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The Condition of the Road Infrastructure in the Trakai District in the Second Half of the 18th Century: A Case Study

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Abstract. The article discusses the state of road infrastructure in the Trakai district in the second half of the 18th century. Roads and related elements such as bridges, dykes, and inns were crucial for communication, trade, and transport, and their quality impacted the daily lives of residents and travellers. The Trakai district, due to its central location, could enjoy better road conditions compared to other areas of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Nevertheless, the road infrastructure in the region still faced many issues, such as a lack of adequate maintenance and modernisation. The article emphasises that roads were often in poor condition, which limited their functionality. There are also references to local initiatives aimed at improving the infrastructure. The analysis of the state of roads in the Trakai district can be viewed as a lens through which broader infrastructure problems throughout the Grand Duchy of Lithuania can be observed.

Key words: *Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Trakai district, roads, road infrastructure.*

Anotacija. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama kelių infrastruktūros būklė Trakų paviete XVIII amžiaus antrojoje pusėje. Keliai ir su jais susiję elementai, tokie kaip tiltai, pylimai ir smuklės, buvo svarbūs komunikacijai, prekybai ir transportui, o jų kokybė turėjo įtakos tiek gyventojų, tiek keliautojų kasdienybei. Trakų pavietas dėl centrinės vietos galėjo džiaugtis geresnėmis

kelių sąlygomis, palyginti su kitomis Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės dalimis. Tačiau kelių infrastruktūra regione vis dar susidūrė su daugybe problemų, tokių kaip netinkama priežiūra ir modernizavimo trūkumas. Straipsnyje pabrėžiama, kad keliai dažnai buvo prastos būklės, o tai ribojo jų funkcionalumą. Taip pat pateikiami pagerinti infrastruktūrą siekusių vietos iniciatyvų pavyzdžiai. Per Trakų pavieto kelių būklės analizę galima įžvelgti platesnes infrastruktūros problemas visoje Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje.

Esminiai žodžiai: *Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė, Trakų pavietas, keliai, kelių infrastruktūra*.

In 1778, while recounting his journey through the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, British historian and traveller William Coxe observed with pointed clarity: "The roads in Lithuania are entirely neglected, little better than narrow by-paths winding through dense forests without the slightest degree of artificial planning. They are often so narrow that a carriage can barely pass, frequently obstructed by tree stumps and roots, and in many places so exceedingly sandy that even eight small horses could scarcely drag us forward".[1] His journey coincided with the launch of infrastructure surveys initiated a year earlier – efforts aimed at assessing the actual condition of bridges and causeways, which laid the groundwork for eventual repairs. It is therefore hardly surprising that, despite these nascent efforts, Coxe encountered roads in a deplorable state – perfectly in line with the widespread contemporary perception of their quality. The Commonwealth's road infrastructure was subject to constant criticism from both travellers and administrative bodies, embodying one of the most visible markers of the state's inadequate attention to public communication networks. The dismal condition of the roadways – rooted in chronic neglect, environmental challenges, and fragmented institutional responsibility – became, in effect, a defining feature of the socio-economic landscape of the age.[2]

Infrastructure reforms formed part of a broader project of state modernisation, inspired in no small measure by Enlightenment ideals that emphasised the rationalisation of governance and the improvement of public institutions.[3] Amid economic

[1] COXE, William. *Travels in Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark*. London, 1802, Vol. 1, p. 237.

[2] CIESIELSKI, Tomasz. Roads, travelling and communication in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century. Russian and west european visitors' perspective. In *Gremium. Studia nad Historią, Kulturą i Polityką*, 2020, t. 14, p. 119–140; JANECZEK, Andrzej. Staropolski układ komunikacyjny na mapie józefińskiej Galicji z lat 1779–1783. Szansa czy iluzja rekonstrukcji. In ed. J. Kamińska-Kwak, *Galicyjskie drogi i bezdroża. Studium infrastruktury, organizacji i kultury podróżowania* (pp. 9–12). Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2013.

[3] These measures echoed the reforms undertaken in other parts of Europe, particularly in France and England, where the modernisation of infrastructure was part of a broader project of state rationalisation

and political disarray, the imperative to streamline communication and ensure the more efficient movement of information and goods across the diverse regions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth gained strategic importance. Roads, bridges, and crossings were not merely functional components of local infrastructure; they may also be read as symbolic markers of an ambition to overcome stagnation and build a modern polity. While Enlightenment thought undoubtedly contributed to a shift in how communication infrastructure was conceptualised – particularly within urban and state spaces – its influence should not be overstated. Equally transformative was the concrete, comparative experience of the Commonwealth's elites with road systems abroad. Encounters with the efficiently maintained routes of France or Prussia often exerted a more persuasive force than the abstract prescriptions of philosophers, offering not just models to emulate but arguments grounded in pragmatic utility and aspirational prestige. In this sense, modernisation was driven not solely by the spirit of ideas, but by the practical and symbolic imperative to measure up to Europe's infrastructural standards.

The quality of roads and related structures serves as a mirror reflecting the broader condition of the state itself. Perhaps the most evocative – though temporally and geographically distant – example is that of the Roman Empire, whose administrative efficiency rested in part on a well-organised road network, and whose decline was foreshadowed by the gradual neglect of this very infrastructure.[4] In a similar vein, the deterioration of the transport system in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania mirrored the wider crisis afflicting the polity. This infrastructural decay laid bare not only local hardships – from the difficulty of reaching markets, fairs, or Sunday holy mass – but also exposed deeper strategic vulnerabilities. The stagnation of merchant mobility and the weakening of effective control over once-promising regions, including those of military significance, became symptomatic of a faltering state. In this sense, infrastructure emerges not as a neutral technical domain, but as a diagnostic indicator of political vitality – or its erosion.

This was not a neutral space – the transport network pulsed with interdependencies, where roads, bridges, and inns were not merely part of the scenery, but actively structured movement, set the rhythm of the economy, and shaped the everyday experiences of both travellers and local inhabitants. Communication routes did not exist in a vacuum – their

and the subordination of space to administrative logic and economic efficiency. ARBELLOT, Guy. La grande mutation des routes de France au XVIIIe siècle. *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales,* 1972, 28(3), p. 765–791; ALBERT, William. *The Turnpike Road System in England, 1663–1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972; BOGART, Dan. Turnpike trusts and the transportation revolution in 18th century England. *Explorations in Economic History*, 2005, 42(4), p. 479–508; COCHON, Anne. Les transports intérieurs sous la Révolution. Une politique de l'espace. *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, 2008, t. 2, p. 5–28.

4 BERECHMAN, Joseph. Transportation – Economic Aspects of Roman Highway Development. The Case of Via Appia. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 2003, 37(5), p. 453–478.

utility depended on durable bridges connecting riverbanks and causeways that protected against the whims of wetlands, making roads genuinely passable and integrating them into a broader pattern of spatial continuity. However, they required regular maintenance and funding, directly linking them to the system of tolls and local inns, where travellers could pay fees and rest. The combination of bridge and inn was one of the key factors in the process of settlement development. Inns were not merely places of rest – they served as crucial nodes in the transport network, offering not only shelter but also information on road conditions, opportunities to change horses, and refuge. The quality of the road influenced the number of travellers, and thus the profitability of inns, which in turn had the means to support local repair initiatives.

In poor technical condition, a bridge or causeway became a destabilising actor within the system, forcing detours and slowing down trade. Paradoxically, the worse the road, the more important the inns became – travellers would stop more frequently to rest, which increased their economic significance but could also contribute to the emergence of illegal establishments. In this network, every element affected the others: a damaged bridge could paralyse traffic on the road, while a closed inn might lead to a given route losing its importance. Road infrastructure was therefore not a static system, but a living organism, in which people, structures, and institutions continuously influenced one another, negotiating the durability and effectiveness of communication.

The article is a case study dedicated to the transport infrastructure of the Trakai district in the second half of the 18th century, with particular emphasis on the condition of roads, bridges, embankments, and the network of inns. The choice of this region is motivated both by the availability of source material and the need to situate the research within a specific local context, allowing for the capture of operational mechanisms on a micro scale. The selected area stands out due to its strategic location at the intersection of several key communication routes – both land and water – making it an important hub in the transport structure of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Additionally, it is worth highlighting the significance of an individualised approach to managing road infrastructure, which moves away from viewing it as a homogeneous, monolithic system in favour of analysing its individual components within their local context. Such decomposition enables not only a more precise diagnosis of the technical condition but also allows for consideration of diverse regional factors – both environmental and socio-economic – which translates into more effective, adaptive strategies for the maintenance and modernisation of the road network. This positioning raises the question to what extent geographic centrality translated into a privileged infrastructural status, manifested in better technical condition of roads and greater effectiveness of repair efforts.

The aim of this study is therefore to examine whether and how the location of the Trakai district determined the intensity of administrative oversight and the quality of maintenance of communication routes, thus constituting a model case of

the relationship between spatial function and infrastructure condition. The analysis is based on materials documenting not only the technical condition of the objects studied but also specific organisational actions, which allowed for an assessment of the infrastructure's functionality and its impact on mobility and economic life. This study fits within a broader research trend on the effectiveness of infrastructural reforms in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, while also offering a point of reference for interregional comparisons.

To capture the complexity of the infrastructure under study, I employed the actor-network theory (ANT) approach in the article. This method allows roads, bridges, embankments, and inns to be treated not as static objects but as active elements within a network of social, administrative, and material relations. It enables the analysis of infrastructure as a dynamic system in which people, institutions, and things interact in the process of producing space. Instead of searching for simple causes and effects, ANT allows tracing the tangled dependencies in which the infrastructure itself acquires agency. This makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of how infrastructure not only reflected but also shaped practices of power, mobility, and resource management.

In the first half of the 18th century, the condition of transport infrastructure was affected by administrative problems related to the management and enforcement of repair obligations. The landscape of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania itself long resisted infrastructural development – tangled networks of rivers and lakes, impenetrable swamps, and dense forests effectively impeded the construction and maintenance of roads and bridges, becoming natural allies of chaos. Spring thaws and autumn rains caused dirt roads to become impassable, while wooden bridges and embankments frequently suffered damage. The lack of durable building materials and technologies that could effectively stabilise roads in difficult terrain further exacerbated these problems. Natural environmental barriers constituted only half the problem – the real obstacle was also administrative neglect. Local authorities and landowners, although obligated by regulations, often avoided responsibility for roads and bridges, leaving them in a condition that resembled neglect more than compliance with the law.[5]

[5] The importance of roads and bridges, as well as the obligation to repair them, was already mentioned in the privilege of Casimir Jagiellon on May 2, 1447, and was likely a continuation of earlier customary law, known as *starina*. These obligations were reaffirmed in Casimir Jagiellon's *Sudiebnik* (1486), the privilege of Alexander Jagiellon (1492), and Sigismund I (1506). They were further elaborated in the Second Lithuanian Statute (1566), which required the manager of a given structure to compensate travellers in case of harm caused by the manager's negligence. Additionally, the width of the road was specified as sufficient to allow two carts to pass freely, and in the Third Statute (1588), it was clarified to be one and a half rod. KUNIGIELIS, Joanna. Organizacja funkcjonowania mostów i grobli w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim od drugiej połowy XV do końca XVI wieku – zarys problematyki. *Rocznik Lituanistyczny*, 2021, t. 7, p. 41–44; JURKIEWICZ, Jan. *Powinności włościan w dobrach prywatnych w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XVI–XVII wieku*. Poznań, 1991; WYSŁOUCH, Seweryn. *Posługi komunikacyjne w miastach W. Ks. Litewskiego na prawie magdeburskiem do połowy XVI w.* Wilno, 1936.

The establishment of the Polish and Lithuanian Treasury Commissions in 1764[6] aimed to reform and improve the management of state affairs, including public finances. One of the Commission's tasks was to increase state revenue by tightening the tax system, reducing abuses, and introducing more effective control mechanisms, all within the broader effort to improve the overall condition of the state.[7]

The first attempt at reform that had a direct impact on the state of infrastructure took place during the Convocation Sejm of 1764, when it was decided to standardise the toll rates for bridges and causeways, part of which was allocated for the periodic repair of these structures.[8] Accordingly, for installations with higher maintenance costs, the maximum toll could be set at 3 grosze per horse or ox, while for others it ranged between 1 and 2 grosze.[9] However, the introduced rates proved insufficient, and by 1768 it was decided that higher tolls would be imposed on bridges and causeways exceeding 150 ells (*łokcie*) in length, as longer crossings placed greater strain on the structures.[10]

Bridges and causeways were not only physical connectors between regions, but also the true lifeblood of trade, whose pulse depended on their condition and accessibility. They determined the fluidity of goods transport and the freedom of human movement, making them key nodes on the region's mobility map. The better the state of a given structure and the greater the safety along the route, the more intense the commercial traffic, which in turn fostered the development of local markets and the economic integration of regions. While viewing bridge and causeway tolls as a form of participation in the maintenance and financing of the road system may carry traces of an ahistorical perspective – since such fees were primarily seen as a source of revenue rather than part of a planned infrastructure policy – their contextual role should not

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6 *Volumina Legum*, 1860, p. 154.

7 BAŁTRUSZAJTYS, Grażyna. Podział czynności komisarzy Komisji Skarbu Koronnego z roku 1766. *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych*, 1972, t. 32, p. 89–100; *Sądownictwo Komisji Skarbowych w sprawach handlowych i przemysłowych 1764–1794*. Warszawa, 1977; DANOWSKA, Ewa. Komisja Skarbu Koronnego – zakres władzy i odpowiedzialności. *Rocznik Biblioteki PAU i PAN w Krakowie*, 1996, R. 41, p. 45–62; JUCHNIEWICZ, Joanna. Sejmowa kontrola finansowej działalności państwa w latach 1764–1792. *Studia Prawnoustrojowe*, 2005, Nr. 5, s. 129–146.

8 These findings were frequently referenced at a later time. *Dziennik rządowo-ekonomiczno handlowy […] Zajmujący 3 miesiące styczeń luty, marzec 1790,* 1790, p. 27.

9 *Volumina Legum*, 1860, t. 7, p. 22.

10 Ibid., p. 313–314; KUNIGIELIS, Joanna. Myta mostowe i grobelne w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w drugiej połowie XVIII w. *Rocznik Lituanistyczny*, 2024, t. 10, p. 227–291.

be overlooked.[11] They nonetheless remained parts of a greater whole, thus forming one of the components of an efficient communication system.[12]

Intensified efforts to inspect and improve bridges and causeways became noticeable from the late 1770s, when large-scale surveys of these structures began to be conducted across the territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Alongside these activities, authorities decided to revisit the issue of toll rates. According to the decree (*universal*) issued on April 26, 1779, all landowners who collected tolls were required to present valid privileges or documents confirming the expenses incurred in the construction and maintenance of the infrastructure. Toll collection from merchants was permitted only at a single designated location and had to be based on a document bearing the seal of the Treasury Commission.[13]

Additionally, bridge administrators were required to propose the toll rates themselves; however, their justification was subject to verification through established procedures.[14] Each toll had to be clearly justified, and illegal or excessive charges were to be eliminated.[15] Despite these regulations, the problem of proliferating tolls remained persistent, as evidenced by merchants' complaints and the instructions issued to Treasury Commissioners at the Sejm in 1786 and 1788.[16]

An analysis of economic protocols reveals that some toll collection concessions were granted in cycles of 3, 4, or 5 years, after which they were typically extended[17] – usually under the same conditions, although with the possibility of rate increases if justified by current needs.[18] However, there were cases in which such permissions were revoked – primarily when revenues from other facilities operating within the estate

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[11] ZAWADZKI, Mateusz; JAKIMOWICZ, Kamil. Obraz dróg lądowych w Rzeczpospolitej w świetle wybranych źródeł narracyjnych i kartograficznych z XVI–XVIII w. Zarys problemu. *Res Historica*, 2024, Nr. 57, p. 693–694.

[12] In the Kaunas district, adjacent to the Trakai district, during the economic *sejmik* in Kaunas (February 4, 1766), a *laudum* concerning bridges was signed, granting approval for the inspection of roads and bridges – *propter universalem commoditatem*. Akta sejmiku kowieńskiego z lat 1733–1795. Ed. M. Jusupović. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IH PAN, 2019, p. 188–189.

[13] *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, Nr. 151, k. 3–3v.

[14] There were instances of refusals, such as in Rudamina, Jašiūnai, and Merkinė, where the Treasury Commission of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania denied Karol Radziwiłł the right to collect bridge tolls. This was justified by the fact that he was already earning sufficient income from numerous inns located along the route. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 122, k. 43v–44v.

[15] *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 151, k. 3–3v.

[16] PILARCZYK, Piotr Miłosz. Instrukcje dla litewskich komisarzy skarbowych delegowanych na sejmy (1780–1790). *Krakowskie Studia z Historii Państwa i Prawa*, 2020, 13(2), p. 248, 252.

[17] For example, the toll in Konotop was extended in 1779 and 1783. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 115, l. 23–24; b. 1002, l. 140–141.

[18] For example, the toll in Eitkūnai in 1779 amounted to 1 grosz per horse or ox in a merchant cart, while in 1786 it was increased to 2 grosze, and in 1789 to 3 grosze. *LVIA*, f. 11, op. 1, b. 117, l. 9v; b. 120, l. 125–125v; b. 122, l. 93v–94.

already generated significant profits for the landowner.[19] It must also be assumed, however, that such decisions could at times have been strategic in nature.

Table 1. *Comparison of lustrations and confirmations for the Trakai district in the years 1778–1787*

Domain	Lustration of bridges and dykes	Confirmation of bridge and dyke tolls
Kalvarija starosty	3 IV 1778	23 IV 1779
Mūrinė Vokė	25 IV 1778	24 X 1778; 5 III 1789
Alytus economy	10 III 1780	-
Varėna starosty	23 VII 1780	22 IV 1780
Butrimonys	6 XI 1781	5 XII 1781
Alovė	25 XI 1781	7 XII 1781
Aukštadvaris	14 VI 1784	19 XI 1784
Abromiškės	27 III 1787	4 V 1787
Vokė	-	29 IV 1783

Source: Author's own study based on: *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai*. Ed. Algirdas Baliulis, Tomas Čelkis. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2018, nr. 11, p. 57–58; nr. 17, p. 67–69; nr. 47, p.149-152; nr. 52, p. 157–158; nr. 71, p. 229–230; nr. 125, p. 327; nr. 151, p. 378–380; nr. 152, p. 380–381; LVIA, f. 11, ap., 1, b. 115, c. 20–20v.; b. 117, c. 21v–22; n. 118, c. 4v–5, 150v, 156; b. 121, c. 69v–70, b. 1002, c. 78, 231.

When attempting to assess the quality of transport infrastructure in the second half of the 18th century, several key elements must be taken into account, as they significantly influenced both its functionality and the social and economic life of the regions. Most importantly, the condition of roads – including their surface and width – was crucial for the efficiency of travel, determining its speed and comfort. Equally important was the distribution and quality of bridges, which affected the ability to safely cross bodies of water, thereby reducing travel time. This also applies to other constructions designed to facilitate movement, such as embankments, corduroy roads, or brushwood causeways used in marshy areas. Another essential factor was the presence and condition of inns and taverns, which served as rest and supply points. Equally significant was the issue of safety – both in terms of protection against banditry and the prevention of damage caused by adverse weather conditions. All of these elements were framed and reinforced by legal regulations, which acted as a unifying structure.

[19] By virtue of a privilege granted on April 4, 1782, Kocieł was authorised to collect tolls also in the Markowskie starosty on the route from Minsk to Vilnius and Königsberg, from Kuraniec to Myadzyel, from Illa, Radashkovichy, and Minsk, as well as from Baruny and Olshany to Vilnius. However, due to his ownership of numerous inns and mills, the permit was revoked. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 120, l. 131v–132.

Bridges and causeways

Based on the inspections carried out in the Trakai district and the parish descriptions from 1784, a picture emerges of bridges and causeways being maintained in relatively good condition. However, it is important to note the individualised approach taken by the treasury officials appointed to conduct these inspections.[20] Although all the documents included the necessary information regarding the dimensions and construction methods of each structure, individual inspectors often added important supplementary remarks that enriched the overall assessment – such as notes on environmental conditions.

In the case of bridges and causeways located in the Kalvarija starosty, the inspection reports emphasised the distance between these structures and the sources of timber supply. The lack of nearby forests and the complex land ownership situation could have had a direct impact on their technical condition. Limited access to wood hindered both construction and maintenance, while land ownership issues may have complicated the coordination of repair efforts. Such factors affected the quality of maintenance and, consequently, the long-term durability and functionality of the structures. This was evident, for instance, in the case of the bridge near Kalvarija over the Kirsna River, whose cost was estimated at 1,500 złoty – due in part to the absence of forested land belonging to the estate and the considerable distance to timber markets.[21] The same problem was encountered in the Kirsna manor and in the town of Kalvarija, where costs were further increased by the need to bring in carpenters and diggers from Prussia.[22] The lack of local specialists necessitated hiring skilled labour from abroad, which delayed the execution of the work. This situation illustrates how local limitations shaped the organisation and costs associated with managing bridges and causeways.

The terrain's relief also affected the durability of the structures. The causeways located along the road passing through the village of Sabališkės in the Abromiškės estate were influenced by the hilly topography of the area. Water flowing down from the higher elevations caused erosion or flooding, which consequently weakened the causeway structures in the valleys. The construction and maintenance of these structures were therefore more costly, as they required excavations, embankments, and additional stabilisation works to prevent landslides. According to the 1787 inspection records, this area appeared inhospitable. It was marshy, difficult to drain, and crossed by numerous small streams – too small to power a mill wheel – making passage especially

[20] More about treasury court officials: ŠMIGELSKYTĖ-STUKIENĖ, Ramunė. Oficjaliści Komisji Skarbowej jako grupa społeczna Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego (1764–1795). In Tamara Bairašauskaitė (ed.), *Социальные группы и их влияние на развитие общества в XVI–XIX веках* (pp. 67–86). Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2015.

[21] *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai*. Ed. Algirdas Baliulis, Tomas Čelkis. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2018, Nr. 17, p. 68.

[22] Ibid., p. 67–68.

challenging during spring thaws.[23] Although the toll for crossing the bridge or causeway was 3 grosze per horse or ox pulling a merchant's cart,[24] the royal steward Józef Bakowski noted that "the possessor, without any prospect of advantage, constructed such causeways and bridges" which is quite telling considering the mention of only a single inn operating in the area.[25]

Such information submitted to the Treasury Commission – perhaps written under the subtle influence of the landowner – also appeared in other inspections. Landowners, having a direct interest in the inspection results, might have gently influenced their content, emphasising their contributions. Similar examples can be found in the 1781 inspection of Olona, belonging to Ludwika Skarżyńska, née Iwanowska,[26] or in the 1784 inspection of Aukštadvaris, where Onufry Lacki built new bridges and dykes.[27] It should be noted that these locations were situated along significant communication routes – Olona on the route from Vilnius to Königsberg and Aukštadvaris on the old royal route from Punia to Vilnius. Consequently, the income from tolls could cover the costs of periodic repairs, while the presence of taverns with propination privileges were likely to increase revenue.

The maintenance of structures, while dependent on the degree of damage, was equally influenced by the natural wear and tear of materials due to use and external factors. For bridges or paved road sections, the type of timber used and the method of treatment were particularly important. Among generally vague mentions of structures simply described as wooden, there were also more detailed accounts. For instance, in the Marcinkonys parish, in Zervynos and Žiūrai, bridges over the Ūla River were made of *kurhlaks* – round, usually unstripped logs.[28] These differed from squared logs (*brusowane*), which were mechanically processed to achieve a smooth, rectangular, or square shape.

Although seemingly marginal, the presence of bark on wooden beams constitutes a significant indicator of technological awareness and the level of infrastructural investment in 18th-century construction practices. Removing the bark was not merely an aesthetic treatment or routine carpentry procedure – it had profound practical implications affecting the durability of the structure, its resistance to biodegradation, and overall operational efficiency in environments with elevated humidity. Bark, as

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[23] Ibid., Nr. 152, p. 380–381.

[24] *LVIA*, f. 11, Nr. 121, k. 69v.–70.

[25] „[…] possesor bez żadnych perspektyw awantażu takowe groble i mosty poczynił". *Senųjų Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės kelių aprašymai*. Ed. Algirdas Baliulis, Tomas Čelkis. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2018, Nr. 152, p. 380–381.

[26] „[…] w mieyscu dotąd przeprawy trudney, a teraz kupcom y publico do przejazdu wygodnym, nie dla żadnych innych pożytków, iak tylko dla publiczney wygody kosztem possesorki są ufundowanemi". Ibid., Nr. 77, p. 241.

[27] „Te całe dzieło znacznym kosztem posesora […] A ztąd gdyby iaka dla posesora mogła wypaść korzyść nie wiadomo, chyba za wystawieniem przy onych groblach karczmy, może nieiakowy dla posesora nastąpić zysk y awantaż". Ibid., Nr. 125, p. 327.

[28] *LVIA*, f. 376, ap. 1, b. 4 , c. 35.

a natural membrane that retains moisture and creates favourable conditions for the growth of wood-decaying fungi and wood-boring insects, accelerated material deterioration. Leaving the bark made beams more susceptible to rot, which – under marshy or swampy conditions prevalent in many parts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – had tangible consequences for the lifespan of bridges, causeways, and crossings.

Conversely, removing the bark – which required additional labour, tools, and time – was a more economically costly but technologically conscious decision. The choice between debarked and bark-covered beams was not merely a material issue but also reflected investment priorities: whether a structure was intended to be durable and cost-effective in the long term or only functional for a short period. Thus, the presence or absence of bark can be regarded as an informal indicator of the "civilisational threshold" of local infrastructure – the more frequent the use of debarked beams, the greater the likelihood that the investment was considered strategic and long-term.

This seemingly insignificant element – the bark – had tangible consequences. Structures made from debarked logs were more durable and resistant to weather conditions and moisture. Removing the bark reduced the risk of wood decay, as it was the bark that retained moisture, promoting the growth of fungi and insects. As a result, structures made from debarked logs could last longer, particularly in humid or marshy areas. However, this was a more expensive choice. On the other hand, logs with bark were quicker and cheaper to process, making them a popular choice for temporary or less demanding structures.

The condition of bridges and dykes in the Trakai district was the result of complex interdependencies between legal regulations, their enforcement, and the financial capabilities of their administrators. A key role was played by toll revenue,[29] which covered the costs of repairs and construction of these structures, including the purchase of materials and payment for the work of craftsmen and labourers.[30] Effective management

[29] The value of the bridge and dykes toll amounted: Mūrinė Vokė (1778) – on the road from Vilnius to Grodno and Königsberg: 1 grosz per horse and ox in a merchant wagon, 2 szeląg per livestock driven for sale, on the road from Trakai to Vilnius: 3 grosze per horse and ox in a merchant wagon, 1 grosz per livestock driven for sale. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 115, c. 20–20v; Kalvarija starosty (1779) – 5 grosze per horse and ox in a merchant wagon, 1 grosz per driven livestock for sale. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 117, c. 21v–22; Varėna starosty (1780) – on the route from Grodno to Vilnius: 6 grosze per horse and ox in a merchant wagon; on the route from the Lida district to Vilnius: 3 grosze per horse and ox in a merchant wagon. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 118, c. 4v–5; Butrimonys (1781) – on the route from Vilnius to Prussia: 2 grosze per horse and ox in a merchant wagon. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 118, c. 150; Aluona (1781) – on the route from Vilnius to Königsberg: 1 grosz per horse and ox in a merchant wagon. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 118, c. 156; Vokė (1783) – bridge on the Voke river: 2 grosze per horse and ox in a merchant wagon and on the Kaunas road: 1 grosz per horse and ox in a merchant wagon. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 1002, c. 78; Aukštadvaris – the old Königsberg route, from Punia and Alytus to Vilnius: 2 grosze per horse and ox in a merchant wagon. *LVIA*, f. 11, Nr. 1002, k. 231; Abromiškės (1787) – in the village of Sabališkės: 3 grosze per horse or ox in a merchant wagon. *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 121, c. 69v–70.

[30] As late as 1791, by virtue of the universal decree of the Civil-Military and Order Commission of the Trakai Voivodeship, a standardised toll for bridges and ferries was introduced for structures located on the Neris and Nemunas rivers. *AGAD*, Tzw. Metryka Litewska, IX 27, l. 673.

also required adequate technical resources, the lack of which in certain areas necessitated the recruitment of specialists from more distant regions, significantly increasing expenses. At the same time, legal regulations concerning the maintenance of bridges and embankments imposed an obligation on landowners to care for the infrastructure, which often conflicted with their financial means. The amount of toll revenue and the availability of wood and other building materials, combined with environmental conditions, influenced the durability and quality of these structures. Thus, the technical condition of bridges and embankments reflected the interplay of economic, administrative, and natural factors that determined their usability and functionality.

Roads

Due to its strategic location, the Trakai district was continuously traversed by key communication routes connecting various parts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the second half of the 18th century, two key postal routes passed through this area: the Kaunas and Grodno postal routes,[31] as well as a network of numerous local roads, which formed a series of smaller arteries linking villages, noble estates, inns, mills, and other points of local significance.

The condition of the roads in the Trakai district is best illustrated by the parish descriptions from 1784. The project itself was initiated in 1778 by the Bishop of Płock, Michał Poniatowski, with the goal of creating a map of the Płock Diocese to serve church administration. In 1784, after more detailed guidelines for descriptions were introduced for the parish priests, Poniatowski, who had already assumed the role of primate, expanded this initiative to other dioceses of the Commonwealth.[32]

In the descriptions of the parishes of the Trakai deanery from 1784,[33] which include information about individual roads, one can observe diversity both in the form and content of the information provided by the parish priests. This may have resulted from several factors. The form of the description depended on the individual approach of each priest to presenting information about the roads. Some used a more formal, administrative language, emphasising the importance of a given route, while others adopted a more descriptive style, focusing on the practical aspects of travel. It is likely that some priests, depending on their education and experience, applied varying levels of detail. These differences may also stem from differing approaches to data collection. Some may have concentrated on more technical aspects, such as the type of road surface, difficulties in passage, and hazards along the route, whereas others focused on issues

[31] *VUB*, f. 23–48.

[32] Przyszłość kultury Polaków na Kresach, t. 2: *Kraj rodzinny matki mej*. Ed. Józef Maroszek. Białystok-Drohiczyn, 2000, p. 6.

[33] *LVIA*, f. 376, ap. 1, b. 4, c. 1–175.

related to the road's function in the context of social communication, providing precise descriptions of the route's course. These differences could also result from the varying conditions of roads in different parishes. In areas where roads were well maintained, priests may have limited themselves to simple route information, while in regions where roads were in poorer condition, the descriptions might have included details regarding the difficulties of travel.

The nobility of the Trakai district – though probably not limited to this region – demonstrated administrative awareness by recognising road infrastructure not only as a tool for trade but also as a vital element of public order. Sejmik (local assembly) instructions emphasising the necessity of maintaining roads in good technical condition reflected a deep understanding of the complex mechanisms underpinning state functioning.[34] Roads were regarded as strategic spaces essential for military mobility, the efficiency of the judiciary, and the ability to participate in political life, thereby granting them a constitutional dimension. Simultaneously, the nobility perceived the accessibility of routes as a prerequisite for the economic integration of the region with the main centres of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, thus manifesting thinking in terms of supra-local exchange networks. Road infrastructure became a medium for the flow not only of goods but also of influence, information, and the symbolic presence of the state. It was also valued as an expression of civic responsibility – on one hand, an ethical duty embedded in the model of local elite participation, and on the other, a formal mandate imposed by central authorities, creating a distinctive dualism that combined voluntary engagement with hierarchical imperative. Care for the roads was therefore a means of counteracting peripheralisation and an attempt to preserve the region's competitiveness relative to stronger districts. In this context, attention to infrastructure gained the status of a tool for self-organisation and emancipation of the local elite. Thus, this seemingly technical matter reveals fundamental processes of mental and systemic transformation.

Unlike bridges and dykes, the condition of the roads appears to be moderate, though still better than in many other areas. Compared to other counties, especially those in the north,[35] Trakai stood out exceptionally well, which can be attributed both to its strategic location and the presence of key communication routes crossing its territory.

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[34] „Urządzenie przepraw dróg publicznych i prywatnych, ile jest przyczyną pomnożenia handlu i wygody powszechnej, tyle j.w. posłowie dołożą starania, aby porządek zreperowania przepraw i dróg dla pożytku wspołecznego ustanowiony, prawem opisany i najczulszej egzekucji poddany został". Instruction for the ordinary sejm of 21 August 1786. *LVIA*, SA 5919, k. 600–609v.

[35] For example, in the Pelekai parish in the Breslaujà district of the Vilnius Voivodeship, the roads were described in 1784 as: „Drogi w obszerności całej parafii pelikańskiej są arcy złe, ponieważ się najwięcej ciągną błotami, chrośniakami i miejscami trudnymi ku przeprawie." *LVIA*, f. 376, ap. 1, b. 7, c. 261. Meanwhile, in the Deltuva parish in the Ukmergė district of the Vilnius Voivodeship, the road from Kėdainiai to Žeimiai: „na wiosnę i w jesieni tak topka i zła, ze trudno pojazdem jechać." *LVIA*, f. 376, ap. 1, b. 9, c. 13.

The county's central location made maintaining the communication infrastructure not only a necessity but also a priority, driven by the need to ensure the efficient flow of goods, information, and travellers.

It was characterised by a diverse and moderately challenging terrain. Located on the border of the Central European Lowland and the Eastern Baltic Lake District, this area did not feature extremely difficult-to-cross landforms, such as vast swamps. The moraine hills and glacial valleys naturally organised the communication system, allowing for the design of routes that bypassed larger obstacles. The road network in Trakai district appears to be relatively coherent, and there are no mentions of exceptional difficulties or obstacles in the parish descriptions that could complicate travel. Most roads – as was the case throughout the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – were unpaved and left to the mercy of nature, reflecting a life cycle governed by the rhythm of the weather. During rainfall, the roads became a muddy battleground. In the heat of summer, the dried and fragmented surface disintegrated, resulting in the formation of loose ground.

A section of the road from Mikašiūnai to Rūdninkai, passing through a forest and swampy areas.

The hilly and wooded surroundings of Trakai.

1 illus. *Mikołaj Zieliński, A map of the Trakai district with six parishes, compiled and drawn in 1800 [Mapa powiatu trockiego z sześciu parafii złożona, zrysowana w roku 1800], VUB, F23-48*

The roads of Trakai district show considerable diversity both in terms of quality and the landscape through which they passed. The communication network in this region

was dominated by forest roads, often root-bound, stony, and hilly, which clearly limited their passability, especially during rainy periods. In the Onuškis parish, the roads were characterised by difficult conditions – narrow, densely forested, and at the same time rough and wet, reflecting the terrain's topography and the presence of forests.[36] In contrast, the roads in the Daugai parish, although also passing through forests, were often interspersed with open fields, providing better conditions for travel compared to the more rugged areas.[37] In the Liškiava parish, open fields and sandy routes predominated, which, although flat, were prone to sinking during rain.[38]

The terrain significantly influenced the difficulty of traversing the roads. In the Merkinė parish, many routes passed through hilly areas and swamps, requiring numerous bridges and dykes.[39] Similarly, in the Valkininkai parish, roads with sandy substrates, despite having flat sections, were troublesome due to the lack of paving.[40] The lack of paved roads was a general feature of the entire communication network in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which significantly hindered transportation and travel, especially in difficult weather conditions. Other differences between the various routes also stemmed from the availability of infrastructure – bridges and dykes were more common near larger settlements, confirming the centralisation of investments. However, a common feature was the challenging yet manageable natural environment – roads often passed through wetlands and forests, and their maintenance relied on the local community.

Ultimately, the roads in the Trakai district, compared to other districts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, should be assessed as relatively satisfactory. Although not free from typical period problems such as mud, ruts, and protruding roots, they appeared in better condition than in many other regions. The communication network, despite local environmental challenges, met both the needs of the inhabitants and the strategic requirements of the district. The contrast between less developed areas and the centrally located, better-maintained Trakai district highlighted its relatively favourable infrastructural situation.

The quality of a road is not limited only to its surface, proper signage, or clarity of the route, but also includes the level of safety for users from robberies. This also depended on the effectiveness of preventive measures taken by the authorities and local administration. Although the Lithuanian Statutes already included provisions on penalties for highway robberies, this law did not prove to be an effective deterrent against such crimes.[41] However, this problem remained prevalent even at the end of

[36] *LVIA*, f. 376, ap. 1, b. 4, p. 7–8.
[37] Ibid., p. 20–22.
[38] Ibid., p. 28–30.
[39] Ibid., p. 48–53.
[40] Ibid., p. 78–81.
[41] BURBA, Domininkas. Plėšimo samprata XVIII amžiaus Vilniaus pavieto bajorų bylose: terminologijos, ryšių su kitais nusikaltimais ir erdvės klausimai. *Istorija,* 2014, 95(3), p. 24–39; ČELKIS, Tomas. Highway robbery in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16th–17th Century. *Faravid,* 2024, t. 55, p. 35–40.

the 18th century, as confirmed by, for example, the instruction for the ordinary sejm of August 16, 1784.[42]

Inns

Inns have been an integral part of the road network for centuries, serving not only as roadside havens for weary travellers but also as bustling centres of trade and social life. Situated along major communication routes, they played a crucial logistical role – offering rest, a warm meal, shelter, and the opportunity to exchange horses, making them an invaluable support for merchants, postal couriers, and state administration.

Particularly important were the inns that emerged at crossroads and river crossings – these were the places where trade was most vibrant, and around them, the seeds of local economic centres began to take root. In regions with harsh natural conditions, such as marshy valleys or mountain passes, they even served as bastions of safety, protecting travellers from the unpredictability of the routes and the whims of nature. Thus, they were not merely ordinary taverns – they formed the heart of the road infrastructure of their time, connecting people, goods, and ideas.

Inns were also a crucial element of the taxation system, as their owners paid fees to the state treasury, and the establishments themselves often operated within the framework of royal estates or magnate-owned properties. Some of them served as checkpoints where tolls were collected[43] and the movement of people and goods was monitored, playing a significant role in fiscal administration and state security.

Of course, the technical condition of the inns varied, and their construction depended on many factors, such as the purpose of the building, the financial resources of the owners or leaseholders, as well as their location. In cities, where inns experienced heavy traffic, the buildings were often more elaborate, featuring additional rooms such as banquet halls or guest chambers.[44] In rural areas, where inns served more as resting points for travellers or meeting places for small, local communities,[45] their construction could be modest, and the buildings were often uniform, single-room structures with simple furnishings.

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[42] *LVIA*, SA 5919, c. 129.

[43] This practice was observed in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at least since the 16th century. In the village of Gojcieniszki, in the Ašmena district of the Vilnius voivodeship, in 1565, the toll was paid at the inn, and the inn keeper was responsible for handing over the revenues to the manor. *AGAD*, dz. 29, Nr. 96, p. 21.

[44] Jerzy Gordziejew estimates that in the 1790s, there were 55 inns and around 130 taverns operating in Grodno. GORDZIEJEW, Jerzy. *Komisje Porządkowe Cywilno-Wojskowe w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w okresie Sejmu Czteroletniego (1789–1792)*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2010, p. 203.

[45] BURSZTA, Józef. *Wieś i karczma. Rola karczmy w życiu wsi pańszczyźnianej*. Warszawa: Instytut im. Oskara Kolberga, 1950, p. 24–27.

For example, the inn located in Buiviškiai, situated off the main routes, was described in 1781 as follows:

> *[…] miserable, old, thatched, without an entrance gate, consisting of a room with a chamber, with two small glass windows in the room and one window in the chamber. A hallway with large side doors, and behind the inn, in the garden by the marsh, a small brewery […].*[46]

The inn in Anglininkai, although located near an important road from Senieji Trakai to Onuškis, was in no better condition. In 1791, its state was recorded as follows:

> *An inn with a brewery, without a barn, small, converted from a malt house, with small hallways, in which the threshold of the entrance door to the living room is located; there are two doors to empty storage rooms, collapsed, old, without floors and without windows […].*[47] *In the room, there are two small, square new windows, a clay floor, an ordinary clay stove on wooden supports, and a wooden-hinged plank door leading to the room […] the roof of this little inn is covered with old turf.*

Eventually, by 1800, the inn disappeared from the map.[48]

The overall image of taverns in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was far from ideal – rather than comfortable havens for travellers, they often resembled dilapidated shelters where exhaustion triumphed over discomfort, and the quality of service gave way to sheer necessity.[49]

In the context of the location and technical condition of inns in the Trakai district, it should be noted that competition, in the classical sense, played no role in their operations. During the period in question, there was typically only one such establishment in a given locality. The operation of a inns was based on obtaining the appropriate permit, which made them function more as local monopolies, with their activity closely tied

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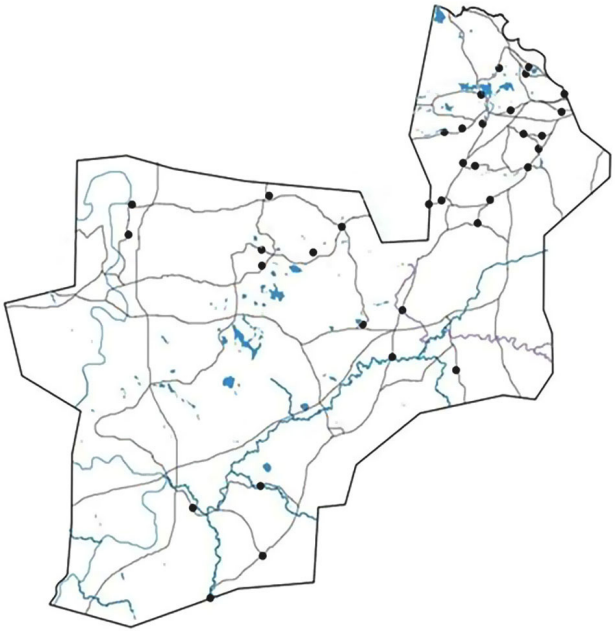
[46] „[…] mizerna, stara, słomą kryta, bez wjazdu, mająca izbę z komorą, w izbie okien dwa z szkła drobnego, a w komorze okno jedno. Sień w których wrota duże z boku, w tyle zaś za karczmą na ogrodzie nad błotem browarek […]." *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 1264, c. 5v.

[47] „Karczma przy browarze, bez stodoły, mała, z słodowni przerobiona, z sionkami małemi, w których sionkach, próg drzwi do izby mieszkalnej, jest dwoje drzwi do komórek pustych, zawalonych, starych, bez posadzek i bez okien […]. W izbie zaś okien dwa małych, kwadratowych nowych, posadzka gliniana, piec ordynaryjny gliniany na słupkach drewnianych, drzwi do tej izby z desek na biegunie drewnianym […] pokrycie tej karczemki z darnic stare." *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 1351, c. 1v.

[48] *VUB*, F23-48.

[49] The conditions in taverns must have changed little – if not worsened – since the 17th century, when Gaspar de Tende wrote: „Brak przede wszystkim w Polsce gospód lub zajazdów, w których można by wygodnie umieścić się i otrzymać łóżko. Znajdują się tam zwykle drewniane budynki zwane „karczmami", w których trzeba niejednokrotnie ulokować się obok koni, krów i świń, w długiej stajni skleconej ze źle spojonych desek i krytej słomą. W głębi tej stajni jest zwykle izba z piecem, ale nie można tam mieszkać w lecie z powodu much, pcheł, pluskiew oraz fetorów. Nawet przy dużych upałach okna pozostają tam zamknięte". Cudzoziemcy o Polsce. Relacje i opinie, t. 1*: X-XVII w.* Ed. Jan GINTEL. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1971, p. 209.

to the specific demands of the local population and travellers. The distribution of inns in the Trakai deanery in 1784 is shown on the map below.



Map 1. *The location of inns in the Trakai deanery in 1784*

Source. Author's own study based on *LVIA*, f. 376, ap. 1, b. 4, p. 1–175[50].

When examining the distribution of inns in the Trakai district, it is immediately apparent that most of them were concentrated in the area around Trakai, which served as a natural transport hub where key and smaller roads intersected. The geographical location of Trakai, at the crossroads of routes leading to Grodno, Vilnius, and Kaunas, made the town one of the most important points in the region. The Kaunas and Grodno routes passing through this area not only connected the central hubs of the region but also determined the placement of smaller infrastructure roads, and thus the taverns associated with them. In places where these routes crossed, the local network of inns was denser, responding to the intensity of traveller traffic, as people would spend the night or rest before continuing their journey. Two main communication branches are also clearly marked: the route towards Kaunas and the route towards Grodno, which suggests that these were probably wayside inns.[51]

[50] Map of the Trakai deanery prepared on the basis of: LITAK, Stanisław. *Atlas Kościoła łacińskiego w Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w XVIII wieku* [online]. Lublin: Institute for the Historical Geography of the Church in Poland, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin [Accessed 2 November 2025]. Available from: https://geo-ecclesiae.kul.pl/latin-church-1772.

[51] ZAWADZKI, Mateusz: JAKIMOWICZ, Kamil. Możliwości badawcze odtworzenia sieci karczem zajezdnych w okresie staropolskim. Studium przypadku na przykładzie powiatu lubelskiego w drugiej

It is important to remember that the identified 35 inns represent a conventional figure, limited to officially operating, taxed establishments recorded in the parish descriptions of 1784. However, this raises the question of the scale of the informal sector within this industry. The issue of so-called hole-and-corner inns (*pokątne*) must have been ongoing, not only in the Trakai district,[52] and it could have involved not only the illegal sale of alcohol but also the provision of lodging services. Their existence was not only a reflection of certain administrative shortcomings but also a symptom of a deeper conflict between state fiscal policies and the grassroots mechanisms of the local economy. These illegal taverns and inns were part of a broader phenomenon of informal economy, which on one hand stemmed from the need to bypass taxation and state regulations, and on the other hand responded to genuine social demand. They provided not only alcohol but also lodging. Such unauthorised establishments often emerged in locations where official infrastructure was insufficient – along remote stretches of roads or in areas where the number of travellers exceeded the capacity of legally sanctioned inns.

Attempts were made to counteract this informal sector, as evidenced by the commissioning and execution of inspections of inns and taverns.[53] This procedure aimed not only at assessing state revenues derived from leasing such establishments but also at detecting abuses. Inns that remained outside the official register posed a significant threat both to the state budget and to the system of alcohol trade control, which in the 18th century was gaining increasing fiscal and customary importance.[54]. During the Trakai regional assemblies between 1773 and 1776,[55] the necessity of conducting such inspections and audits within the Trakai district was also emphasised.

Conclusions

The first and fundamental conclusion emerging from current observations is the need for in-depth research on the state of transport infrastructure in various regions of the

połowie XVIII wieku. *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, 2024, 71(3), p. 407–426.

[52] CIEŚLA, Maria. *Kupcy, arendarze i rzemieślnicy: różnorodność zawodowa Żydów w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XVII i XVIII w*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IH PAN, 2018, p. 98, 105.

[53] The inspections were carried out in the Duchy of Samogitia (1766), and in the Grodno district (1781). *LVIA*, f. 11, ap. 1, b. 1219, c. 129–162; f. 11, ap. 1, b. 1219, c. 768–785.

[54] It is evident in the universal of the Civil-Military and Order Commission of the Trakai voivodeship from February 7, 1791, in which we read: „Praktykowane ze szkodą ubogiego poddaństwa przez Żydów osobliwie karczmy, mosty, przewozy trzymających, zdzierstwa, których to domiarem: ciż Żydzi z wódką po parafiach jeżdżąc, za tę szczupłą ofiarę w bardziej szkodliwą w użyciu od chłopów wyłudzają zboże i dalsze wiktuały, tak dalece: że chłopi trunkiem mając zagrzaną głowę ostatek swego majątku oddają […], nie mając chleba, doświadczają nędzy i panów w ratowaniu siebie i zapomodze nieprzestannej na znaczne narażają wydatki." *AGAD*, Tzw. ML IX 27, 469.

[55] *LVIA*, SA 5917, c. 714 (1773); *LVIA*, SA 5917, c. 821v. (1774), *LVIA*, SA 5917, c. 949 (1775), *LVIA,* SA 5917, c. 1081v (1776).

Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Only detailed regional analysis can capture the diversity of investment practices and the intensity of road network usage during the late Enlightenment period. The reforms of the second half of the 18th century, although conceived as nationwide, were in practice subject to significant local modulations, shaped by environmental and socio-economic conditions. Topography, the density and hierarchy of the settlement network, as well as the political and economic activity of local elites, introduced variability that cannot be properly understood without a spatial approach. There is a clear need for studies integrating multiple types of sources – administrative, cartographic, and economic – in order to reconstruct not only the layout of roads, but also their functions and technical condition. The lack of such analyses often leads to oversimplifications in assessing the efficiency of state structures and social mobility in the late Commonwealth period.

The state of road infrastructure in the Trakai district in the second half of the 18th century, despite evident environmental and administrative challenges, appears relatively favourable compared to other regions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – and it is precisely this nuance, hidden beneath layers of general assessments, that deserves deeper reflection. The analysis reveals that this condition was not the result of consistent state policy, but rather a combination of advantageous geographical conditions, the pragmatism of local elites, and a series of incidental circumstances. The district's central location, the intersection of trade routes leading to Vilnius, Kaunas, and Grodno and beyond, as well as the relatively gentle terrain, facilitated the maintenance of passable roads even in the face of the technological limitations typical of the period. The region's geography proved to be an ally: varied, yet not excessively demanding, it allowed for the effective planning and upkeep of routes. However, the diversity of the landscape also set clear boundaries to accessibility, reminding us that space was not merely a backdrop, but an active force shaping human agency.

The conclusions can be structured into four mutually interrelated and overlapping aspects:

1. **Infrastructure as the outcome of entangled agency: environment, technology, and law.** The condition of roads, bridges, and causeways in the Trakai district was not the direct result of a consistently implemented state modernisation policy, but rather the outcome of complex interactions between natural conditions, resource availability (especially timber), technical competencies, fiscal logic, and the individual strategies of landowners. It is worth noting that in many cases it was precisely local constraints – such as the lack of nearby forests, challenging terrain, and water erosion – that set the limits for the durability of investments. Juxtaposing this information with data on construction costs, the toll system, and the necessity of bringing in specialists from Prussia, reveals that infrastructure was not merely a system of transportation, but also a telling indicator of local economic and technological tensions.

2. **Subtle indicators of technical rationality: timber as an archive of decision-making**. Mentions of construction materials should not be dismissed as marginal curiosities, but rather regarded as valuable micro-evidence of local technological capabilities and investment priorities. The presence of bark on logs, although largely overlooked in previous research, can be interpreted as an indicator of a short-term, cost-saving strategy, in contrast to long-term, durability-oriented investments. This seemingly minor detail thus becomes a kind of "infrastructural index" – a hidden yet eloquent trace of decisions made under conditions of limited funding, technological constraints, and organisational fragmentation. At the same time, it exemplifies the need to reassess material (and linguistic) sources – to read them more carefully through a techno-cultural lens.
3. **Local forms of modernity: Can infrastructure be understood as a tool of social self-regulation and performative citizenship?** Traditional interpretations of infrastructural modernisation in the late 18th century tend to locate its origins primarily within the framework of centrally driven institutional reforms inspired by Enlightenment ideals – particularly the activities of the Treasury Commissions established after 1764. However, the case study of the Trakai district appears to suggest an alternative – and thus far insufficiently recognised –pathway: a bottom-up modernisation, initiated and sustained by local actors, especially the provincial nobility, who were aware of the broader shifts but operated within the intersecting logics of fiscal interest and the common good. It is precisely within this local perspective that we gain access to the actual shape of modernity: not linear, not centrally planned, but negotiated on a daily basis under conditions of environmental resistance, limited resources, and ambiguous institutional responsibility. This is a form of modernity stretched between mud and tolls, between bark-covered logs and the absence of local craftsmen, between fiscal pragmatism and the symbolic capital of prestige.

In light of the above, there is a clear need for broader research into the mechanisms of social infrastructure management in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, employing analytical tools that move beyond the conventional "state–society" dichotomy. It is particularly important to investigate how local practices of infrastructural care contributed to the consolidation of territorial communities, functioning simultaneously as cultural, political, and organisational resources in times of institutional crisis.

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Trakų pavieto kelių infrastruktūros būklė XVIII a. antrojoje pusėje: atvejo analizė

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje atskleidžiama Trakų pavieto kelių infrastruktūros būklė XVIII a. antrojoje pusėje, pabrėžiama jos reikšmė komunikacijai ir prekybai. Nors dėl centrinės geografinės padėties keliai čia buvo geresni nei kitose Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės dalyse, regione susidurta su epochai būdingomis problemomis. Apleisti traktai, purvinos vėžės ir per pavasario

polaidį neišvažiuojami ruožai pavertė keliones tikru iššūkiu. Tiltai ir pylimai, nors ir būtini, dažnai buvo apverktinos būklės, o jų remontas priklausė nuo rinkliavų sistemos ir reguliarių patikrinimų. Iždo komisija bandė įgyvendinti reformas, tačiau jų veiksmingumas buvo ribotas. Pirkliai ir keliautojai skundėsi sudėtingu susisiekimu, o seimeliai ne kartą pabrėžė būtinybę gerinti situaciją. Papildomą pavojų kėlė plėšikai, dėl kurių kelionės tapdavo dar rizikingesnės. Smuklės, nors ir tankiai išsidėsčiusios prie pagrindinių kelių, dažnai priminė griuvėsius, siūlydamos daugiau nepatogumų nei poilsio. Nors Trakų pavieto keliai buvo geresni nei kituose regionuose, jų bendra būklė atspindėjo platesnę infrastruktūros nepriežiūros problemą LDK. Lėšų stygius, administracinis chaosas ir negailestingos gamtinės sąlygos kiekvieną kelionę paversdavo tikru nuotykiu – tik ne visada maloniu.

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