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Beyond the Warehouse:

**Representing Hanseatic Memory through immaterial exchanges
through medieval trade networks.**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the Hanse's legacy goes the exchange of goods, understanding how medieval trade networks also transported intangible practices, such as ideas, customs, and shared practices across Northern Europe. It discusses that such practices – from common legal frameworks and rituals for commerce to building techniques and a common language – were as important to the Hanse's world as warehouses and ships. Such commonalties produced a cohesive identity across borders and diverse cities, leaving a mark on urban life and potentially a collective memory. By examining key trade outposts and the cultural ties that bound them, the research reveals a network held together not only by commerce but by a mutual understanding and governance that transcended borders. Further, the thesis assesses how this layered heritage is represented today, and how the existing taxonomy of the Water Museum Network could assist. It finds that the taxonomy could classify museums and archives which commemorate the Hanse's history, they could further include heritage which represents this rich history.

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Abbreviations

ANTE	Ancestral Hydro-Technologies, Community-based practices, and Citizens Observatories
GIS	Geographic Information Mapping
GOOD	Good practices with solutions that can contribute to manage resilience and climate adaptation
IDEM	Interpretation and Visitors' Centres, Digital Museums, Eco-Museums, Community-based Museums, Extended Museums
INTL	Intangible Heritage and the Heritage of 'Living Waters
MUCD	Museums, Collections and Documentation Centers
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WASH	Waterscapes (Cultural Landscapes), Sites, and water-related Heritage Assets
WMN	Water Museum Network

1. Introduction

Long before today's concept of Europe was formalized by treaties and borders, merchants from the Low German-speaking regions established a sprawling commercial network that transcended political boundaries. The Hanse – as it would later become known – was a powerful economic and trade alliance in Northern Europe, thriving from the 13th to the 17th centuries. Its influence extended far beyond the exchange of goods, shaping urban forms, port infrastructures, and the transmission of architectural and technological knowledge. The Nomination form for the documents on the Hanse which are to be included in the Memory of the World collection by UNESCO, even goes as far to argue that “a surprising amount of the unity of today's Europe can be traced back to the contacts between individuals and regions engendered by the Hanse.” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 1)

This thesis also draws upon a collection of internationally recognized archival documents listed in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. These primary sources, comprising seventeen key documents, exemplify unique governance, communication, and documentation practices of the Hanse, including written agreements and protocols from the periodic assemblies known as the "Hansetage." As part of the Memory of the World programme, these documents are acknowledged for their exceptional historical value and their critical role in preserving cultural heritage, facilitating intercultural dialogue, and promoting mutual understanding across time (UNESCO, 2025).

Focus is laid on the key Kontore (trading outposts), analysing how maritime commerce facilitated not only the movement of material goods but also the transfer of immaterial practices – including construction techniques, governance structures, and economic models. Rather than framing the Hanseatic League purely as an economic phenomenon, this thesis examines the intangible practices that sustained a shared Hanseatic identity across both space and time. The thesis investigates several such elements – rituals, language use, guild culture, and spatial protocols – to understand how this network not only moved goods but shaped social life along its paths. From Kontore embedded in foreign cities to subtle forms of standardization among strangers, these practices allowed merchants to navigate cultural and political diversity while maintaining functional unity.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the long-term economic and infrastructural impact of medieval trade on urban development (Wahl, 2016). Additionally, studies on water-based commerce highlight the strategic value of port accessibility in economic expansion (Bosker et al., 2013), especially in the context of Europe. Meanwhile, institutional factors – especially legal norms and merchant guild structures – have been identified to play an essential role in sustaining trade and urban growth in Hanseatic cities (Cantoni & Yuchtman, 2014).

Furthermore, this perspective also offers the questions on how this Hanseatic memory is curated today: How is this history translated into museum spaces and institutional narratives? Which aspects are emphasized, which are underrepresented, and how do exhibition formats shape our understanding of such a layered past? Drawing on the taxonomy developed by the UNESCO-affiliated Water Museums Global Network (WMN), this study continues on an inventory to reflect on the role of trade in shaping identity, mobility, and culture – both historically and in contemporary heritage practice.

Understanding history not as a series of discrete events but as a set of networks and flows provides a methodological framework that links historical trade research with contemporary museum classification systems. In doing so, the thesis contributes to broader discussions on water heritage networks and architectural history as vectors for cultural memory.

Spanning multiple modern borders, the Hanseatic trade network left behind architectural and institutional relics that point to a once-cohesive identity defined by guild-based organization. This thesis investigates key markers of that identity and seeks to visualize the geographic and cultural extent of the Hanseatic world.

The Hanse utilized its privileges to organize the exchange of products over immense distances, enabling people to acquire products and resources which they could not obtain locally. On the heels of the exchange of products followed cultural exchanges: language and architecture, the arts and the law.

2. *A brief history of the Hanse*

Emerging in the 12th century and expanding rapidly throughout the medieval period, the Hanse connected more than 200 cities through shared economic interests, legal conventions, and linguistic practices. Its merchants dominated Baltic markets, yet their commercial reach extended westward to England and the French Atlantic coast, and southward to the Iberian Peninsula and Italy (European Hansemuseum, 2025). Along these varied routes, local alliances and common rules bound together a remarkably diverse group of traders.

By the 14th century, this loose but highly organized alliance had begun to refer to itself as the Hanse. The term Hanse, derived from the Old High German word for “troop” or “group,” had long been used for associations of long-distance traders. Central to the cohesion of this network was the use of Middle Low German, which served as the *lingua franca* of northern European trade until the late 16th century (Selzer, 2024).

In key foreign trading locations, Hanseatic merchants founded semi-permanent settlements – eventually formalized in the 16th century as Kontore (from the French “*comptoir*”, meaning “counter” or “table” at which merchants conducted transactions). The four largest of these were in Novgorod, Bruges, London, and Bergen. Each of these became a critical node and institutional anchor for long-distance commerce in an otherwise largely decentralized system.

2.1. *Trading Patterns across modern state borders*

Although the Hanse did not constitute a nation-state in the modern sense, it did employ many of nation-building tools as for example outlined by Walters (2009) to maintain a sense of unity across diffuse geographies. Legal frameworks, guild conventions, and language norms served as a cultural glue that transcended political borders.

In the 12th century, Low German merchants joined forces with traders from Visby on Gotland to extend commerce into Novgorod. By that time, Gotlandic merchants already maintained robust

trade with Russia, leveraging deep knowledge of Baltic Sea routes. Thanks to its strategic position, Gotland functioned as a crucial hub linking Russian, Swedish, Danish, and Low German merchants.

One key route led merchants from the Gulf of Finland through the Neva River, across Lake Ladoga, and onward via the Volkhov River to Novgorod. These waterways were dangerous, hence demanding specialized local knowledge. To cope, goods were often transferred onto smaller, locally adapted boats from larger cogs typically used by the Hanse.

The fact that merchants of different origins cooperated so closely was highly unusual for the era, making it a foundational development step for what could later develop into the Hanseatic League.

Several early agreements and treaties throughout the 12th and 13th century helped consolidate this emerging transregional network. These accords formalized cooperative principles, gave rise to guilds, and supported the formation of traveling groups (e.g., Gotlandic-Low German trade delegations). By pooling resources and knowledge, the merchants minimized risks while forging long-distance commercial corridors – a hallmark of early Hanseatic collaboration.

2.2. Lübeck, centre of the Hanse

Following its early consolidation, the low-German merchants expanded not only in geographic scope but also in the diversity and complexity of its commodity flows. Lübeck became a critical node for redistributing goods exchanged within the Baltic. Among the most crucial goods exchanged were not only furs from Novgorod, but also herring from the waters off Scania, and salt from Lüneburg.

In Scania – then part of the Danish crown – Low German merchants secured favorable deals by purchasing directly from local fishermen, leveraging their scale and organization to outcompete others. They brought Lüneburg salt to the region to preserve the fish on-site, enabling efficient onward transport to inland markets via the port of Lübeck. Preserved herring became a staple of trade, not least because the Catholic Church prescribed abstinence from meat on 100 days of a calendar year. Demand for salted fish surged across the continent, and Lübeck – thanks to its advantageous location – grew into a logistical center for redistribution. By the 13th century, it had established itself as a hub in the east-west trade along the Baltic and was also linked overland to Hamburg and further bridging into the North Sea network. This dual maritime and inland accessibility catalyzed Lübeck's rise as a hub of Hanseatic commerce.

Influence on spatial practice

The city's spatial infrastructure adapted to this function. In 1216, the construction of the Holsten Bridge formalized a division between the seaport and the inland port, reflecting Lübeck's increasing specialization in trade infrastructure. Dockworkers transferred cargo from ocean-going vessels to barges and carts, which then traveled south and west, weaving the city into continental distribution systems. Lübeck, in this sense, became not just a city of trade but a node where maritime, geographic, and infrastructural logics intersected – and where goods, people, and cultural practices entered circulation far beyond the city itself. During this period, Dutch specialists

were hired to drain marshy areas for urban expansion, illustrating how ongoing international cooperation shaped Lübeck's spatial evolution (European Hansemuseum, 2025).

2.3. Early commercial outposts and the Kontore

The first outpost of what would later be recognized as a Hanseatic station was established around 1200 in Novgorod and is known as St. Peter's Yard. The name, likely reflecting a religious background, also symbolized a broader ambition: projecting stability and communal governance abroad. Its coat of arms featured the key to the kingdom of heaven (a nod to Saint Peter) alongside an eagle representing both the Holy Roman Empire and the German Kingdom. This emblem embodied a dual identity: devout Christian merchants operating under German imperial influence, establishing a distinctive community on foreign soil.

By the 14th century, Hanseatic influence stretched across Northern Europe and reached as far as Genoa and Venice. Although enclaves had existed for centuries – as mentioned previously – the formal term Kontor emerged more consistently in the 16th century. There were four main Kontore and an estimated 44 smaller external trading posts. Despite their geographic spread, each of the four main Kontore shared certain defining traits:

- A recognized legal entity,
- an elected board (with a so called “Ältermann”),
- a standardized set of rules for merchant conduct within the premises,
- a shared account for collective expenses and
- a coat of arms symbolizing a “corporate identity”.

In addition to defensive needs, walls around Kontore physically solidified the borders and realm of Hanseatic law and governance. By creating a distinct border, the merchants could maintain their own legal framework regardless of the host country's rules. This autonomy is evident at sites like the Steelyard in London, which had its own organizational structures, linguistic norms, and trading rights – clearly separating it from the surrounding parameters.

For example, in Novgorod, imported goods might include textiles, metals, “haberdashery”, foods and finished products and for exports to the west furs, wax, honey, falcony birds, sturgeon and train oil, birch bark, spices and silk fabric. Each Kontor mediated these flows, ensuring consistent quality standards and dispute resolution.

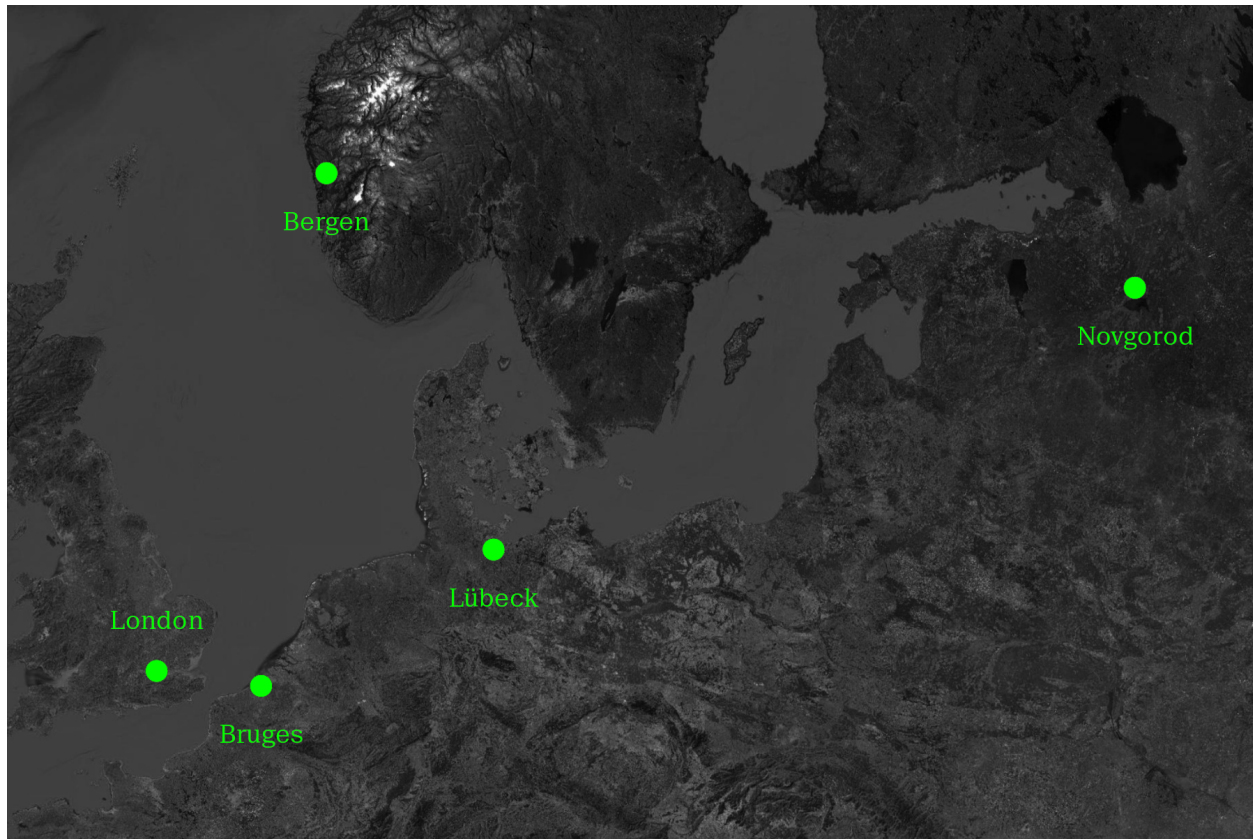


Fig. 1 – Hanse Network: Location of the four key Kontore and Lübeck, 1:25.000.000, illustration by author.

2.4. *Identifying a key route: the salt-fish trade*

Seaborne trade gave the Europe a chance for rapid growth in the medieval times, since the focus on water-based trade gave way for strong efficiency gains by innovations in shipbuilding and navigation techniques (Bosker et al., 2013). They also argue that through analysis of a large dataset, fragmented development with lesser dependence on state-wide governments proved advantageous for growth. State-independence, water-based, trade-oriented as the drivers for a shift towards the global centre towards Europe away from the Islamic world.

One particularly illustrative path along this network is the salt-fish route, linking Lüneburg (for salt) with Scania (for herring) and funnelling through hubs like Lübeck.

This trade potentially stimulated:

- Architectural development of ports, warehouses, and marketplaces,
- innovative shipbuilding and navigation techniques to maximize water-based transport efficiency, and
- ongoing urban transformations, as storage facilities and supporting infrastructure expanded in tandem with trade volumes.

As Bosker et al. (2013) note, medieval Europe's focus on water-based trade allowed for faster economic growth than land-based trade alone. Innovations in maritime technology and the relative independence of city-states or local powers further accelerated this process, shifting the global trade centre of gravity increasingly toward Europe during that time in general.

The salt-fish route, in essence, underscores how the Hanse relied on specialized commodities – like salt and fish – that required each other. Without salt, fish spoiled quickly; without fish, salt's market was limited. This synergy fortified the economies of both Lüneburg and Scania, with Lübeck acting as a central clearinghouse for distribution throughout the continent.

While the salt-fish trade illustrates how specialized goods stimulated architectural and logistical innovation, it also highlights the need for fixed outposts to stabilize and control such long-distance exchanges. It is precisely this demand for regulation, standardization, and presence abroad that also led to the emergence of the four main Kontore—in Bergen, Bruges, London, and Novgorod—as formalized institutional extensions of Hanseatic governance and trade practice.

3. Architectural and Infrastructural Remnants of Hanseatic Trade

This chapter examines the physical and spatial legacy left by the Hanseatic League, focusing explicitly on architectural typologies and infrastructural elements that emerged along key trade routes. By analysing structures such as ports, warehouses, and guild halls, this chapter provides a clear architectural narrative of how Hanseatic trade reshaped urban environments. Special attention is given to Lübeck, whose surviving buildings exemplify common Hanseatic architectural traits such as brick Gothic and logistical innovations that directly supported maritime commerce.

This section discusses the physical traces of the Hanseatic League, focusing on how trade-related infrastructure and urban development mirrored the League's evolving commercial priorities.

3.1. Lübeck as an Architectural Case Study of Origin

Lübeck offers a clear example of how the Hanse influenced city form. Piling walls and a palace typology (“Saalgeschossbau”), as noted by Gläser (2000), became common features of Hanseatic urban centers. Archaeological records suggest that between 1200 and 1300, as many as 700 to 1.300 new brick houses were constructed in Lübeck alone, reflecting a construction boom fueled by thriving the sprawling commerce.

Over time, city planners introduced new infrastructural elements to accommodate the logistics of trade. Cross-sectional studies shown in the European Hansemuseum highlight how narrow, elongated plots facilitated storage and streamlined the movement of goods from ships to warehouse-like residences.

3.2. Brick Gothic, other building techniques

Although bricks had been a known building material as far back as ancient Rome, they fell largely out of use in the former Germanic provinces following the collapse of the Roman Empire. Beginning in the mid-12th century, however, brick construction experienced a sudden resurgence

across multiple regions—among them Denmark, the Lübeck Bay, the Elbe-Havel area, and even Friesland and Bavaria. Despite the relative expense of fired bricks, newly affluent merchants, enriched by long-distance trade, could afford to invest in this durable building material.

At the same time, the Gothic style that first emerged around 1140 in the Île-de-France region near Paris began to spread throughout Europe. When combined with brick, this fusion gave rise to what became known as Brick Gothic, a defining architectural mode in Baltic cities by the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Crucially, Hanseatic trade networks helped accelerate this process.

Low German merchants facilitated the transfer of building technologies, cultural practices, and skilled workers, ensuring that brick Gothic methods permeated a wide area. Local masons further adapted these techniques, sometimes incorporating mechanical aids – such as windlasses – to hoist goods within multi-story buildings—an innovation that underscored the deep ties between architectural design and mercantile needs.

3.3. Concrete Cases of Hanseatic Spatial Practice: Lübeck's Warehouses

Lübeck serves not merely as the symbolic heart of the Hanseatic League but also provides concrete evidence of architectural typologies central to Hanseatic trade practices. Among the most significant structures defining Hanseatic urbanism were merchant townhouses and warehouses, typologies widely recognised across the network. An examination of Lübeck's merchant warehouses, in particular, demonstrates how immaterial practices such as standardized measurement, logistical planning, and merchant organization were materialized through built form.

A cross-sectional analysis of typical Lübeck merchant townhouses from around 1300 – displayed in the European Hanseumuseum – reveals a highly specialized spatial logic that integrated domestic, commercial, and storage functions vertically within narrow urban plots. These buildings characteristically faced the street with a stepped gable and possessed considerable interior space designated explicitly for storage, highlighting their primary commercial function. Crucially, the merchant no longer accompanied his goods physically to trading centers; instead, his business operations—including storage, accounting, and sale—were centralized within these townhouses. This shift required not only architectural adaptations but also transformed mercantile practices into more stationary, administratively driven operations, necessitating a higher degree of spatial and organizational standardization (European Hanseumuseum, 2025).

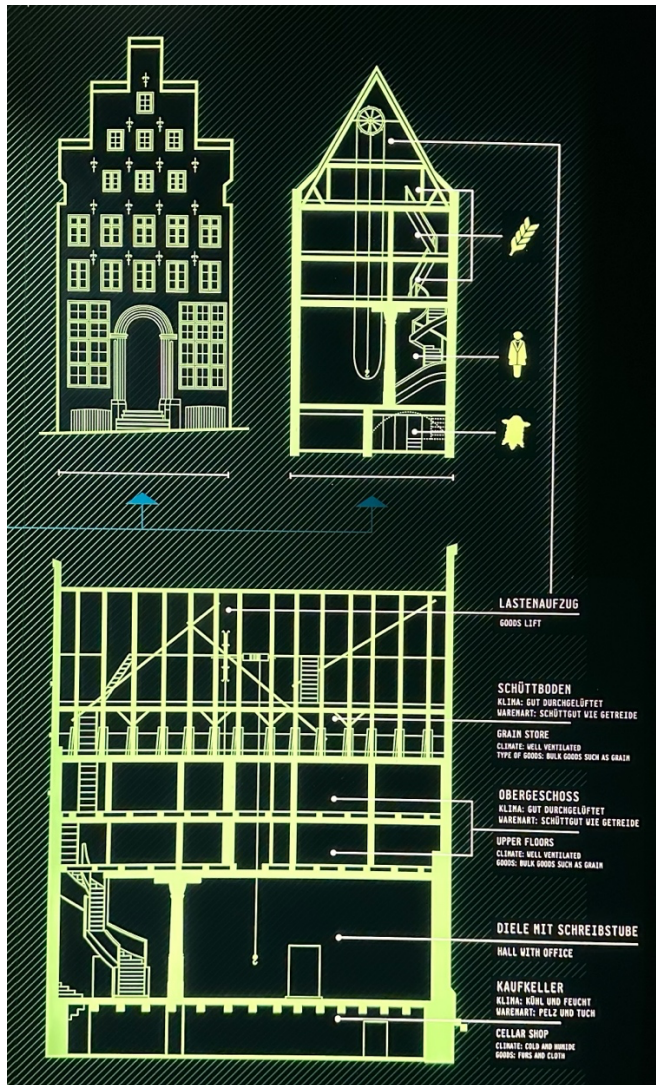


Fig. 2 – Image of the Cross Section as displayed in the European Hansemuseum (2025).

These Lübeck buildings thus embody broader Hanseatic principles of efficient logistical management and spatial economy. Architectural historian Hübler (as cited in European Hansemuseum, 2025) emphasizes the critical role of the internal goods lift (Lastenaufzug), visible in warehouse cross-sections, allowing efficient vertical transportation of goods directly from storage spaces to the ground level. The internal structure, a spacious cellar (Kaufkeller), ground floor hall (Diele), upper floors for bulk storage (Schüttboden), demonstrates a sophisticated response to urban spatial constraints, simultaneously reflecting a strict merchant discipline in organizing and accessing merchandise.

Through trade and cultural exchange, these architectural innovations were replicated in Kontore across Northern Europe, becoming standardized typologies. In Bergen's Bryggen, for example, similar spatial arrangements clearly echo Lübeck's warehouse typology, underscoring how Lübeck's spatial practices and immaterial organizational standards permeated the broader Hanseatic network (Gläser, 2000).

This clear architectural lineage highlights Lübeck warehouses as not merely functional storage spaces but as critical vessels of immaterial Hanseatic heritage—transferring norms of trade discipline, governance, and organizational efficiency across diverse cultural landscapes.

These structures also shaped contemporary museum narratives: the adjacent European Hansemuseum (WMN Type 1.1 MUCD) employs augmented reality to reconstruct loading scenes, yet its portrayal focuses more on trade scale than the social implications of warehouse labor.

These examples emphasize the interplay between architectural form and economic function, underscoring the League's capacity to reshape urban space in accordance with commercial needs.

3.4. Brick Gothic, other building techniques

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4. Immaterial exchanges in Hanseatic trade

Beyond tangible structures, the Hanse's legacy is equally evident in the intangible dimensions of its commerce. This includes knowledge transfer, governance frameworks, and socio-political norms that shaped the League's character and endurance.

4.1. Knowledge Transfer and Construction Techniques

Maritime routes were lanes not just for goods but also for ideas. Shipwrights, carpenters, and masons travelled with merchants, introducing innovations in building techniques wherever the League maintained a presence. Over time, these cumulative influences contributed to a transregional architectural language that resonated from the Baltic Sea to the North Sea (European Hansemuseum, 2025).

4.2. Guilds and legal Institutions

Merchant guilds played a key role in standardizing trade protocols, dispute potential resolutions, and labour practices. Guilds often enforced collective bargaining rights, establishing quality controls on goods while also shaping the built environment – for instance, by setting guidelines for the design of stalls in market halls or even influencing the sizes of storage facilities.

Overlapping with these guild regulations were legal institutions such as merchant courts. Their rulings offered predictability across borders, thereby lowering transaction costs and fostering a sense of trust among distant trading partners.

The architectural logic embodied in Lübeck's merchant warehouses also reveals the League's reliance on immaterial practices of standardization and guild control. As shown in the cross-section exhibited at the European Hansemuseum, these buildings encoded rules on storage, measurement, and work separation directly into their spatial design. The vertical separation of functions—goods cellar, office hall, upper grain floors—mirrored the merchant's shifting role from itinerant trader to sedentary record-keeper, with spatial protocols enabling and reinforcing that shift (European Hansemuseum, 2025). Such spatialization of discipline exemplifies how immaterial norms were translated into physical form and exported through the Kontore network.

Urban Planning Influences

Immaterial exchanges also emerged in urban planning. For example, the standardized widths of certain streets, or the recurring presence of "guild halls" in specific quarters, testifies to a Hanseatic imprint on municipal organization. Even city charters occasionally integrated language or clauses reflecting Hanseatic norms (UNESCO, 2017), ensuring that foreign merchants could operate under familiar rules wherever they went.

These intangible frameworks were as critical as physical infrastructure in sustaining the League's commercial coherence.

4.3. *Immaterial Exchanges in Hanseatic Trade*

Beyond tangible infrastructures, the Hanseatic League was sustained significantly by intangible practices, including governance norms, legal frameworks, shared linguistic conventions, and guild structures. This chapter explores these immaterial aspects, also introducing primary archival sources recognized by the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. These archival materials concretely illustrate how intangible cultural practices provided cohesion, stability, and operational consistency across geographically dispersed trade networks. Such sources illuminate governance norms, merchant culture, and interregional legal frameworks, pivotal to understanding the operational mechanisms of the Hanseatic League.

These archival documents are preserved and internationally recognized due to their extraordinary historical significance, reflected by their inclusion in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. This register aims to safeguard, facilitate access to, and promote documentary heritage, in order to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding across time (UNESCO, 2025). Specifically, seventeen Hanseatic documents (or groups of documents), structured into six categories and sourced from six countries and eleven institutions, were selected for this register. They exemplify the unique communicative and unifying mechanisms of the Hanseatic League, notably the "Hansetage" (assembly meetings) and the distinct documentation practice of recording decisions known as "Rezesse". Collectively, these documents illustrate the character, functionality, and significant contribution of the Hanseatic League to the historical development of Northern Europe (Lübeck Archiv der Hansestadt, 2025). These documents contained in the UNESCO-Register „Memory of the World“ are shown in the following list (Lübeck Archiv der Hansestadt, 2025).

I. Hanseatic Diet (Convocation of Members)

1. Collections of the Diet's Resolutions, 1369–1517

- a) Historical Archives of the City of Cologne
- b) State Archives of Bremen
- c) State Archives of Hamburg

II. Commercial Treaties and Privileges

- 2. Commercial Treaty with the Prince of Novgorod, 1191/1192
- 3. Charter of King Eric of Norway, 1294
- 4. Cartulary of the Bruges Counter (Great Hanseatic Book of Privileges A), 1252–1486
- 5. Charter of King Edward VI of England, 1547

III. Counters (Trading Posts)

- 6. Second Version of the Novgorod By-laws (Schra), before 1298

7. Charters of the Bruges Counter, 1458–1502
8. By-laws of the London Counter (Steelyard), 1554
9. Record Books of the Commercial Court of the Bergen Counter, 1633–1759

IV. Maritime Law

10. The Hamburg Red Book with Maritime Law, 1301–1306

V. Conflicts and Alliances

11. Proclamation of the Trade Boycott of Flanders, 1358
12. The Confederation of Cologne, 1367
13. Poundage Registers for the Second Round of Hanseatic Poundage Collection, 1368–1371
14. The Peace of Stralsund, 1370
15. Alliance (Tohopesate) of 19 Hanseatic Towns, 1476

VI. Merchants' Documents

16. Correspondence and Records of Hildebrand Veckinchusen, 1395–1437
17. Russian-Low German Primer, 1607

Commercial Treaty with the Prince of Novgorod, 1191/1192

The treaty of 1191/92 represents one of the earliest surviving formalizations of trade between Gotlanders, Low German merchants, and Russian partners. Although the original document does not survive independently, its content was inserted into a later treaty from 1259 between Prince Alexander Jaroslavich Nevskij of Novgorod and Low German merchants. This reuse suggests that the 1191/92 agreement served as a foundational legal precedent for German-Russian trade. The 1259 charter, written in Old Russian on parchment and bearing multiple seals, remains preserved today in the Latvian State Historical Archives in Riga. Scholars believe it was moved there for safekeeping following the suppression of the Novgorod Kontor in 1494—a decision likely motivated by Riga's strong Hanseatic ties (UNESCO, 2017).

Kontorordnung (Kontor By-laws) (before 1298)

The "Kontorordnung" or Kontor By-laws described structured governance within Hanseatic trading outposts – the Kontore. For instance, the Novgorod Kontor Ordnung dated some time before 1298 exemplifies detailed administrative and social regulation for merchants abroad:

“The preface to the by-laws spotlights the vital innovation these early Hanseatic merchants achieved. Theirs was a voluntary union of merchants from a multitude of towns lying in the territories of numerous lords. It was not by the will of any lord that the merchants agreed to bury

their differences and cooperate with one another. Rather, they had freely assented to the concord.” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12).

These rules not only facilitated trade but also fostered a shared mercantile identity, transcending political and regional divisions.

Correspondence and Records of Hildebrand Veckinchusen (1395-1437)

The extensive letters and account books of Hildebrand Veckinchusen offer a rare glimpse into the daily life and informal networks central to Hanseatic trade. Veckinchusen's detailed commercial documents reflect a dynamic system of economic relationships and communications across the Hanseatic world: “Veckinchusen’s letters and account books give us a lively impression of the activities of a fairly typical overseas merchant trading along the main artery of Hanseatic trade: Flanders-Lübeck-Baltic and so on to Novgorod” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 18).

Veckinchusen's archival records emphasize the interpersonal trust and reputation crucial for the Hanse's extensive trade networks, illustrating immaterial elements underpinning tangible commercial transactions and the earliest surviving documents of this type. These primary sources substantiate theoretical discussions of immaterial Hanseatic practices, confirming their crucial role in sustaining Hanseatic economic and social structures.

5. Contemporary representation in museums and heritage institutions.

This chapter transitions from historical analysis to contemporary heritage interpretation, examining how Hanseatic history is presented and curated in modern museums and archival institutions. Employing the Water Museums Global Network (WMN) taxonomy, this chapter categorizes and critically evaluates various heritage institutions to understand their approaches in displaying tangible and intangible Hanseatic legacies. It further leverages GIS mapping to visualize these institutions, ultimately identifying potential gaps or biases in current museum narratives and their representation of complex historical dynamics.

5.1. The Water Museum Network's Classification

The WMN classifies water-related heritage by the following categories (Eulisse, 2023);

- Type 1: Existing Institutions
- Type 2: Future Museums and Interpretative Centres
- Type 3: Good Practices to achieve the SDGs

Type 1 is further categorised into: 1.1 MUCD - Museums, Collections and Documentation Centers and 1.2 IDEM- Interpretation and Visitors' Centres, Digital Museums, Eco-Museums, Community-based Museums, Extended Museums.

Type 2 is further categorised into: 2.1 WASH - Waterscapes (Cultural Landscapes), Sites, and water-related Heritage Assets, 2.2 ANTE - Ancestral Hydro-Technologies, Community-based practices, and Citizens Observatories and 2.3 INTL - Intangible Heritage and the Heritage of 'Living Waters'.

Type 3 is further categorised into: 3.1 GOOD – Good practices with solutions that can contribute to manage resilience and climate adaptation.

Since the Hanse thrived on maritime connectivity, many of its historic sites – from port cities to medieval canals – may align with the WMN's taxonomy. This could offer a structured lens for cataloguing Hanseatic relics and for situating them within broader conversations about water heritage.

5.2. *GIS-Based Mapping of Hanseatic Heritage*

Contemporary institutions increasingly use digital tools and GIS-based exhibits to link dispersed sites. Some museums, for instance, provide interactive digital maps allowing visitors to trace trade routes or identify extant Hanseatic warehouses. By combining historical research and museum interpretation, such tools can illuminate how intangible practices (guild regulations, shared languages) interacted with tangible sites (Kontore, city walls).

In addition to contextual background, historical Geographic Information System (GIS) offers a powerful tool for visualizing the spatial extent of Hanseatic remnants. By layering historic property and trade records over modern maps and categorising it following the WMN taxonomy, it can be identified where infrastructure such as salt warehouses, port facilities, and market halls once stood and how their history is represented today.

This multi-layered approach also aids comparisons across cities, highlighting how each location balanced common Hanseatic traits – like brick Gothic – with local building traditions.

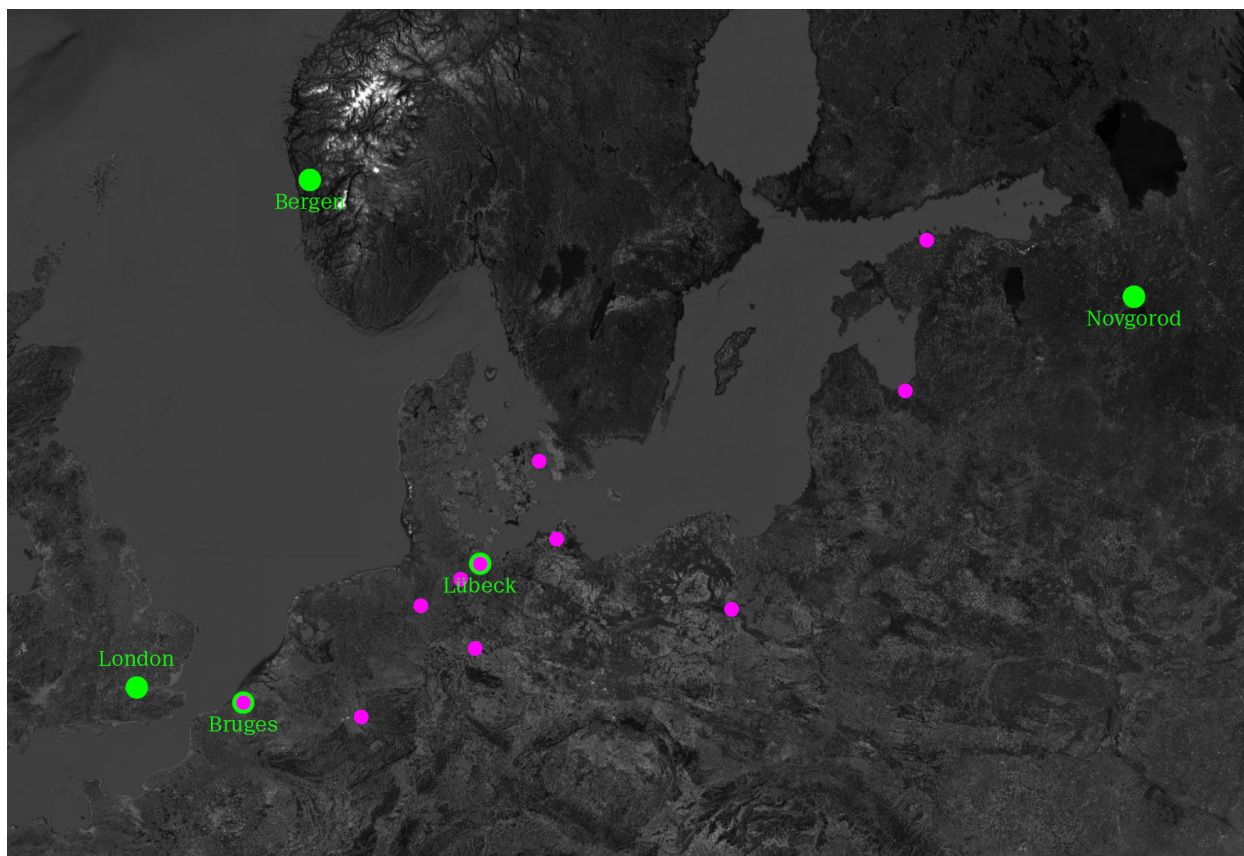


Fig. 3 – Geographic Distribution of archives holding Hanseatic UNESCO Memory of the World Documents, 1:25.000.000, (UNESCO, 2017) illustration by author.

5.3. Critical Reflection on WMN Classifications of Hanseatic Archives

Applying the WMN taxonomy to institutions housing significant Hanseatic archival materials reveals a distinct uniformity. As illustrated in Table 1, all selected institutions fall within Type 1.1 (MUCD), representing museums, collections, and documentation centers with an emphasis on archival materials.

<i>Institution or Archive</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>WMN Type</i>
City Archives of Brunswick	Braunschweig, Germany	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
State Archives of Bremen	Bremen, Germany	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
Bruges City Archives	Bruges, Belgium	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
Historical Archives of the City of Cologne	Cologne, Germany	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
The Royal Danish Library	Copenhagen, Denmark	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
State Archives of Hamburg	Hamburg, Germany	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
Archives of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck	Lübeck, Germany	Type 1.1 (MUCD)

Latvian State Historical Archives	Riga, Latvia	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
City Archives of the Hanseatic City of Stralsund	Stralsund, Germany	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
City Archives of Tallinn	Tallinn, Estonia	Type 1.1 (MUCD)
State Archives of Toruń	Torun, Poland	Type 1.1 (MUCD)

Table 1. – Archives holding documents on the history of the Hanse as registered in the UNESCO Memory of the World.

However, this uniform classification highlights a critical limitation in how contemporary institutions and the WMN represent Hanseatic heritage. By predominantly presenting heritage through archival documentation, there is a risk of a narrowly historical, text-based understanding that neglects other interpretive possibilities such as immersive or interactive experiences. Consequently, broader and potentially more inclusive or critical narratives – such as socio-economic inequities, everyday labour practices, and cultural interactions – may remain underrepresented or inadequately contextualized in this collection. This assessment supports the necessity for museums and heritage sites to diversify interpretative frameworks, enhancing their ability to engage critically with intangible heritage beyond archival documentation alone.

Townhouses of the kind as discussed in Chapter 3.3, still standing in Lübeck's Altstadt today, are not museums in the institutional sense but function as critical vessels of architectural memory. Within the WMN framework, they would be categorized as Type 2.1 WASH, representing built heritage situated within a broader waterscape. These structures embody the spatial legacy of water-related trade, logistics, and governance, making the historic city itself an open, distributed archive of Hanseatic commerce and identity.

Following the WMN taxonomy developed by the Global Network of Water Museums, a preserved Hanseatic townhouse that contributes to a historical urban fabric shaped by maritime trade and located near key port infrastructures would fall under Type 2.1 WASH – "Waterscapes (Cultural Landscapes), Sites, and Water-Related Heritage Assets" (Eulisse, 2023, p. 57). This category is reserved for future or non-institutional heritage components that embody spatial and cultural links to water-based economies and are part of broader hydro–social landscapes.

6. Conclusion

This thesis highlights a dual legacy of the Hanse: firstly, the tangible framework of trade infrastructure, namely ports, warehouses, and urban expansions, but also the intangible ecosystems of legal codes, guild traditions, and linguistic ties that bound merchants together.

6.1. Limitations and suggestions for further research

Laying the groundwork within these pages, further field work, museum studies, archival analysis could've tried to understand how a few defined practices are represented within this framework.

Setting up the historical and research basis to define key immaterial or material key identifiers which could have then been mapped via GIS and then poured into a recommendation to be included in the World Inventory of the WMN and classified via its taxonomy.

Further, this study aimed to begin to understand how such a complex legacy is remembered today. In museum exhibits and archival displays, the rich context of guild customs, multilingual negotiation, and cooperation beyond medieval borders can remain obscured. This represents a gap in representation: by focusing on tangible artifacts and official records, we risk simplifying a historical narrative that was, in reality, multifaceted and highly contextual. The thesis argues that embracing these potentially overlooked dimensions – the informal alliances, the shared stories, even the conflicts and negotiations – could be essential for a more critical and inclusive portrayal of Hanseatic heritage.

At the same time, reflecting on the limitations of this research is vital. Much of the Hanseatic League's intangible fabric must be inferred from fragmentary records, as everyday interactions and the voices of smaller trade outposts often escaped the official archives. Or in today's representation a close examination of modern cityscapes and local museums. These data gaps and archival silences mean that any reconstruction of Hanseatic social life is inevitably partial. The thesis confronted these interpretation boundaries by cross-referencing architectural evidence with written accounts, but subtleties of mercantile culture remain beyond this reach. Acknowledging these constraints should not diminish the findings – instead, it underlines the need for humility and further inquiry when dealing with a past so deeply layered and influential today.

In conclusion, by moving beyond the warehouse and into the realm of ideas and practices, this study offers an understanding of what the Hanseatic League was and how it is remembered. The League's legacy emerges not just in brick walls or ledger books, but in the enduring habits of collaboration and cultural exchange that once knit together a region. Recognizing these intangible threads alongside the tangible can help contemporary representations of Hanseatic heritage evolve, bridging the gap between the historical reality and the story we tell today. Ultimately, the Hanseatic memory is most faithfully preserved when we honour the full spectrum of its exchange – material and immaterial – that shaped a vibrant maritime network.

Figures

Fig. 1 – Hanse Network: Location of the four key Kontore and Lübeck, 1:25.000.000, illustration by author.

Fig. 2 – Image of the Cross Section as displayed in the European Hansemuseum (2025).

Fig. 3 – Geographic Distribution of archives holding Hanseatic UNESCO Memory of the World Documents, 1:25.000.000, (UNESCO, 2017) illustration by author.

Tables

Table 1 – Archives holding documents on the history of the Hanse as registered in the UNESCO Memory of the World.

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