

## BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF MAPPING KAZDANGA

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### Abstract

In this article, the authors examine the digital mapping of cultural heritage and place identity in Kazdanga, Latvia, employing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates historical, ethnographic, and digital humanities methodologies. Through field research, archival analysis, and community engagement, the research has been aimed at exploring the interaction of spatial, temporal, and social dimensions in shaping local identity. Using the *Palladio* tool for data structuring and visualisation, the authors critically assess the methodological challenges of representing heterogeneous and intangible cultural heritage data in digital formats. The findings highlight the significance of both material and immaterial heritage in constructing place identity, emphasizing the relationship between historical continuity and socio-cultural transformation. The research challenges the limitations of existing metadata standards in capturing the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of local heritage. By demonstrating the potential of digital visualisation for cultural heritage research, the authors advocate for participatory and reflexive approaches that integrate community perspectives into digital heritage initiatives, encouraging sustainable engagement with local history and identity.

**Keywords:** *Kazdanga, cultural heritage, place identity, data visualization, digital humanities.*

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## Introduction

Kazdanga is a small village in Latvia, in the Dienvidkurzeme (South Courland) region, which historically developed as the residence of the wealthy and politically influential Baltic German von Manteuffel family. The Kazdanga Manor complex (Katzdangen), which once belonged to the von Manteuffel family, has a unique value [Leja 1999: 10]. It was built in the classicist style at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the famous Western European architect Johann Georg Adam Berlitz [Šlipenbahs 2023: 125]. The manor complex and grand palace, built in the classicist style, has a cultural and historical significance not only for Kurzeme (Courland), but also for all of Latvia and the Baltic region. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the painters Vilhelms Purvītis and Johann Walter visited the von Manteuffel family in Kazdanga several times [Leja 1999: 9, 24]. Many of V. Purvītis' landscapes were created in Kazdanga or inspired by this picturesque environment. In recent years, the number of visitors to Kazdanga has increased, including those in search of the creative legacy of Vilhelms Purvītis. Not far from Kazdanga, on the bank of the Alokste River, lies the archaeologically and historically significant Valāta (also Kazdanga) Hillfort, a fortified settlement of the Curonians [Brašiņš 1923: 85–86]. A park was established around the Kazdanga manor in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a landscape park. Currently, the Kazdanga Manor Park is one of the largest and dendrologically richest manor parks in Latvia in terms of area (196 ha). It contains 47 different tree taxa and 7 specially protected species [Dabas aizsardzības pārvalde 2023]. The park has two circular crosses – a scarce type of grave monument in Latvia. Kazdanga was first in all of Tsarist Russia, where pond farming began around 1870, which is why there are many ponds in the Kazdanga Manor Park territory [Leja 1999: 290]. The park features marked walking trails, bike paths, well-maintained recreation areas, a labyrinth, a 190-metre-long jetty with a bird-watching tower over Dzirnezers lake, and swimming areas. Until 2009, the name of Kazdanga was closely associated with agricultural education. In 1923, the State Kazdanga Two-Year Agricultural and Fish Farming School was opened, but as soon as 1930, a secondary agricultural educational institution was founded, becoming the first agricultural high school in Kurzeme [Leja 1999: 5, 78, 83–84]. Since then, it has also been known by such names as the State Kazdanga Agricultural Technical School, the Kazdanga Sovkhoz Technical School of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Latvian SSR, and the Kazdanga Vocational Secondary School. The heritage of various cultural layers has been preserved in Kazdanga. On the one hand, it has been influenced by the von Manteuffel barons, who established a manor complex and its park and ponds. On the other hand, the Soviet period also had a significant impact, with the restoration of the Technical School and the development of sports activities and infrastructure. In

the consciousness of Kazdanga residents (*kazdandznieki*), not only historical places are important (besides the palace and manor parks, also Valāta Hillfort, Devil's Stone (*Velnakmens*), etc.), but also newly created places (*Kazbārs* (a bar), *Pīlādžu aleja* (Rowan alley), and others). Moreover, traditions preserved over generations, for example, dishes characteristic of Kurzeme (sour porridge, *sklandrauši* – small, round rye-crust pies filled with a layered mixture of mashed potatoes and carrots), folk medicine practices, sauna rituals, fishing in fishponds, various festivals and events (Summer Solstice, Park Festival, swimming competitions, etc.) form the place identity of the Kazdanga residents. In their consciousness, specific territories and traditions cultivated over the years have become values that bring them joy and pride.

Due to the fact that Kazdanga parish was included in the Dienvidkurzeme region, which was established on 1 July 2021, implementing the administrative-territorial reform, as a result of which eight previously existing regions – Grobiņa, Aizpute, Rucava, Pāvilosta, Durbe, Nīca, Priekule and Vaiņode [Dienvidkurzemes novada pašvaldība 2023] – merged, Kazdanga has partially lost the status of a historically significant centre. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kazdanga was one of the centres of Kurzeme, and the population of Kazdanga parish has currently decreased to 1142 residents. For comparison, in 1999, the population reached 2002 [Latvijas Republikas Ministru kabinets 1999]. However, in general, the residents of Kazdanga strive to cherish their heritage.

The objective of this article is to critically examine the process of mapping Kazdanga's cultural heritage and place identity through the use of digital tools, particularly the Palladio platform. The research aims to explore how both tangible and intangible cultural elements can be systematically documented, structured, and visualised to reflect the complexity of place identity. To achieve this, the researchers undertook several interconnected tasks: conducting fieldwork and interviews with Kazdanga residents to gather oral histories; analysing historical and literary sources to extract relevant cultural data; structuring these data into metadata across spatial, temporal, and social dimensions; and applying visualisation techniques to uncover hidden patterns and connections. This multifaceted approach is guided by key research questions: How can diverse cultural data be translated into structured digital formats? What challenges arise in the representation of narrative and symbolic heritage through digital tools? In what ways does place identity emerge from the intersection of people, places, and histories in Kazdanga? And how can digital visualisation serve not only as an analytical method but also as a form of engagement with local communities? By addressing these questions, the article contributes to broader discussions in cultural heritage studies and digital humanities about the potential and limitations of representing regional identity through structured data and visual media.

## Approach to the research object

In the summer of 2023 and 2024, representatives of the working group of the project “Kazdanga – from place stories to community identity networking and cultural heritage digitisation”, supported by the research project competition “Development of Scientific Activities at the Latvian Academy of Culture” of the Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies of the Latvian Academy of Culture, conducted field research in Kazdanga, and also organized a seminar for Kazdanga residents. Initially, the focus of the research project was on the study of intangible or living cultural heritage in Kazdanga; however, as the work continued, attention was also paid to tangible cultural heritage, as well as community identity and place identity.

During both projects, several sources on the history and culture of Kazdanga were analysed in parallel with the fieldwork, and as a result of their processing, a list of events and descriptions of Kazdanga was created. In this project, they were supplemented with new literary sources and annotated according to cultural, institutional, and symbolic dimensions, adapted to the theory of place identity. The processed data set was visualized using the Palladio tool, which is designed for the visualisation and exploration of structured and described data in historical and cultural studies. To create a comprehensive digital data set that reflects the identity of Kazdanga, the project plans to develop a “Kazdanga Identity Map” and prepare it for use by local residents.

## Living or intangible cultural heritage

Since the group of people under study has been defined as a living cultural heritage community in Kazdanga, it is worth noting some key aspects regarding the concept of intangible or living cultural heritage.

On 1 December 2016, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law adopted by the *Saeima* entered into force. It defines intangible cultural heritage as “a part of the cultural heritage of Latvia, which represents the cultural traditions of Latvia and consists of the knowledge, skills, values and behaviour models passed down from generation to generation, defined by the surrounding environment and developed by interaction with history, nature and creativity, including oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge concerning nature and the universe, traditional craftsmanship, as well as instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith” [LR Saeima 2016].

Unlike the UNESCO Convention [UNESCO 2003], the law emphasizes the connection of intangible cultural heritage with the cultural and historical heritage of Latvia, and the definition of the Latvian law excludes UNESCO’s substantive emphasis on the fact that communities and groups constantly create heritage anew,

thus creating a rather static time-space framework for the formation of intangible cultural heritage in the law, which is focused on the past [Muktupāvela, Laķe 2022: 65].

The law, unlike the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, also defines the concept of community, which means “a group of persons (for the purpose of this Law in some cases also private persons) characterized by a shared sense of identity and united by intangible cultural heritage and shared interest in its safeguarding and transmission to future generations” [LR Saeima 2016].

### **Concepts of identity**

Identity, including that of a place, is greatly influenced by both material and intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, the meaning of the location and identity ideas provided in the article should also be explained in order to more fully represent the methodologies used to map Kazdanga’s identity and cultural heritage.

British geographer Doreen Massey believes that place is more related to an individual sense of belonging, while space is associated with the processes and relationships of a larger community – culture or society [Massey 1994: 146–155]. The concept of place will be used to understand the space inhabited and practiced by a person. Place is a process created by human interaction in space – moving, imagining, traveling, etc. [Massey 1994: 149, 185–189].

The concept of identity refers to an active, conscious process in which meanings are constructed based on individual or collective experience and interaction [Castells 2000: 6–7], thus confirming that identity is symbolic and conditional. The concept of identity includes two criteria for comparison: similarity, common belonging, and difference, which are the dynamic principles of identification [Jenkins 2008: 17]. Individuals can unite in broader groups based on shared values, beliefs, experiences, and interactions while also being aware of their differences (social status, gender, etc.). British archaeologist Christopher Tilley notes that a significant part of the construction of personal and social identity is non-verbal, but material objects, things, and places are also active agents of identity, rather than imperceptible reflections of already existing ideas and socio-political relationships [Tilley 2006: 17–18]. Over time, social identity, as that of the physical space that it pertains to, evolves as new buildings are constructed, landscapes change, technologies advance and historical events shape collective memory. These transformations are generally gradual, allowing place identity – similar to personal identity – to retain both continuity and permanence despite ongoing change.

Place identity is a concept that refers to the individual, community, and sense of belonging (ties) to a specific place, or cultural space [Peng, Strijker, Wu 2020: 2–4]. People have an emotional, psychological, and cultural connection to the place they live in or are closely associated with. Such a concept is implied in the term

“place identity”. Place identity researchers Jianchao Peng, Dirk Strijker, and Qun Wu distinguish two identity characteristics –

- place identity of a place, which is related to how a specific place is identified and distinguished in the context of other places;
- place identity of people, which refers to the residents of a specific place, and their subjective understanding of this place [Peng, Strijker, Wu 2020: 2–4].

The study of place identity is inherently interdisciplinary, involving fields such as geography, psychology, humanities, and social sciences. As a result, the theoretical framework surrounding place identity is highly multifaceted (as discussed by Peng). There is no single methodological approach for analysing place identity, nor a definitive set of criteria for selecting key aspects of the study. However, a common thread in place identity research is the interplay between subjective perceptions and objective classifications, and what seems to be consistent among all literature on place identity, is that identity is inherently spatial – any concept or idea is imagined within a physical space. Place identity changes over time, undergoing transformations in both meaning and symbolism and these changes do not occur autonomously – they are driven by social catalysts, including local inhabitants and other stakeholders.

The interconnection of spatial, temporal and social dimensions is a common thread in place identity, as well as cultural heritage theoretical framework. Cultural heritage values refer to the aesthetic, historical, research, social, spiritual, or other characteristics that current or future generations attribute to a particular place, object, or practice [ICOMOS 2002: 21], while place identity is a concept that applies to the inherent identity of a particular place and its culture and history. It is based on the idea that a particular place can be different from others and that its inhabitants have a special connection to this place, its history and culture. Understanding the identity of Kazdanga can allow for the purposeful promotion and preservation of living heritage, help in the development of place branding, and strengthen the community.

### **Developing a multidimensional approach to mapping Kazdanga**

As stated previously, the initial project aimed to document and analyse Kazdanga’s living heritage through fieldwork and interviews. To prepare, the research team reviewed Kazdanga’s historical and cultural identity by selecting and annotating four literary sources [Leja 1999; Birzniece 2006; Mežsēta et al. 2008/2013; Šlipenbahs 2023] for relevant facts, descriptions, and events. This process balanced oral histories – which capture residents’ subjective perceptions – with structured literary accounts, thereby establishing a framework for subsequent interviews. The literature review metadata table was also designed to establish a balanced dichotomy between the data sources: while the interviews captured residents’ personal sense of place, the literature reflects

the intrinsic “place identity” of Kazdanga. While the findings from the interviews have been disseminated at conferences and in publications, the metadata annotations informed a further development of structured metadata to be eventually visualized through digital methods. By breaking down the content of the selected books into smaller, structured data components, the researchers were able to visualize complex relationships using the *Palladio*, an interpretative tool for historical and cultural research, which would enable the creation of diverse visualisations including maps, networks, and timelines that reveal underlying relationships and trends, thereby uncovering non-obvious data connections.

To prepare the dataset for visualisation in *Palladio*, the research team performed a thorough literature analysis to prepare the information for visualisation in *Palladio*, which initially produced more than 670 metadata records that captured important Kazdanga-related events and descriptions. Following a content analysis of each record, keywords were used to identify pertinent themes, including places, persons, eras, and general subjects. Following that, these keywords were categorized into organized groups that were appropriate for cultural heritage studies and compatible with *Palladio's* data visualisation features. In order to facilitate timeline visualisations, a temporal dimension was created by recording the referenced time of each occurrence, either an exact year or an approximation timeframe. Using a location dataset for *Palladio's* mapping functionality, referenced locations were linked to exact geographic coordinates to map spatial linkages. Referenced persons, which identified people connected to historical events and linked them to a different dataset used for *Palladio's* gallery feature, further reflected the social component. Through interactive timelines, maps, and networks, this systematic approach made sure that the metadata could be used for digital visualisations in an efficient manner, exposing historical and cultural relationships.

The absence of widely accepted metadata standards designed especially for intangible or semi-structured cultural data is a recurring issue with this methodology. Existing frameworks offer foundational guidelines, yet they may not be fully adaptable to intangible cultural practices or the nuanced local knowledge embedded in personal narratives. While there have been attempts on creating relational models between cultural heritage and place identity [Kermani et al., 2016], tools like *Palladio* demand data formats and relational structures that are very specific [Stanford Humanities + Design]. For example, genealogical or network-based visualisation requires very strict linking fields such as relationships, and place references. Yet cultural heritage data-rich in nuance and often quite incomplete in locations or dates is quite resistant to compressing into the relationship formats that tools desire. Given these constraints, a bottom-up approach was adopted in this project, allowing the structure to emerge organically rather than being imposed rigidly. This approach was informed by

theoretical literature, textual sources on Kazdanga, interview analyses, and, crucially, the embodied experience of Kazdanga itself, shaped by researchers' insights gathered during two fieldwork trips.

The second phase of the project built upon the first by improving the geographical, temporal, and social components of the metadata framework and adding deeper insights from place identity theory. In order to represent the complex stories of Kazdanga's legacy, the place identity report needed mapping with exact geographic coordinates, linking to photographs for galleries, and interconnected data to reflect the layered narratives of Kazdanga's heritage. To achieve this, metadata categories were broadened to encompass natural landscapes, buildings, personal names, narratives, and occupations. The temporal dimension was enhanced by distinguishing between documented historical events – such as the abolition of serfdom and political revolutions – and symbolic or cultural transformations, including legends, folktales, and related figures like the White Lady. Spatial data was categorized not only by natural landscape features such as hills, lakes, and forests but also by human-made structures, institutional functions, and external references to places beyond Kazdanga, illustrating broader connections. Social metadata classification was similarly refined, identifying individuals by ethnic or national identity, social class, and occupation, while also recognizing how people actively shaped place functionality – transforming buildings into institutions through their roles and interactions. Additionally, institutions and cultural practices, from schools and folklore groups to festivals and communal gatherings, were systematically coded to capture Kazdanga's evolving identity. The complete structure of the metadata table can be observed in Table 1, where temporal dimension categories are coded pink, spatial dimension – in red, social dimension – in blue.

**Table 1.**

**Kazdanga identity map metadata schema.**

Literature Review		Referenced Places	Referenced People
Source ID		Place Name	Person Name
Data Entry – 1 event or description		GPS Coordinates	Lifespan
Mentioned Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Practices</li> <li>• Institutions</li> <li>• Myths and legends</li> </ul>	Description	Description
Mentioned Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Landscape</li> <li>• Artificial Structures</li> </ul>	Link to Image	Link to Image
Mentioned People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupation</li> <li>• Social Class</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> </ul>		

### **Interpretation of Kazdanga's identity through visualisation: A preliminary view**

This experiment showed how metadata-driven visualisation might reveal previously undiscovered facets of Kazdanga's culture. Digital visualisation and structured categorisation combined to uncover historical trends, social networks, and physical relationships that provided important new information about Kazdanga's changing identity.

The dataset was further refined when the metadata categories changed, with person and places descriptions added, coordinate data checked, and several data entries combined, as well as supplemented with another literary source [Hänbergs 1970]. Consequently, there are currently 587 coded metadata entries in the dataset. In attempt to balance qualitative observations with automated data aggregation, a structured yet interpretative preliminary portrayals of Kazdanga's cultural heritage and place identity can be modelled.

Out of the 587 metadata entries, 454 are coded with referenced places, highlighting the strong spatial dimension of Kazdanga's cultural identity. Notably, when subdividing natural and cultural landscape objects, the dataset revealed 109 references to natural objects and 208 references to man-made structures. This observation suggests that artificial structures play a more prominent role in textual sources than natural physical objects. However, it is important to note that certain features – such as the park and pond – are in fact human-made, though they do not fit neatly into the subdivision of natural landscape and artificial structures.

When observing spatial patterns of Kazdanga's identity after mapping locations referenced in textual sources through *Palladio Maps* revealed that Kazdanga Castle/ Technical School and its park were the most frequently mentioned sites, spanning both the Baronial era and later periods influenced by the technical school. The historical development of the manor reflects the broader socio-political dynamics of the Baronial era, during which landownership was closely tied to feudal privilege and service. Initially granted as a fief in 1392 by the Livonian Order to the Giseler and Wigandt families, the estate in 1533 came under the control of Karl Soie (documented between 1520 and 1537) [Mašnovskis 2019: 215]. His lineage later adopted the noble name von Manteuffel-Szoegge, and retained hereditary ownership of the estate for nearly four centuries – a period in the history of Kazdanga Manor commonly referred to as the Baronial Era. Among Karl Soies's descendants were Karl (d. 1578) and Johann (d. 1583), who successively inherited the property. The lineage concluded with Karl Wilhelm von Manteuffel (1872–1948), whose death marked the end of the Manteuffel family's long-standing noble lineage in the region. This indicates that as historical events and construction purposes evolved, their geographical position



Figure 2. *Palladio Maps* visualization of Kazdanga's places

stayed unchanged, so establishing a feeling of continuity in Kazdanga's cultural landscape. Upon completing the data structuring and refinement process, some differences emerged between the first and second phases of the project (see Figure 2). A significant alteration was the heightened visibility of Valāta Hillfort in the network visualisation, illustrating how additional annotations and broadened metadata categories offered a more accurate depiction of Kazdanga's geographical dimension.

The change in map visualisations can also be ascribed to the addition of another literary source, which offered additional references and new perspectives on the historical significance of the location. Additionally, during both field expeditions, locations were systematically documented, with coordinates recorded and images captured, forming the basis for a *Palladio Gallery* that can function as a visual catalogue of Kazdanga's places. See, for example, Figure 3, where referenced places are displayed with their respective titles, GPS coordinates, descriptions and images gathered during fieldwork. Upon clicking onto the entry a map displaying the geographical coordinates is generated, indicating the precise physical location of the site. However, it is important to note that data refinement primarily took place after the second expedition and many locations still require supplemental information regarding coordinates. Furthermore, even though Kazdanga is the primary focus of the information, it is important to recognize that some of the cited locations are outside of Kazdanga. These were also coded into the table in order to document broader regional and cultural connections of Kazdanga's identity in context with other places.

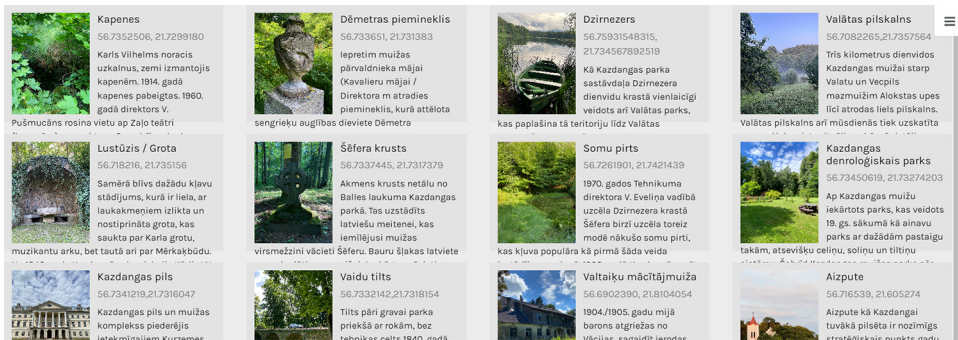


Figure 3. *Palladio* Gallery visualization of Kazdanga's places

Because it makes it easier to track historical continuities and changes within Kazdanga, the temporal dimension is essential to comprehending both cultural legacy and place identity. About 70% of the dataset's entries contain referenced time, and many of them give either exact dates or rough time ranges in cases where the exact years are unknown. While some events have only a single associated date, others span periods and were initially recorded with both a start and end date. To ensure compatibility with *Palladio*, such entries were extracted into a separate table and time coded into two columns ("from" and "to"), as *Palladio* does not support comma-separated values for precise date fields. By structuring the data in this way, the temporal dimension became more accessible for visualisation through *Palladio's* *Timeline* feature.

When events were organized chronologically, *Palladio's* *Timeline* visualisation highlighted several recurring themes, such as park development, sports events, and institutional activities, spanning the Baronial period, the interwar years, and the Soviet era, with World War II serving as a major turning point (see Figure 4). Key historical events included:

- Archaeological excavations at Valāta hillfort (1896, 1902, 1921, 1932).
- The establishment of sports facilities (1918–1940).
- Park landscaping and the foundation of an agricultural school (1930–1931).
- Technical school students' contributions to park maintenance (1944–1990).
- Volunteer activities by nature groups (1970–1980).
- The installation of tree plaques (1988–1989).

One intriguing observation was that both the earliest and latest records on the timeline related to trees – beginning with the park's establishment (1790–1820), followed by extensive tree planting (1890–1914), and culminating in the modern labelling of trees (1988–1989). This suggests that trees serve as a central and symbolic element of Kazdanga's evolving identity.

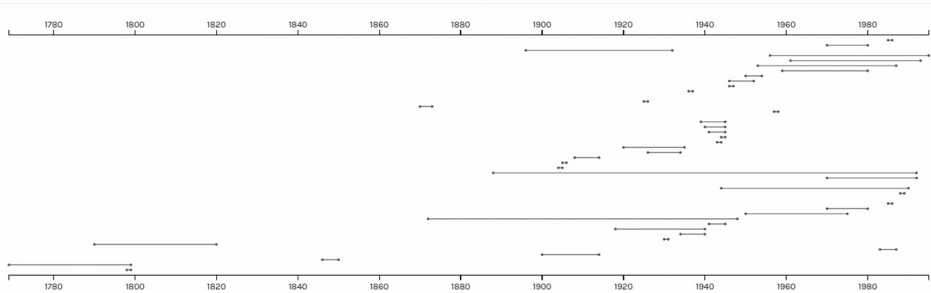


Figure 4. *Palladio Timespan* visualization of events in Kazdanga spanning several years

The importance of the social dimension in Kazdanga's historical narrative is demonstrated by the fact that 281 of the 587 dataset items make reference to particular people. Only 23 entries in this dataset specify nationality or ethnicity, but 188 entries referenced an occupation and 83 – social class. This distribution draws attention to a significant feature of the data: social hierarchies and occupational positions were more frequently recorded than national or ethnic identities. Given the small sample of the literary sources, which are subjective and interpretative in nature, this points more evidently to the fact that to the authors of stories Kazdanga's place identity may have been constructed more through professional and class-based associations than through overt cultural or ethnic markers.

Similar to the spatial visualisation of places, drawing from resources like Aizpute.lv, an interactive gallery visualisation that incorporates existing photographs and descriptions of Kazdanga's historical characters might be created, much like the geographical representation of locations. Furthermore, timespan visualisation is made possible by the years of birth and death of individuals, which may be in line with more general temporal trends in the dataset. A more detailed knowledge of how people's lifespans intersected with historical occurrences and institutional advancements in Kazdanga might be possible with this method.

However, differentiating between generations of the Manteuffel-Baron family, a lineage essential to Kazdanga's history, presents a significant structuring difficulty. The dataset includes multiple individuals with similar or identical names – such as Georgs Manteifeils, Kārlis Vilhelms Georgs, and Karls Gothards Ernsts – which complicates the efforts to differentiate them within network visualisations. While contextual clues can often help identify specific figures, the dynastic nature of this lineage presents a persistent issue in ensuring clear and accurate metadata visualisation.

Network analysis through *Palladio* revealed that Kazdanga's social structure can be visualized through clusters of interconnected individuals, representing micro-communities that played distinct roles in shaping the town's identity. For example,

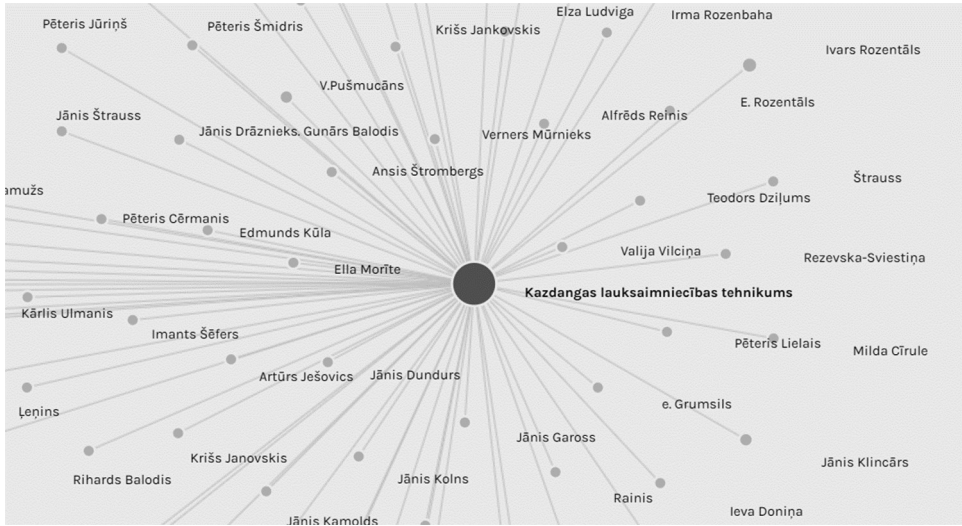


Figure 5. *Palladio* Network visualization fragment of referenced places and people

people related to Kazdanga Technical School through professional associations and educational institutions make up one network cluster (see Figure 5). By tracing the of those associated with the school and by providing additional information in Referenced People table might provide fresh insights into the school's historical relevance and its influence on local communities. Overall, the social dimension of the dataset provides a means to analyse historical relations anachronistically, allowing for a broader structural understanding of how individuals interacted across different periods.

### Benefits and challenges of mapping Kazdanga

Cultural heritage data often originates from diverse sources and formats, ranging from stories and personal testimonies, which tend to be inconsistent, include human error, compared to periodical and historical documents with strict dating and a strong factual basis. Working with digital data visualisation tools like *Palladio* and producing cohesive visual representations are made extremely difficult by this variability. Clear metadata development and standardisation criteria are necessary to achieve uniformity in such datasets, especially when data organisation and exploration are done using visual tools like *Palladio*. While *Palladio* provided useful insights into the relationships among people, places, and events, the sparsity of data required some adjustments. In particular, competing geographical names and a lack of historical data made it impossible to ensure historical accuracy. Although more than 70 sites have been located and charted, some are still unconfirmed because of changing names and insufficient historical records.

Similarly, the personal data tables require further refinement, potentially through community-led archival research. A more thorough picture of people's histories might be possible by adding more specific information to the dataset regarding the social dimension, such as dates of birth and death, localities, jobs, and ties to Kazdanga. The spatial dimension is also yet to be strengthened by re-examining areas with missing coordinates and linking more images from data gathered during fieldwork.

Visualisation is not an inherently neutral process. The decisions made during data representation – such as what to include, how to categorize data, and the choice of colours or design elements – can introduce unintended biases. These biases shape how audiences perceive cultural heritage, potentially leading to skewed interpretations [Windhager et al. 2019: 2311–2330]. Projects involving intangible and semi-structured cultural data are especially susceptible to these biases, as strict classification runs the danger of oversimplifying or distorting local knowledge. Working together with the community to improve the dataset in ways that guarantee its beneficial usage for regional stakeholders is crucial in light of these difficulties. However, the degree to which the visualisation may be tailored to these requirements is limited by the design constraints of tools like *Palladio*.

While metadata standards provide structured fields for data entry – such as creator, date, location, and subject – they often fail to accommodate the interpretive elements embedded in local festivals, rituals, and oral traditions. As a result, project researchers had to redefine or create new metadata categories, which holds a risk to result in inconsistent documentation standards and fragmented data. Additional difficulties arise from *Palladio*'s strict data structure, especially when working with ambiguous or partial records, which results in a large number of empty fields that do not cleanly fit into its framework. One example of this limitation is the representation of Kazdanga Park, a large territory that includes both general references to the park as a whole and specific mentions of particular sites within it, such as the Grota or Stirnleja, each with distinct coordinates. *Palladio*'s framework, which is based on discrete point-based data, struggles to accommodate such layered spatial identities. Though instead of being limited by rigid physical definitions, these diverse perceptions of place identity can still be investigated in a more flexible, interpretative way by utilizing the dataset's interconnectedness. In this case, the challenge is mitigated by using a general “park” tag – classified under the “artificial structure” dimension – which links broader narratives and events associated with Kazdanga Park to more specific, geolocated sites within it.

Questions of data consistency and reinterpretation are brought up by the diverse nature of the dataset, which has been enlarged and altered throughout time by various researchers. Because individuals from a variety of backgrounds have contributed varied methods for gathering and labelling data, the dataset has expanded naturally.

This is especially clear in the records of individuals mentioned, where differences in documentation techniques (e.g., using initials rather than full names) indicate limitations in the source material as well as human error. While such inconsistencies might initially seem like data loss, they also offer opportunities for reinterpretation, as gaps in the dataset can be refined through additional research, substantial data cleaning, and supplementing that with placeholders of “best guesses”; every interpretation during data cleaning, however, diminishes the capacity of the material for its representation.

This ongoing development of the dataset illustrates the dynamic and contentious manner in which history is documented and interpreted, symbolically reflecting the fluidity of heritage and identity itself. This is consistent with the larger ‘data vs. capta’ debate [Drucker, 2020], which challenges the notion that data is an objective reality and emphasizes that it is always a result of representation, interpretation, and selection. As a work in progress, the Kazdanga Cultural Map offers a chance to critically interact with this discussion, showing how cultural heritage initiatives need to strike a balance between the subjectivity of historical knowledge and the structural nature of data.

The long-term maintenance of digital cultural heritage visualisations is also an important issue. Preserving digital values, especially in a constantly changing technological environment, requires ongoing investment and the allocation of resources that cultural institutions do not always have at their disposal. Recognizing that work with multiple format spreadsheets and applying *Palladio*, as well as other digital humanities tools, requires technical expertise, there is a need to develop accessible and sustainable solutions for both academic and community use. Two potential approaches include:

1. Developing an organized, navigable database of maps and galleries that is enhanced with metadata and descriptions to serve as a ready-made browsing catalogue for residents.
2. Collaborative data entry, organisation, visualisation, and interpretation could be facilitated by setting up workshops with nearby schools, guaranteeing that the dataset stays dynamic and representative of community viewpoints. Many entries on people remain incomplete, and local knowledge – particularly from long-time residents – could provide valuable missing details.

Visualisation of cultural heritage data can mediate between complex, large amounts of data and human perception and understanding, while also functioning as an accelerator for new, creative ways of exploring research paths. Data visualisation has the potential to enable fresh interpretations and meaningful interactions between researchers and their research objects, revealing previously unseen

patterns and connections, as well as creating qualitative, binding engagement with the audience. This approach not only enhances comprehension but also prompts new interpretations, as evidenced in the Kazdanga cultural heritage mapping project, where visualisation led to new research directions and, at the same time, highlighted significant challenges.

## Conclusion

Through the integration of spatial, temporal, and social factors as they relate to a place identity, this study sought to document and depict Kazdanga's cultural history through structured metadata. The use of digital humanities tools, particularly *Palladio*, allowed for a novel approach to mapping and analysing historical and cultural data. The project offered several advantages by examining underlying relationships between various facets of place identification through the organizing of data from multiple textual sources. The dataset gave researchers a starting point for additional research into Kazdanga identity, allowing for a more complex comprehension of the connections between individuals, locations, and cultural narratives. For local stakeholders, such as business owners and institutional representatives, structured data can inform the strategic development of Kazdanga's identity and branding. Additionally, because the dataset might be utilized in partnership with the local government and schools to improve digital literacy and cultural involvement, the initiative offers the local people a chance to interact with digital technologies. Kazdanga's digital heritage effort can improve data integrity, conserve local knowledge, and encourage a sense of ownership among inhabitants by incorporating community engagement into the project's workflow. By doing this, the initiative adopts a dynamic, interactive approach to documenting cultural heritage rather than a static portrayal of the past.

In conclusion, there are opportunities and challenges associated with an experimental, multifaceted strategy like this one. Because historical and oral data are fragmented, a flexible approach is necessary, and although *Palladio* is a powerful tool, it must be carefully modified to accommodate qualitative and incomplete data. However, these challenges also open avenues for collaborative knowledge-building, engaging both researchers and the local community in an ongoing process of mapping, interpreting, and preserving Kazdanga's cultural heritage.

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