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PILOT TESTING OF THE BALTIC COASTAL HIKING ROUTE IN ESTONIA



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Introduction

Pilot testing of the Baltic Coastal Hiking route in Estonia was done in Estonia – Latvia Programme from European Regional Development Fund project “Hiking Route Along the Baltic Sea Coastline in Latvia and Estonia”.

Project goal is to develop long distance hiking along the Baltic sea coastline in Estonia and Latvia.

Most often, the main reason for the development of various routes is the desire to have a positive impact on the economic and social development of the region, connecting different places and experiences interesting for tourists, resulting in the creation of "threads" which properly developed and maintained can also positively affect the quality of life of local people. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the developed route according to the following characteristics: available information on the route; existing and missing infrastructure of the route; route navigation; testing of services and sights; identification of the current situation, finding out the opinion and knowledge of the local population regarding the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, studying the opinions of the hikers of the route, drawing conclusions and suggesting recommendations to the route developers on the necessary improvements. The testing of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route took place in two parts.

On September 20, 2018, (on Thursday, in good sunny weather) 34 students of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA) bachelor's programmes (Business Administration, Communication and Public Relations, Media Studies and Journalism) and ViA Finance and Procurement Specialist, former quality management lecturer for master's students Inita Sakne went on a trip in Pärnu County, Estonia, to test three sections of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route (Jürtaka in Latvian, Ranniku Matkarada in Estonian) and the objects in it. At the same time, a local population survey was conducted in Häädemeeste village. The results of the testing are supplemented with a survey of 20 hikers. In total, three parts of the route were checked in nature:

- ✓ Orijõe – Lepanina (Figure 1) (the route of day 31);
- ✓ Part of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route in Häädemeeste village and vicinity;
- ✓ Part of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route between Sooküla and Võidu villages.

On August 5, 2018, A. Liviņa carried out a pre-research check of the route of day 35 of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, the results of which showed that the trail is not marked in nature. On September 14 and 15, 2018, the 1st year students of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences Tourism and Leisure study field Master's study programmes went on a trip to explore a part of about 1200 kilometers long Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. The aim of the students was to explore the following section of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route:

- ✓ from the southern border of the town of Pärnu: from the Pärnu Bay Golf Links to the crossroads of Kalevipoik and Marjameeste Streets (part of the route of day 34). 12.4 km on foot in 2.5 hours – it is advisable to do it in 4 hours);
- ✓ from the southern border of Pärnu to Liu village (day 35 of the route). 27 km on foot, on average in 7 hours.

19 master's students, ViA professor and leading researcher Agita Līviņa and a tourism industry professional, ViA guest lecturer Inese Šīrava participated in the testing of these parts of the route. Testing took place on Friday and Saturday, in good weather conditions, in the sunny autumn when tourists and holiday-makers can enjoy the beginning of autumn. The students were divided into five teams for the testing of these parts of the route, applying different target audiences to each of the teams: 1) a group of friends with a car, 2) young entrepreneurs, 3) backpackers, 4) a group of three generations - parents, children and seniors, 5) travelling with public transport. Of the testers of this section of the route, 55% of the students indicated they participated in a more serious hiking trip for the first time. Whereas the students who have previously been on hiking trips go hiking 2 times a year – 11%, 3-4 times a year – 33%, and more than 4 times a year – 56%. 55% walk on average 11 – 15km in a day, 33% 16 – 20km, so this was the longest hike the testers had done during their lifetime. Of all the participants of the hiking trip, about 35% had heard of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route before the hike, 20% knew the website www.coastalhiking.eu. 80% of the participants of the testing hike managed to upload GPX files of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route to their mobile devices, 50% indicated that the file upload was moderately difficult (medium), 25% - hard and 25% - easy.

1. Assessment of day 34 and 35 of the route

1.1. Availability of information about the route and the review of its quality before the visit

Before going on the testing hike of day 34 and 35 of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route in nature, a feasibility study was carried out on the available information and its content both on the official website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route <http://coastalhiking.eu/lv> and on various social sites, and inquiring in Tourist Information Centres in Valmiera, Salacgrīva, Saulkrasti and Pärnu, as well as studying the offered results on the Internet search engine "Google".

The official website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route is united in design, the trail logo is displayed on the first page and the traveler is introduced with white-blue-white colours representing the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. It is evident that the developers of the trail have



Figure 1. Incompletely developed language option on the website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route

Source: Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, 2018

thought about hikers from different countries because the information is available in 5 languages - Latvian, Estonian, Russian, English and German, but it is not fully developed. For example, when choosing the German

language, the information is presented partly in German, partly in English (see Figure 1); also when choosing the Latvian language, this section is presented in English. Unfortunately, a good and compact print file is not available, which would be useful if travellers do not have access to smart devices which is relevant for the senior audience or if mobile devices have discharged, and if travelers deliberately want to save battery time. GPX file with the route is downloadable. Not all the attractions have pictures.

Similarly, by clicking on the social site Facebook.com icon, the message "Page is not available" will appear. This fact can reduce the interest of travellers in finding more information and create a negative impression. The page is developed so that the traveller, when opening the route that he/she is interested in, would find out everything that is necessary - there is a map showing the places of interest, tourist accommodation, places to eat, shops, as well as the information about the trail and the traffic of the public bus. In general, the information is sufficient. **Recommendation:** For the places of interest, tourist accommodation facilities and other places not only phone numbers should be included, but also links, for example, to the website of a tourist accommodation establishment etc. It would also be necessary to explain the icon indicating "difficulty" (for example, for day 1 the green icon has an explanation – easy, but for days 34 and 35 there is a blue icon without any explanation).

Using the search tools in social media like Facebook.com with the hashtag #jūrtaka (the title of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route in Latvian) or #coastalhiking, the Facebook page of the trail opens displaying project activities. Adding the keyword "Pärnu", a single user entry is displayed stating that the Pärnu-Liu part of the route has been hiked, but without any feedback on its quality or recommendations for other travellers. **On the social site Facebook.com** the information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking route is available on two pages - in Latvian (<https://www.facebook.com/jurtaka/>) and in Estonian (<https://www.facebook.com/rannikumatkarada/>).

Facebook.com: When connecting to the linked site Facebook.com from the official website of the trail, the authors of the work encountered a lack of connectivity through both the computer and other devices. The FB symbol added on the official website directed to a disclaimer - "This page is not available. The link that you opened could be damaged or deleted ", so if people who are interested wanted to get information, write reviews or ask questions through the social network, they could not or were not able to do it.

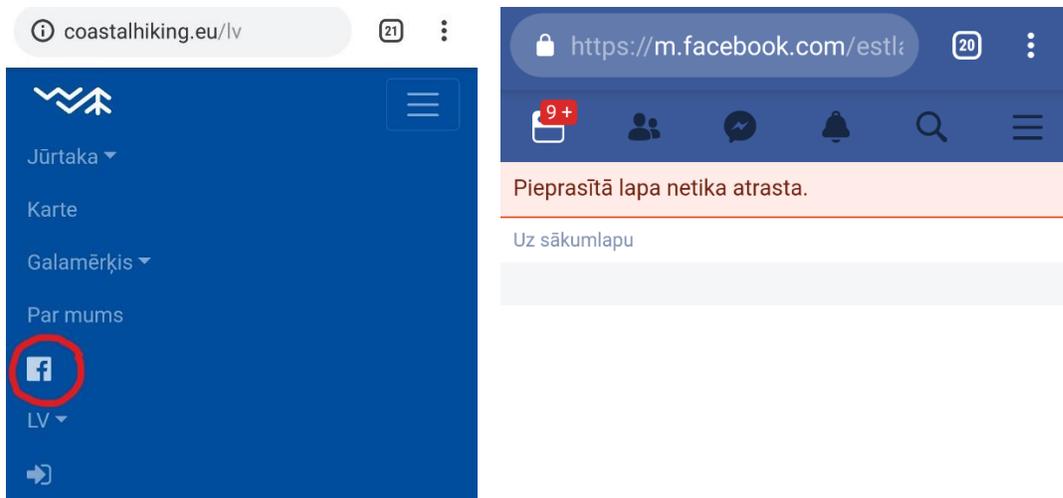
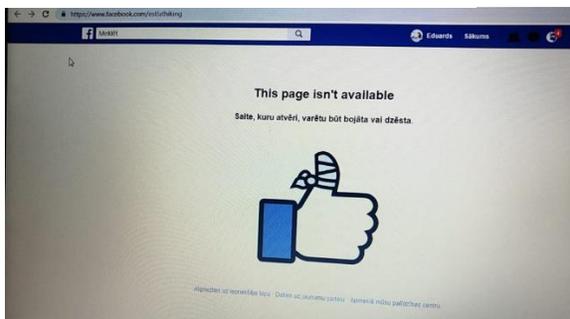


Figure 2. The Baltic Coastal Hiking Route website access via Facebook.com from a phone and a computer. The author of the image: L. Iraids, 2018



Trying to log in to the FB from the official website repeatedly, after having visited the route, the access to the social network showed changes, it was possible to do it, as well as read all the available information, see people's references and assessments in both Latvian and English. Both pages are active (the last entry on the Latvian page is on September 12, on the Estonian page on September 13 (accessed on September 18)) with up-to-date information and the possibility to find out about events in the area covered by the trail, which is very useful for planning a route because there is an opportunity to participate in one of them, for example, trail marking or coastal cleaning.

The Latvian page is more active in "sharing" the information about the events organized, the Estonian page more actively popularizes and shows the trail development process to the public. For a group of friends travelling by car, it was also important to see the visual

representation of the trail in the social network **Instagram**. In this social media, the hashtag #jūrtaka has been used 22 times, while #jurtaka – twice. None of them reflects the parts of the route near Pärnu. **Recommendation:** The trail markers, developers and also hikers should make more active entries on the social network Instagram to increase the visibility and popularity of the trail among young people (In June 2018, *Instagram* had 1 billion active users, most of them 18-29 years old (Lisa, 2018)). On the social network **Twitter**, there are five entries with a hashtag #jūrtaka, of which four have been made by Mērsrags Tourism Information Center.

While planning the route and trying to find attractions that are not included on the route offered by the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, **the official tourism website of Estonia** www.visitestonia.com and **Pärnu Tourism website** www.visitparnu.com were also viewed. Both sites are available in several languages, including Latvian. Exploring their content, it was discovered that there are various routes and attractions available in the selected parts of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, but it was not possible to find information about the trail itself anywhere (the search was done both in Latvian and in Estonian) (Sihtasutus Pärnumaa Turism, 2018; Visitestonia, 2018). Also during the telephone conversation on September 10 with the employees of Pärnu Tourism Information Center, it was discovered that the information on such hiking route had so far not come to their attention and action. On the positive side, it was possible to find the information on parking lots, as well as bus stops on these sites, which was important in planning the route.

By typing the search word "Jūrtaka" in **the search engine Google**, more than 10 000 results are found, while searching in the Estonian language – 13 500 results. Positively, the first result found is the official website of the trail, including the information on both the development process of the project and the trail, as well as on various events for both travellers and coastal residents and entrepreneurs (Google, 2018) with expanded content in the sections "Haapsalu, Estonia", "Baltic Coastal Hiking Route - Practical information", "Route", "Baltic Coastal Hiking Route - Map", "Event calendar" and "Pärnu, Estonia". The second result is a novelty kurzeme.lv "*Jūrtaka* - more than 1200 km long route along the Baltic Sea!". The third result is the article on the website mammamunteti.lv "30-day hiking

route „Jūrtaka”, Latvian part has been developed”. Fourth result – pavilosta.lv "Coastal hiking route „Jūrtaka”". The fifth result is a PDF presentation on the project activities on the website of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments lps.lv. The sixth is the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route handbook for tourism entrepreneurs on the website of "Lauku Ceļotājs" (Baltic Country Holidays). But the last of the results on the first page of the search is the entry on the website of Jūrmala Council jurmala.lv „Coastal hiking trail in development - hiking route along the Baltic Sea”.

By entering the keywords "jūrtaka pārnavā" (coastal trail pārnavā), from 373 results the first are days 31, 35, 34, and 41 of the route having the word Pärnu in their titles, as well as two related articles on mammamunteti.lv website.

When entering the keywords "coastal hiking", 85 700 000 results appear, the first two refer to the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route project. The first is the official website coastalhiking.eu, the second one is the official website of „Interreg Estonia-Latvia”. It is followed by three sources that look at the best coastal routes in the world – theadventurejunkies.com, cntraveler.com, booksurfcamps.com, and the sixth result is the information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route in the English language on "Lauku ceļotājs" (Baltic Country Holidays) webpage. As the next, macsadventure.com offer twelve coastal routes in Europe that do not include the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. The eighth result is the information from the webpage of Vidzeme Tourism Association vidzeme.com, containing the information on the project in English. The last two results refer to the best coastal routes of America (sportiva.com) and Lonely Planet’s best coastal routes of Sicily.

When entering the keywords "coastal hiking parnu" 45 400 results appear, and the first two are from the official Estonian tourism website visitestonia.com, and both explore the local nature trails in Pärnu, which are not directly related to the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. The next two results direct to the official website of the project – coastalhiking.eu. The fifth result is a reference and rating on tripadvisor.com of one of Pärnu local nature trails which is 600 meters long. The sixth result is "Lauku ceļotājs", but the last one is an article on six best day trips from Tallinn, where Pärnu is mentioned as the summer capital.

Before going to Pärnu, **Tourism Information Centres (TIC)** of Saulkrasti, Salacgrīva and Valmiera were contacted to find out if printed materials about the planned route were available. Although all the contacted TIC employees were informed about this route and recommended searching for information on the website of the route, printed materials were not yet available to the public. While in **Pärnu**, **TIC** in the old town was visited, **the employees were unaware** of this route, they were surprised about such questions, therefore no recommendations were offered for the travellers by car regarding the route (where to start / end the route, the bus schedules, etc.). Rather, the students provided information to the employees of Pärnu TIC. **Recommendation:** To organize an informative seminar for all TIC employees, but especially the TICs of the towns on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. To introduce the staff with the route, the map and possible travellers' questions on accommodation, transport, and baggage storage / transportation services.

Conclusion: The information on the website on Pärnu routes of day 34 and 35 is sufficient, but the lack of feedback on the social media Facebook, Instagram, Twitter creates distrust and does not attract the attention of tourists.

1.2. Testing of navigation

The official website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route has an interactive map (see Figure 2) with a 1200 km long route divided in days, each day has a more detailed view of various services. The file of the route for each day is saved and only available as the GPX file. It is **recommended** that at least some applications are specified on the website www.coastalhiking.eu, such as maps.eu, that can be used in successfully opening these maps and using them during travelling.

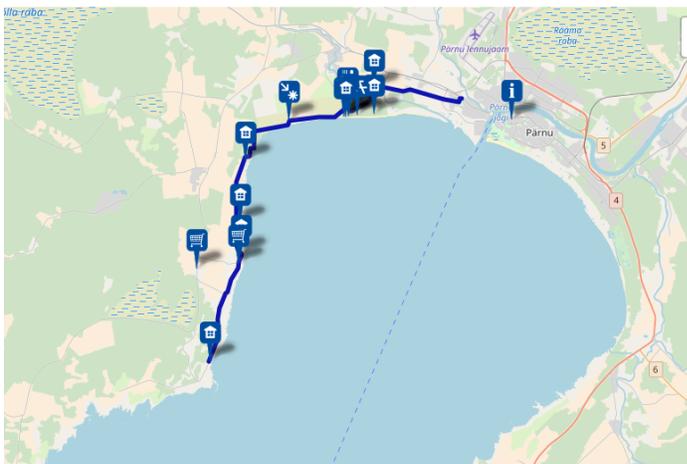


Figure 3. Offered route of day 34 of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route

Source: Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, 2018

Days 34 and 35 of the route were tracked along with several devices and GPS tracking programmes. One of them was Endomodo, which registered the time spent on the route, the distance travelled and the actual route hiked. As well as that, the route was monitored by the mobile application GPX Viewer, which was evaluating the same components of the route, but not online. When downloading the GPX file for days 34 and 35, tourists may have to face the fact that looking at these maps might require searching for applications that support opening them, so before starting the trip, travellers need to make sure the maps found on the website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route can be opened on their mobile devices.

There are two ways to use the GPX files available on the website.

1. Convert the GPX file of the required day to a format such as KMZ or KML that is corresponding to the most frequently used navigation applications;
2. Download a GPX file supporting navigation on your mobile device.

The working group chose to convert the file to use it in a familiar application with a known interface. The MAPS.ME app is easy to use without downloading mobile data, that is, it does not require mobile data to represent surrounding data layers. Parts of the route in Latvia and Estonia can be downloaded before going on the trip by using home or public wireless internet. In this case, the hikers do not need to worry about the availability of mobile data at the relevant location of the route.

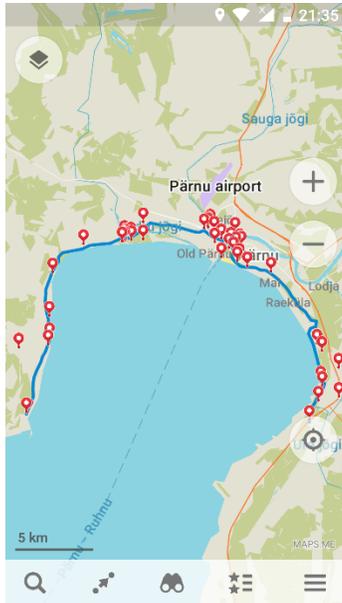


Figure 4. Use of the converted GPX file for the route of day 34 and 35 as a KMZ file in the MAPS.ME app. The author of the image: R.Pastars, 2018

It was nice that after hiking the route of day 35, the link on the website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route directing to the social network Facebook page was correct and led to the social network page because it did not happen on the day of hiking the route.

On September 14 a part of the route of day 34 was completed (starting at the bridge crossing the Pärnu River (GPS: 58.38663, 24.49143), next to a gas station and a parking lot, tourist accommodation is situated nearby) and the entire route of day 35. A part of the group started the route of day 35 at the end of day 34 at the Pärnu Marina Club. It was observed that a lot of people visited this club; it was possible to receive the relevant services - catering, toilet, accommodation, playgrounds and tourism information, as the letter i on a green background could be found both on the outside and inside.

When starting the hike, the group found out that these parts of the route **have not been marked**, therefore, it was not possible to assess the quality of marking, but it gives **an opportunity to make corrections in the trail planning** and progress. During the trip, the group found out that the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route is unmarked. During the entire route of day 35 and in part of day 34 there are no signs indicating that there is a specially developed trail available here. Thus, it was necessary to complete this part of the route using the GPS route available on the Internet.

For the most part, it was well planned and followed the shortest ways. Since at the crossroads the group had to be guided by navigation rather than the direction signs of the route to understand where to go, we indicated the main points and junctions that definitely required marking of the route with blue points (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Places that definitely require marking (Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, 2018.)

As it can be seen, it is basically in the town as well as at the larger crossroads. The following pictures show recommendations where, according to the authors, trail marking would be required. **Recommendation** sites are predominantly places where there are road crossings, turns, maps and tourist information, as well as other places with signs where the Baltic



Coastal Hiking Route marking would be useful (the pictures are put in the order from the beginning to the end).

Figure 6. Crossroads requiring marking (Karina Kaļonova, 2018)

The end of the route of day 34 leading travellers out of the town of Pärnu is following along the main street, but this does not seem to be the best solution, therefore it is suggested to leave the town by less important roads, closer to both the river and the Gulf (see Figure 7). This route correction, just like the original, provides an opportunity to visit a shop before leaving the town to buy the food for the further trip. The end of the route of day 34 and the beginning of day 35 are also considered unsuccessful. **Recommendation:** to finish the day 34 in the town where there is a relatively large number of tourist accommodation establishments, attractions, places of recreation and providers of catering services.



Figure 7. Proposed correction of day 35 of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route when leaving the town of Pärnu
Avots: created by the authors, 2018

The alternative route includes a deviation from the main transit street to a smaller street with less traffic of cars, pedestrians and cyclists. On the alternative route, the Sauga River can be crossed over the pedestrian bridge.



Figure 8. Alternative part of the route, crossing of the River Sauga. The author of the image: R.Pastars, 2018

After the pedestrian bridge, the route follows a well-trodden path along the banks of the river. At the end of the alternative route it is possible to shop in the supermarket and in the same place safely cross the main street over a pedestrian crossing to continue the original route.



Figure 9. Alternative part of the route after the pedestrian bridge along the banks of the River Sauga. The author of the image: R. Pastars, 2018

Continuing the trip to Valgeranna, the travellers must be careful while walking along the roadside and crossing the crossroads as there is an active car traffic. When turning to Valgeranna, there is a pedestrian / bicycle road that allows moving without disturbing the car traffic. The place for rest (a bench) must be indicated **on the map** GPS: 58.39204, 24.38616 (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. Place for rest near White Beach Golf
Source: Photo by the authors 2018



Figure 11. Sign directing to *Meremetsa*
(Karina Kaļonova, 2018).

Figure 12. Point of crossroads on the route
(Karina Kaļonova, 2018).



When arriving at Valgeranna, there is a **recommendation to make a correction in the route**: not to go straight using the asphalt road, but to go along the seacoast (see Figure 13), offering a traveller two choices - a longer or shorter walk along the sea, in order to have a

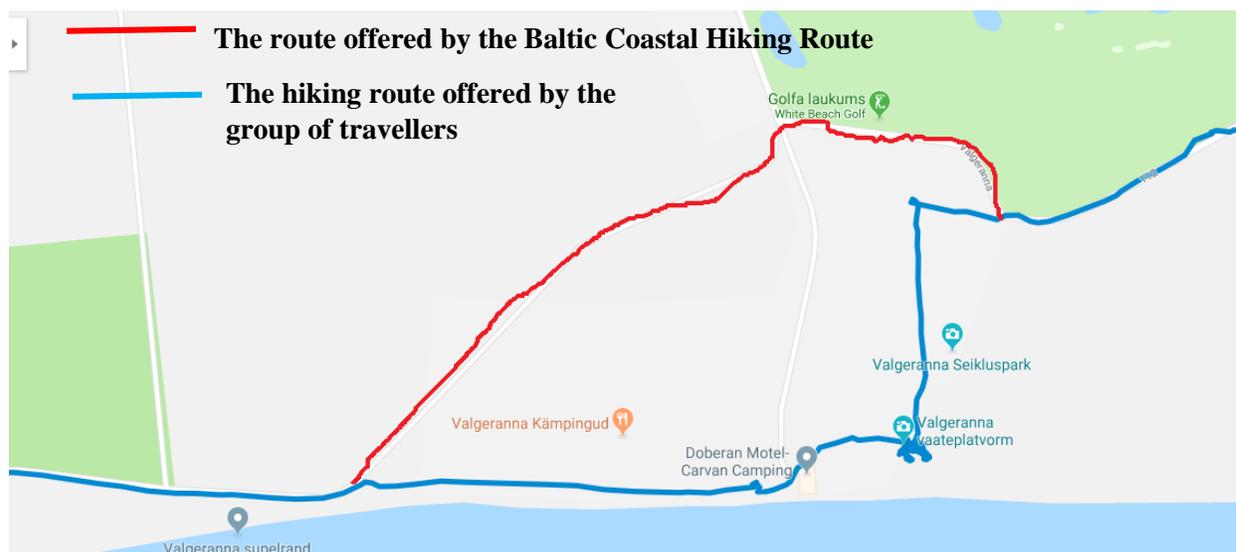


Figure 13. Proposed correction of day 35 of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route
Source: created by the authors, 2018

possibility to have a break at Valgeranna Beach and climb Valgeranna Observation Tower.



Up to the Recreation and Education Centre Ojako the navigation was understandable and easy to trace, since the route followed gravel and asphalt roads, also the location of attractions and accommodation establishments coincided with those in nature. **It is necessary** to indicate the observation tower on the map (GPS: 58.31751, 24.28286) .

Figure 14. Floods on beach.

On **September 15**, a part of the route of day 34 was checked (from the southern border of Pärnu: Kalevi poik and Marjameeste street junction / „Pärnu Bay Golf Links” to the Pärnu beach). The route was not marked, so it was not possible to compare the navigation with the marking made in nature.

At the golf club the navigation led the travellers along the seacoast, but this **was not possible** because the coast was flooded (see Figure 14). The developers of the route **should inform** travellers that the route is not available during all seasons and offer an alternative route past the golf club.



Figure 15. GPS mistake

As it can be seen in the picture, the route shows that you should continue walking through various private houses. And in some places it goes next to a road, but it is a minimal and

permissible GPS inaccuracy. In turn, the rest of the route, i.e., in places without street networks, the digital route and the related points coincided with the real situation, see Figure 16.

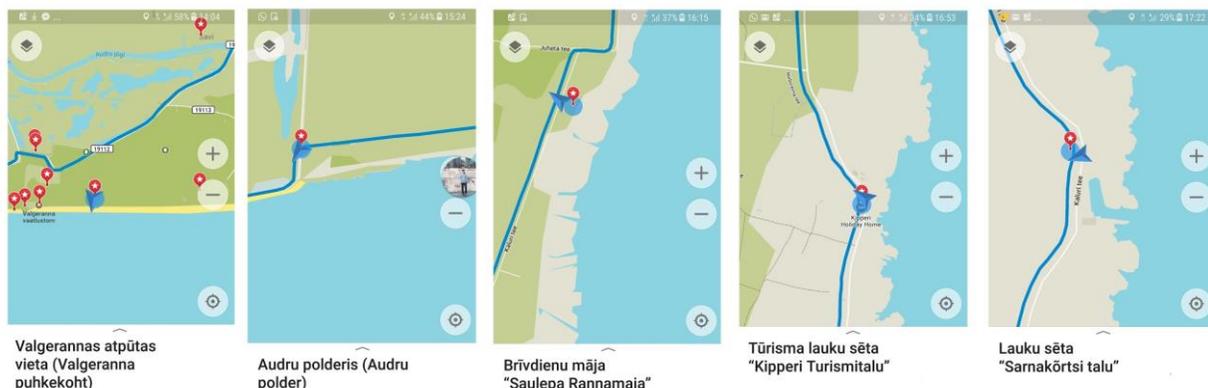


Figure 16 Correspondence of the points on the route with the actual location of the travellers. (K.Sprudzāne telephone screenshots, 2018)

When hiking this part of the route, we also noticed various objects that were not directly on the specified GPS route. In the Figure 17, the pink color indicates the places that the route **should** pass by.

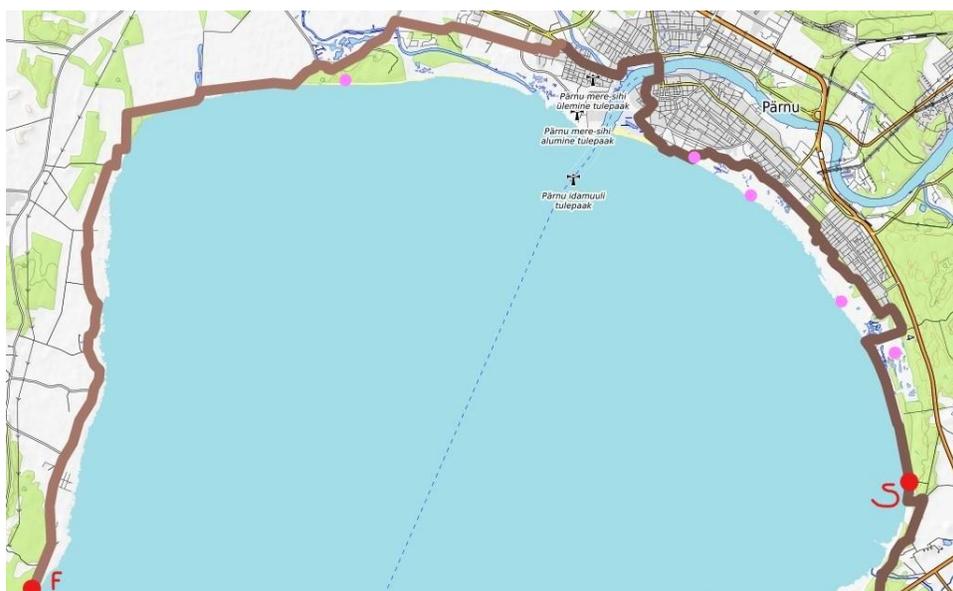


Figure 17. Significant objects (Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, 2018.)

Looking from the red dot S, the first pink point indicates the place where the protected area is located. Butterfly orchids grow in this area (see Figure 21). It would certainly be worthwhile

to visit specifically this part of the route when they are blooming. The next two pink points indicate observation towers with a magnificent view of the sea and its meadows (see Figure 18). The last point in the town is a place where a wooden plank trail with an observation tower has been developed. It stretches along the seacoast as well as through the reed field next to it (see Figure 19). While the last point indicates a recreation place with a large shed with chairs and a table. It should be noted that this was the only place of this type throughout the route and it was not located directly on the route.



As it can be seen, this is a protected area and the entrance is prohibited. However, as the field is exposed, it is definitely possible to see the flowers during the florescence.

Figure 18. Territory with butterfly orchids (Eva Rozentāle,2018.)



Figure 19. Observation tower (Eva Rozentāle, 2018.)

The towers are not too high, but are enough to observe the surrounding nature and try to see birds. On the route of day 34 it is possible to create a new recreation area near the first observation tower, as well as that it is possible to reduce the route in this same place since

the route from Kalevi Street immediately leads into a small forest path, thus bypassing the observation tower and losing one attraction.

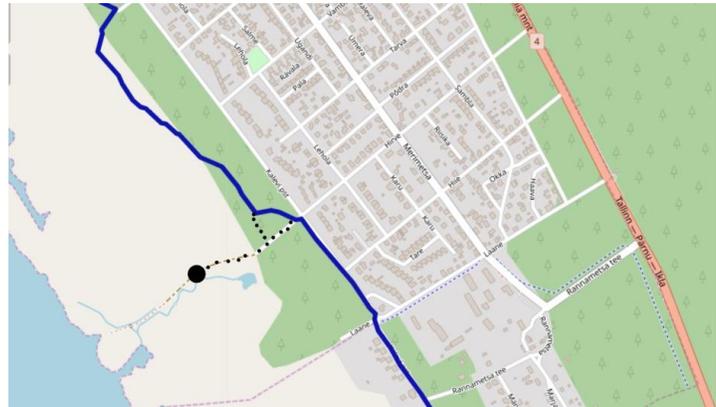


Figure 20. Optimised route of day 34. (A. Kitnere illustration, 2018)



Figure 21. Wooden plank trail and the observation tower (Eva Rozentāle, 2018.)

The wooden plank trail is relatively long and, while walking along it, you can enjoy a wonderful hike through the reeds. The tower overlooks the Pärnu Beach.

Further the route follows along the Pärnu coastal meadow hiking trail, past the pasture grounds of wild cows. The trail is well-trodden, there are various information boards and recreation areas not related to the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. It is **necessary** to indicate the

observation tower (GPS: 58.34648, 24.56241) and the recreation area (GPS: 58.35199, 24.5603) on the map.

As the trail approaches the town, it continues to navigate through the well-kept paths, a **recommendation** - to go closer to the sea and continue the route along the seashore up to the Pärnu Beach Promenade. Similarly, it is **recommended** not to go into the town after visiting the promenade, but to continue along the seacoast up to the breakwater (see Figure 34), where, as already mentioned, the part of the route of day 34 could end. It is important to provide information about tourism objects, historical centre of the Parnu resort and other services in the Hiking trail website that hikers can use opportunities which city can provide.

In general after completing the two-day testing, one of the **main recommendations** regarding the navigation of the parts of the route is to include on the official webpage of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route not only the route divided in days, but also make it possible for the travellers to plan their own route (similar to the interactive route planner created by the Latvian Investment and Development Agency <http://www.latvia.travel/trip-planner/#/> (LIAA, 2018), so that the travellers would not need to download several maps if several parts of the route are to be completed.

A detailed route for both days can be found here:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=17PigCSQwsjoWmHfIF_mjqptTONDoFbvT&ll=57.96938548252179%2C24.844252062050032&z=9

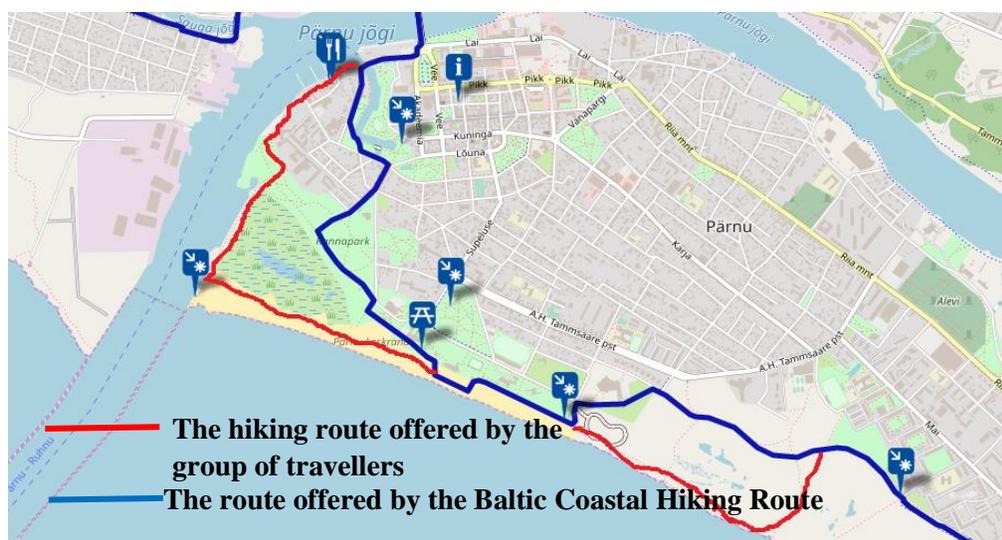


Figure 34. Proposed correction of day 34 of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route

Source: created by the authors, 2018

1.3. Assessment of Infrastructure

When developing a route, it is important to take into account the existing infrastructure so that the information about the surrounding area, the services offered, such as shops, caterers, accommodation, recreation areas and toilets is clear to the hikers of the route. It is also important to indicate all of the above mentioned services on the map, which would help the travellers to plan their time and route.

When checking the route, attention was paid to the location of information boards, availability of signs, toilets and recreation areas on the route.

1.3.1. Information boards

During the hiking trip we observed that there are several large-scale maps on the route. The first one is located just before the sign of the town of Pärnu. It is **recommended** by the **authors of the work** to indicate the location of the map, so that travellers get an idea of the distances, attractions and places of recreation in the area (see Figure 35).



Figure 35. Map of Pärnu town
Source: photo by the authors, 2018



Figure 36. Maps in Valgeranna parking lot
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018

There are two large-scale maps in the parking lot of Valgeranna Adventure Park that depict the Valgeranna Disc Golf Course and the map of the area with a marked territory of the adventure park that gives travellers an idea of the size of the area (see Figure 36). There is also a

small recreation area next to the parking lot, and the White Beach Golf Course administration office building with toilets is on the other side of the parking lot.

On the roadside near the Valgeranna Adventure Park and opposite the golf course, an information board is placed (see Figure 37), which provides information on sustainable attitudes and environmental awareness. There are

various suggestions on how to be environmentally friendly while being in nature, and information on bans in this area. The information is provided in Estonian, Russian and English. The information board serves as a message board where local people can freely advertise their services.

The **recommendation** of the authors of the work would be to provide information about the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route together with the map on this information board since it is located in a place visible and accessible to hikers at the roadside.

The next information board was at Valgeranna Beach, it contained information about the sculpture placed on Valgeranna Beach overlooking the sea. The information was beautifully presented with illustrations, but unfortunately the information was available only in Estonian (see Figure 388).

Figure 38. Information board at Valgeranna Beach

Source: Photo by the authors, 2018



39.attēls. Info stends ceļā uz Valgerannu
Avots: Autoru foto, 2018

Since this information board is located on the beach close to the surrounding recreation areas, changing booths, an observation tower and accommodation facility, the authors of the work consider this to be a great spot for placing the information. Due to the flow of people, there is a greater **possibility** to introduce beach guests with the information about the surrounding area and the Baltic

Coastal Hiking Route in general, especially during the warm months of the year when holidaymakers are visiting the coast.

Outside the route, 2 more stands were found - one on the disc golf course (see Figure 40), the other on Valgeranna health trails (see Figure 41).



Figure 40. Information board on disc golf
(Karina Kaļonova, 2018.)



Figure 41. Information board on Valgeranna
health trails (Karina Kaļonova, 2018.)

These information boards indicate activities that can be done outside the route and that would take a relatively long time.

The next place of interest is Audru Polder, which is a drained area delimited by protection dikes in the floodplains (see Fig.42). This sightseeing object **requires an information board** that would provide information about this area if it has already been included as an attraction. The crossroads on the route require signs indicating the further route, as visitors of the trail may get confused about the further direction.



Figure 42. Territory of Audru Polder (Photo by A.Kokoreviča,2018)

The next object indicated on the route of day 35 is the Holiday Home Saulepa Seaside Villa. We would like to add that those travellers that do not have the map of the route would find it difficult to find this accommodation facility because no signs directing to this enterprise were noticed on the road. This accommodation facility offers accommodation for up to 15 people. The group managed to meet holiday home guests who were Estonian and UK citizens. We managed to find out that guests were not given any information about the existence of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route.

Arriving at the end of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route day 35, which is the Recreation and Education centre "Ojako", a map can be seen on one of the walls of the building showing the surrounding area with marked recreation areas and attractions as well as useful contacts (see *Figure 43*).



Figure 43. Map at the Recreation and Education Centre "Ojako"
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018

When evaluating the information boards and their availability on the route, we **can conclude** that at least one information board can be found in each of the stages - beginning, middle and end. When hiking this route and evaluating the information obtained during the hike, **the authors of the work would recommend** placing an information board at Audru Polder, currently there is a direction sign to the polder, but there is no explanatory information on its origin. The information on the area in general and the fishing villages located further could also be included.

1.3.2. Direction signs

In the section of the route from the centre of Pärnu to Valgeranna Adventure Park, there are direction signs to the attractions, recreation and catering places as well as accommodation facilities that are indicated on the route. The direction signs are located 1 kilometer before the service providers on the main road (see Figure 44).



Figure 44. Direction signs to accommodation facilities
Source: Photo by the authors 2018

Valgeranna Adventure Park contains several signs of the proposed activities and prohibition signs, so that the park visitors do not litter the park, do not ride horses, and do not go through the park by quadracycles, thus taking care of the tidiness of the park (see Figure 45). There are several garbage bins and bicycle stands in the Adventure Park. After going through Valgeranna Adventure Park, we continued the route along a gravel and asphalt road to the

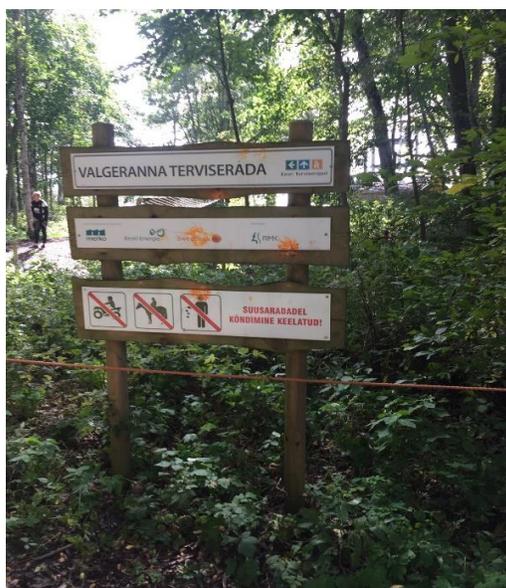


Figure 45. Sign in Valgeranna Park
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018



Figure 46. Romantiline Rannatee sign
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018

Recreation and Education Centre "Ojako". In

this section of the road, there were several holiday houses and farms, although there were signs indicating the name of the house, it would be necessary to indicate the service they provide. As well as that, in many places along the route, we encountered the sign "Romantiline Rannatee" translated as the Romantic Coast (see Figure 46). The aforementioned sign denotes a 250 km long route in Pärnu region, which winds through the sandy beaches of Pärnu, coastal forests, fishermen's villages and nearby towns. Each sign indicates a webpage that lets you know what kind of activities are offered at each location, contact information of recommended accommodation facilities, and photo galleries (Romantiline Rannatee, 2018). These signs serve as a marking for recognizing the "Romantic Coast" route.

In the town of Pärnu there was a direction sign to the Koidula Museum, but it is not included in the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route.



Direction sign to Koidula Museum (photo by the authors, 14.09.2018.)



Information material about the museum in its window (photo by the authors, 14.09.2018.)



Unfortunately, the signs— forbidden, private property – catch out attention in Valgeranna, although this private area is for tourists.

Figure 47. Prohibition signs on the territory of Valgeranna recreation area (photo by the authors, 14.09.2018.)

1.3.3. Recreation areas

While completing the routes of days 34 and 35, we found that there were several recreation areas throughout the course of the trip, of course, there were parts where the recreation areas were not available for a walk of an hour to two hours. In the part of the town of Pärnu (day 34) the map shown in the picture indicates two major parks that are on the trail. The first park is Pärnu Beach Park which provides tourism information not related to the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route about the park and the surrounding nearby objects, accommodation and catering facilities. The map also indicates a place for rest near the beach, as there are several benches and nearby cafes. It can be seen that there are many places of interest near Pärnu Beach, as well as that, the information is available about the beach itself (see Figure 48).



Figure 48. Information board about Pärnu Beach (Ausma Kalniņa, 2018)

The Baltic Coastal Hiking Route website only indicates the nearest parks, one catering facility and a tourism center, but there are several restaurants and cafes very close to the trail, as well as several attractions such as the New Art Museum, which is about 500 meters from the

trail. The New Art Museum was visited and evaluated by a secret shopper to assess the quality of the service provided and the inclusion on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route as one of the attractions on day 34 of the trail.

The next recreation area – Valgeranna – benches are available in the recreation area, but they are not related to the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route and were discovered when moving slightly off the trail (see Figure 49). It should be noted that this was the first recreation area with toilets during a 10-kilometer hike since the beginning of the route. The recreation area (as well as the adventure park) is indicated on the website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. A bench near the golf course is available on the route (see Figure 50).



Figure 49. Recreation area by the sea developed by VMD. Author of the image: R. Pastars, 2018

There were no separate signs for the recreation area, however, the site was managed and maintained clean. Also, there was no place for a bonfire due to the fire risk of conifers and the high wind.



Figure 50. Bench at the golf course

(Karina Kaļonova, 2018).

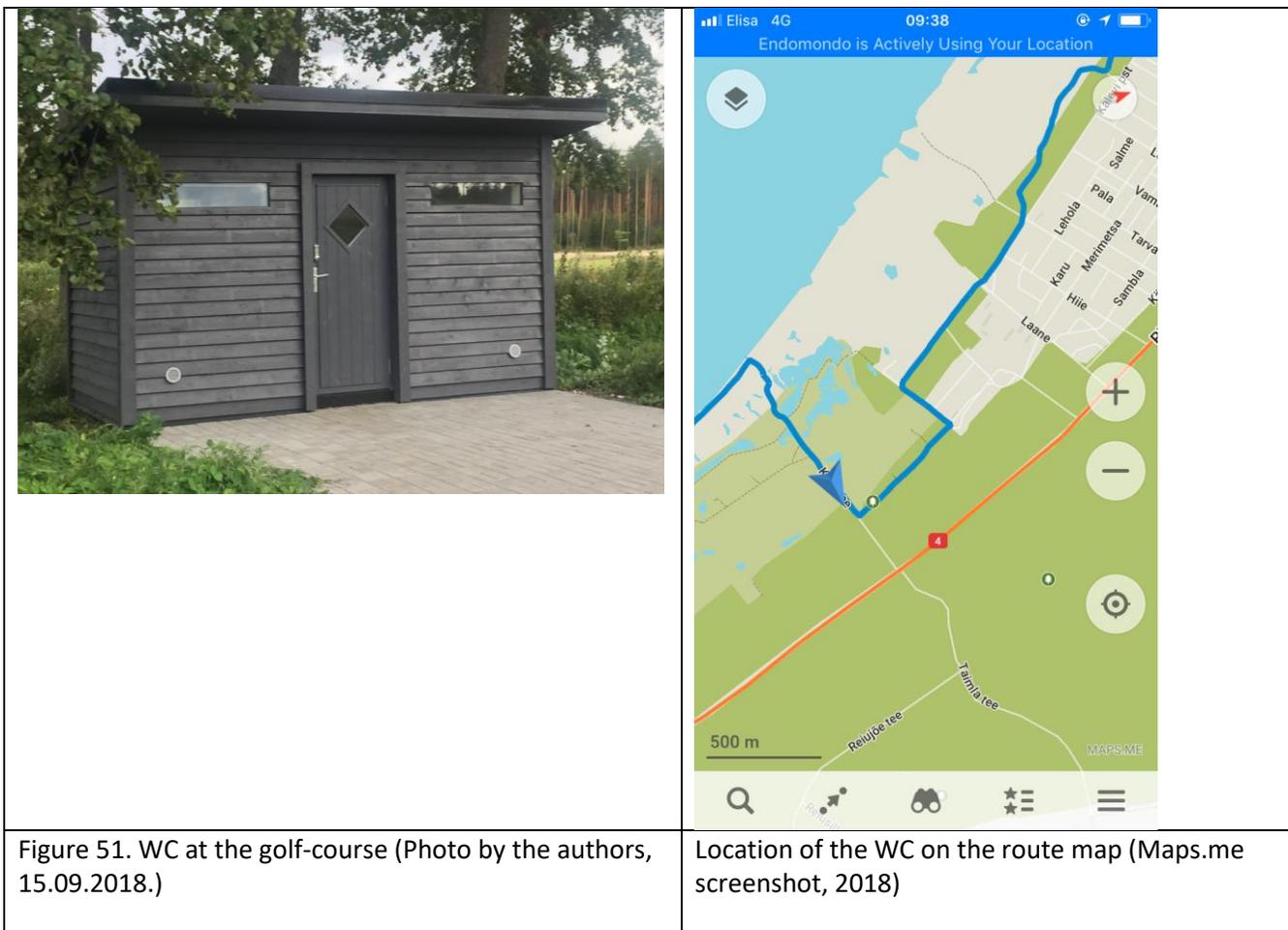
As it can be seen, these two places give a possibility to rest from walking. The shed is next to the sea and this is the first time the sea is visible on the route. The bench is located next to the golf course and it is evident from the initials that it has been created by the owners of the golf course.

When checking the waste bins on the route, it was found that a waste bin was only available at the Valgeranna recreation area (see Figure 50).

The lack of recreation areas is felt in the part of the route following the recreation area of Valgeranna Beach with available holiday homes, a caravan park with water and electricity, a cafe, toilets and tourism information. Between Valgeranna and the Recreation and Education Centre "Ojako" there are several holiday homes, campsites and private properties with well-kept recreation areas. However, when walking this route during the colder months of the year, these recreation areas might not be accessible to visitors.

1.3.4. Toilets

There is a toilet with a door code at the golf club (see Annex 2, Figure 51) in the part of the route of day 34. The next toilet is at the observation tower which is not marked on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route.



There is a pay toilet on the corner of Academy Street, it is near the starting point of the day 35 route just before crossing the main Pärnu bridge towards Tallinn. The fee for service is EUR 0.40. Although the building is small, it provides separate facilities for ladies, men and disabled persons, as well as a possibility to have a shower. The authors of the report are of the opinion that this is an example of good practice because it provides a possibility for a hiker who has been on the road for several days to refresh before moving ahead. (see Figure 52)

Figure 52. Toilets in the centre of Pärnu
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018

Figure 53. Toilets at the Valgeranna Beach
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018

There are several toilets in the vicinity of Valgeranna, including the administration building of the golf-course “White Beach Golf”, there are two dry toilets at the recreation area of the



Valgeranna Beach, as well as toilets in the café of the holiday house “Doberani Rannamaja”. However, it should be taken into account that some of the toilets could be closed during the off-season. (see Figure 53)

There is a public toilet, as well as a restaurant and golf equipment available at the golf-course in Valgeranna “White Beach Golf”.

The survey shows that there is an insufficient number of toilets and recreation areas where one can relax, have a meal or just sit down, especially in autumn when the season is over, in the part of the route between Valgeranna and the Recreation and Education Centre “Ojako”. Perhaps, it would be enough with a couple of benches placed every few kilometres for the purpose of resting before moving ahead.

1.3.5. Road surfacing

The group could not understand why the route of day 34 runs off the asphalt just before the observation tower, instead of including it as a part of the route. The authors of the report propose to include the observation tower as the tourist attraction and to make also minor changes to the route at the place where it turns off the asphalt to the forest path. It is very difficult to notice the place where the route runs off the asphalt to continue as a forest path. Besides, it was noticed that the trail needs cleaning (especially for those having backpacks) to make walking physically easier. The authors of the report understood that

there was another well-maintained foot-bridge entryway to the trail next to that path (see Annex 2, Figures 54). Once the group has viewed the tower, it seemed quite obvious to continue the route along the more visible trail instead of the one indicated on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route (see Annex 2, Figure 55). It is a good idea to continue the route along the forest path, as it provides diverse scenery, the trail has different surfacing, there is a possibility to see cows and horses, and it makes the route in general more diverse and interesting. Later the route leads to the paved bicycle-pedestrian path. Starting from the next observation tower, the route runs along the same asphalt road up to the promenade of the Pärnu beach. This section of the road is rather monotone, thus, at the level of our senses, it seems long and not very interesting. Therefore, the authors recommend, starting from the observation tower, to take an opportunity and go along the trail that leads along the sea (see Annex 2, Figure 56) up to two more observation towers which are the part of the route.



Figure 54. Recommended trail to continue the route from the observation tower (Photo by the authors, 15.09.2018.)

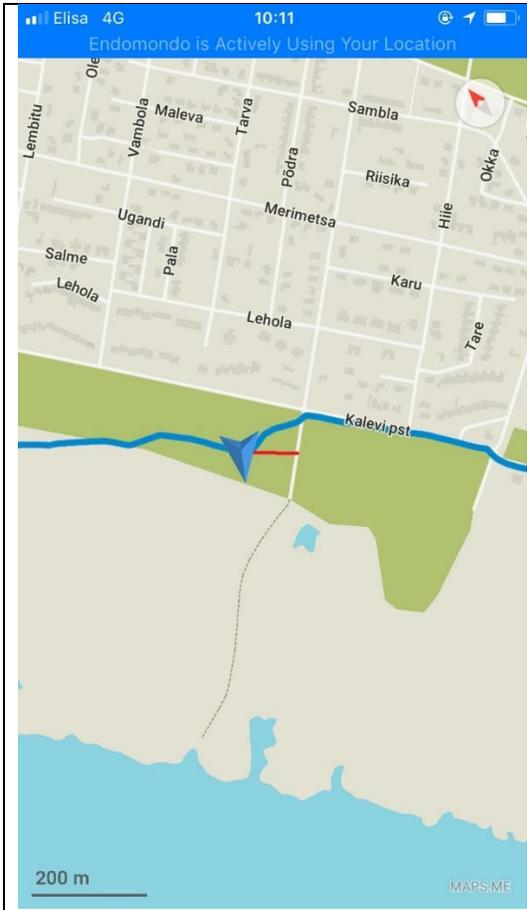
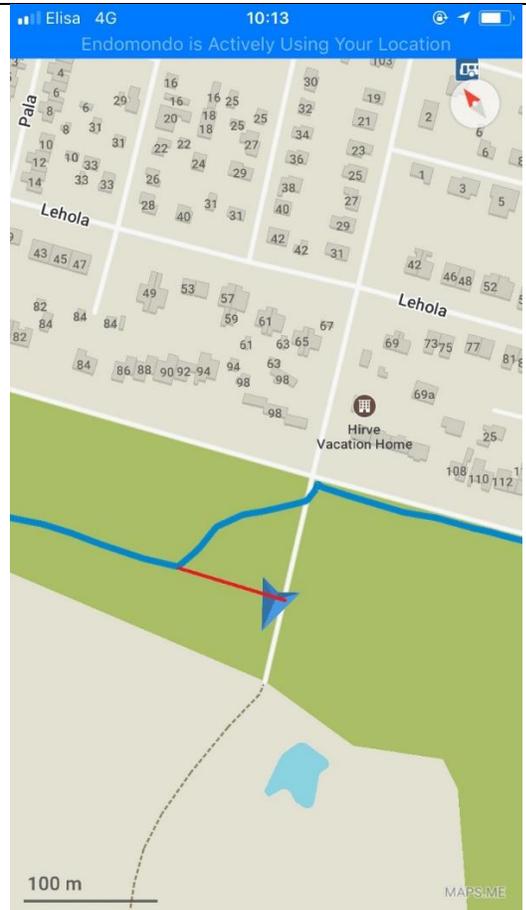
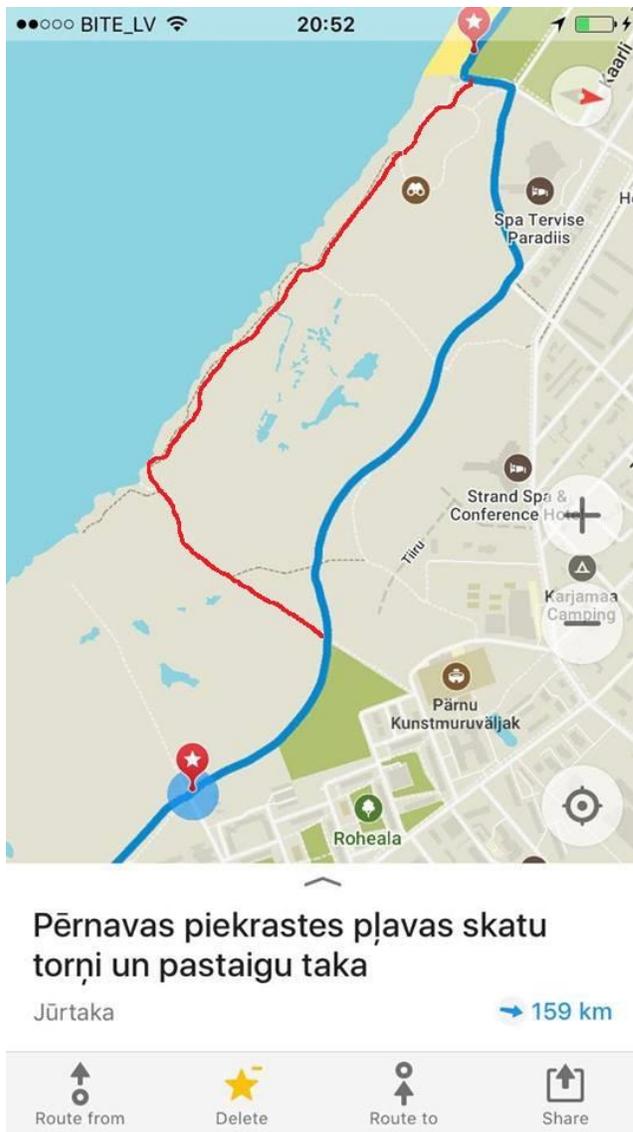


Figure 55. The location of the path (red) shown in Figure 8 on the map (Maps.me screenshot, 2018)



Continuation of the route after viewing the tower along the recommended road to be included in the route (Maps.me screenshot, 2018)



(Pärnu coastal meadow observation towers and the walking trail)

Figure 56. Authors' recommendation for improving the route (red) (Maps.me screenshot, 2018)

Upon exploring the route on-site, it was found out that the route of day 35 consists of several types of road surfacing such as asphalt pavement and gravel road. A very small section of the road went also along the Valgeranna Sand Beach (the testers chose this route because the planned route ran along the road!). According to the authors of the report, all road surfaces of this route are suitable for both cycling and walking. There are several bicycle rental points in the centre of Pärnu, as well as suitable infrastructure for cycling. **Suggestion** – to go by bike from Pärnu to Valgeranna, to set up a rental point, it could also provide services for those travelling to the Valgernanna beach.

For those who travel by car, there are several car parking lots in the centre of Pärnu, approximately in the middle of the route at Valgeranna Adventure Park and at the destination of day 35 – “Ojako” Recreation and Education Centre.

Upon assessing the elements of infrastructure of the route in general, it is concluded that there are enough information boards and direction signs in individual sections of the route, however, the authors **suggest** to supplement them with the visual materials of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route to inform the visitors and inhabitants of Pärnu of the unique route that unites all the Baltic States. It would be necessary to deal with the issues related to seasonality as several catering and recreation places are not available throughout the year, thus limiting the possibilities of travellers.

1.3.6. Security aspects

During the testing, high animal and bird diversity was observed. We saw swans at the Valgeranna beach, cows were grazing in the electric enclosure in the meadows near Audru polder, a little bit further there were horse stables. However, when considering hikers' safety, it is worth to mention that we met 3 dogs on our way (see Figure 57, 58). Two of them were watchdogs that would not allow strangers to enter their territories. If a traveller is not afraid of dogs and boldly continues his way, no issues should arise between the animal and the traveller. Children who act unreasonably from time to time may make the situation worse by provoking a dog.



Figure 57. Threat No. 1



Figure 58. Threat No. 2 (Karina Kaļonova, 2018).

(Karina Kaļonova, 2018).

Dogs freely roam around the route that runs through the fishing village as there is no fencing; such dogs may endanger hikers. Besides, if one goes hiking together with a dog, it is recommended to use a dog lead.

During the warm months of the year when nature awakens, snakes may endanger travellers. Our group also saw an adder on the road. Although it is not dangerous, it can be an unpleasant surprise.

The route of day 35 crosses the highway, the traffic there is not regulated by a traffic light or a pedestrian crossing. The travellers should pay special attention to cross the highway safely.

Hospitality of Pärnu inhabitants

One of the examples of friendly tourism is hospitality of Pärnu inhabitants as they offered their products to passers-by. (see *Figure 59*) It is a very nice way to create a positive image of the local inhabitants and the town in general.



Figure 59. Example of the hospitality of Pärnu inhabitants

Source: photo by the authors, 2018

1.4. Assessment of services and tourist attractions

Tourists are always interested in various tourism products. Upon hiking along this route, at the end of day 34 and during day 35, there were several tourist attractions, however, as it was early September, almost all objects were closed. There are only five tourist attractions mentioned on the website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, however, there are also others which are worth to be marked on the map.

1.4.1. Assessment of services

Each student group received EUR 20.00 for the purposes of testing services while hiking the part of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. Since no group spent EUR 20.00 during the two days, it implies that there is a relatively limited offer of services.

Accommodation is an important issue for hikers. There are a lot of places of accommodation (Pärnu town) within this part of the route. All places had large information boards, the accommodation establishments were close to the route. It is a great advantage, as there is no

need to look far away for lodging if one decides not to go further. All accommodation establishments were marked on the map. The only suggestion is to add lodging possibilities also after Valgeranna, as there were no such possibilities. Perhaps, some individuals from the fishing village would like to provide lodging for hikers and offer some fish and other services.

As the summer was over, there were no places to have a meal within this section of the road for almost 30 km. There were three places where one can have a meal, but only one – “White Beach Golf” – was open. There were also two shops on our way, but they were closed (their business activity was terminated). There is a need of catering establishments that are open throughout the year. Information of the establishments that do not operate anymore should be updated.

The Tourism Information Centre is located in the centre of the town which is not quite near this route. The most serious disadvantage is that the TIC has no information of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. Some advertisements, booklets and maps on the possible hiking route should be made available. Tourists love to try something new.

In the middle of the route of day 35, behind Valgeranna towards Ojako, there is an abandoned building, one could renovate it and provide services the visitors are interested in. For example, catering services with added value of recreation – paintball.



Figure 60. New business possibility. Photo by R. Pastars, 2018

Transport

The authors wanted to find out whether there was a possibility to take their luggage from the current lodging place to the next one, however, they did not receive specific offers from Pärnu TIC. The employees of the centre suggested addressing particular accommodation establishments. However, certain TIC employees could not offer this service – luggage

transfer from one lodging place to another one. This made the authors think that this service was also not available.

Additional assignment for the group – to find possibilities to get from Liu to Pärnu by public transport in the evening, and to get from Pärnu to Valgeranna around 10 o'clock in the morning.

Public transport from “Ojako” was available in this part of the route, however, time-tables on the Internet and at the bus stop differed. Perhaps, because of the change of the season, they were not yet updated. We as a group of friends after reaching the destination could not get back to the centre of Pärnu as the public transport did not run at the time specified. We waited more than 1 h, however, no public transport showed up. Tourists have to get taxi that is quite expensive due to the long distance or they have to ask somebody to give a lift, however, there are only a few vehicles passing by. There is a possibility to use taxi services offered by three taxi companies – Elekritakso, E-Takso, Gotakso. As the authors found out, taxi fare in this section is approximately EUR 23, and it takes approximately 30 minutes under normal traffic conditions.

There are several options to get from Liu to Pärnu or vice versa by public transport. It is possible to go by bus and it takes 36 – 49 minutes in terms of time (Rome2rio Pty Ltd, 2018) and it costs on average EUR 1.70, depending on the bus route. Taking into account the above, it was decided to use the cheapest and this time the most comfortable transport – a bus, as the group of hikers was large and it was a possibility for a large group to travel together.

A detailed and clear list of the public transport routes is available on the Internet. The list is available in three languages – Estonian, English and Russian (Pärnu public transport, 2018.)

The first task is to find suitable time when the bus runs from Liu - Pärnu Coach Station to Pärnu:

- **Liu - Pärnu Coach Station**

Valid on: 20/09/2018

1. **Departure 14:47 Arrival 15:45**

Weekdays Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa Su

2. Departure 17:45 Arrival 18:31

Weekdays Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa Su

3. Departure 21:25 Arrival 22:05

Weekdays Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa Su

Upon discussing the time-table, it turned out that the most optimal time to leave for the route of day 35 from Pärnu is around 10 o'clock in the morning in order to catch the bus at 17:45. According to the information on the Internet, walking takes 6-7 hours. Thus, one should not hurry and worry about leaving very early in the morning or returning very late in the evening. Although the last bus leaves at 21:25, if the hikers want to get home on time, it would be too late. A bus ticket from Liu to Pärnu costs EUR 1. If somebody wants to do exactly the route day 35, the authors of the report suggest first to take a bus to Liu and then go to Pärnu. Thus, instead of worrying about catching the bus, you can enjoy the hike in a more relaxed manner.

The second task was to find transport possibilities from Pärnu to Valgeranna:

- **Pärnu Coach Station - Valgeranna tee**

Valid on: 20/09/2018

1. Departure 08:40 Arrival 08:51

Weekdays Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa Su

2. Departure 10:15 Arrival 10:25

Weekdays Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa Su

3. Departure 10:30 Arrival 10:43

Weekdays Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa Su

4. Departure 12:10 Arrival 12:20

Weekdays Su

5. Departure 12:40 Arrival 12:52

Weekdays Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa Su

If people want to skip a section that goes through the town, it is better to go to Valgerunna and start from there. Buses run both in the morning and also a bit more intensively at noontime. A bus ticket from Pärnu to Valgeranna costs EUR 0.70.

During the hike, attention is paid to the information at the bus stops. Time-tables are not available at all stops, however, some stops have the necessary information. Please note that the information available at the bus stops informs on the seasonal routes (see Figure 61). There are busses that have slightly different route during a certain period of time. Thus, the most accurate and specific information can be found on the Internet.



Figure 61. A time-table at the bus stop (Karina Kaļonova, 2018.)

The image shows time-tables that were at the bus stops during the hike. For example, we arrived at the stop “Ojako” around 18:30. According to the information available on the Internet, we got on time for the last bus which was scheduled at half past nine. However, according to the time-table at the bus stop, the next bus would be at 18:49. However, there was no bus. It shows that the information at the bus stops is seasonal, and it is not correct at the certain periods of time which in our case was September 14.

1.4.2. Assessment of the tourist attractions

On the way to the starting point of day 35, we saw a brown sign directing to the museum and also the museum right beside it. We decided to visit it. Designations on the Maps.me map also show that there is a museum; however, it is not included in the attractions of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. The museum is located at 37 Johann Voldemar Jannseni, and its name is Koidula Museum. The window of the museum has a TripAdvisor label on it indicating that the museum is known on a broader scale. According to reviews on TripAdvisor, the museum is rated as 26 of 74 things to do in Pärnu (Tripadvisor.com, 2018).

The first and one of the largest tourist attractions was the **“White Beach Golf” course**. After a walk of approximately 1 km, a view of a golf-course unfolded. Signs are visible, and it is marked on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route map as the first tourist attraction of day 35. This golf-course from the point of view of tourists or hikers is only as a nice attraction as the long distance hikers would not play golf. Another disadvantage of this attraction is its seasonality as it is suitable only for the warm months of the year, unlike the route that is open for hiking throughout the year.

The next attraction immediately after the golf-course was **Valgeranna Adventure Park**. For us as a group of friends, this could be a very suitable attraction object where to rest a while from uninterrupted walking. There are a lot of clear signs in the park. The park is located near the sea, thus, one can relax at the seashore and have a meal there. The park is open from the beginning of May to the beginning of October. Prices in comparison to the Latvian adventure parks are relatively expensive. An adult ticket in the summer months costs EUR 21, while in May and October – EUR 17. For those hiking at another time this service is not available. As the route runs directly through this tourist attraction, we would suggest to slightly lower prices or to apply discounts, for example, for students. If the route becomes relevant also in winter, it is important to offer some services suitable for this season. It is good that there are

benches and tables placed not far from the park and next to the sea where the hikers can relax.

Valgeranna observation platform is located just next to the adventure park. It is a 9 m high



Figure 62. Valgeranna beach
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018.

observation tower with a round platform from which a beautiful view of the sea unfolds. (see Figure 62) There are different sculptures around it. The nearby cafe was, of course, closed in September. It is possible to use also camping sites during summer. **If the route were changed slightly**, the hikers would have a longer section of the road along the sea. The observation platform is free of charge

making it possible for every hiker to observe the sea. It is a very relevant attraction for every hiker of the route.

The last tourist attraction marked on the map was the **Audru polder**. As it can be seen on the website, there is only a small sign of this attraction. There was a nice view of the sea across the meadows, therefore this section of the road did not seem so monotonous, although there were no visitor attractions or farmsteads. There is no description of this polder or migratory birds that can be seen during the flooding. It could be **improved** by adding a stand or pictures of the birds that can be seen during the spring and autumn months when they settle there. In general, this section of the road along the meadows was very monotonous.

There is a pottery workshop on this route which could be of interest to tourists, however, unfortunately, it was closed in September. **I would recommend adding it to the map as a tourist attraction.** There is a clearly visible sign and a nicely arranged surrounding area (see Figure 63) directly on the route. Tourists might want to see it and have some activities there as it would not take a lot of time and would serve as a short break. One group even met a resident, interviewed him and came to a conclusion that the respondent was aware of this

route, he got information from TV commercials. Unfortunately, it was impossible to get further information on this enterprise on the particular website, as the website was not active.

The last kilometres of this part of the route featured a lot of fisherman's houses. According to the website, it is possible to see fishing villages and small ports, however, there is nothing under the section "Services". We would suggest asking local inhabitants, perhaps there are some people who would like to sell some fish to tourists during summers, as we saw nets drying and boats lying outside a lot of houses (see Figure 64). It might be that some of the fishermen are willing **to show their collections**, as there were old boats in the yards of some



Figure 64. Fishing village
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018.



Figure 63. Pottery workshop
Source: Photo by the authors, 2018.

houses. It could be as a tourist service. Tourists would love to make a picture on the boat and buy some fish to taste them on the spot and rest a while, as there are a lot of private properties and no place to sit down. Access to the sea is only through the yards of private properties. The shop – Lindi – indicated on the route map was closed. We are a three-generation family, therefore this factor is very important for us, as the places where to buy water and food were several kilometres away. Not far from the closed shop the group discovered two objects which were not on the route map – Lindi port and an observation tower. This area is a well-known nesting ground for

birds, and the tower is an excellent place to enjoy the advantage provided by this place (see Figure 65).



Figure 65. The shop – Lindi – indicated on the map, the port and the observation tower (Photo by A.Kokoreviča, 2018)

Three kilometres before our destination – Recreation and Education Centre “Ojako” – the group noticed a sign informing in Estonian of a visitor attraction – a burial place, however, it was not marked on the route map. There is a sign at the beginning of the road and a short description of the visitor attraction, but it is in the Estonian language. The group went to explore this unmarked object, and at the end of the road the view of a private house unfolded. The group met residents who could answer our questions in the Russian language. The respondents also were not aware of the existence of the route. It was possible to have a look at the burial place of the 13th century (see Figure 66).



Figure 66 Visitor attraction – *Marksa hieko.ht ohvrikiviga* – and direction signs (Photo by A. Kokoreviča, 2018)

Conclusion. In general, there are a very few tourist attractions once the summer is over. It was possible to enjoy natural landscapes, a golf club and Pärnu town up to Valgeranna Recreation Park, however, after Valgeranna there were no tourist services and the road to “Ojako” was very boring. The road to the fishing village (approximately 10 km) was far from being pleasant. It was practically impossible to see the sea, there were a few houses and a gravel road. There is a suggestion to add some more visitor attractions, it would be better to have more sections along the sea instead of walking along the gravel road. A place where to relax and have one’s own lunch should be built or arranged, as there were no benches or places to eat. As the route runs through Pärnu, tourists could visit some of the old town tourist attractions. It is worth to consider minor corrections to the route by including there old town’s architecture as suggested places to must see. There are churches, museums and various workshops in the old town of Pärnu. Maps and services of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route should be updated more often. It is important to point out that a large part of the tourist attractions and services are available only during the warm season. The facts about closed shops and busses which do not run also should be considered.

1.5. Awareness of local people of the route

The authors are of the opinion that awareness of local people of the route in their neighbourhood is also an important factor in order to develop, promote and maintain such routes. In this particular case, awareness of local people would help both directly and indirectly to make the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route popular and to attract more visitors, wherewith developing infrastructure and attracting new service providers to the route area.

In total, all five groups surveyed 89 people of which 19% were aware of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, but 81% did not know such a route. Thus, the local people were briefly informed of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route and information leaflets of *Lauku ceļotājs* were distributed.

Although the number of people surveyed was not large – thus, it can not represent the opinion of the inhabitants of Estonia or Pärnu – after discussing things with all five groups of testers which surveyed the same or similar number of local people, as well as from the conversation with the customer service staff of Pärnu TIC regarding awareness of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, we can conclude that local people have poor or even no information of the existence of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route along Pärnu Gulf or Estonian seashore.

On September 14, 2018, within the framework of testing the route of day 35 of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, from 12.30 to 19.15 the inhabitants of Pärnu neighbourhood were asked to participate in a survey. The authors of the report surveyed local people of various age and sex in order to find out their opinion of the route, its goals, infrastructure and contribution to the nearby sites and objects. Most respondents were pedestrians or cyclists, individuals or groups, who live near the route. Potential respondents primarily were addressed in English, in case of necessity – in Russian. 54 people who agreed to answer, depending on their language preferences, could choose between English or Estonian to fill out the questionnaires. The approximate age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 60. Among the respondents who did not know anything about this hiking route, ten individuals were related to some of the sites marked on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route (Valgeranna Adventure Park and Recreation and Education Centre “Ojako”).

Out of seven respondents who knew about the route:

- 5 of them found information on Facebook.com and 4 of them from printed media, 8 – from colleagues (working in tourism industry) and/or friends, 8 – from television; one of the respondents thought that the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route is only in Latvia.
- 3 of them pointed out that information on developing of such a route was sufficient, but 3 of them answered that there was not enough information. One of the respondents answered “No. There are no rocks, a lot of people even do not know about the route”, 1 respondent answered “no comments”;

- The following answers were given to the question whether there were enough possibilities to get involved in the route development: 4 respondents gave a positive answer and 1 chose the answer “No”. One of the respondents answered “No. Nobody has ever asked”.

All the respondents agree on the fact that it is necessary to have more information in mass media, on social networks and, of course, local people and newcomers themselves have to be aware of the existence of the route.

The authors of the report are concerned about the respondents who had heard of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, however, it seemed that they meant other routes which share the same trail sections with the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. During the testing, no person was met hiking that part of the route. This can point out to both seasonality and current attendance of the route on weekdays.

34 respondents in Pärnu answered that they were not aware of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route and they had not heard of it before. The results of the survey, of course, surprised the tester group, especially because Pärnu historically is known as a resort town and is especially attractive for tourists – thus, we can conclude that quite a few inhabitants are also involved in the tourism industry and they need to know about the existence of the section of such a huge route in the town.

Characterizations: Almost all respondents think that they did not know about the development of such a route near the town due to lack of information. They would appreciate more information on the development of such a trail and availability of information also elsewhere not only on the website. The website is not the initial source of information, it is a source of additional information. 93% of the respondents think that as they were not aware of the development of such a route, they did not have a possibility to make contributions to its development. 1 respondent is of the opinion that yes, it may be considered as an advertisement free of charge, it would help inform others of the existence of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route.

A person in Pärnu town who was aware of the route is a man just before the retirement age who is working for the administration of Pärnu College of Tartu University. He

found information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route in the newspaper. He is of the opinion that sufficient amount of information is provided on the route and its development. Besides, he thinks that he had enough possibilities to help develop the route by his contribution. He did not provide details on the last two statements.

Conclusions

Upon testing the route in Pärnu and along its gulf, exploring the town and some of its enterprises, it is possible to come to several conclusions and suggestions regarding the days 34 and 35 of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route.

1. Pärnu is known as one of the most rapidly growing towns in Estonia, and it is great benefit also to the common Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. The developers of the route should take into account the following:
 - 1.1. the information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route should be available also at www.visitparnu.com;
 - 1.2. the product and service providers indicated on the route should also include references to the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route on their websites;
 - 1.3. the employees of Pärnu Tourism Information Centre, first of all, should be informed of such a route, secondly, they need relevant handouts.
2. Tourist attractions under the section “Worth seeing” should be updated with more detailed descriptions and service provider links, if any, in order to make it easier for the website visitors to get further information.
3. The developers of the route should consider a possibility to recommend the route of day 35 to tourists as a bicycle route due to the monotonous nature of the part of the route.
4. The route should be adapted for the hiking needs of a three-generation family. At present:
 - 4.1. the location of the sightseeing objects is irregular; it can be changed by promoting involvement of local product and service providers especially in the part of day 35 where benefits of the fishing villages are not currently widely offered;
 - 4.2. there are not enough recreation areas along the route – sheds and benches, picnic sites should be placed and maintained, and toilets arranged;
 - 4.3. in some places the route is dangerous due to the traffic.

5. To make the section of day 35 more pleasant for the families which are not used to long hikes – to set up bicycle rental/returning points;
6. A group which travels by car can access any section of the route – from Pärnu to Valgeranna, to park the car, to access sightseeing objects, there are public parking lots with good/well-maintained infrastructure;
7. The end part of day 34 and the starting part of day 35 are at a strategically inconvenient place if a tourist chooses to overnight in the town;
8. Upon testing, it was discovered that the route was not yet marked;
9. Printed materials about the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route are not yet available, as we looked for alternatives, we noticed that the website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route is not linked to the Pärnu tourism application;
10. It is possible to find out about events closely related to the route on the Facebook page of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, however, events/activities offered by the nearby enterprises are not promoted;
11. There are no printed materials about the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route at the Tourism Information Centre (TIC);
12. Upon surveying the employees of TIC, it was found that they did not have an opinion about the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route as they were not informed about this route;
13. The section *Valgeranna – Ojako* is very monotonous. There are a few tourist attractions, a few recreation areas, it is difficult to access the sea, there are a lot of signs of private properties. The route runs mostly along the road from which the sea cannot be seen (from Pärnu to Valgeranna). Thus, only the maps available give evidence of the nearby sea.
14. There is no information on the website regarding typical seasonality of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route – changes to the services available due to the end of the summer season;
15. 81% of 89 local inhabitants surveyed had not heard of the route.
16. It will be very difficult to promote the product in the market if even local people can not say anything about it.

17. To add a useful tip section that it is recommendable to have cash in order to be able to pay for services.

18. Although the route of the trail is relatively close to several important sightseeing objects in the town, they are not included in the route;

19. Local governments have different attitudes towards the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route (also tourism) – more/less enthusiasm was observed.

Recommendations:

1. It is suggested to end day 34 and to start day 35 in the parking lot at the Pärnu River bridge in the centre of Pärnu;
2. To assign practical work of marking the route to the students of Estonian Tourism educational establishments, in this case, to students of Pärnu College of Tartu University;
3. To develop printed materials which would be available at the Tourism Information Centres of Estonia, Latvia and the nearby regions;
4. To make the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route and its website popular on social networks which currently may reach global audience; to use press releases for the purposes of arising awareness and promoting, articles – brochures, booklets, for example, at TICs; conferences, for example, at schools, to introduce young people to active lifestyle;
5. Social networks – blogs, facebook.com, instagram, hashtags
6. To add not only phone numbers, but also links to attractions, tourist accommodation establishments and other places included on the website of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. Likewise, it would be necessary to explain the icon at the sign “Difficulty level”;
7. To mark the location on the large-sized map at the Pärnu sign in order to give an idea to travellers of the distances, attractions and recreation areas in the vicinity;
8. There are information boards placed both on the way to Valgeranni and at the Valgeranni beach which are at very visible places. These would be excellent places for the information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route;
9. Upon arriving in Valgeranni, it is suggested to make changes to the route: to proceed along the seashore instead of walking along the asphalt road, thus letting a traveller to choose between two options – a longer or a shorter section for walking along the sea in order to have a break at Valgeranni;
10. Both small and large companies near the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route should provide information on a regular basis on the upcoming events also in the vicinity of the route in order to summarize it on social networks of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. Thus, it

will not only attract visitors to one's own event but also will popularize the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route.

2. Assessment of day 31, 32 and 33 of the route

Profile of the testers:

- Male: 6 (18%), female 28 (82%) – 34 students altogether;
- Four students were in Estonia for the first time;
- Eight students (23%) had heard of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route before the pilot testing, but 4 students had previously heard of (or used) the website www.coastalhikng.eu;
- Of 34 students, seven (20%) went on a hiking trip for the first time;
- Of the rest (80%), most go hiking at least twice a year, while five respondents indicated that they go hiking more than 4 times a year (Figure 2);
- Most of those who have hitherto gone hiking, walk the distance of around 15 km a day (Figure 3);
- Different hiking experiences during the pilot testing also allowed analysing the walking route from the perspective of different experiences (both inexperienced and experienced hikers).



Figure 1. Lemme Beach (route of day 31)

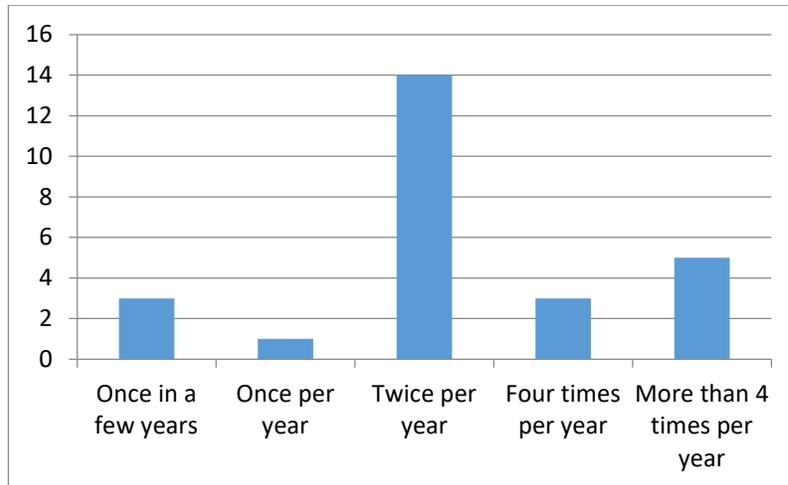


Figure 2. The number of hiking trips per year of the students – testers

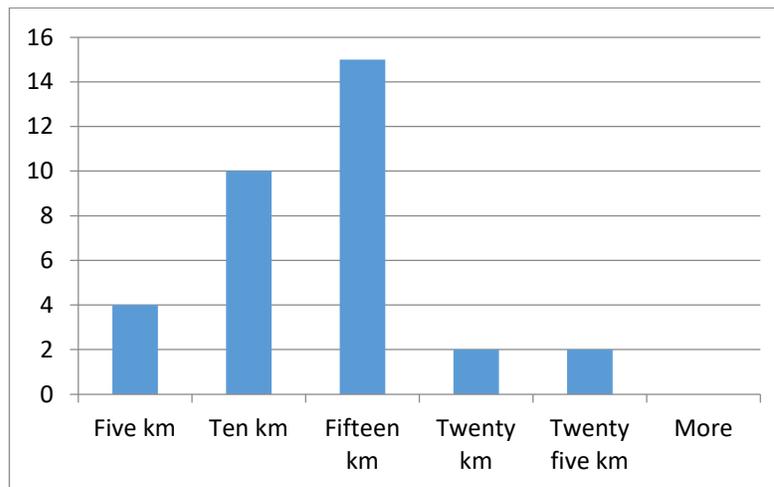


Figure 3. The number of kilometres the students – testers walk during one hiking trip

2.1. Assessment of Infrastructure

2.1.1. Using the GPX file of the route

One of the tools that can help in walking the route of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route is GPX files that were taken during the survey of the trail in 2017 with a GPS device. They are currently downloadable at www.coastalhiking.eu for each day.

Before the pilot testing, all students were given the task of downloading the relevant sections of the route that were going to be tested on their mobile devices. 23 students (67%) succeeded in doing that.

To the question "How easy was it to download the trail route GPX file to mobile devices?", the following answers were obtained (Figure 4). Four of the students did not try to download GPX files.

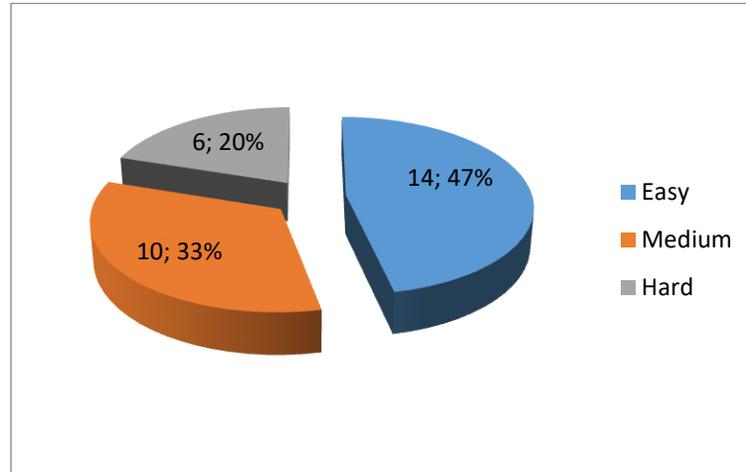


Figure 4. Downloading of GPX files to the mobile devices of the testers

When asked the question "Did you encounter any problems during the process of downloading GPX files?", the following answers were received (unedited):

- When you open the file, it does not work (Samsung);
- The file cannot be opened (IOS operating system);
- Does not work on iPhone;
- The link to the file is difficult to find (IOS);
- Need the Internet to work in forest;
- Different downloading to Adroid and Apple devices;
- Displayed only the map, but did not open specific points (IOS);
- Difficult to choose an application (IOS) in which GPX can be used;
- The file downloaded as a string of numbers and could not be put into the application;
- The map link cannot be open.

Recommendation: to develop a step-by-step description of how to download and use GPX files in different phone operating systems in one common manual that is publicly available at www.coastalhiking.eu.

To the question "Did the GPX file help you navigate the route?", 18 answers were received: Yes (11 answers), No (1) and Do not know (6).

2.1.2. Signs

To the question "How do you evaluate the quantity and quality of the signs at the Baltic Coastal hiking route?", 27 students rated it as sufficient and 2 as insufficient. Despite this positive assessment, it should be noted that in the course of the inspection in all three sections of the trail there were no signs that would make it easier for hikers to find the trail in nature.

Recommendation: to place at least some signs in the places where the route runs along the coast and comes out on it, or in the case of a road crossing – signs indicating which direction to go.

To the question "Are there enough signs directing to local service providers?", the following answers were received: yes (10), partially (18), no (4). Two respondents did not give an answer.

Recommendation: to place signs directing to service providers, especially on the coast, where there usually are no signs to the inland.

2.1.3. Information boards

In the course of the testing, two information boards were seen (one in the recreation area at Lemme Beach developed by Estonian State Forest - RMK (Figure 5) and the other at Kabli Ornithological Station (Figure 6). None of them had any information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, neither was there any mention of the trail route. Obviously, the boards have been installed before the creation of the trail in nature.

To the question "How do you evaluate the availability of information boards in the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route?", the following answers were received: sufficient (17) and insufficient (17).

To the question "How do you evaluate the quality of content on the information boards from the hiker's perspective?", the following answers were received: good quality (22), poor quality (1). The remaining 11 respondents answered that the content of the information boards should be duplicated also in English and Russian as the content is not comprehensible to them in this language.

Recommendation: to install a new information board at the Lemme Beach (or in the parking lot in front of it) containing information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. To provide some information about the trail on the information boards that will be restored in the future and which do not focus particularly on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. The previously mentioned information should also be duplicated in English and Russian as the contents of the surveyed information boards were only in Estonian.



Figure 5. The information board at the recreation area developed by RMK



Figure 6. The information board at Kabli Ornithological Station

2.1.4. Recreation areas

During the pilot testing one recreation area was inspected - the recreation area developed by RMK at Lemme Beach (Figure 7).

The following answers were received to the question “How do you assess the quality of the recreation area in a 5-point system?”(Figure 7):

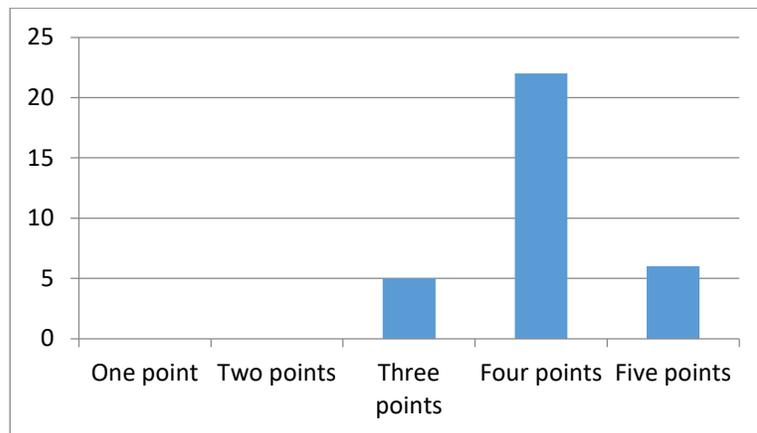


Figure 7. The assessment of the infrastructure at the recreation area

As you can see in the figure above, the average evaluation of the recreation area is four points (good).

Recommendation: to restore broken wooden parts of the tables and chairs that have a rot. Some respondents mentioned that such recreation areas could be more frequent, especially at the following section of the trail from Häädemeeste to Uulu.



Figure 7. The recreation area developed by RMK at Lemme Beach

2.1.5. Toilets

During the testing, one dry toilet in the recreation area developed by RMK before Lemme Beach was observed. Toilets were also available at the Lepanin Hotel located near the route

of the tested trail and at Metsäaie majutus tourist accommodation that was visited during the second half of the day.

To the question "How do you rate the quantity and availability of WC in the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route in a 5-point system?", the following answers were obtained:

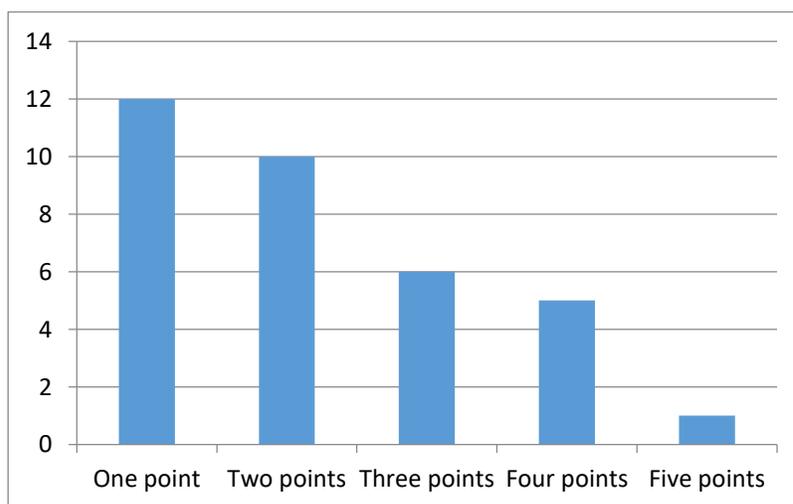


Figure 8. Assessment of the number and availability of toilets

Most respondents rated the availability of toilets with one point (very poor) or two points (poor). One of the respondents admitted that he/she had not seen any toilets.

Recommendation: The municipalities should, according to their possibilities, install dry toilets near beaches and recreation areas, as well as in significant populated places such as - Häädemeeste (as well as signs directing towards them).

2.1.6. Trail marking

Of the three surveyed sections (see below), the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route was marked in the last two parts (underlined).

- Orijõe – Lapanina;
- Part of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route in Häädemeeste village and vicinity;
- Part of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route between Sooküla and Võidu villages.

Recommendation: On the one hand, if the trail stretches along the coast, it can be unmarked, but in places where the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route comes out on the beach or leads away from the sea, marking is absolutely necessary. Also, it is worthwhile to draw a sign near the objects on the beach, so that a hiker knows that they are still in the trail area.



Figure 9. Trail marking with paint on trees near Häädemeeste

The students acknowledged that the marking greatly helped navigate the trail and stay on its route, especially in the woods where there is a dense network of forest trails and paths.

2.1.7. Safety

Since the accessibility and the improvement of the environment is also related to safety (not only), the students were asked the question "Do you consider the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route as safe?". 33 respondents answered "Yes", one did not give an answer to this question. Private property, fences, as well as other obstacles and freely roaming domestic animals were not encountered on the route.

2.2. Services and Attractions

In the course of the pilot testing, various service objects important to hikers and also attractions were checked.

2.2.1. Shops

In the surveyed area shops were only available in Häädemeeste village. No communication or language problems were encountered in the shops, the payment could be made either in cash or by a card. In the shops, there was a range of groceries available for hikers.

2.2.2. Accommodation



Figure 10. Metsääre majutus tourist accommodation

In the framework of the pilot testing, one accommodation establishment Metsääre majutus (Figure 10) offering overnight and catering services was checked. Its owner Olavi Pulst showed the accommodation and catering premises and the special offer – a wet sauna in a barrel. The students rated the hospitality of the hosts at 4.6 points in a five-point system. The accommodation was easy to find, both following the signs in nature and the legends of google maps and other electronically accessible maps used on mobile devices. WC was available here, a possibility to wash hands after the trip, and charge mobile devices.

2.2.3. Catering service providers

A lunch was arranged in the previously mentioned Metsääre majutus accommodation (Figure 11). The communication with the hosts was easy, fast and flexible. For lunch, Solyanka (a Russian soup) made by the owners was offered (a suitable food for hikers). According to the available information, the hosts organize culinary master classes and participate in various local and regional festivals related to culinary issues. By prior timely agreement, the owners can also prepare vegetarian dishes.



Figure 11. Metsääre majutus catering premises for large groups – an outdoor arbour

The lunch was served in an outdoor arbour with enough space for a tourist group as large as one bus.

Recommendation: This would be a very suitable establishment near which (in a public place – from the outside) an information board or other informative material (stand) on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route and its offer could be placed.

2.2.4. Transport services

Public transport was running in the surveyed area. There was regular traffic with the centre of the district - Pärnu.

2.2.5. Attractions

The following places of interest were visited during the pilot testing:

- Lemme Beach;
- Kabli Ornithological Station (Figure 12);
- Kabli bird watching tower;
- Nature trail near bird watching tower;
- Häädemeeste village;
- Häädemeeste churches (closed);

Kabli Ornithological Station with the adjacent nature trail were recognized by all the students (34) as interesting attractions, but the narration and communication with the local guide was evaluated at 3.3 points (out of five).

Recommendation: The content of the information board at Kabli Ornithological Station should also be duplicated in English, indicating the possibilities to visit the nearby ornithological station - whether such a service is offered at all (price, time, contacts), or it is the goodwill and free time of ornithologists. In this case it was not quite clear.



Figure 12. Kabli Ornithological Station

2.3. Involvement of local inhabitants

In the framework of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route pilot testing, a survey of local inhabitants was carried out (Figure 13):

- Date: 20.09.2018.
- Place: Häädemeeste village
- Time: 12 15 – 13 15
- Questionnaires were prepared in Estonian and English
- Working language – English or Estonian.

The main aim of the survey was to find out the awareness of the local inhabitants about the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route and their willingness to engage in the processes related to its further development.

2.3.1. The profile of the local inhabitants - respondents

- Number – 34 Häädemeeste residents (In 2010 – 790 inhabitants¹);
- Age from 13 to 80;
- 41% male and 59% female.

2.3.2. Results

62% of the respondents had heard of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route at least once (in Estonia - Ranniku Matkarada), but 38% were unaware of this fact. When viewed from the perspective of sex, women were more informed (59%) about the trail, men - 41%. The survey also showed a tendency - the younger the respondent, the less informed. It can also be explained by the sources and types of acquiring information (Figure 14), according to which most respondents indicated that the information about the trail was mainly acquired from friends and the press. It was followed by the social platform Facebook as the third most popular source, the fourth - conferences and seminars etc. From the results obtained, it can be concluded that, despite the fact that the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route is a new initiative, many local residents have heard about it.



Figure 13. The students of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences on the way to survey local inhabitants of Häädemeeste village

¹ Source: <http://haademeestevald.kovtp.ee/>

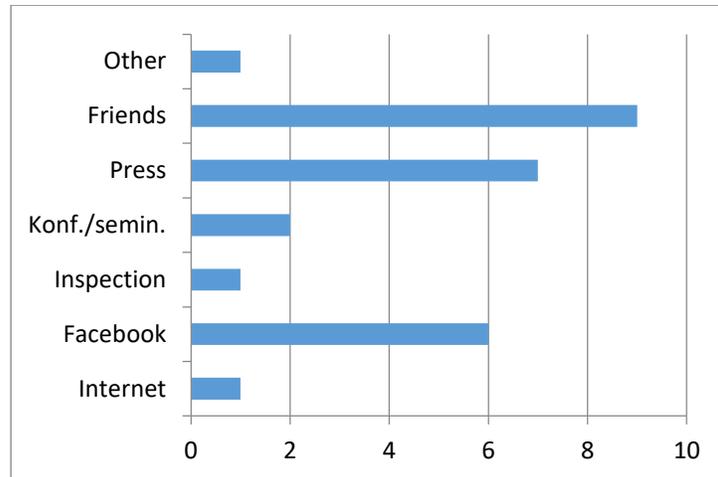


Figure 14. Local inhabitants' sources of information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route

To the question "Do you think that so far there has been enough information about the development of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route?", 12 local residents answered "yes", and 10 – "no". The other 12 did not know how to answer this question. In turn, the question "Have you been able to get involved and contribute to the development of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route?", the answers were distributed equally – 12 "yes" and 12 "no", 10 people did not have an opinion.

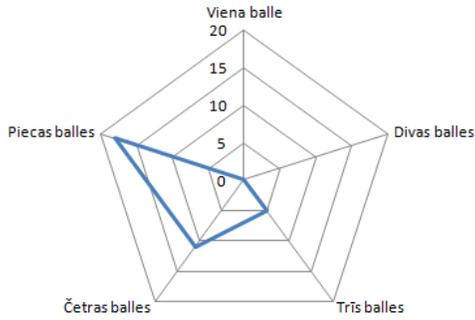
The survey leads to the conclusion that, despite the fact that the project started only two years ago, a relatively large part of the population of Haademeeste is aware of its results. About half of the respondents consider that the information (mainly from friends, the press and social networks) on the project activities has been sufficient, as well as there has been an opportunity to engage in various project-related activities, but just as many have an opposite opinion.

Recommendation: The municipalities (TICs), local initiative groups, entrepreneurs, and other involved parties should continue active marketing of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route also after the formal end of the project.

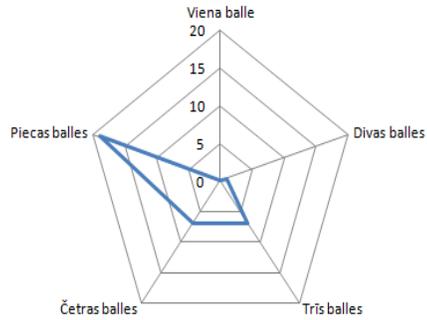
3. Motivation, Needs and Satisfaction of Hikers

At the end of the pilot testing, also the students – testers themselves were surveyed regarding the most important prerequisites and **needs** during hiking along the coast. Figure 15 below summarizes the answers of 34 students.

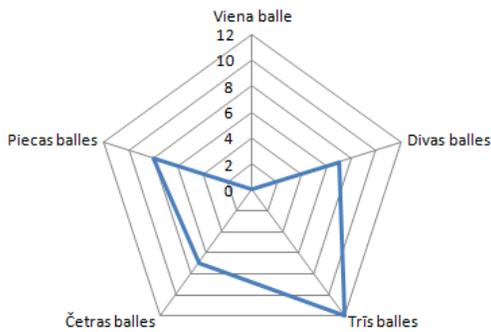
Information on the route



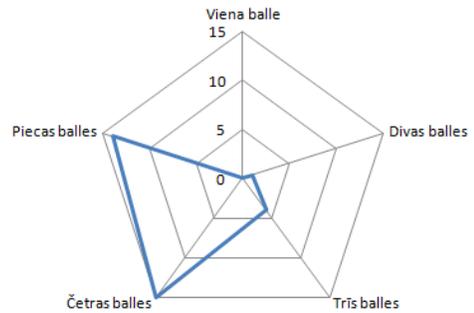
Marking of the route



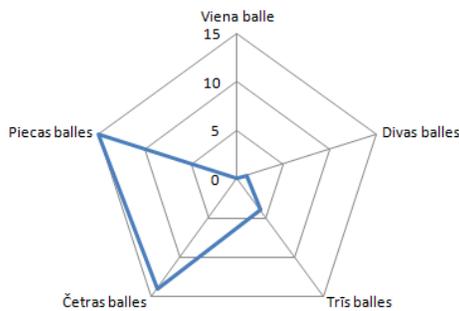
Warmth after the hike



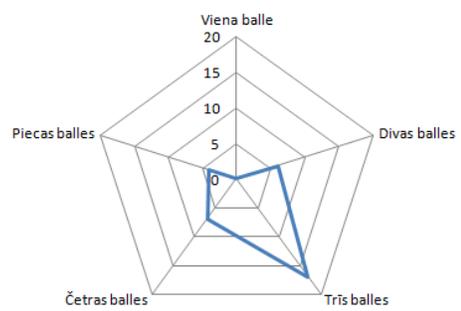
Water, food



Safety

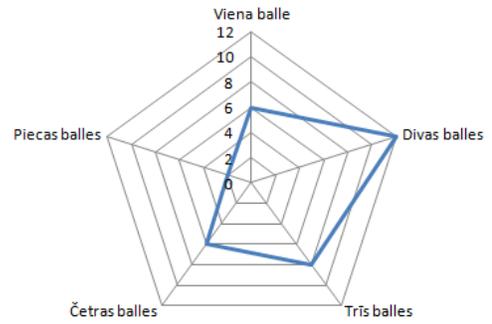
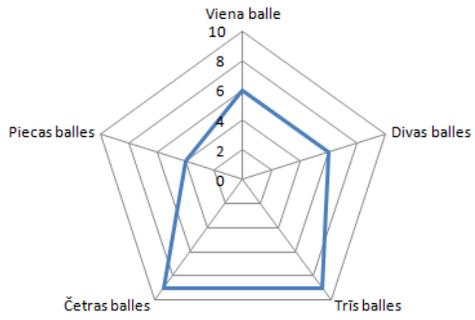


Transport services



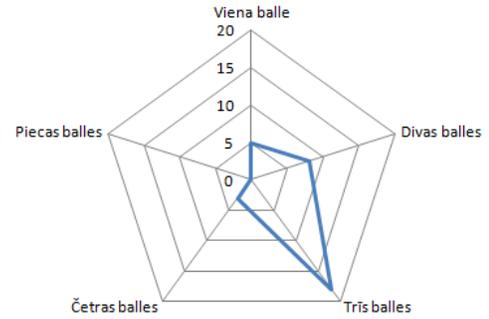
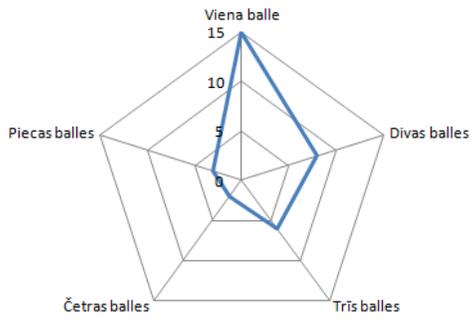
Charging points

Internet



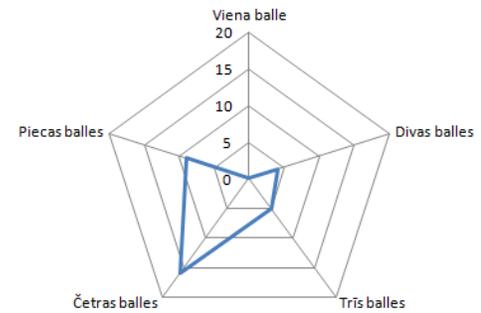
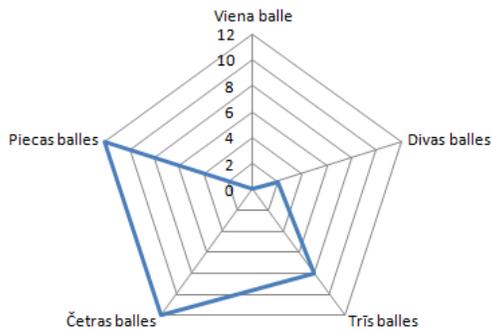
Sharing in social networks

Local guide



Suitable weather conditions

Good accommodation



Good camping

Shower



Figure 15. Needs of the hikers (answers provided by the students – testers)

The following aspects were nominated as a top priority (5 points):

- Information on the route;
- Marking.

Very important (~ 4 points):

- Safety;
- Water and food;
- Weather conditions;
- Quality of accommodation;
- Quality of camping;
- Shower.

Important (~ 3 points):

- Warmth;
- Transport;
- Charging points;
- Local guide.

Not so important:

- Internet;
- Reflecting the event in social networks.

34 students were also asked a question on how they rate (in a 5 point system) each of the surveyed parts of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route - how **satisfied** they are with the experience.

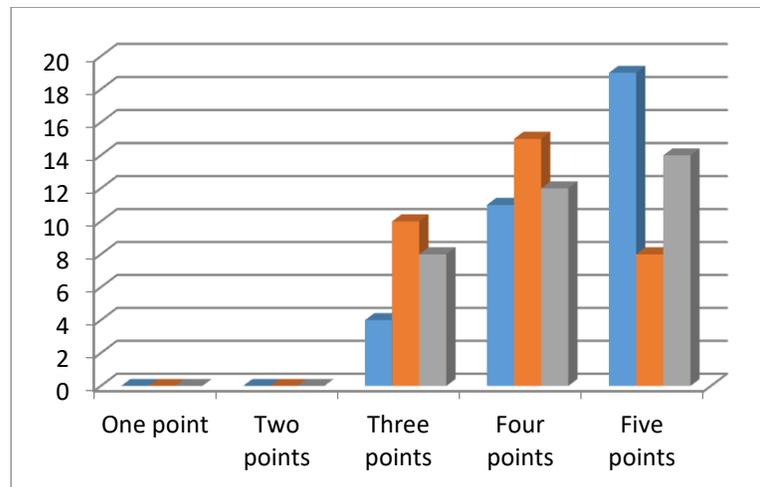


Figure 16. The satisfaction of the students – testers with three surveyed parts of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route
 Oriijõe – Lapanina – blue colour
 Part of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route in Häädemeeste village and vicinity – red colour
 Part of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route between Sooküla and Võidu villages – green colour

As shown in Figure 16, the first section stretching along the sandy beach (blue) and the third section through woody dunes between Häädemeeste and Uulu (green) have received the highest evaluation.

The following answers were provided by the students to the question „What is your best memory (one of the indicators of satisfaction) from the testing of the trail?“:

- Clean forests;
- Surprise that the trail also leads through a forest;
- Beautiful, untouched nature;
- Available recreation areas;
- Walk along the coast (as an activity);
- Visit to Häädemeeste;
- Kabli Ornithological Station.

The following answers were provided by the students to the question “What did you dislike (one of the indicators of satisfaction) or miss during the testing of the trail?“:

- Lack of toilets;
- There were stones, algae and grass near the sea;
- Few places for rest in the forest parts of the trail;
- Kabli Ornithological Station;
- Lack of information boards on plants and animals and on the route;

- Boring sections of the trip without attractions, landscapes;
- Information in Estonian only;
- Not enough signs;
- If a person does not know about the trail, it is difficult to find it in nature;
- Lack of water filling points;
- Lack of a surprise element.

The following answers were provided by the students to the question “What improvements would be necessary in further development of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route?”:

- Kilometre counting signs to know how many kilometres have been walked or how many are left;
- More recreation areas and restoration of the existing ones;
- Garbage cans;
- Toilets;
- Information boards;
- Further marketing and visibility;
- Signs directing to service objects;
- Manual for the downloadable files - how to use them in practice;
- Information in English;
- Marking in all parts of the trail;
- Information in nature - at which part of the trail we are currently located.

The students gave the following answers to the question “What motivated you to join the hiking trip along the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route?”:

- Good company;
- Desire to discover the Baltic coast;
- People with a similar mindset;
- Enough free time;
- Finances;
- Good weather conditions;
- General interest by the public on hiking and its growth;
- Collaborative activities;
- Suitable shoes;
- Registering for completing certain sections, such as collecting stamps.

The profile of the respondents: During the study, 18 hikers were surveyed. Of these, female – 15, male – 3. The respondents according to their age: up to 20 years - 3, from 21 to 35 years - 3, from 36 - 50 - 9, and above 50 - three respondents. Nationality - Latvians - 11, Estonians - 7. Latvian respondents were mainly from Riga (9 altogether), the rest from Ādaži and Roja,

one from each place. Estonian respondents were from Pärnu (2), Muraste (1), Kloogranna (1), the districts of Ääsmäe (1), Pärnu (1) and Lääne (1).

The question “How long is your hiking trip?” was answered by the respondents as follows (Figure 17):

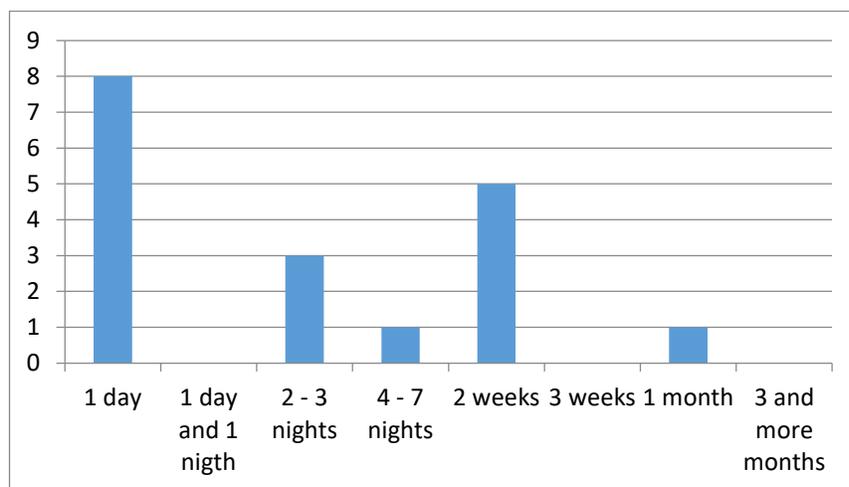


Figure 17. Time spent on the hiking trip

The answers indicate that one-day hiking trips are currently popular, but the next most common answer is “two weeks” which also indicates the popularity of long-distance hiking trips.

Figure 18 shows that most respondents have chosen 10-20 km and 20-30 km long hiking trips.

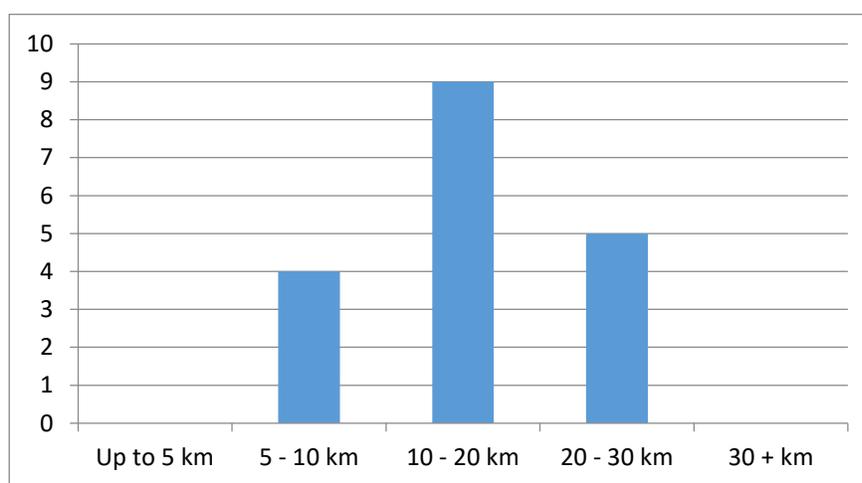


Figure 18. The length of the hiking trips

The most common reasons why the respondents went on hiking trips were the following:

- Spending leisure time (7 respondents);
- Interesting traveling companions (4 respondents);
- Easier to navigate (1 respondent);
- Relaxation (2 respondents);
- Freedom (1 respondent);
- Possibility to swim (1 respondent);
- Professional photography (1 respondent)
- No mosquitos during the day (1 respondent).

To the question: "Is this your first time going on a hike in Estonia?", the answers of the respondents were divided as follows: yes – 7, no – 11.

Figure 19 shows that most often the respondents choose to go on a hiking trip with friends, but the "solo" (hiking alone) option is the second most common answer.

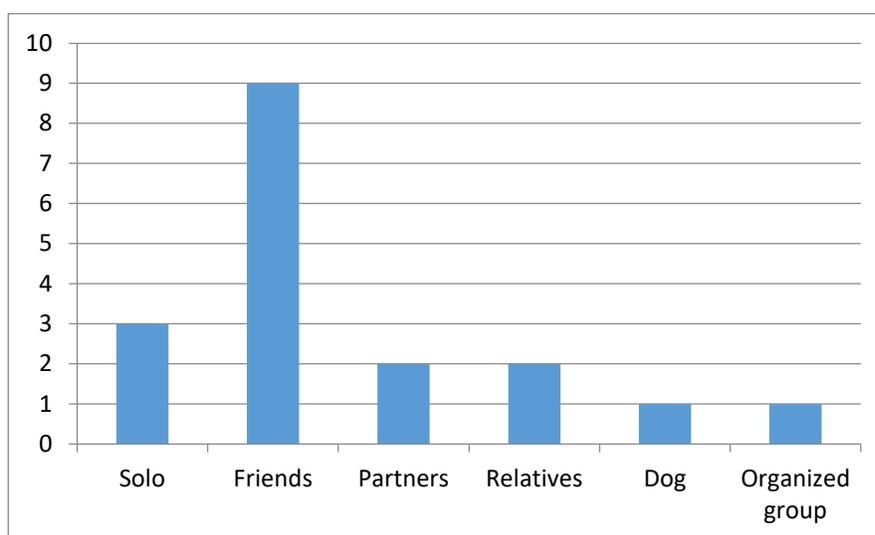


Figure 19. Travel companionship of the respondents

The surveyed respondents planned the trip:

- A week ago – 3;
- A month ago – 6;
- During the last hiking trip – 2;
- A year ago – 4.

The other answers to this question were as follows:

- I decided on hiking the same day;

- I planned 7 years ago;
- I planned half a year in advance;
- I made a decision a few days ago.

The most frequently used sources of information for the respondents when planning or choosing the hiking trip are the social site Facebook and other hikers (Figure 19).

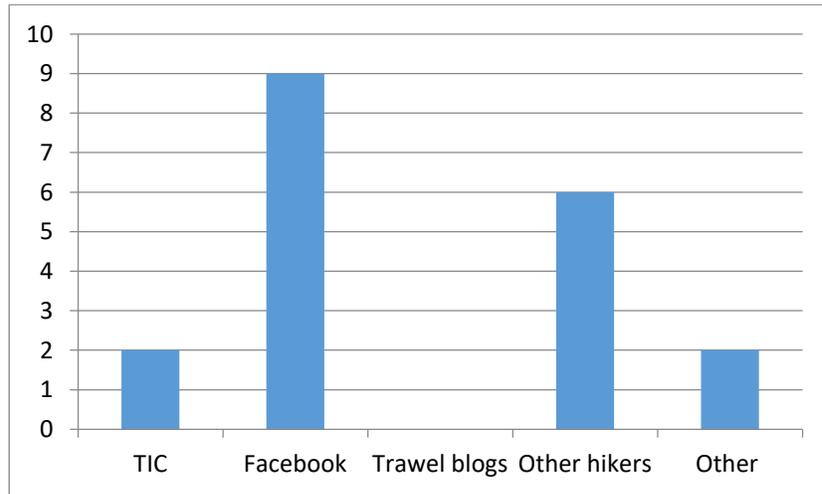


Figure 19. Sources of acquiring information

The daily expenditure of the respondents is broken down as follows (Figure 20):

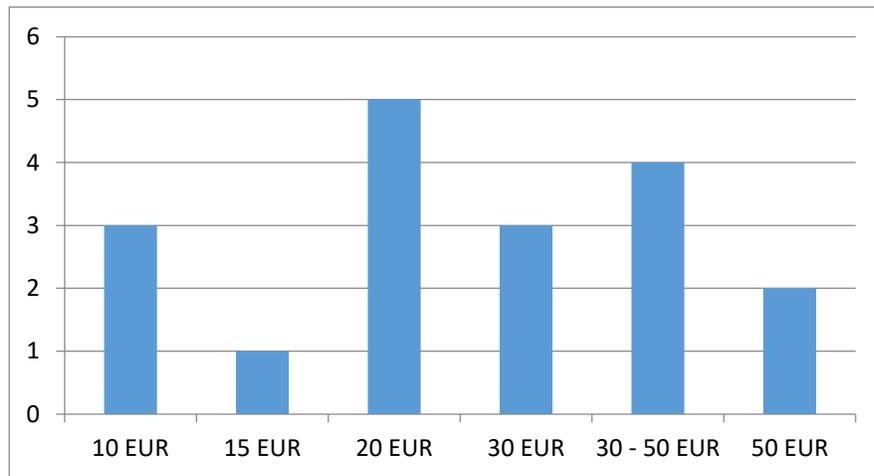


Figure 20. Expenditure per day

Most of the respondents spend over 20 EUR per day. These responses confirm that, despite the often accepted "stereotype" that "they walk on foot because they have no money," hikers, especially those that travel for several days, are a significant tourist niche for local service providers.

In turn, 11 respondents provided answers regarding the total expenditure during the hiking trip, indicating that they spent up to 100 EUR (two), 100-400 (six) and 300-500 (three). This is the amount that is often spent by people travelling to Mediterranean and Turkish resorts.

To the question "Where did you start your hiking trip?", the mentioned places were as follows: Tēstamā (1 respondent), Narva (five), Varbla (one), Nõva (one), Virtsu (two), Ikla (two), Ainaži (one), Laulasmaa (one), Lene (one), Pärnu (two), but one - does not remember the place where the trip started.

To the question "What influenced you to begin the trip from a specific starting point?", the following answers were received from the respondents:

- The fact that this is a borderline, the state border (two);
- I was in this place during a work trip before (three);
- Advice from friends (five);
- Organized trip (three);
- Close to home (one);
- Beautiful juniper fields (two);
- Possibility to meet other hikers (two).

To the question: "Do you know that the trip you made is the longest hiking route in the Baltics?", the answers were divided as follows: Yes, we knew (sixteen respondents), No, we did not know (two respondents).

To the question: "Did the development of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route as a long-distance hiking route influence your choice to go on this hike?" 10 respondents answered in the affirmative, 3 answered in the negative, 5 did not answer at all.

To the question "What helped you navigate on the trail?", the respondents answered as follows: maps (four respondents), GPS - 6, but in the "other answer" section there were answers – "other phone application" and the marking in nature.

To the question "Did you have enough information on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, the places of interest and service objects on it?", 12 respondents answered in the affirmative, but six in the negative. One of the drawbacks mentioned was the suggestion that there should be more signs.

To the question on the services used while traveling on the coast, the respondents answered as follows (Figure 21). The chart shows the services most commonly used by hikers – accommodation, catering and shops, which also accounts for most of travel expenses.

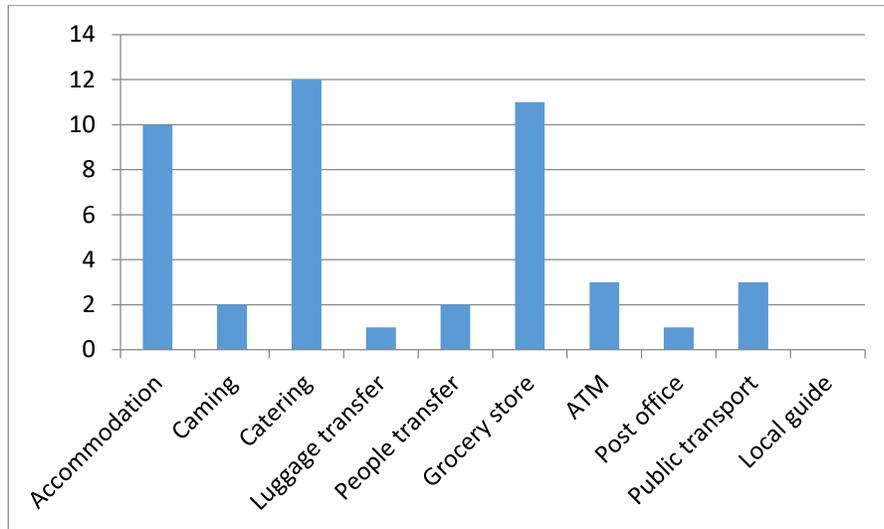


Figure 21. Services used by hikers

Annex 1

Article on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route

By Beāte Putniņa, „Media studies and Journalism”, 4th year

Heritage of the impressive Baltic Coastal Hiking Route

A popular destination for tourists during the last warm autumn weekends are hiking trails. One of the most popular objects of this type is the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, which extends not only within the borders of Latvia, but also in Estonia.

The length of the trail is certainly remarkable. An approximately 1200-km-long walking path along the Baltic coast extends from Pape Nature Park near Liepāja in Latvia up to Tallinn in Estonia, on its way including countless secrets of nature and interesting attractions not only for tourists, but also for local people.

However, the common pride of Latvia and Estonia is called differently in each of the countries: if we call it *Jūrtaka* in Latvia, then the neighbours call the trail *Ranniku Matkarada*. According to the official information source of the trail - the webpage www.coastalhiking.eu – the trail offers a possibility to see around 450 nature and historical objects, including two UNESCO natural heritage ambassadors - Baltic pearls - the capital cities of Riga and Tallinn. The path that extends along the vastness of the sea includes natural splendour – the rustle of billowing waves interchanges with bird songs and the accents of different plants. One of the most mysterious objects are the islands situated close to the trail - it is undoubtedly interesting to explore Kihnu, Saaremaa, Muhu, Hiiumaa, Vormsi, Osmussaari, which definitely offer another kind of visual experience thanks to the climate and location factors characteristic to islands.

Among the most prominent attractions in the vastness of the trail, it is also worth mentioning the highest points of the trail, respectively, the Rannamõisa cliffs in Estonia, extending 35 meters above sea level, as well as the valuable point – Pakri Lighthouse viewing platform together with Pakri cliffs reaching 70 meters above sea level and allowing visitors enjoy the beautiful Baltic sights and feel the scenery of the sea.

It takes 60 days to hike the entire route of the seaside nature trail, but experienced hikers can also do it faster. Some of the possibilities for surveying the trail are also events organized within the objects on the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route. The ongoing events in October include Pärnu Café Week in Pärnu, Estonia from October 6 to 14, exciting Saaremaa Rally from October 12 to 13, Lamprey Day for fans of sea food in Salacgrīva on October 13, Light Festival "Staro Latvija" in Jurmala and also a sports event - Pärnu coastal race from October 20 to 22.

In order to get a better idea on the impressions from the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route, we asked two Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences students who participated in the survey of

the trail in the framework of their studies to share their reflections. Aija Mūrniece (Media Studies and Journalism): "I learned a lot of new information during the tour. Walking along the sea was great, but my greatest discoveries were directly related to the world of plants and animals. In fact, the tour made me look at the usual things in nature in a different way - each meadow and a seemingly simple object has a special species, a place that makes it special. "

Līga Laizāne (Business Administration): "For me, the most favourite attraction during the trip was the bird watching tower – there was an opportunity to visit a place where birds are caught and ringed. We also saw one of the rare species of birds - these things make the visit to the trail special. Usually I do not pay attention to such things, but the natural heritage of the trail is so abundant that it cannot be left unnoticed! "

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