

TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

VEJLE – VISBY – NOVGOROD
OPENING IN JANUARY 2016 – DECEMBER 2016



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The following paper is an attempt to conceptualize a storyline for an international travelling exhibition, as a result of a recent cooperation between local museums in Northwestern Russia, Sweden and Denmark. It will show some of the routes for cultural communication built by the Vikings. This exhibition will enable the involved local museums to have a platform on which they can display and exhibit their cultural heritage and items of great national and international value

The exhibition is planned for 4 months at each museum.

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The concept and content of the exhibition will be the same at the various locations/museums – only the main language will differ between Danish, Swedish and Russian, though followed by subtexts in English.

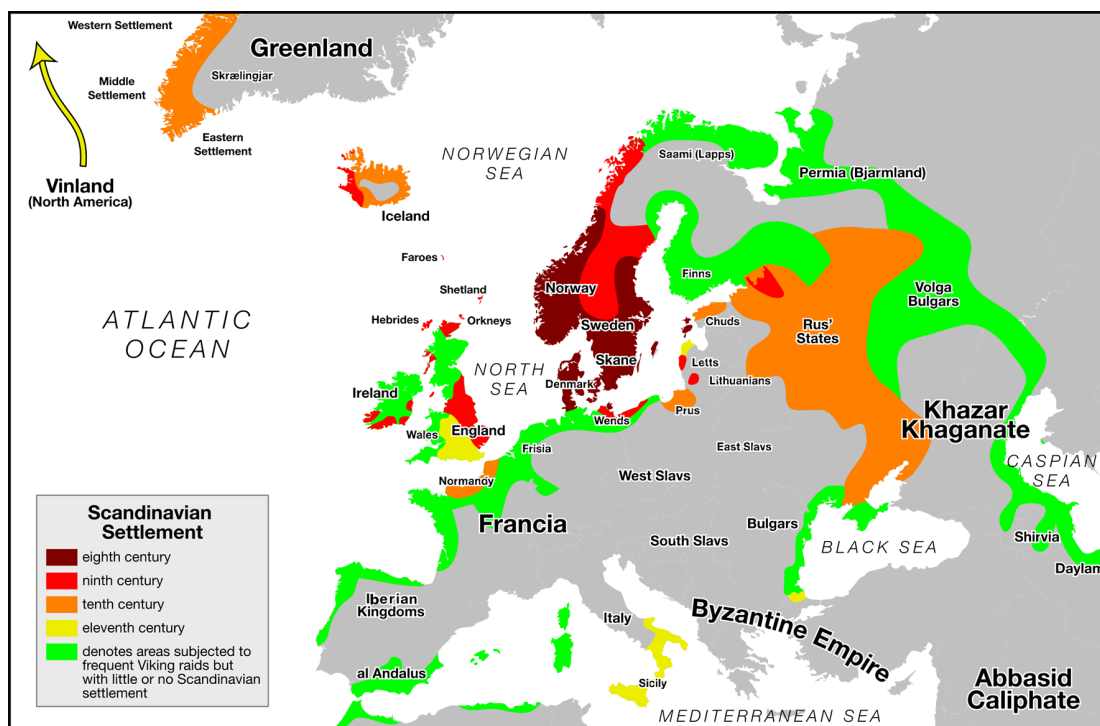
The goal is to show cultural heritage as experienced and used by smaller local museums, which are in daily contact with the heritage area and naturally are eager to show these fantastic areas to a broader audience – areas that are not always equally available to the broad audience. Hereby a mutual understanding of our common cultural heritage will be created. The exhibition will focus on the inquisitive person with an interest for history and school children.

1. STORYLINE

The exhibition will show the routes for trade and communication in the Baltic – built by the Vikings in the 8th-11th century AD. We will follow the Viking trails from the Baltic through the Finnish Gulf, Ladoga Sea and further down the Russian river systems. During these voyages, trading and alliances were formed during these cultural meetings. Themes like governance but also daily life reflects the result of these meetings. But what were the premises for this active communication and expansion around the Baltic. The explanation for such an expansion should be seen in the contemporary society and with the supreme skills of shipbuilding and navigation. How did they navigate in these new territories and how did the cultural meeting take place. The exhibition will tell this story, highlighted by several archaeological finds.

KEY WORDS:

Viking Age | Vikings in the Baltic | Innovation | Maritime | Technological Revolution



2. THEMES

2.1 TRADE & ALLIANCES, CULTURAL MEETING, COMMUNICATION AND GOVERNANCE

TRADE AND ALLIANCES

The overall communication as well as transportation was made possible by the excellent maritime and navigational skills. The trading routes from this time are a supreme example of that.

Whether as colonizers, traders or warriors, Scandinavians reached almost every part of the old world and discovered lands in the new world. From the Nordic kingdoms, their ships penetrated the West European coasts, sailed through the Strait of Gibraltar into The Mediterranean Sea and, from there journeyed to Italy, Spain, Morocco and the Holy Land. From the Baltic Sea, they made way into the Continent, travelling up Russian rivers and waterways to the Black Sea and Caspian Sea – and all the way to Bagdad.

Ships

Long distance travelling was naturally made with the huge ships, which are so distinctive for the Viking Age and preserved in Vestfold in Norway, Ladby in Denmark and at the bottom of The Roskilde fjord. For a long time it has been assumed, that when sailing down the Russian rivers, they dragged the ships over the river banks over to the next river. This is probably not always the case. In many cases, one should picture the traders shifting over to smaller vessels and sometimes using other means of transportation, maybe sledges. Remains of boats, rivets and nails have been found in large numbers at Staraja Ladoga and Gorodishe.

The Scandinavians used two kinds of ships to travel to the East. A smaller vessel, mainly meant for cargo carriage - mentioned as skipa and larger vessels, meant for the open sea, which were called knorr. When sailing down the Russian rivers, the large vessels were most likely changed into smaller and swifter- moving riverboats. Ship building equipment has been found from the site of Staraja Ladoga and it seems that this site also served as a ship-changing site.

The Baltic area, Northwestern Russia and Novgorod



Rivet from ship found at Gorodishe

The Slavic people, who settled the southern part of the Baltic - east of the Carolingian empire, had close relations to Scandinavia during this time. This is particularly obvious when looking at the Slavic trading centers along the coast – for example Wolin, Truso in Poland. The same kind of connections can be seen in the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), Finland and in the northwestern Russia.

At this time many of the Russian early towns are mentioned in various written sources. The towns usually arose in the most highly developed agricultural areas of the Rus, like that of the fertile area around the river delta by the Volchov river. When it comes to Scandinavian contacts, towns/ports of trades began to appear. Staraja Ladoga - Aldeigjuborg was situated on the western side of Volkhov river, at it's confluence with the smaller Ladozhka river. The site grew from a smaller market place in the 8th century to a large fortified site with princely and military presence in the 10th century.

Situated further south along the river of Volkhov the town of Novgorod and 2 km upstream from Novgorod, lies Gorodishe – the forerunner to Novgorod.



Excavating at Ruriko Gorodishe

Gorodishe is one of the settlements which was clearly connected to the Scandinavians. According to the Nestor Chronicle, it was to Gorodishe – Holmgård – also called “Ruriks stronghold”, that the Scandinavian Rurik and his kinsmen were invited to come and rule in the year of 862 AD. Arriving to Novgorod, he most likely settled at the hillfort of Gorodishe. The size of the site is around 10 to 12 hectares.

Here archaeological excavations have revealed a defended market centre with pottery, jewellery, beads, combs and other objects of Scandinavian character. Novgorod and Rurik Gorodishe are also a part of a highly fertile area in the Wolchov river-delta. Artisan industry appears in these early towns where the social upper class, with the King and his retinue. The settlement expanded to Novgorod in the mid 10th century.

The importance of Novgorod in the 10th century are underlined by the huge archaeological culture layers. The information of foreign trade is copious in this area, among these western coins, amber from the Baltic, silver from the Orient, shells of Greek nuts are also found in Novgorod, silver coins, dirhems, found in to large hoards in Novgorod.

Looking at the north western part of Russia there are a vast number of artefacts found, that are connected to Scandinavia. The most numerous finds of Scandinavian origin are the oval brooches and other jewellery belonging to the female dress. These pieces of jewellery are often found in grave types of Scandinavian origin, which could lead us to assume that whole families immigrated; men, women and children. Especially when it comes to fashion, it can be seen that women were more conservative than men, when it came to clothing and fashion. So in studying fashion in the Viking Age it is quite clear to recognize cultural meetings and alliances. The Russian connection to Scandinavia is also evident from a large number of archaeological finds, especially in Birka, Sigtuna and at the island of Gotland.

Scandinavia

The Scandinavian countries constituted of a cultural unity, though there were both geographical, political and economical differences. The landscape throughout this area formed clear geographical barriers – like fjords, mountains, forests, lakes, rivers and islands. Particularly the islands in the Baltic sea, as Bornholm, Öland and Gotland. In Denmark, Jutland is connected to the European Continent. This gave a natural division based on livelihood and economics. Language wise the area consisted of “Nordic” (Swedish, Norse and Danish) and Finno-Ugric languages. This also goes for the different tribes, especially the northern and eastern tribes. There are obvious political differences between Swedes, Danes and Norsemen and with different political agendas and interests. These facts can be stated by both the archaeological records and the written sources.

The importance of maritime structure and navigational skills, was of mutual importance in Scandinavia. The ship is one of the most important means of transportation, but the ship also influenced other sides of their lives – their belief, houses and graves. But furthestmost the maritime superiority made a premise for exploiting and controlling larger areas.

The island of Gotland

The Island of Gotland was located in the middle of a huge transportation channel between east and west and the Viking age has left numerous traces on Gotland, in form of hoards and almost 600 picture stones. The picture stones illustrate the religious beliefs and mythology as well as fashion, ships and weapons. They were influenced by their neighbours in the Baltic area and formed both relations and alliances with other people around this area. The Gotlanders were among the first to sail the waterways of the Russian and Polish regions as they headed down to the Caliphate and Byzantium. From this cultural clash came inspiration which had a profound impact on every aspect of Gotlandic society. One of the main targets for these eastern

voyages was silver. During the Viking age thousands of kilograms of silver were brought to Gotland. This trade with silver diminishes during the 10th century and the Gotlanders had settled in Novgorod, where they acquired their own land and established a gotlandic trading post – known as Gutagård. Together with Russians and Danes, the Gotlanders worked a busy route between Novgorod and the Danish trading centre of Hedeby.



About 700 treasures from the Viking Age has been found at Gotland. The Spilling-hoard – weighing 68 kg – is the largest silver hoard from Viking Age, ever found in the world.

Denmark

The Danes inhabited the land that during the Viking Age was formed into the Kingdom of Denmark.

During the Viking age the Danish Kingdom also contained of Skåne and Halland towards east, a part of Norway (Viken- area) and by Danevirke and the river Eider towards the south.

Denmark was rather divided into an eastern and western part during the Viking age with rather different traditions and settlement patterns. The eastern Denmark was characterized by single wealthy settlements like Tissø and Lejre at Zealand, that are princely in their expressions. Opposite there are large regulated settlements in Jutland - the western part of Denmark. In the beginning of the Viking age the land was probably ruled by smaller kingdoms/kings, that during the 10th century formed as a state – a Kingdom, as stated on the large runic stone in Jelling – Jutland in approximately 965 AD.

Jelling

“King Harald bade be made these kumls after Gorm his father and Thyra his mother – that Harald who won for himself Denmark all, and Norway, and made the Danes Christian”.

The royal residence in Jelling was gathered in a “monumental area” consisting of two large gravemounds, two runic stones, a hall-building/church and three hall-buildings within a huge palisade enhancing an area of 12,5 hectares. This is due to be the place from where the King declared both his right to the kingdom and Conversion to Christianity.

2.2 CULTURAL MEETING

The Baltic might be considered a huge melting pot for different cultural traditions and expressions during the Viking Age. But also a huge melting pot for different populations, both from Scandinavia and the local Slavic population. In prehistoric times the south-east going tra-

ding route along the Russian rivers were an effective source of spreading and communicating “news” and information from a world far beyond the world known by the northern population. (exhibit exotic items – like the ape-cranium from Gorodishe)

A wish to identify certain artefacts with certain ethnic groups and cultures can often seem to be a very difficult task and also a wish to simplify a complex matter. Is a family of Scandinavian origin in Novgorod, still to be considered Scandinavian – after 20-30 years?



Bronze pendant found in Gorodishe.

A runic-inscription in memorial of Ravn who died in the rapids of the river Dnjepr between Kiev and the Black Sea.

As suggested by some scholars – the migrating people can take on a new, transmigrant identity that allows them to keep in touch with both an old and a new ethnic identity (Håkansdotter: 2013). In all, the archaeological evidence suggests intensified trade between Scandinavia and the Baltic and Eastern European regions during the Viking Age. This kind of contacts and cultural meeting could have resulted in a kind of hybrid artefacts. This is also a pattern seen in other areas with the same kind of assimilation – for example in Finland, where you can see how Scandinavian ornamentation melts together with specific Fenno-ugric forms, as seen on circular brooches.

This kind of assimilation is also obvious when looking at weaponry – especially in Russia, where imported weapons were gradually modified to suit local circumstances.

As to the names Rus and Varangians, they both signify people coming from one place (Scandinavia) and moving to or settling in, another place. Sometimes they are associated with specific roles such as warriors or princely retinue, sometimes representing a complete community. The difference between the terms, is that the term Rus encounters men, women and children whereas Varangians encounters men, maybe mercenaries or a kind of professional soldiers. Both names occur in written sources. The name Rus appears in many Arabic sources, in Frankish Annals and in Byzantine sources. The meaning of the word Rus is by some scholars believed to

derive from the Finnish word for Sweden – Ruotsi. The name Varangians is used in the byzantine sources, describing a Rus' army mentioned as the Varangian guard.
(exhibit Ulfbert-swords)

2.3 COMMUNICATION

The hagiographic runic stones still stands like visible landmarks sat by people during the Viking age. The runic stones tell many stories about private family relations, ownership and expeditions. The runic inscriptions also give information about the development of a mutual Scandinavian language. Runic inscriptions also occur on other items, for example on a pendant with a ring found in Ruriko Gorodishe.



Pendant with runic inscriptions
found at Gorodishe



Example of a birch bark letter (nr. 202)
found in Novgorod

Means of communication get a totally new perspective when it comes to the Novgorod area. Here finds of birch bark letters with inscriptions and regular texts have been found since the 1950's. The information on these birch bark letters are various and huge and gives a good look into everyday communication, details of housekeeping, business orders, political news; they describe conflicts; they are bonds, wills, feudal engagements etc. The letters have mainly been written by ordinary people –both men women and some children too, which brings in the aspect of literacy. Literacy seems to have been widespread among ordinary people. The instrument used to write on these birch bark letters was a bone or iron point, equipped in the other end with a little spatula, serving the same purpose as a modern rubber. This instrument was also used to write on small wax tablets (exhibit). The wax tablets played a special role in the teaching and writing. Children copied characters using the tablets like slates, like children using Ipads today. Some of the exhibited items will give a good insight into the daily life and the fact, that children also learned to write and read. These letters are written in Cyrillic letters and will be displayed at the exhibition.

2.4 GOVERNANCE

What is clear is that Viking Expansion was only made possible by the Vikings' legendary superiority in shipbuilding technology and their supreme navigational skills, which allowed them to travel further, faster and more securely than their contemporaries. It is likewise important to reflect upon – the social premises for making this development possible. In the final phases of the Viking Age, communication skills and the organizational level of the society were amongst the things that made the utilization of these innovations possible.

But what is equally interesting is their obvious ability to mediate and to govern. This seems to be a highly valuable asset, which is vividly described in different written sources such as in the "Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum", Heimskringla and in the "First Chronicle", by Adam of Bremen and Snorre Sturlasson, in the Islandic Sagas. When it comes to historical sources, the Russian Primary Chronicle is the most quoted. The Chronicle was written by the monk Nestor in 12th century Kiev and tells the story of how the Kievan Rus' empire came to be. The famous "calling of the Varangians" describes how the Kievan Rus was founded by the help of "recruited" men from across the sea – called Rus. In 862 AD, Rurik, his two brothers were called from their home to settle in, what is now Russia in three different locations. The Rurikid dynasty is believed to have ruled Russia up to the 16th century. (exhibit: copies of the chronicle and especially the drawings put together as a kind of Bayeux-tapestry)



2.5 STATE FORMATION

The importance of Novgorod and Ruriko Gorodishe in the birth of the Russian State, as described, is quite parallel to the importance and role Jelling plays in the birth of the Danish State.

The birth place of the Danish State is displayed in Jelling, Denmark. Here one can see how the Jelling-dynasty with king Gorm and his son Harald Bluetooth quite suddenly occurs as a royal dynasty, without references to this part of the history in the written sources of the Viking Age. The Danish land/Denmark did most likely consist of several small kingdoms during the later part of the Viking age, but with the arrival of the Jelling-dynasty, the state formation suddenly seems to take form.

Ruriks stronghold which was called to Russia and most likely settled at the hillfort of Gorodishe , seems to become an administrative center and when the settlement moves to Novgorod in the middle of the 10th century, Gorodishe seems to have continued as a military and administrative centre as well as the residence of the princes who ruled in Novgorod. Artefacts that underline this fact – are the 3000 lead seals found here. The 10th century obviously forms a time of huge changes in the society and also the final entry of Christianity.



Prince Vsevolod's seal, Novgorod

3 SCIENCE AND NEW METHODS IN INTERPRETATION

One of the main sources for this exhibition would be new scientific data deriving from excavations and expeditions. Scientific methods, for example metallurgical analysis of sword with inscriptions – will be displayed and explaining the technological innovation in the weaponry and swords.

We will explore the possibility whether some of the found human remains from burial sites in the area have been analyzed for strontium-isotopes. If this should be the case, a strontium-isotope analysis can be displayed, explaining how it today is possible to prove movement and migration by analyzing samples from human teeth.

When it comes to maritime and navigational skills the exhibition will partly rely upon experience gained by building replicas of known wrecks from the period. We have interesting and important information and experience gathered by enthusiastic professionals - having sailed the same routes with these ships.

Display: be an scientist and adventurer !

4 THE EXHIBITION STRATEGY

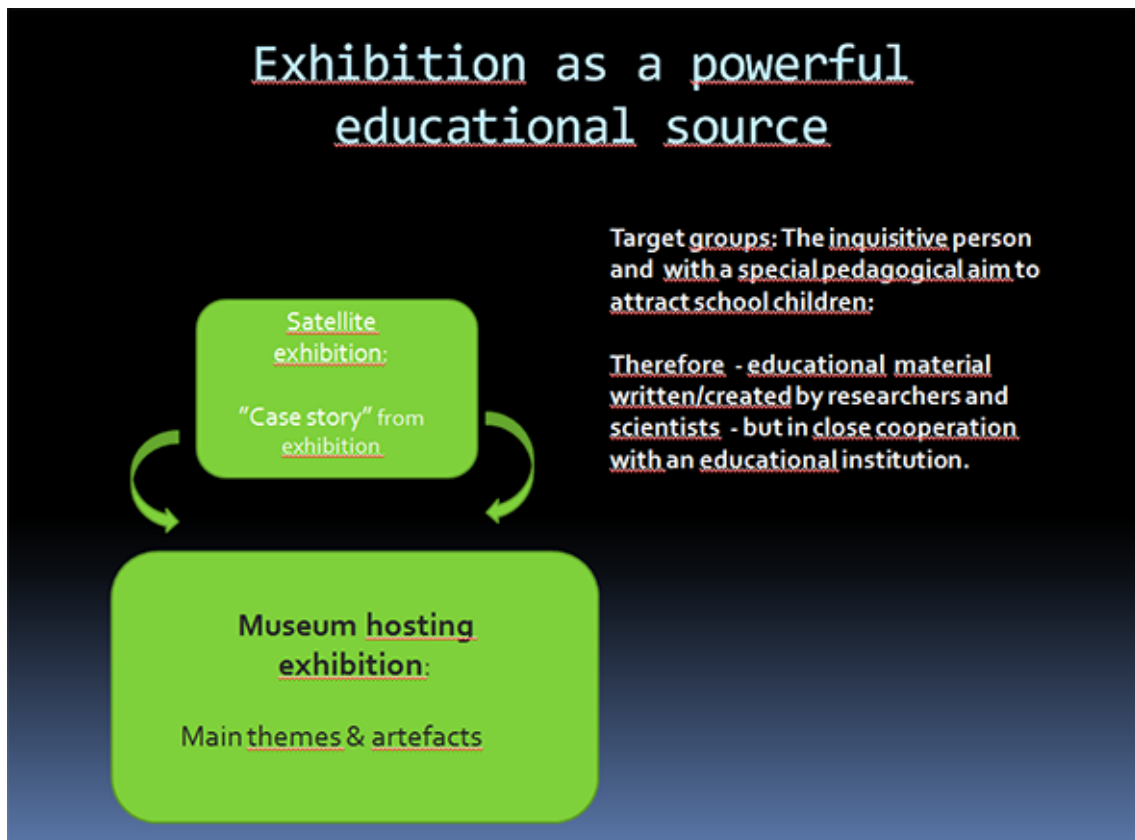
Regarding the strategy, one of the main ideas is to have the main museum hosting the exhibition as well as a “satellite exhibition” at another location, showing one specific item and/or theme. Practically this means having one main exhibition in Vejle, Visby and Novgorod together with a smaller and more limited exhibition (like a kind of a show case) at another local museum or location connected to the local cultural heritage.

This way the exhibition would reach even further. The final strategy will be formulated jointly by the project group and the architect.

The Form/Design/Graphics

The goal is for the aesthetic form and expression to be as simple and clear as possible. The exhibition should be an interaction between a digital and an analog storytelling. We aim to create a setting with an atmosphere.

In the further work of realization of this exhibition, the concrete building up of the exhibition will be done in cooperation with an architect.



The idea of a main exhibition and a satellite exhibition illustrated

4.1 ARTEFACTS ON DISPLAY

A list of representative finds will be chosen to demonstrate the diversity and yet similarity in this geographical area. The artefacts will be connected to the general themes and topics in the exhibition – trade, alliances, cultural meeting, communication, innovation and governance. A number of these artefacts have a special story to tell, which can draw lines into present times. For example the birch bark letters and the theme of literacy. The process of storytelling could involve building dialogues between groups of artefacts. For example displaying the artefacts according to themes and subjects and arranging them storywise.



Picturestone from Gotland depicting a figure holding a snake in each hand.

4.2 EXHIBITION AS A POWERFUL EDUCATIONAL SOURCE

As known - The Historical Awareness is an important integrated part of every human being. It gives a sense of value and mutual understanding through recollection and remembrance.

The target groups will be all inquisitive persons and also with a special pedagogical aim to attract school children. The idea is therefore to create educational material written and created by professionals (scholars) – in close cooperation with an educational institution.

4.3 A SPECIAL APPROACH TO DIDACTICS

Given the broad and international educational frame around the Baltic Sea, we see this travelling exhibition concept as a suitable platform to explore the perception of the different strategies for dissemination. Each country has a different tradition concerning dissemination and also quite different approaches to educational traditions as well as educational goals. When trying to create a common educational program for an international travelling exhibition, it will be essential to be able to work with the differences. Recently a new National center for knowledge regarding education of History and Cultural Heritage “Nationalt Videncenter for Historie- og Kulturarvsformidling”, has been established in Denmark . This center will be engaged in working with topics concerning the didactics and the learning process.



Different traditions for dissemination.
 In top a “teaching situation” in Novgorod Museum and below a “teaching situation” in Vejle Museum

4.4 DISSEMINATION – MEDIATION

We want to create an evocative atmosphere and construct an interpretive strategy to bring the premise for the storyline to life. We will work on the basic tools in both dissemination programs and the more specific educational programs by engaging visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning. A vast group of museums are currently using digital platforms as the only solution when it comes to communication in the exhibition. And hereby the digital concept is dominating both in form and in content. The digital concept is an effective and diverse media to use in exhibitions, though one should remember that the digital solution is not an innovation – merely a tool. A Travelling exhibition might also have certain limitations, when it comes to internet access in certain areas and therefore it is important to have a good balance between “hands on” mediation and the digital mediation. “Hands on” objects could be samples of fur, wax, a copy of a scale and an iron collar for slaves, silk etc. A copy of a small wax board would also be interesting, when it comes to telling the story about communication and literacy during the Viking Age. Here especially children could try writing messages. This creating a perspective to todays smartphones and tablets. At the same time the digital media gives other opportunities – like sharing an educational program, game, application etc.

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE THIS?

By staging an engaging atmosphere, the distance between the museum visitor and the world from which the object originates will be reduced. This will be an atmosphere that will increase learning.

Overall we can create a mutual interest and understanding by making the most recent research more accessible and also in a more popular way. The core of the exhibition will contain the most recent research results followed by exquisite items from these three regions. This will speak to all inquisitive people and make them ask questions – which we hope to answer. But creating a mutual understanding – also presupposes creating and consolidating a professional network.

4.5 PRIVATE AND PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS – CULTURAL TOURISM

We believe in the power of authenticity when it comes to telling a story and therefore we want to engage the local tourist agencies and to give them a platform at the exhibition to reach out across borders and to give an introduction to their respective areas. This is a good opportunity to reach out to areas and people beyond the local region and also to make some areas more accessible. This is especially the case regarding the sailing route from the bottom of the Finnis

Gulf, Lake Ladoga and Staraja Ladoga, following the Wolchov River to Novgorod and Ruriko Gorodishe and Lake Ilmen. It is intended to show a film picturing the panoramic view, when sailing this route. This is a good opportunity to make a public & private partnership, where museums and branches “the tourist industry” can cooperate in promoting and marketing Cultural Heritage.



Jelling, nearby Vejle showing showing the cultural heritage area with the two huge gravemounds, runic stones and church visible.

5 PURPOSE AND EFFECTS

A valuable purpose of this conceptualization, is to create an inspirational, but yet solid foundation for the further development of a travelling exhibition. An obvious gain from this cooperation will be research crossing borders. The overall main purpose of this exhibition is to help creating a historical awareness of our common history and identity in the Baltic area. This will be valuable when building bridges between the past and the present and hereby hopefully creating ground for a common understanding and responsibility, which may come to use when dealing with many of the challenges of today in the Baltic area, on topics like environment or infrastructure. This could be issues like infrastructure and pollution. Bridging between past and present on these topics could help create a sustainable mutual awareness of our common past and hopefully future.



Ruriko Gorodishe - View from the Wolchov river.

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Gotlands Museum (Sweden)- partner

Novgorod Museum (Russia) - partner

Norden Association

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