



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

**VYTAUTO DIDŽIOJO UNIVERSITETO  
PROGRAMOS *BALTIJOS REGIONO KULTŪROS*  
(612U70001)  
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

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**EVALUATION REPORT  
OF *CULTURES OF BALTIC REGION* (612U70001)  
STUDY PROGRAMME  
AT VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY**

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Išvados parengtos anglų kalba  
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## DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	Baltijos regiono kultūros
Valstybinis kodas	612U70001
Studijų sritis	Humanitariniai mokslai
Studijų kryptis	Regiono kultūros studijos
Studijų programos rūšis	Universitetinės studijos
Studijų pakopa	Pirmoji
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	Nuolaitinė (4)
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	240
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	Regiono kultūros studijų bakalauras
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	2011 balandžio 1 d.

## INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	Cultures of the Baltic Region
State code	612U70001
Study area	Humanities
Study field	Area Studies
Kind of the study programme	University Studies
Study Cycle	First
Study mode (length in years)	Full time (4)
Volume of the study programme in credits	240
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Bachelor of Area Studies
Date of registration of the study programme	1st April 2011

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The programme, „Cultures of the Baltic Region,“ is unique in Lithuania, and a valuable addition to programmes offered at Vytautas Magnus University. It is an Area studies programme, offering multidisciplinary approaches to the geographical region around the Baltic Sea. Students study history, culture and languages to gain a comprehensive understanding of the region.

This is an ambitious programme that requires teachers and students to forge paths in new directions. Both teachers and students are highly motivated to ensure success. The programme is in high demand: In its first two years, 2011 and 2012, 43 students were admitted out of a total of 445 applicants. Because the programme was established so recently, it is not yet possible to assess learning outcomes, most importantly the student research skills that will be demonstrated in their theses. It is likewise not possible to foresee long term outcomes such as student success in second-cycle studies or in the job market after graduation. Preliminary signs are good: Some students have had successful practice experience (discussed below), indicating that their specialization will probably be in demand when they graduate.

The programme was established on the initiative of the Department of Culture Studies and Ethnology (DCSE), with full support from the Dean of Humanities. Like the successful VMU East Asian Studies programme which was its administrative model, this programme is interdisciplinary and thus requires interdepartmental cooperation. Together with the DCSE, six other departments – three in the Faculty of Humanities, and three other units offer the programme's courses. Such cooperation and collegial interaction among departments and faculties improves the academic atmosphere at Vytautas Magnus University as a whole. It is a boon to students who will find flexibility and much potential for enrichment in their mobility among departments and in choice of courses. Even in this administrative diversity, however, the programme maintains a coherent focus in its aims and learning outcomes.

The programme is highly relevant to the globalizing world of the twenty-first century. As cooperation intensifies among the states of northern Europe (the Baltic region), demand for people with broad, multicultural training will continue to increase. „Culture,“ as explored in this programme, includes a broad spectrum of human expressions, from archaic mythology and customs, to traditions of everyday life; scholars study old traditions and their transformation and adaptation in the modern world. Besides knowledge of cultural facts and theories that help interpret those facts, the programme gives students hands-on experience to prepare for careers in academic research, public administration of culture, and other jobs. The programme has potential to grow as the university pursues its strategy of adding courses and programmes taught in English, serving international students in the Erasmus programme and other exchanges.

The self evaluation report is well prepared and clearly presented. One small addition would make the report easier to navigate: The Table of Contents should include annex titles, for example, “Annex 1: Course Descriptions,” and under each annex the course titles or lecturers' names should be listed with page numbers – it is difficult to find a specific course description or lecturer's activities in this 200+ page document.

## II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

### *1. Programme aims and learning outcomes*

Information about the programme is online and thus accessible to students, parents, faculty and government administrators.

The programme's aims and learning outcomes are clearly defined (Sections A3, B1, B5 and C1-5 in Table 1 are particularly useful). Among other things, students will be able to identify products of traditional culture, and will apply cultural theories while interpreting these items of culture. They will know how to compile, organize, and publicize what they discover in either academic research or public programmes. A prerequisite for excellence is the ability to compare across cultures: A student must know the region well, and must use at least three of the region's languages in her or his work. Fluency in a fourth language, English, is not a programme requirement, but it is essential because it is the main language used in ethnological research about the region.

Multilingual skills, familiarity with an international region, and mobility are necessary in the current national and international world. These skills help deepen and strengthen cooperation among the countries of northern Europe. It is also clear that there are individual benefits for students in this programme, allowing them to successfully compete with other Europeans in the labor market. They will be fluent in multiple languages and trained to understand diverse cultures, two excellent skills that benefit a large variety of careers, including plans mentioned by the programme's students: jobs in the tourism business, translation, government jobs, graduate school and teaching.

The programme's aims and learning outcomes are consistent with general abilities required of students in the Humanities at the first-cycle level. Section D in Table 1 reaffirms outcomes that are appropriate for most undergraduate university programmes. A person with a bachelor's degree is usually expected to know how to do independent research and analysis that can adapt to changing settings, and to have the ability to communicate findings in a variety of settings. Students with these general skills are qualified to continue studies at the next cycle, or to work in many jobs that apply these basic skills.

The programme's name, content, expected learning outcomes and qualifications offered are consistent with each other.

It should be noted that two words in the programme's name may mean different things to different people. The word "Baltic" as used in this name is defined in section 1.1. It is the region around the Baltic Sea, bounded by Norway and Denmark in the West, and Russia and Belarus in the East. The word "Cultures" is used in the anthropological sense. The programme's focus on traditional cultures and their modern adaptations should be mentioned in the programme report, public descriptions, and marketing materials, because people outside of academe often think "culture" means only works of modern artists and literary authors (these are offered in the curriculum, but only one elective course for each), as well as professional composers and filmmakers (presently not engaged in the curriculum).

### *2. Curriculum design*

The programme's curriculum meets requirements for first-cycle university programmes as stipulated by law: Out of a total of 240 credits required for the bachelor's degree, 60 follow general VMU education requirements and will not be discussed here. Most of the programme's required 180 credits are in courses oriented toward theoretical preparation and professional

capacity, and among them 15 credits are related to practical training (listed on page 14 of the report). Subjects studied include at least 30% independent work.

The study programme includes 33 topics courses, courses in nine languages taught at two levels each, and course credits earned for internships (practice) and thesis preparation. A series of courses that give a general introduction to the region, and courses that introduce theories and methods of culture studies. The sequence of courses develops from these broad categories to more complex, specialized topics. In the "Basic Study" section, students begin a regional specialization when they choose their two foreign languages. At the more advanced level, students take a series of courses in theory and methods, and choose among specialized courses in three categories:

- the traditional cultures of two language groups (Block 1),
- two genres of culture (Block 2); and
- two aspects of public culture (Block 3).

Finally, students apply theoretical skills in practice off campus, and in writing a thesis based on independent research. Course topics do not overlap. They follow a clear sequence from introductory and general to deeper and more specialized topics. These courses all are consistent with the first-cycle level of study. Students follow a clear progression of studies toward the desired learning outcomes, and the learning outcomes of the courses add up to the desired learning outcome of the programme as a whole.

The content of the "Basic Study" courses (BRK numbers) gives a good introduction to current international theories and methods of ethnology and culture studies. There is some room for improvement in this part of the curriculum. Many of the publications assigned in these programme courses miss the programme's regional orientation. In most of the course descriptions and reading lists from this section of the programme, for example, the Nordic countries are missing - this is regrettable for two reasons:

- In the assigned readings, students do not encounter sufficient comparative examples of culture from the western Baltic (Nordic) region, and
- they do not engage ethnology research and theories of Nordic scholars, whose cutting-edge publications address relevant topics such as public culture, ethnic cultures and migration in the global world.

Absent also is Estonian scholarship, which for the past decade has been emerging as an international leader in folklore studies. Many publications by Nordic and Estonian folklorists/ethnologists are in English and easily accessible to the programme's students.

The current gap in the programme's regional coverage may be related to the language and research specialization of the instructors (discussed below). Instructors could over time modify and expand their course plans to add case studies that more completely reflect the Baltic region's diverse cultures. Until such content changes are made, course names or the A3 section of the course descriptions should be changed to inform students about a given course's regional focus. For example, BRK 2001 might more appropriately be titled "Introduction to Lithuanian Folklore Science," because only Lithuanian publications appear in the reading list.

### 3. Staff

The programme has a staff of 15 teachers who teach topics courses, and nine language instructors. As required by laws governing Lithuania's universities, established scientists teach more than half of the programme's courses; in fact, all of the topics courses are taught by teachers with doctoral degrees, and only some of the language courses are taught by teachers who are not doctors of science. The instructors are highly qualified and able to ensure learning outcomes: They have published their research in numerous peer-reviewed sources, and they have substantial years of teaching experience. The programme's core courses are distributed equally among seven instructors who all hold the doctoral degree, while affiliated faculty in other departments complement theory and methods with deeper knowledge about the region's various countries. The teaching staff is thus able to ensure learning outcomes. There may be a danger of overloading individual instructors when students choose thesis topics and advisors, but the teaching staff currently believe, based on their familiarity with the students, that the advising workload will be distributed evenly among instructors. Several instructors teach simultaneously in more than one programme, however, and their combined advising load may become too large. Future reports on faculty workload should include calculations as established by the order of VMU Rector, "On teaching staff pedagogical workload calculation".

There has been no turnover in the core department faculty over these first two years, and it seems that the programme's language instruction has also been stable despite teacher turnover. Key language instructors are missing, however. It is hoped that the university will soon be able to hire instructors of Estonian and Swedish, to ensure instruction in all of the region's languages.

The teaching staff's research demonstrates the programme's greatest strengths. Their publications and course reading lists demonstrate that they are, without a doubt, well versed in current international scholarship. A logical next step would be for the teaching staff to enter the international discourse and publish more of their work in journals outside of Lithuania.

The staff's research topics also indicate what might be a weakness in the programme: a heavy focus on the eastern half of the Baltic region, and on Lithuania in particular. Only one staff member (Gustaitienė) publishes research about Scandinavian literature and culture, for example, and of the six persons who speak Polish, only one (Miklaševič) has published research about Polish culture. It appears that the teaching staff's research interests do not always coincide with the regional focus of the programme. This is not necessarily a problem: the programme's curriculum ensures that students may easily specialize in western Baltic cultures, and several staff members can advise them if they do. These Scandinavian specialists, however, may encounter an unequal, heavy workload when students choose them as thesis advisors.

The students interviewed by the committee are choosing to specialize in Danish, Finnish, Latvian, Norwegian, and German, and some plan to travel or already are on exchange to Estonia, Finland, Latvia, and Poland. It is likely that they will need thesis advisors who are familiar with those cultures; most are covered, but there is presently no staff member fluent in Estonian who can advise the two students presently on exchange in that country. Only one student is currently studying Russian, which seems to be the main foreign research language for the seven core faculty members in the Department of Cultural Studies and Ethnology.

During the meetings at VDU, it appeared that students may sometimes be more fluent in English than their instructors. This is a desired area of growth for the programme's teaching staff, and it should be a focus of instructors' professional development in the near future. Instructors will need to work to ensure that they can help students navigate the large volume of English-language scholarship about the Baltic region. Both students and teachers need to strengthen their foundations in western-Baltic studies. The processes of European integration and cooperation

that were mentioned in the programme's aims, as well as the best job prospects for the programme's graduates, are closely related to the western Baltic region. Teachers have already improved their qualifications through internships in the USA, the UK, and Ireland; similar exchanges to the Nordic countries would improve the programme's connections to Scandinavia.

#### ***4. Facilities and learning resources***

University facilities are definitely adequate for this first-cycle programme's needs. Classrooms are excellent, and computers and other equipment are up-to-date. There are adequate arrangements for students' practice. The Moodle system allows easy distribution of course materials.

Library resources are adequate, but there is room for improvement and growth. The report did not include information about the VDU library's holdings of books related to the Baltic region's cultures, and did not estimate the number of books in the regional languages. The Baltic region cultures collection seems to be much smaller than what will soon be needed when students begin thesis research. The committee was not able to determine, for example, how many books in the library are about Norwegian or Finnish culture, or how many Swedish-, Polish-, Estonian-, or Danish-language books are in the collection, or an approximate number of books related to ethnology and cultural studies theory and methods. The committee later received more detailed information about library resources for ethnology and regional studies.

Although students are trained in basic search techniques, they do not yet seem to know much about specific Baltic-region resources that are available in the library's ample online databases: They have skills necessary for researching a particular topic, but they do not seem to know where to look for new research on other topics related to their country of interest. Current research published in journals reflects current trends in Baltic region studies. Students should encounter in their class reading lists, for example, articles found in *Ethnologia Europaea*, *Scandinavian Studies*, and *Journal of Baltic Studies*.

#### ***5. Study process and student assessment***

As mentioned above, it is difficult to assess and evaluate the study process, because the programme is only in its second year. A critical indicator of learning outcomes will be the theses that students write in their fourth year. Nevertheless signs are good that the programme is achieving many intermediate steps toward the final learning outcomes. The well-grounded programme admission process ensures that students with high potential are enrolling. Dropout rates are low, and it seems that they are not related to the programme's quality or content. Student motivation is high. Students interviewed by the committee are enthusiastic about the language courses, for example, and in fact some are requesting that VMU increase language offerings to the third level. As mentioned above, student mobility also seems to be on a good course – two students are already abroad during their second year of study, earlier than usual, and at least five more plan to go abroad next year.

The students' job prospects after graduation seem to be good. The committee met with representatives of agencies who have worked with the students in practice, and may be potential employers in the future. Student skills in foreign languages and cultures, for example, make them valuable researchers and contributors to work at local museums; students and graduates will help plan and organize local cultural events, and expand international cultural contacts. Although no commercial or government stakeholders were able to meet with the committee, students and instructors both mentioned that tourism businesses and government agencies are prospective employers.



Students did not indicate any problems in the way their performance is assessed, and the committee believes that the assessment process is transparent, fair and thorough.

## ***6. Programme management***

As discussed in the introduction, the programme was established on the initiative of the Department, with full support of the Dean. The university and department regularly gather and analyze data about student enrollment and career paths. The university has involved other stakeholders, among them potential employers, both as hosts for student practice assignments as well as advisors on the programme's strengths and weaknesses. It must be emphasized that the social partners, hosts of student practices, and potential future employers were enthusiastic and have nothing but good words to say about this new programme. Conversations with students, teachers and administrators during the site visit indicate that the programme is running smoothly and collegially.

Students regularly give feedback in a university-wide system of course evaluation, and also in less formal conversations with their instructors. The students who met with our committee expressed satisfaction that the instructors and administrators respond appropriately to their suggestions. For example, students requested more instruction in Baltic history, and they believe that a longer course will be added soon.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure regular instruction in all of the region's languages; teachers must be hired for Estonian and Swedish language courses.
2. Assess and expand library holdings of books and other materials in the Baltic region's languages, to ensure that students have sources they need in their thesis research. The library's collection should also be assessed regarding books about cultural studies theory and methods, and English-or Lithuanian- language publications about the Baltic region's cultures.
3. Support faculty development of course materials and research projects to include more of the program's regional perspective; particular attention should be given to adding examples and scholarship from the west Baltic region (the Nordic countries and Poland) and Estonia.
4. Support faculty mobility: The university or programme should support participation in international conferences related to the study of the Baltic region (for example, the biennial Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe), and instructors' teaching exchanges or guest lectures in other Baltic region countries, particularly in the western Baltic region.
5. Improve teaching staff's communicative and research skills in English, to ensure current content in courses and advance the university's internationalization strategy.
6. Strengthen the internal coherence of the teaching staff. The challenge of an interdepartmental program is that teachers work in several departments. Here, all teachers, including language instructors, should feel committed to the team, and actively look for ways to integrate their specialization into the broad, multilingual and interdisciplinary study of the Baltic region.
7. Investigate possibilities for student practice and job prospects in the private sector (tourism, international business, etc.)

#### IV. SUMMARY

This new programme is a welcome addition to higher education in Lithuania. There is no comparable programme at any other university in Lithuania. Students gain valuable knowledge about the Baltic region, understood in the broadest sense to include the cultures and countries surrounding the Baltic Sea (Norway, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, and Denmark). After graduating from the programme, students will have skills in at least three national languages spoken in these countries, allowing them to explore and interpret the rich heritage and human diversity characteristic of the region. Using also a fourth language, English, they will have learned current international theories and methods of cultural analysis. They will have gained practical experience doing work related to the region's culture.

Interdisciplinary, multilingual training gives students flexibility and offers multiple perspectives in the study of any issue. Upon completing this first-cycle program, students will have the general skills expected of a university graduate: they will think analytically, do independent research, and communicate their findings clearly. They will be exceptionally well prepared to work in a variety of jobs related to culture (museums, administration of public culture, tourism, marketing, etc.). With the ability to speak multiple languages, the graduates of this programme will be unique among people in Lithuania and Europe, and highly competitive in a variety of careers.

The new programme is most definitely on the path to success. Recommendations presented here aim to improve an already strong program. We believe that our recommendations will not come as a surprise to the programme staff. During the site visit, for example, teachers noted that all of the region's languages should be taught every year, and agreed that the library's holdings of books in regional languages should be increased. The main barrier to such improvements is insufficient money. Other improvements can be made with little financial expense: To strengthen the program's coherence and focus on the entire Baltic region, courses about methods and theory of culture studies should include more examples from the region's diverse cultures, particularly from the western Baltic countries. Teachers should be encouraged to engage in transregional research projects.

## V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Cultures of Baltic region* (state code – 612U70001) at Vytautas Magnus University is given positive evaluation.

*Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.*

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation Area in Points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	4
2.	Curriculum design	3
3.	Staff	3
4.	Material resources	3
5.	Study process and assessment (student admission, study process student support, achievement assessment)	4
6.	Programme management (programme administration, internal quality assurance)	4
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>21</b>

\*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is exceptionally good.

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## V. APIBENDRINAMASIS ĮVERTINIMAS

Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto studijų programa *Baltijos regiono kultūros* (valstybinis kodas – 612U70001) vertinama teigiamai.

Eil. Nr.	Vertinimo sritis	Srities įvertinimas, balais*
1.	Programos tikslai ir numatomi studijų rezultatai	4
2.	Programos sandara	3
3.	Personalas	3
4.	Materialieji ištekliai	3
5.	Studijų eiga ir jos vertinimas	4
6.	Programos vadyba	4
	<b>Iš viso:</b>	<b>21</b>

\* 1 - Nepatenkinamai (yra esminių trūkumų, kuriuos būtina pašalinti)

2 - Patenkinamai (tenkina minimalius reikalavimus, reikia tobulinti)

3 - Gerai (sistemiškai plėtojama sritis, turi savitų bruožų)

4 - Labai gerai (sritis yra išskirtinė)

## IV. SANTRAUKA

Džiugu, kad ši nauja programa papildė Lietuvos aukštojo mokslo programų sąrašą. Panaši programa nedėstoma nė viename Lietuvos universitete. Studentai įgyja vertingų ir išsamių žinių apie Baltijos jūros regiono šalis (Norvegiją, Suomiją, Rusiją, Estiją, Latviją, Lietuvą, Lenkiją, Vokietiją ir Daniją) ir jų kultūrą. Baigę programą, studentai mokės mažiausiai tris šių šalių kalbas; tai suteikia jiems galimybę tyrinėti turtingą regiono paveldą ir tautų įvairovę. Mokėdami dar vieną, anglų, kalbą, jie išmoks šiuolaikinių kultūros analizės teorijų ir metodų. Mokslinis darbas apie regiono kultūrą padės jiems įgyti praktinių žinių.

Tarpdisciplininis, daugiakalbis mokymas suteikia studentams lankstumo ir gausybę galimybių studijuoti bet kokį dalyką. Baigę pirmosios studijų pakopos programą studentai įgyja bendrų universitete suteikiamų žinių: jie gebės analitiškai mąstyti, savarankiškai atlikti mokslinį tyrimą ir paskelbti jo išvadas. Absolventai galės dirbti įvairiose su kultūra susijusiose srityse (muziejuose, visuomenės kultūros administravimo, turizmo, rinkodaros ir kituose sektoriuose).

Kadangi šie specialistai mokės kelias kalbas, jie bus vertinami Lietuvoje bei Europoje ir bus pajėgūs konkuruoti įvairiose darbo srityse.

Naujoji programa neabejotinai susilauks sėkmės. Pateiktose rekomendacijose siūloma, kaip dar labiau pagerinti šią sėkmingai vykdomą programą. Nemanome, kad mūsų rekomendacijos nustebins programos dėstytojus. Vizito metu dėstytojai sutiko, kad visos regiono kalbos turėtų būti dėstomos kiekvienais metais ir pritarė nuomonei, kad bibliotekos knygų regiono kalbomis ištekliai turi būti padidinti. Pagrindinė kliūtis šiems pasiūlymams įgyvendinti yra lėšų trūkumas. Kitus dalykus galima būtų pagerinti investuojant nedaug lėšų: sustiprinti programos vientisumą ir skirti dėmesį visam Baltijos regionui, įtraukti į kultūros studijų teorijos ir metodologijos kursus daugiau pavyzdžių apie regiono kultūrinę įvairovę, ypač vakarų Baltijos šalių. Dėstytojus reikėtų skatinti dalyvauti tarpregioniniuose mokslinių tyrimų projektuose.

### **III. REKOMENDACIJOS**

1. Užtikrinti nuolatinį visų regiono kalbų mokymą; įdarbinti estų ir švedų kalbų dėstytojus.
2. Peržiūrėti ir plėsti bibliotekos knygų ir kitų resursų Baltijos regiono kalbomis atsargas, užtikrinti, kad studentai turėtų reikalingų šaltinių savo moksliniams darbams. Įvertinti bibliotekos knygų apie kultūros studijų teoriją ir metodologiją ir leidinių apie Baltijos regiono kultūras anglų ir lietuvių kalbomis atsargas.
3. Remti fakulteto vykdomą kursų medžiagos ir tyrimo projektų plėtrą, siekiant įtraukti į programą daugiau medžiagos apie regiono kultūras; ypatingą dėmesį skirti vakarų Baltijos regionui (Šiaurės šalių ir Lenkijos) ir Estijos.
4. Remti fakulteto mobilumą: skatinti dalyvavimą tarptautinėse konferencijose apie Baltijos regiono kultūras (pavyzdžiui kas dvejus metus vykstančioje Europos šalių Baltijos studijų konferencijoje) ir dėstytojų mainus arba siūsti dėstytojus skaityti paskaitas kitose Baltijos regiono šalyse, ypač vakarų Baltijos regiono šalyse.
5. Gerinti dėstytojų bendravimo ir mokslinių tyrimų anglų kalba gebėjimus, kad kursuose būtų pateikiamos naujausios žinios ir būtų vykdoma universiteto internacionalizavimo strategija.

6. Stiprinti programos dėstytojų komandą, nes tai, jog programos dėstytojai dirba keliuose skirtinguose fakultetuose yra iššūkis. Visi dėstytojai, taip pat ir užsienio kalbų, turėtų sudaryti komandą ir ieškoti būdų, kaip integruoti savo specializaciją į plataus masto, daugiakalbes ir tarpdisciplinines Baltijos regiono studijas.

7. Ieškoti galimybių, kad studentai galėtų atlikti praktiką ir įsidarbinti privačiame sektoriuje (turizmo, tarptautinio verslo ir kt.)

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