

Insight into the concept of developing the photo album

“ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE”



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article

#photography #graphic design #photographic album #Latgale
#road signs



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Abstract

The search for historical landscape studies can be a fascinating and educational process, allowing one to learn about past events and their impact on today's landscape. While working on the research, the authors paid attention to various searches for historical landscape studies in order to best present the research topic, which is closely related to the historical landscape of Latgale. To address the issue of preserving the cultural and historical environment of Latgale, topics were collected and included in the photo album “ROAD SIGNS OF LATGALE.” These include mailboxes, bus stops, bus stop signs, milk tables, movable road signs, crucifixes, haystacks, churches of Latgale, wooden houses, window decorations of houses, and people. The photo reports were created thematically, analyzing their visual and informational value.

When driving along the roads of Latgale, there are things that catch the eye. These are Latgale road signs in the literal and figurative sense. There are road signs that indicate the name of a place, a bus stop, etc. But isn't a road sign also a milk stand on the side of the road, a person, a mailbox, an old wooden house with openwork window decorations, a lake, a river, dead ash trees or an old oak tree with branches leaning over the road, a church, a brid-

ge, a cemetery, an apple orchard, a blue tractor, a currant bush, a crucifix, a haystack and flowering bushes in the garden of an abandoned house?

Over time, a lot has changed. The rural landscapes of childhood memories were completely different. Now, driving along the road between hills and lakes, guest houses appear that usually do not fit into the landscape view and rebuilt old houses that have been deprived of the story of their beautiful windows. Then all that remains is

to say – yes, everything is ruined here – let's drive on, there is nothing to see here! Sad, but at the same time we can say that poverty in Latgale has given us the opportunity to keep many things authentic and unspoiled, because right around the bend in an overgrown apple orchard hides an old farmhouse with lacy window decorations, delicately glazed porch windows, proportional shapes of buildings. You can say that everything is as it should be – for real! But the house has no owner who knows how to appreciate and preserve it.

Many people think that everything that is old and decaying must be demolished. This is the wrong solution, because such houses exist only in Latgale! They can be saved, "canned", not touched, left for the future, because they do not bother anyone. The same can be said about many other things that we see while driving on the road. That is how the idea came to collect themes in photo stories to raise the issue of preserving the environment that bears historical testimony and to create a photo album.

The purpose of the research: to create a photo album about Latgale in order to raise the issue of environmental preservation, which bears historical evidence.

Research methods: theoretical – research of literature and Internet sources; empirical – observation, analysis of the data obtained in the study (photographs).

Research methodology

The study used theoretical and empirical research methods. Qualitative research is based on the analysis of data collected as a result of the observation method. Observation is a data collection method that allows analyzing the social world from the perspective of an external observer in order to test theories about phenomena and processes based on their manifestations and distribution. Unlike observation in everyday conditions, exploratory observation is more focused and systematic. The researcher must define what he wants to observe and how to record it. Open observation was used, which is defined as a type of observation that does not involve the use of pre-prepared topics or observation protocols, the researcher is guided only by the research questions he raises [1]. The authors conducted observations during photo fixation from March 2022 to February 2023. In 2024, the results of the study were

compiled in the photo album "ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE", the content and artistic value of the photographs was important during the photo selection stage. In turn, in 2025, the album will be published in paper format.

Research results

The quest for historical landscape research can be a fascinating and educational process that allows you to learn about past events and their impact on today's landscape. While working on the study, the authors paid attention to various quests for historical landscape research in order to best reveal the research topic, which is closely related to the historical landscape in Latgale.

Historical landscape research should begin with a study of literary sources. Libraries, archives and digital resources can be useful in this process. The authors of the work studied the literature to obtain information not only about the Latgale environment, but also to understand the relevance and importance of photo albums today. A study of historical books, documents and other literature related to the Latgale region and the creation of photo albums was carried out.

Visits to historical sites played an important role in the study of the historical landscape of Latgale. Visiting historical sites, such as museums, old towns, ancient castle ruins and other important landscape elements, gives the best idea of the place under study.

Pay attention to manors and castles. Manors and castle ruins are often well-preserved historical monuments. By studying their history and significance in the local context, you can learn a lot of necessary information about the environment and landscape under study. Also, by visiting archaeological excavations, you can see what has been discovered in the past and what way of life was in the past. It is important to talk to experts and locals. By contacting historians, museum staff, or locals, you can gain additional information about specific historical sites or events.

Nowadays, any research is unthinkable without exploring digital resources. When conducting research, one must examine digital archives, museum collections, and historical portals, where photographs, documents, and other materials can be examined.

The authors paid the greatest attention to territorial research trips in the development of the

study. Going to places related to historical landscapes allows for greater research, as it allows you to see and understand the landscape from a historical perspective. Trips are impossible to do without studying geographical and historical maps.

Maps help to understand how the landscape has changed over time and what historical factors have been. Many of these research methods were used by the authors in the development of their research, with the study of historical roads playing a significant role.

During the development of the research, while conducting research and photographing sections of roads, the authors often managed to find environmental objects that were later recognized in museum archives or private photo collections. In Figure 1, you can see a window from Bīķernieki parish, a photograph of which is in the *zudusilatvija.lv* photo collection.

Looking at the 1st picture, you can see that, despite the fact that the pictures are different – one is in color and the other is in black and white, people tried to preserve the architectural element,

or window. Some time ago, it was painted, but the decorative board above the window has disappeared. It is precisely this kind of change that makes us think about our values, about preserving and cherishing them.

Developing a concept for a photo album theme

By obtaining extensive information about the history of photography, the peculiarities of the Latgale landscape, studying printing technologies and modern design trends, as well as gathering information about photo albums, it became clear what the concept of the new photo album should be. It should convey Latgalian warmth, both in terms of content and composition, creating the lost and remaining values of Latgale.

However, it should be understood that when developing a photo album for printing, various elements must be carefully considered to ensure that the final product is visually attractive, user-friendly and effectively conveys the intended message

Analyzing the information obtained, the authors of the study conclude that



Fig. 1 Window in the historical perspective

Source: left <https://zudusilatvija.lv/objects/object/6954/> and to the right. Source: photo by I. Auzāne.

the influence of social media also played an important role in the photo album “ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE”. They helped to conduct not only empirical research, but also to understand how the social network viewer relates to various photographs that reflect the atmosphere characteristic of Latgale. This research helped to more seriously choose the list of topics to be published in the photo album.

Historical objects in the road landscape can make a diverse contribution to the travel experience and understanding of local culture. These objects can be both natural formations, such as ancient mounds, rivers or forests, and man-made, such as houses, farmsteads, churches, village remains or monuments. Historical objects can be a researcher’s research topic, because in the modern Latgale road landscape, one can encounter a great many historical environmental objects.

Historic sites often serve as symbols of identity. They are associated with the local community and can be a source of pride in the history, art, and traditions of a region. These sites foster a connection between people and their cultural heritage. Historic sites play an important role not only in preserving culture and history [2], but also in enhancing the travel experience and providing an educational experience. Travelers have the opportunity to both enjoy visual and architectural beauty and gain a deeper understanding of the rich history and heritage of the region they are visiting.

Environmental features in the roadside landscape can offer interesting insights into the past and cultural heritage. Various roadside features or nearby landmarks are often linked to the histo-

ry, traditions or significant events of the region. Some examples include:

- **Crucifixes** – Information is found on Internet resources that Latgale is the only region in Latvia where crucifixes are found outside of churches or residential premises. For example, the Latvian Wikipedia page about crucifixes states: “The crucifixes of Latgalian villages and roadsides are symbols of the Christian faith and objects of sacred art, which are most often found in Latgale on roadsides or crossroads [3]. “There was at least one crucifix in every village in Latgale, and in the largest ones even two: one at each end of the village. It was a unifier and a rallying point for people” [4]. This is how Wikipedia explains the crucifix (figs. 2, 3, 4).
- **House window decorations** – Architect Pēteris Blūms says that nowhere else in Latvia can you see the window decorations characteristic of Latgale. He points out their significance: “This is how communication takes place through the window – you see the world, the world sees you. Various ornamental signs, so-called amulets, are used in window decorations – for protection or to invoke favor from higher powers and also show the identity of the homeowner” [5]. During the observation, it was concluded that the window decorations (fig. 5, 6, 7, 8) are very diverse and that it is almost impossible to find two identical ones. Many windows do not have window shutters, many did not have them. The texture of the walls of wooden houses highlights the color of the window decorations that have faded in the sun, creating a picturesque



Fig. 2, 3, 4 Latgale road signs. Crucifixes. Road section Višķi – Aglona, Grāveri – Okra. Source: photo by I. Auzāne.

mood and highlighting their shape. A precise rhythm of ornament and a graceful stylization of vegetation were seen in the decorations. When studying and photographing windows, one may want to recognize the handwriting of the masters. When photographing window decorations, it was concluded that a common style appears in windows at specific sections of the road. There is a pronounced variety of window decorations in cities, because in the post-war years many houses from different regions were transferred to the city.

- **Milk tables** – Milk tables are small architectural forms located on the sides of Latgale roads (fig. 9, 10). Despite their common function, a variety of

their forms was observed. Functionally, they can be used for transferring milk cans or for aesthetic pleasure. It was observed that reflectors are attached to several tables. Latgalian milk tables have attracted the attention of travelers. For example, Laura Melne, editor of the news website ReTV.lv, has described the recognition of the beauty and interestingness of milk tables on social media: “For several months now, you can follow the milk table gallery and stories on the social media Instagram account “@pina_golds”. It is maintained by Latgalians Amanda Anusāne and Vizma Mičule. Mičule points out the features that make milk tables special: “First of all, the fact that a milk table cannot be bought ready-made in a store, there is no single standard for it. Each owner makes a milk table according to their individual “project” and available resources. Mostly the raw material is wood, but there are also various metal structures. If we look at the design of milk tables, then it is also a completely free flight of people’s imagination – some milk tables are very minimalistic, others have some decorative elements. We have even seen a milk table with wood carvings! What makes milk tables even more special is that their time is numbered. In many places, milk tables are no longer used for milk delivery, because the milk machine takes milk “straight” from the milk house and the milk machines are equipped with a hose through which milk is pumped out of the cans, which no longer need to be placed on a platform – they can stand on the ground. Therefore, the main function of the milk table – a platform for convenient lifting of the can and pouring it into the machine’s tank – is no longer needed. But we have noticed that many milk tables still serve as letterbox stands” [6].



Fig. 5, 6, 7, 8 Latgale road signs. Window decorations. Source: photo by I. Auzāne.



Fig. 9, 10 Latgale road signs. Milk stalls. Road section Aglona – Dagda. Source: photo by I. Auzāne.

- **Haystacks** – Haystacks used to be an integral part of the Latvian landscape, but now they have become a rarity. Hay was traditionally stacked and dried in haystacks. Nowadays, hay is no longer placed in stacks. While driving, views of hay bales were observed – rhythmically arranged, chaotically arranged, packed and unpacked. Haystacks stacked in stacks were also seen (fig. 11, 12, 13). The topics examined are unique to each region of Latvia. We know that human activity differs in each region of Latvia, even in a county, because people's mentality is different. The authors of the study wanted to emphasize the special character of the Latgale region by examining the topics discussed above. They were included in the graphic design of the photo album and supplemented with other important topics.

Composition, color scheme and typeface graphic design for the photo album “ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE”

Visual history, or visual history, is an approach that uses images, graphics, photographs, films, paintings, and other

visual elements to understand and interpret the past. This approach offers the opportunity to see historical events and processes through visual materials, which can be a powerful way to deepen understanding of the past and promote emotional and sensory connections to historical events.

During the development of the project, I. Auzāne (one of the authors of the study) made more than 160 window photofixations. The page layout shows 144 window photos. As the authors of the study note, this is the most valuable asset during the development of the photo album. A window tells its own story about each house. It reflects its own unique mood. Each master, working on the design of the window, invested not only work, but also his soul, trying to make the window for a specific homeowner, thus making the building special. A photo collage of windows was also used in the design of the album cover (fig. 14).

The color scheme of the photo album is both bright and neutral. The page backgrounds are matched to the tonality of the photographs – highlighting or neutrally merging the photo collage into one image. The authors of the stu-

Fig. 11, 12, 13 Latgale road signs. Haystacks and hay bales. Road section Jaundome-Andzeļi. Source: photo by I. Auzāne.



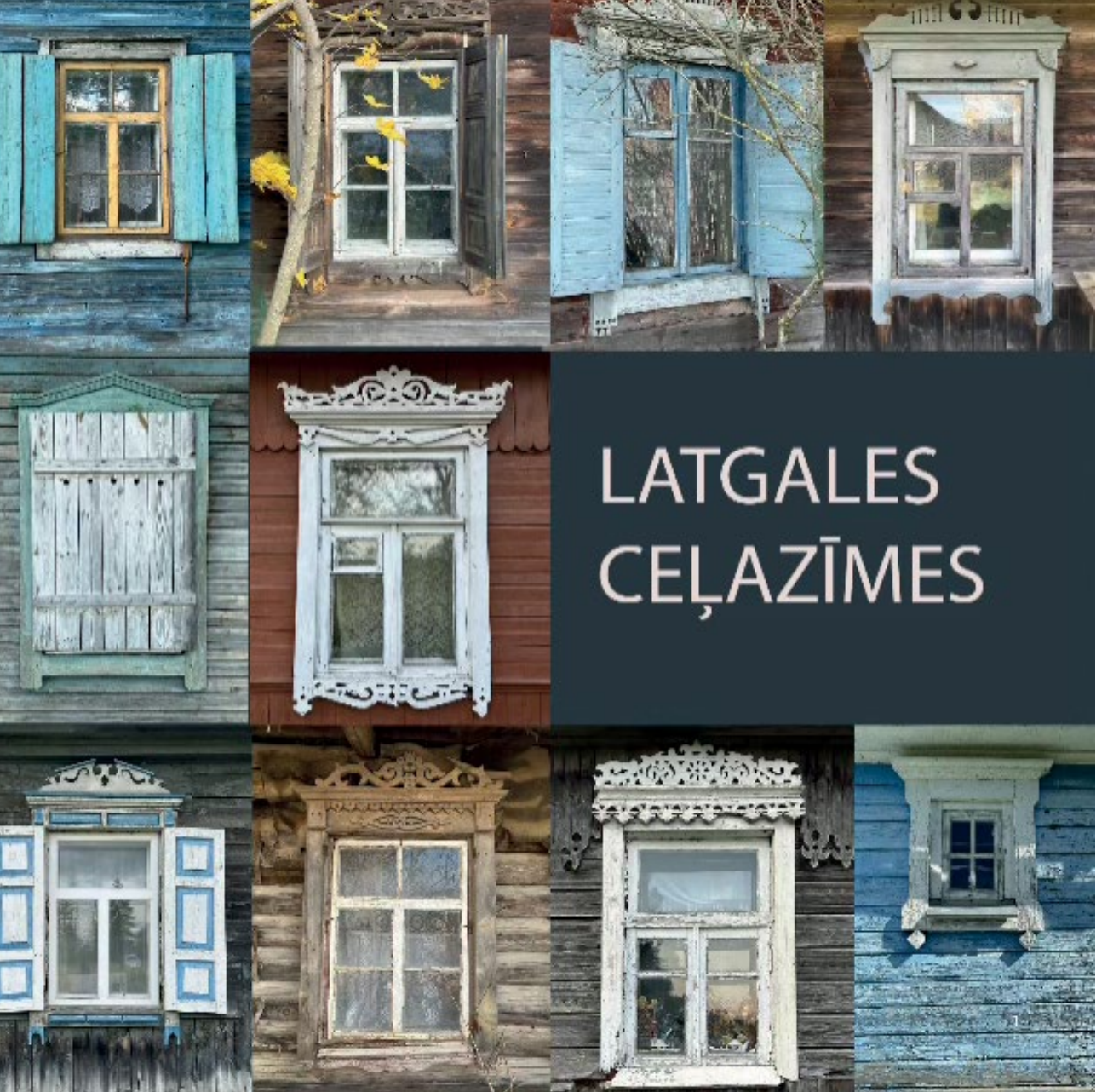


Fig. 14 Cover of the photo album "ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE". The graphic design of the cover of the photo album is made up of a photo collage of windows. Design and photo by I. Auzāne.

dy aimed to highlight the content of the photograph, showing what is characteristic of the Latgale environment, therefore, based on the color scheme of the photographs, a basic tone was chosen that would accentuate the photographs in the page layout (fig. 15).

The use of text in the photo album is very conceptual. It is used in the annotation, table of contents, topic titles (fig. 16), and in the conclusion. The location of the objects is not indicated in the photo album in order to provide inspiration for travel and to find these

environmental objects on their own. The content of the photographs tells the Latgalian story in itself, therefore, the authors of the study decided to leave the photographs as the narrator (fig. 17). The topics and annotation are in Latgalian, which reinforces the authors' concept and the expression of Latgalianism in the photo album. The font style Hyphenate was chosen. It is laconic, unobtrusive, and simple. The authors believe that this font choice will further emphasize the main character of the photo album – the photograph.

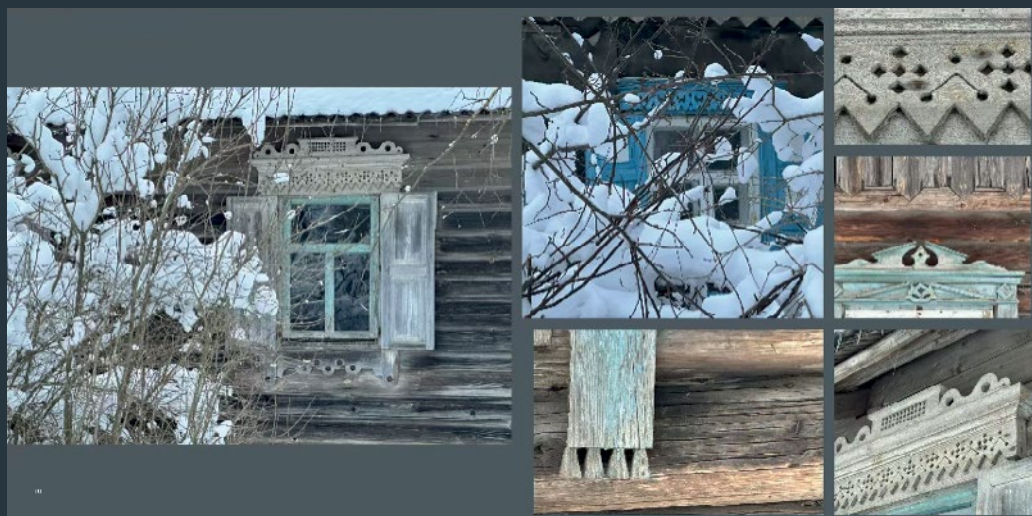


Fig. 15 The color scheme of the pages of the photo album "ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE". Design and photo by I. Auzāne.

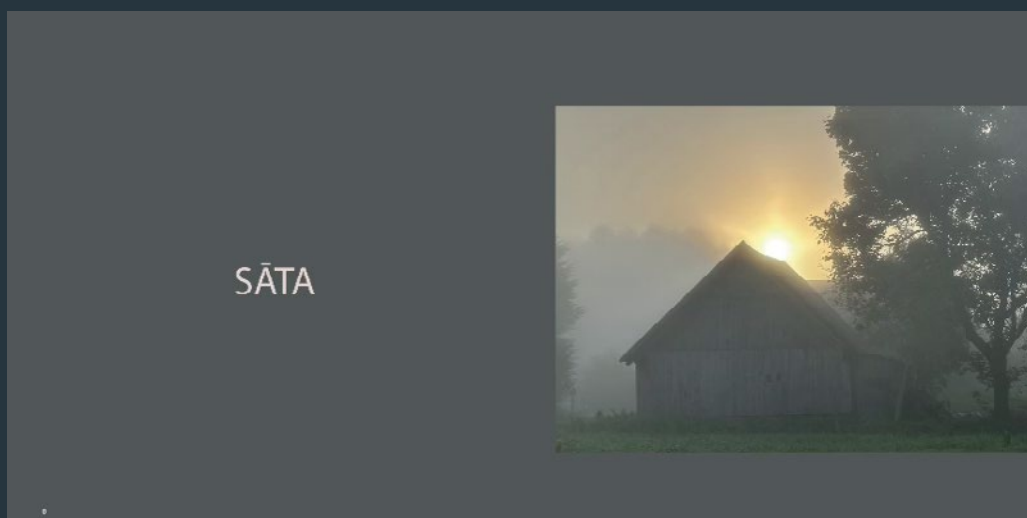


Fig. 16 Layout of the photo album "ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE" for the chapter "Home" I. Design and photo by I. Auzāne.

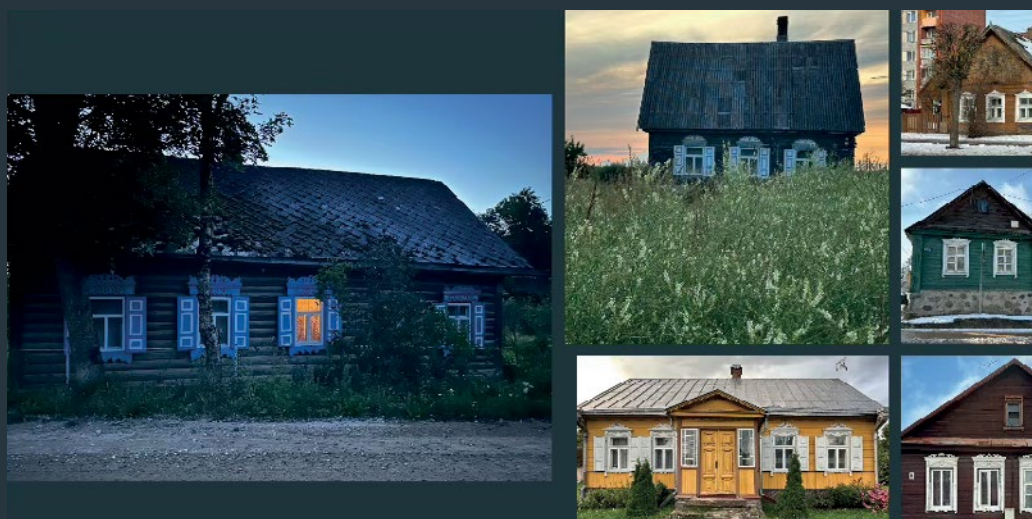


Fig. 17 Layout of the photo album "ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE" for the chapter "Home" II. Design and photo by I. Auzāne.

In the photo album layouts, you can see the placement of photographs on the page area (fig. 15, 16, 17, 18). Photographs are placed in a collage or one by one. The edge of some photographs is composed to the edge of the page, thus creating the impression of spaciousness in the photo album layout.

The size of the photo album is 23x23 cm. The square page composition allowed to place the photographs in such a way that they are well visible to everyone interested. A photo album of this format is easy to hold in your hands and flip through the pages. Based on the development of the layout and the printout of the pilot edition, the authors concluded that this is a very successful size for a photo album.

Conclusions

In order to highlight the issue of preserving the cultural and historical environment in Latgale, topics were collected and included in the photo album "ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE". These are mailboxes, bus stops, bus stop signs, milk tables, moving road signs, crucifixes, haystacks, Latgale churches, wooden houses, house window decorations, and people. Photo stories were created by topic, analyzing the visual and informative value of the topic.

Analyzing the work undertaken, it was concluded that, after researching social networks, publications and publications, the topics envisaged in the work are relevant. Photo stories can be used as teaching material when learning the history of Latgale, as the information will be visual and memorable.

During the research process, new topics will be created, for example – road bridges; rivers and lakes; old country

house gardens; large trees; cemeteries; beaver mischief on the roadsides; road ditches; clay buildings; bathhouses; benches by old houses on the roadside, etc., as well as existing topics will be supplemented and developed. ■

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Fig. 18 Layout of the photo album "ROAD SIGNS IN LATGALE" for the chapter "Window". Design and photo by I. Auzāne.

