Many of these sites were established in the nineteenth century and survived both World Wars (IS Mantojums 2020). This is rare in Latvia, as many of the country's smaller settlements and rural areas were devastated during both of the World Wars and were rebuilt afterwards almost from scratch. However, many manors were burned down during the 1905 revolt, and many settlements were razed during the Second World War. Many churches in the Piebalga region have also been damaged by storms and are still undergoing reconstruction (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021). The region also has a significant number of abandoned farms, villages and manors, located in areas with less traffic, as well as close to some lakes. Historically, the region was much more densely populated than it is now, with Piebalga now being one of

the least populated regions in the country (Table 1). Vecpiebalga municipality has suffered the worst depopulation, due to more severe emigration and other factors, including a lack of apothecaries (Figure 2; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020).



Figure 2. Population changes in Vecpiebalga from 2016-2020. From Vecpiebalga.lv

Municipality	Population	Land area	Municipality type
Carnikava	9276	76,0 km <sup>2</sup>	Coastal/Urban
Burtnieki	7655	652,2 km <sup>2</sup>	Rural
Liepāja	76535	51,3 km <sup>2</sup>	City/Urban
Roja	3785	197,0 km <sup>2</sup>	Coastal/Urban
Jaunpiebalga	2253	245,8 km <sup>2</sup>	Rural
Vecpiebalga	3938	515,0 km <sup>2</sup>	Rural

Table 1. Comparison of population in various Latvian municipalities in 2018. Data from the Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

Vecpiebalga (Figure 3) is the largest municipality in the region by area, but it has a more scattered population and has fewer resources other than land and forests (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Country Traveler 2013). Jaunpiebalga is smaller but has more industry and is wealthier, but with fewer inhabitants (Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021). Jaunpiebalga is the site of a brewery, porcelain factory and some other industries, with there now being various bakeries and confectionery manufacturers. The municipality also has a furniture factory and a fish farm (Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021). At the same time, Vecpiebalga has established a large smoke-house and various other industries involved in the processing of agricultural products (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020). Vecpiebalga also has several schools, that in Dzerbene having a focus on music (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020). Historically the region was famous for its crafts (Kaudzite 1926). However, over time its economy and industry have weakened due to urbanization: more than half of Latvia's population lives in cities (Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs 2018). As a result, industry was concentrated in the cities, and industries in small towns and villages declined. Emigration from the country has exacerbated the problems of rural areas (Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs 2018).

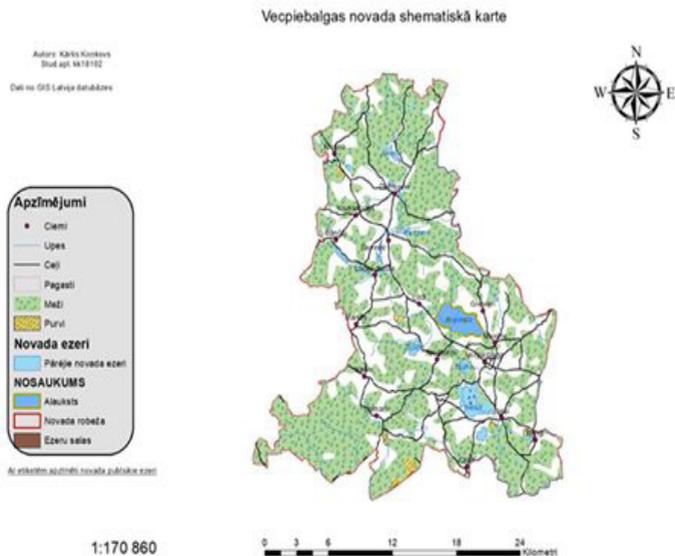


Figure 3. Schematic map of Vecpiebalga municipality. Author's data.

## Research methods

Information on the current situation regarding lake and environmental governance and local culture was obtained using a case-study research methodology. Legislative documents, such as the Vecpiebalga's sustainable development strategy and plan, were examined for cultural and environmental issues. The seven public lakes in Vecpiebalga region – Alaukstis, Juveris, Inesis, Kaives, Taurenis, Zobols and Tauns – were investigated regarding their current governance regimes, and the settlements near them were examined with regard to cultural events, local tales and local opinion about environmental governance. Smaller lakes, like Kaupens and Raunaisis, were also investigated.

Historical forms of lake and environmental governance, culture and beliefs were studied by means of an analysis of the historical literature and of school and museum archives in Vecpiebalga, with historical architecture studies near lakes mentioned in 'Grandfather Stories' such as Lake Raunaisis and Juveris (Slaidins et al. 2020). The public lakes in Vecpiebalga were chosen for investigation, as they are the largest in Piebalga region and had been studied as part of another research project on lake governance (Konkova 2020; Konkova and Ernsteina 2020).

Within the research framework, information on local governments' activities and budgets and on companies in the region was also sought, as it was important to know how many resources the municipality was devoting to religion, culture and environmental governance. Regional planning documents and legislation, as well as existing businesses in the region, were also examined in order to investigate the overall goal of managing the historical district (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021).

## Sources of information

The sources of information used in this study include various historical accounts, folk tales and archive materials gathered for more than 150 years (the 1870s to 2020) by local historians and scholars. These materials are available on the internet but in most cases need to be translated into English (Kaudzite 1926; Latvian folklore repository 2020; Latvian stories and tales 2013; Dzerbene museum archive 2014). Information about Piebalga in English is somewhat limited and is mostly intended to inform tourists about places of interest rather than local cultural customs or beliefs (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv

2021). The information available to tourists covers sights, accommodation and restaurants, as well as brief descriptions of local cultural events and natural sites, but this information is minimal and not suitable for a detailed study of the cultural and natural environments of the Piebalga region. Therefore, for this study, sources of information consisted of archives, books and folklore repositories, where information about the Piebalga region is much broader and more diverse than that available to tourists.

Examples of such materials include folk songs, biographies and memoirs of Piebalga's inhabitants, historical archives and various novels, such as *Surveyors' times*, written by Matiss and Reinis Kaudzites (Brothers Kaudzite 1879). This novel depicted the times when the peasants were given private land for themselves and how the various characters went about claiming it, as well as various other events. The book portrayed the turbulent times of the late nineteenth century in Vidzeme very well and provides significant insights into rural 'life in Latvia more than a hundred years ago' (Brothers Kaudzite 1879). In many cases, though, the depictions of characters and events in the book are somewhat exaggerated. This was the first novel to be written in Latvian by Latvian authors, rather than in German or Russian. Matis Kaudzite, the younger of the two brothers, also wrote several books about historical Latvian municipalities, including Vecpiebalga, where the brothers were born. This particular book contains detailed descriptions of local villages, lakes and other points of interest, many of which can no longer be found on modern maps. It also contained a large amount of data on local folklore, including stories about the creation of Lakes Zobols and Tauns, among others (Kaudzite 1926). The book is not available in English, and examples of it are rare and hard to find in paper form. However, this book is available in digital format, and it can also be viewed at the National Library of Latvia.

Folk tales in Piebalga are harder to find and are usually about the region's lakes, hills, and other areas. However, there are also a significant number of ghost stories about local manors, churches and cemeteries. Some stories were about landlords during the nineteenth century, while others are about animals that were commonly found in the region, such as foxes, wolves and bears.

A large amount of information is available on the website of the Dzerbenes school museum, including various memoirs and historical texts written by people who lived in the parish during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Such texts include the autobiographical story collection 'Vecteva

stasti' ('Grandfathers stories'), in which the author wrote in detail about how the parish was managed during the nineteenth century and after, as well as various folk tales and urban myths of Dzerbene (Dzerbene museum archive 2014). The stories were published in 2020 in the book *Stories of Dzerbene's Grandfather*, which contains many more stories than those available in the Dzerbene school archives (Dzerbene Museum archive 2014; Slaidins et al. 2020). The book contains both autobiographical accounts of the text's author, those of his grandfather, and various stories and descriptions of Dzerbene's inhabitants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book is just as much an autobiography of Janis Slaidins, but it also narrates his grandfather's stories, some of which provided deep insights into life in the county during this period and into the changes that occurred over generations. The book also contained ghost stories and lessons in hunting and fishing, as well as stories that have been passed around Vecpiebalga by oral tradition from the nineteenth century till today (Slaidins et al. 2020). The book was written and published with the support of the Latvian Cultural Fund but was written and illustrated by local artists (ibid.). It has already won considerable popularity, especially in the Vidzeme region (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021). Various authors, including Reinis Kaudzite, wrote research papers and books about the Hernhutian congregations, including their culture and activities in the Piebalga region (Kaudzite 1926; Kaudzite 1877; Krūmiņa-Koņkova S. 1995).

### **Research results: Local culture, religion and customs in Piebalga during the nineteenth century**

The Piebalga region can be shown to have had interesting qualities regarding culture and environmental governance in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The region had a much greater level of literacy than most parts of Latvia (or the Russian Empire) as a result of the influence of the Hernhutian preachers active in Vidzeme at that time. Piebalga's inhabitants developed a journal culture, thanks to which they recorded important daily events, as well as their thoughts about religious or other situations. These journals were passed on to their children so that the next generations could learn about the experiences of their predecessors. This also allowed information regarding socio-political matters, including the governance of natural objects such as lakes, to be better preserved than in other regions (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Country Traveler 2021).

The local peasants formed a very knowledgeable and intelligent population who were active in writing down their experiences and knowledge for future generations. This also resulted in the local community being very knowledgeable about nature and very protective of their lakes, rivers and forests, since their ancestors had written large numbers of detailed accounts about the region and the lifestyle of the people during those times. Thus, under the influence of the Herrnhut congregations, the nature and landscape of the region were considered a gift from God because of its beauty (Slaidins et al. 2020). These accounts gave something for the current generations to compare to today, causing people to see that now everything regarding nature is worse than in the past, namely the rarity of animals and mushrooms, and fewer and weaker streams, not to mention the fact that there used to be many more villages than there are now (Slaidins et al. 2020.; Kaudzite 1926).

Stories about hunting or fishing are popular in Piebalga, many of them being of educational value. They were meant to teach young people how to hunt badgers or grouse properly, while fishing stories and local customs taught people to be respectful of the lakes and other fishermen. One old but no longer widely practiced custom was to give fish to anglers who did not catch anything out of kindness, not mocking them for failure, and thus showing respect for fellow fishermen and the lakes as well. As a quote from Stories of Dzerbene's Grandfather shows: 'If you are neither a thief nor an envier, you will be a friend of Raunaisis all your life, and there will be no shortage of fish' (Slaidins et al. 2020: 19).

Religion also played a fundamental role in the community. The local churches served as one of the most prominent meeting points for the inhabitants, the town halls being further from the settlements than the churches. As the Herrnhutian congregations had all their members read sermons, the region's inhabitants were very knowledgeable about theology and religion, which shaped the view that God was with all of them, regardless of their circumstances, and their faith in God and helping their community was more important than social status or wealth (Krumina-Konkova 1995; Kaudzite 1877; Straube 2021). This also resulted in the local inhabitants being very religious and more respectful towards nature during the nineteenth century due to their being grateful to God for giving them such a beautiful land to live in. I quote another entry from Stories of Dzerbene's Grandfather: 'God is our Lord, and may His glory be in heaven, but for the Latvian, the highest is the earth – the homeland, the

native land, his corner, his patch of ground, who created, nursed, baptized and sanctified the great life' (Slaidins et al. 2020: 5). The Herrnhutians were the dominant influence in Piebalga for several centuries, but gradually their membership dwindled as a result of increased urbanization, the reduction in social and economic differences between native Latvian peasants and Germanic nobles because of the abolition of serfdom and Latvian peasants becoming landlords themselves due to buying out former manor lands, and the reduction in religious freedom during the Soviet period. Indeed, the Herrnhutians were prosecuted by the Soviet authorities, like all other religious organizations (Straube 2021; Krumina-Konkova 1995; Kaudzite 1877). The Herrnhutian congregations in Piebalga were effectively absorbed by the local Lutheran church, which during the nineteenth century already had a dominant presence in Piebalga (Kaudzite 1877; Krumina-Konkova 1995; Straube 2021). However, the Herrnhutian congregations in Piebalga ensured that the local inhabitants were more educated than in other regions. Thus, they ran schools for the peasants, as the first municipality-sponsored schools only appeared during the 1900s (Kaudzite 1877; Kaudzite 1926; Krumina-Konkova 1995; Straube 2021).

Besides the Herrnhutian congregations, as just noted, in the Piebalga region the Lutheran church was the other and primary influence in religious matters (Kaudzite 1877; Kaudzite 1926). Most churches in Piebalga region are Lutheran, though there are a few Catholic churches in the area as well. Historically, German and later Latvian Lutheran pastors were very heavily involved in local cultural life, with many seasonal events being conducted near parish churches, which also served as a gathering point for various events in the parishes (Kaudzite 1926. 1877). Many pastors were also involved in environmental matters, as many of them, like the local population generally, were hunters and fishermen. As such, they often protested against the use of harmful or unethical methods of hunting in these areas, such as using poisoned bait to catch crayfish. However, that did not stop people doing that, and some believe that it is such methods that have caused crayfish to die out in Lake Raunais (Slaidins et al. 2020). Pastors often tried to teach local peasants not to do so, as well as instructing them in other things regarding nature preservation that they may have learned before they were assigned to congregations, but this was not always successful (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926. 1877).

The locals were also quite selective about whom they considered members of their community: people who come to live in the municipality from other

regions are considered partial members due to their not being born in one of the region's parishes. Those who immigrated to Piebalga are considered to be a select group, not locals but still accepted as valued members of the community. The local inhabitants were historically more open to accepting people who took a more active role in the local community, such as doctors, and this trend continues today. However, during the nineteenth century Piebalga inhabitants were, like everywhere else in Latvia, often at the mercy of the German nobles. While most were respected among the locals, others, such as the Landrat Hagemester, who was infamous for his cruelty, are still objects of various ghost stories (Slaidins et al. 2020: 72). However, pastors were also subject to various stories, for example, stories about their various eccentricities, such as their manner of speech. As many of them were German, there were difficulties in understanding them due to their accents (Slaidins et al. 2020). Despite such quirks, during the nineteenth century the inhabitants of Piebalga were noted for being very industrious and hard-working, very active in their region's cultural life and quick to adapt to various changes in their region, such as those brought about by changes in laws or the natural environment, such as disappearance of crayfish or poor harvests (Kaudzite 1877; Kaudzite 1926; Slaidins et al. 2020; Country Traveler 2013).

Regarding local folk tales and myths, the locals have stories about the creation of Alauksts, Inesis, Zobols and Tauns – a pair of rainclouds from which Lakes Alauksts and Inesis formed after fighting each other over a quiet place to do so. It was Alauksts that won, causing Inesis to run away to another area, while Lakes Tauns and Zobols were formed from pieces of the raincloud from which Inesis was formed. One fell into a swamp (Tauns), while the other formed from a splash from the first piece (Zobols). Another folk tale, about Taurene parish, claimed that the parish had been named after modern cows' ancestors, the taur. Another says that the scenic area was created by the devil (traditional Latvian folk tales depict him as a less harmful and more mischievous equal of the mainstream Christian version): the area was covered in water, and the devil ate and spat out mud, every piece of which became a hill in the area (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020, Latvian Stories and Tales 2013). There are other stories regarding the origin of various other lakes, in addition to rivers, hills and swamps in the region, but not all of them are in Latvian; some of the older examples are in German (Latvian Stories and Tales 2013, Latvian Folklore Repository 2020).

Several folk tales are present in works such as *Stories of Dzerbene's Grandfather*, with many stories native to Dzerbene also being included in this work, including stories about the parish church, and many about local inhabitants. Such tales include a large number of stories about Dzerbene manor, which is considered to be haunted, with there being many stories regarding ghosts haunting it already in the nineteenth century (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926; *Latvian Stories and Tales* 2013, *Latvian Folklore Repository* 2020). Dzerbene church also has some ghost stories associated with it. Both sites have various stories, with Dzerbene church having at least two – that ghosts regularly visited the church during Christmas, and that duels are fought between some local nobles' ghosts in the church cemetery (Slaidins et al. 2020: 82). Dzerbene manor also had stories about ghostly carriages visiting the manor at night. There were also ghosts in the manor's tower, among various others (Slaidins, *Maldere Cavarts* 2020: 62). Tales about devils pranking local inhabitants or haunting some parts of the county are also familiar. There are tales about devils dancing near some ruins at moonlight nights in the late autumn in the northern area of Dzerbene (Slaidins et al. 2020; *Latvian Stories and Tales* 2013, *Latvian Folklore Repository* 2020; Kaudzite 1926).

Other parts of Piebalga, such as Vecpiebalga parish, also have stories about hauntings in old buildings, many of them being about the ruins of an old castle near Vecpiebalga church. These stories are about the ghosts of knights riding towards the castle from the church and other ghostly events (*Latvian Stories and Tales* 2013, *Latvian Folklore Repository* 2020). Several ghost stories and folk tales are in German, not Latvian. However, regardless of language, an unusual number are about churches, with some stories being intended to explain why some churches had been rebuilt several times over in a short amount of time. One of the reasons suggested by the stories was that the churches were sinking into the ground, caused by the fact that they had been built very close to rivers or in swampy land where the ground is not suited to buildings of stone. Other tales were about witches in Piebalga, a relatively uncommon topic in Piebalga folktales (*Latvian Stories and Tales* 2013, *Latvian Folklore Repository* 2020; Kaudzite 1926). The locals were not as superstitious as in the less educated regions, therefore, they did not believe in things like sorcery. Today, local beliefs and folklore have remained in good condition, thanks to the brothers Kaudzite, who described the local stories and beliefs of Piebalga in their books, as well

as the work of other local writers and researchers (Brothers Kaudzite 1879; Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Country Traveler 2013).

## **Lake and environmental governance in Piebalga during the nineteenth century**

The inhabitants of Piebalga have been engaged in lake and environmental management since the nineteenth century, when the landlords owned the land in the region. Farmers needed to be well-versed in forestry and hunting, as a peasant's life demanded such knowledge at the time. While feudal lords owned land, most of the work was done by the peasants, who were often given additional duties as, for example, forest rangers, hunting experts and others (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926). In the nineteenth century there was no understanding of environmental protection in that sense, as such functions were included in land management. However, there was an understanding that forests, lakes and rivers must be treated with caution and could not be polluted or overused because they would lose their productivity. People also knew that using poisons in fishing or hunting could also harm their users and could destroy fish and other animal populations. The term 'invasive species' was also known at the time, and attempts were made to limit their spread in the region (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926).

The lakes were managed by lake managers appointed by the nobility, responsible for the cleanliness of the lake shores, monitoring fish populations, and reporting algal blooms and other problems in the lakes under their control (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Country Traveler 2021). Lake managers also combatted illegal fishing. They were given the right to fish in the lakes all year round, both as a privilege and an obligation because it enabled them to check fish populations and species composition. Shore nets, poisoned traps and similar methods were banned by the nobles, but their use was difficult to restrict, as lake managers could not keep track of the entire lakeshore and identify who owned illegal gear. The use of poisoned traps was considered to be the cause of crayfish extinction in Lake Raunausis (Slaidins, et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926). The lake managers had to live near the lakes under their control, enabling the landlords to marry them to the women living in the area if they did not already live near the lakes (Slaidins et al. 2020: 9, 18; Kaudzite 1926). The position of steward could be hereditary, and they usually trained their sons in the responsibilities of the post, even if the position of steward

was not hereditary. The lake managers were chosen from those farmers who were more knowledgeable in lake matters, were skilled anglers and were well educated. This position required a good knowledge of mathematics languages and the ability to write regular reports for the landlords. In the nineteenth century, there was a primitive lake-monitoring system in which observations were made from lake surveys. The increased growth of aquatic plants, as well as blue-green algal blooms (which were noticeable), and their consequences were taken into account, but at the time the causes were not really known. Research on coastal areas was also carried out, as in the nineteenth century it was known that the pollution of lakes by agricultural wastewater was dangerous. Therefore it was not allowed to graze cattle near the lake shores, a rule that it was necessary to follow so that the lakes would not become polluted (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926).

During the nineteenth century, it was possible to rent lakes, but there were also various bans on fishing for certain fish or using specific fishing gear, depending on the season (Slaidins et al. 2020). In winter, for example, it was not allowed to fish using ordinary fishing poles or to catch pike and similar fish. The lakes could be rented only with the landlords' permission, and only to certain people: it was known who used poisoned fishing baits and who polluted the lakes, and such people were not allowed to rent the lakes, even if their alleged offences could not be properly proved (Slaidins et al. 2020).

The forests in the region were managed by forest rangers, who were appointed similarly to lake managers (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926). Forest rangers paid attention to the practice of local inhabitants felling trees without the permission of the landlords, as well as reporting storm damage. The forest rangers were also tasked with removing trees that obstructed roads, as well as combating poaching. There were several forest rangers in the county, each of whom knew was familiar with a particular area. They cooperated with the manor hunters in controlling wild animals (Kaudzite 1926; Slaidins, et al. 2020). The forest rangers also took part in searches if a local resident disappeared, as well as in making maps and planting trees. Already in the nineteenth century, tree plantations had been established on the lands of the landowners, and the forests were restored because wood was important for building and fuel (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Kalvite et al. 2017).

In the nineteenth century, agricultural land was managed by the farmers, who rented them from the landlords (Kaudzite 1926). However, the manors

also had their land managers, who were responsible for the agricultural lands that were placed under the direct management of the manor. Care was taken to ensure that the fertility of the land was not compromised on the lands directly owned by the manors and that the farmers cultivating it left the land fallow and sowed clover regularly to restore soil fertility. Farmers acted similarly on their properties: they did the same in the same year of the year in the same field, as well as periodically sowing clover and peas to restore the amount of nitrogen in the soil (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Kalvite et al. 2017).

The land in the region in the nineteenth century was managed by local landlords, who were interested in ensuring that the land they owned earned them enough profits to maintain their manors and their way of life. Consequently, the farmers were subject to strict control, and the landlords could send them to live where they wanted if that meant that the farmer lived close to his job. However, the landlords had specific responsibilities to the farmers: they had to ensure that they had a livelihood and access to a doctor, and they were not to be separated from their families. Farms left without owners were given to landless farmers or those whose duties required them to live in those areas, as well as to assist in the event of an accident. The land parcels were carefully measured so that the land was distributed to the farmers as equally as possible, and to ensure that the existing land was sufficient for the needs of the manor and was large enough to maintain it (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Brothers Kaudzite 1879).

Foresters and hunting managers were responsible for keeping records of wild animals. However, this was usually done during or before the hunt to determine the number of animals. The populations of bears, wolves and lynxes were carefully monitored, as these animals posed a threat to livestock, as well as the local population (Kaudzite 1926; Slaidins et al. 2020). The landlords offered significant prizes for hunting them, including substantial cash prizes, and freed the hunters from working on the manor for up to a week (Slaidins, et al. 2020: 50-1). Black grouse, ducks and wild pigeons were hunted seasonally, and there were restrictions on their hunting, as it was forbidden to hunt these birds while they were hatching. There were no restrictions on fox-hunting, nor on hunting hares (Kaudzite 1926; Slaidins et al. 2020). Raccoons were considered an invasive species as early as the end of the nineteenth century (Slaidins, et al. 2020) and were regularly hunted because they threatened native animals and livestock. Badgers were also hunted, but in special hunting groups in the

presence of the landlord or his appointed manor employees (Slaidins, et al. 2020). Traps were rarely used, only specially trained hunting dogs (Slaidins et al. 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Brothers Kaudzite 1879).

## **Lake and environmental management in Vecpiebalga at the present time**

Nowadays, lake management is entrusted to specialists selected by the municipalities, their work being done according to a certain methodology and following a special lake-management plan, the Vecpiebalga Municipality management regime for public lakes, and the municipal sustainable development plans, which also have sections regarding the management of lakes and other natural objects in the municipality. Lakes can still be rented, but this is usually done by NGOs, who then manage the lakes under Latvian civil law. The lakes can be rented out temporarily, but this can be done repeatedly. Today, special analyses and questionnaires are used for lake management, but for most municipalities, lake management is carried out by either their environmental or financial departments. For all municipalities in the Piebalga region, lake management is included in the responsibilities of the municipal financial divisions. Vecpiebalga has a public-lake management regime, as well as a monitoring program for Lake Alaukstis (Lakes of Latvia 2015; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020) However, most lakes in both municipalities are not subject to these controls, either because they are private lakes or because they are too difficult to access due to a lack of roads (Lakes of Latvia 2015; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020).

Agricultural land management, support and advice is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Rural Support Service. Each municipality has agricultural experts, and farmers have access to a wide range of support on various issues. Farmers nowadays also need special education, but some knowledge is also acquired through self-study. Today, the Piebalga region is dominated by organic farming, as the climate and soil of most of the region are not suitable for intensive agriculture (Kaudzite 1926; Celotajs.lv 2012; Country Traveler 2013). Several farms are engaged in sheep-, deer- and berry-farming, which were not pursued in the region in the past (Ceļotājs.lv 2012; Slaidins et al. 2020; Country Traveler 2013; Kaudzite 1926).

The forest administration has changed relatively little, but now the forest guards work under the control of the Latvian State Forests management. Municipalities usually own only part of the forests in their territories. Forest

rangers are also responsible for the disposal of illegal waste sites, a problem in Latvia (Kalvite et al. 2017). In the nineteenth century, there were no such problems with dumping waste in forests: such actions were severely punished, as the forests belonged to the landlords. During the nineteenth century, there were fewer things that people could throw away: for example, glass bottles were valuable since glass was expensive, and they could be used again (Slaidins et al. 2020; Brothers Kaudzite 1879; Kaudzite 1926). Now, it is not uncommon for camping sites and areas near swimming sites to be littered (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Kalvite et al. 2017).

Hunting at the present time in Piebalga is pursued solely by hunting associations and strictly according to the national laws. Landowners have to make agreements with the hunting associations if they want to protect their properties from wildlife. Hunting is usually done on established sites, and the hunting associations also regularly maintain special feeding sites for deer, elk and other animals (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Kalvite et al. 2017).

Nowadays in Piebalga, like elsewhere in Latvia, there are strict laws related to land use: the afforestation of agricultural land is prohibited. Landowners must follow the counties' spatial plans (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Kalvite et al. 2017, Latvian Civil Law). Land properties are inspected periodically, but land acquisition is much easier than it was in the nineteenth century. The redistribution of plots of land is still practiced, especially if the properties are very much divided and have been left without owners (Latvian Civil Law).

## **Culture in Piebalga region at the present**

The inhabitants of the Piebalga region are highly active in cultural matters, – the inhabitants in both of Piebalgas municipalities are very active in cultural matters, with song and dance associations and culture clubs being very common in both Vecpiebalga and Jaunpiebalga municipalities, with cultural events and town fairs being a regular occurrence, regardless of everything else (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Kaudzite 1926). Schools in Vecpiebalga all are involved in cultural activities, as all of them have courses and interest groups in music and dancing. Vecpiebalga is also one of the few municipalities in the Cesis County that has to have a dedicated music school (Vecpiebalga.lv 2021). The inhabitants of the Piebalga region are also very industrious. Many inhabitants of them are actively trying to start businesses, to support their families and in order to maintain their properties. The recent

events regarding the COVID-19 pandemic have actually motivated people to take up handicrafts such as weaving, with while others people have started culinary companies and similar businesses. This has also been also a boon for farmers in the region, as they have found new buyers for their products. (Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Celotajs.lv 2021; Country Traveler 2013). Piebalga inhabitants are also quite protective of the environment and scenery of the region, as they still consider the Piebalga scenery to be part of their cultural heritage, and take a more active in matters regarding the development of infrastructure near lakes, and involve in public discussions regarding municipal planning documents (Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020). Furthermore, as a result of their ancestors journal writhing and the preservation of their folktales and stories, Piebalga residents are more protective of the environment than they were before, as a result of the opinion of that at the present, the scenery and environment of the region is worse than what is centuries ago (Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Celotajs.lv 2021; Slaidins et al. 2020).

Piebalga inhabitants however no longer are influenced by the Hernhutian congregations – the congregations no longer truly exist, and their influence has largely faded from the region. Religion no longer plays the same role it once had in the community during the 19th century, but the local congregations continue to support the churches, and the churches often involve in local culture events (Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Celotajs.lv 2021; Country Traveler 2013).

In comparison to the culture in the region centuries ago, there have been only slight changes. The importance of religion in people's lives has diminished, and the region has been influenced by the years of Soviet occupation, just as it has been influenced by immigration to it form cities. However, the inhabitants have managed to preserve their cultural identity, and have managed to cause a wider appreciation of the traditional Piebalga culture, as a result of frequent cultural events, interest groups and efforts of local residents (Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Slaidins et al. 2020). The inhabitants have remained just as industrious and adaptive as they were long ago, and thanks to these qualities and their effort to preserve their identity and heritage, has enabled them to preserve their traditional culture far better than any other cultural

regions in Latvia had in comparison (Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Kaudzite 1926; Celotajs.lv 2021; Country Traveler 2013; Slaidins et al. 2020).

## Conclusions

It can therefore be concluded that Piebalga's inhabitants have managed to preserve their unique culture and mentality, though religion, especially in the shape of the Hernhutian brotherhoods, has largely lost its influence in the region. The region's inhabitants, despite difficulties in doing so, have preserved much of its historical heritage, and while the Hernhutian brotherhoods no longer truly exist, and although religion has a much lower significance than during the nineteenth century, its historical influence has been somewhat preserved, as Piebalga's inhabitants are still very much the same industrious, spirited and creative people that they were centuries ago. The region has changed in many ways, including with regard to the size of the wilderness areas, but the soul of the region and its identity has survived.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>. Regarding culture and religion

Piebalga's region's culture has survived largely relatively intact over the years from the nineteenth century. However, most of the influences of the Hernhutian brotherhoods have faded, as the brotherhoods themselves have all but disappeared. Culture and religion continue to play an important role in both Vecpiebalga and Jaunpiebalga municipalities, with cultural and folklore interest groups being common, but the region has lost much of the influence of religion on its culture and on the lifestyle of its inhabitants. Moreover, Piebalga's inhabitants have managed to maintain most of their historical architecture, and the region has retained its distinctive culture, being the effective birthplace of Latvian literature (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Country Traveler 2013; IS Mantojums 2020)

<sup>2</sup>. Regarding lake governance

Lake governance methods have greatly improved, but their actual effectiveness has greatly declined, due to a lack of resources and manpower to conduct lake management. The older, simpler practices used during the nineteenth century were less accurate but much cheaper, did not need specialists, and had other benefits, such as providing a source of income and allowing the use of otherwise abandoned buildings near lakes. The municipalities of Piebalga should adopt a more modern version of these management practices and monitoring approaches in order to provide at least some management

and monitoring of the lakes in their area. None of the municipalities in Latvia have the resources to manage all the lakes under their jurisdiction, only a few lakes, and rural municipalities struggle even with managing just their largest lakes, those in Piebalga municipalities being no exception. Vecpiebalga in particular can only support management and monitoring for Lake Alauksts, while other lakes are under-supported (Lakes of Latvia 2015; Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Konkovs 2020; Konkovs and Ernsteins 2020).

<sup>3</sup>. Comparison of Piebalga between the nineteenth century and the present day

Taking into consideration the effectiveness of the methods used during the nineteenth century in governing natural objects, present-day municipal governments should attempt to apply a more modern version of them in managing various natural sites such as lakes. Culture has lost most of the influence of religion it once had, and the influence of the Hernhutan brotherhoods has almost completely vanished, as have the brotherhoods themselves. The Piebalga region also has preserved most of the old manors and their support structures, but it has significant issues in repairing and supporting the old manor complexes due to its limited resources (Vecpiebalga.lv 2020; Jaunpiebalga.lv 2021).

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