



ESTONIAN UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES

Institute of agricultural and environmental sciences

Chair of biodiversity and nature tourism



Project „Hiking Route Along the Baltic Sea Coastline in Latvia – Estonia“

Baltic Coastal Hiking Route testing in Latvia FINAL REPORT

Compiler: MSc Marika Kose



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Baltic Coastal Hiking Route testing in Latvia

FINAL REPORT

Compiler: Marika Kose, Estonian University of Life Sciences, lecturer on Nature Tourism, using the materials, collected by students. All materials and copies of field notes have been voluntarily conceded by students to be part of this report.

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This report is a final report, summarizing the results of pilot testing with student group 07.-10.05.2018. The part of this report is the Power Point presentation from 29.05.2018 regional workshop (16 slides) by Marten Kose, the student – participant in the testing. This report is built up according to the topics, given in pilot testing contract. In the APPENDIX there are copies of the field notes/log from students, presenting their feelings and observations during the hike (translated into English).

Background

Nature-based tourism and recreation is increasing and diversifying worldwide, with protected areas and other natural sites key destinations for a range of activities. This is in part driven by the well-recognized social benefits of visitor use of natural areas including improving human health and wellbeing. Nature-based activities can also generate economic revenues for protected areas and local communities through visitor expenditures and commercial concessions (Pickering, Dario, Hernando, & Barros, 2018). Hiking tourism refers to “a vacation or holiday-related outdoor activity that consists of shorter or longer walks in natural and cultural landscapes, and often in rural areas”. Hiking tourism becomes a popular wellness travel trend across the world. For example, over 32 million Americans participated in hiking or backpack trips annually from 2008 to 2016. The number of people involved in hiking or backpack vacations in Germany in 2016 was 17.3 million. Between 2009 and 2013, over a million international visitors participated in hiking during their trips to New Zealand. Visitors enjoy walking on trails, observe beautiful wildlife sceneries, and become connected with nature, which are instant benefits of participating in hiking activities. As a long-term consequence, hiking activities could help people reduce stress, improve sleep quality, and enhance mental health, which promote quality of life (Lee, Manthiou, & Tang, 2018). There are numerous recent studies about hiking and hikers expectations and perceptions about hiking trails and experience. Here are few recommendations, based on research cases on different continents, involving both domestic and foreign travellers from all age groups. While E9 Latvia-Estonia project and concept was built up using the European Ramblers Association input and highlighting the Western- European seniors as main target group, there are many other potential users to attract. As selected target group of the project is seeking solitude and closeness to nature, the other groups of visitors may have different needs. Nonetheless important are environmental and conservational issues and educational opportunities, which go along with such ambitious establishment as E9 Coastal Hiking Route.

Case1. In 2013 a research was carried out in Astraka Refuge located in the Vikos-Aoös National Park in Radovoli, Greece (Lee et al., 2018). 333 visitors were questioned and the recommendations for hiking industry are as follows:

- 1) Emotional value is important to influence tourists' engagement in hiking tourism. Therefore, managers of the hiking destination need to consider how to arouse tourists' excitement, happiness, and other positive feelings when they visit walking trails.
- 2) More view-watching points and rest gateways could be added on walking trails to help tourists take mental and physical breaks as well as reduce stress.
- 3) Novelty also plays an important role in tourists' value perceptions. Hiking tourism destinations need to satisfy tourists' adventures and curiosity needs.
- 4) Hiking destinations should also be environmentally friendly, which achieves the ecological value. Similar with many other outdoor activities, hiking tourism might have negative impacts on the natural ecosystem
- 5) The construction and excessive use of hiking trails adversely affect nature, resulting in physical, ecological, and esthetic impairment of the attractions. The common negative impacts of trails include soil erosion, muddiness, trail extension and widening, vegetation damage, and litter.

Case 2. In ten Italian Natura 2000 sites all over the country in 2014/2015 a visitor survey was carried out to evaluate the providing of the recreational ecosystem services of these protected areas (Schirpke et al., 2018). The researchers gathered information from 1129 respondents on recreational activities, behaviour, expenditure, satisfaction of the visitors, and knowledge of Natura 2000. The outcome, useful for E9 designers might be the 3 visitor types, outlining from cluster analyse by considering socio-demographic data and the expenditure of respondents. Type 1 and type 2 visitors living close to the Natura 2000 sites were dominant in all selected sites, except for three sites predominantly frequented by national and international tourists (type 3). In contrast to large protected areas in Europe, such as national parks, attracting many visitors because of the site's designation as a protected area and high biodiversity this research uncovered poor knowledge about the Natura 2000 network and suggests that Natura 2000 sites are mainly used for recreational purposes by nearby residents. Accordingly, in 2015 the Eurobarometer reported similar numbers: 73% of the Europeans have not heard of the Natura 2000 network and only 10% had some knowledge of it. Promoting the sites and informing about conservation targets might help to increase knowledge about the Natura 2000 network and raise visitors' awareness of biodiversity issues. This finding reminds us that E9 is passing through vast areas of National Parks and other types of protected areas in Estonia and Latvia and the information and awareness rising is worth considering.

Type 1: local recreationist

Type 1 is mainly composed of people over 45 with a good or high level of education and predominantly from the same province and partly from the same region as the Natura 2000 site. The main activity is hiking, but cycling, wine and food tasting, mushroom picking or other activities are among their interests. As this type usually does day trips with a mean distance of 42.8 km, the expenses for accommodation are very low. The expenses at the site and travelling costs are also below the average. Their total average expenses are 22.30 € per day.

Type 2: regional excursionist

This type consists mainly of young and middle-aged people (18–45) with a high level of education, living close to the Natura 2000 site (same province or region). Hiking is the main activity practised by this type of visitors, but also other activities such as relaxation, short trips, cultural visits or events are popular. Some of the visitors stay overnight, but most make day trips. Compared with the other two types, this type has the highest travel expenses, travelling on average 46.1 km, whereas the expenses at the site and for accommodation are in between the other types but below the average of all visitors, accounting for an average 44.52 € per day.

Type 3: sportive tourist

This type includes mainly middle-aged 31–60) visitors with a very high level of education. Most of them are foreign and Italian tourists staying overnight. Their main activities are cycling and hiking. This type spends more money (above average) at the site and for accommodation than the other two types, but least money for travel, staying close to the site in hotels or other tourist accommodations (on average 24.5 km) and not including travel expenses from the place of residence. The average daily expenses per person are 77.06 €.

Type 2 is the most frequent (43%), followed by type 3 (31%) and type 1 (26%) in studied Natura 2000 areas.

Introduction: The testing group and procedure

The test group was 28 students from 3 institutions: Tallinn University (17), Estonian University of Life Sciences (7) and School Centre Nova Gorica, Slovenia (4).

There were 3 supervisors: Mart Reimann, Marika Kose and Andreja Hauptman.

Students were Master and Bachelor degree students and Slovenians – upper secondary technical education students.

The testing was implemented in the frame of Tallinn University subject: “YID6001.YM, ELU – Erialasid Lõimiv Uuendus” which is a new type of subject where, together with their supervisors, students from different study areas create a project on a topic of their interest whereas suitable methods for carrying out their ideas are chosen by themselves.

The students represented following study areas: recreation management, nature tourism, landscape architecture, civil engineering, andragogy, youth work, IT, children protection, nature conservation management and public governance. The age of the participants was from 18 – 45+. The route for testing was chosen Mazirbe – Kolka 20 km; Mersrags – Engure 20 km; Incupe – Zvejniekciems 10 km and the testing time was 07.-10.05.2018.

We got a great organizing support from Aija Neilande from Kurzeme region, who helped to negotiate the accommodations and meals in the region. The Vidzeme region was quite indifferent with the practical advice and organizing.

The test group was not the “traditional” rambler, described in the Conference, where E9 was introduced in Jurmala. We discussed the issue in our group gatherings and agreed, that in Estonia and Latvia, the local population is very active in outdoor activities, and while the E9 is targeting rather foreigners from Western Europe, its main potential is for local population and close neighboring countries.

Infrastructure

We paid attention to the existing and missing infrastructure on the trail (information boards, information signs, resting places etc.).

Information boards and signs:

As we were visiting the E9 in early spring of 2018, where only Slitere NP territory was marked for E9 and all the rest was not, also all E9 information was not established yet, we cannot evaluate the specific E9 related information. However, there was a lot of different information and boards available on our route. Some comments about that.

- 1) Slitere NP was well equipped with different signs about local (Liivi) history, nature and geology-geography. However, as foreigners, it wasn't understandable, as most information was in Latvian or Liivi languages. In Slitere NP also a lot of useful signs were used to direct people to

the shore or other important places. When words were used, knowledge of Latvian was needed. Pictograms would be useful for all languages! There were many local trails, also marked and actively in use. It was sometimes a temptation to follow these not E9. Some people (Slovenians) missed more information, as they were from very distant areas and many historical, cultural and landscape features were unfamiliar to them. They expected/needed more information.

As tourists and environmentalists we noticed these things (participants comments):

"1. DAY

- We expected for the pictograms to be bigger and on a separate board, and we also saw a pictogram that we guessed was about banning fishing, but we couldn't understand it because it wasn't in english.*
- We first encountered pictograms after about 4 km, that's also a thing to think about:*
 - more english, there was too little,*
 - more bathrooms and signs for them,*
 - there were signs for the roads in the forest to the sea, but when we wanted to go from the sea to the forest, we couldn't find an entrance because there were no signs.*
- It's a national park under Natura 2000 and we know there's the Directive of habitats and the Directive of birds, we also encountered a very rare bird which Marika Kose translated it to us something like Blue chest. If it weren't for her we wouldn't know it's migrates over there. Here we were missing a lot of boards about the species of plants and animals there, that are typical for that area, boards of why Natura 2000 is there and what species are endangered and rare.*
- The history was well described, it was also good in english, but we encountered some special trees which were carved. People probably collected resin in that way, but there should be a board explaining that, because it's part of culture and it's interesting, and people misunderstand it.*
- We didn't even know we were in a national park, we noticed only after 2 km. So in bigger villages, like the one where we entered, should have the boards that it's a national park, and all the other boards there, it's a bigger point, and the board about seals was terribly written.*
- We saw some information board that were really faded because they we're turned to the sun probably, they were almost unreadable, otherwise they went well with nature and were nice to look at.*
- The routes were very nice and well managed, and even though there were benches at bigger stops we wanted tables and we missed some simple benches on the roads.*
- There should be signs to take trash with you since there are trash cans on bigger stops, because even though there isn't a lot of trash beside the road now, there will be more when more people come."*

2) In Engure region there were no alternative trails or markings.

3) In Saukrasti area there were different trails and markings and information.

We all understand that E9 is not a study trail or nature trail, but these remarks could be useful to get further ideas. Also the idea of "hopping on and off" the trail in some places, like we did, can cause this confusion. There are certain places, where it would be more likely that people enter the trail and get information, but if they do not do so, then how the information could be delivered when there are so many "competing" trails and information available already? So as the trail is

meant to be entered and left from any part and therefore we should think how to make these enterings relevant to the visitors. Within planning process we have targeted the conventional long distance hikers/ramblers from Western Europe, walking for several continuous days for certain purposes and philosophy. But when we have visitors for one or 2 days, younger people with different perceptions, how we can meet their needs?

Resting places, drinking water and DC-s:

In Slitere NP there were DC-s in some places. None of them were marked as public. Some were probably, but some weren't, but there were no signs. When there is forest around, everybody can find a quiet place for personal needs and you cannot build a toilet in every 5 km-s, that is OK. But the last 10 km-s on the bare beach, towards Kolka, when there was river on the right and the sea on the left, that was quite tricky. When there is no people, all is ok, but when the trail and beach are busy, then the DC issue would become more actual. In Engure - there wasn't anything, but forest was comfortably close. In Saukrasti area, there were places with public facilities, beaches etc. Resting places or benches- that was abundant in Engure area, in second part. In Slitere and Saukrasti there were also some places. It could be debatable, if such trails need benches or tables for resting or shelters, as their maintenance is costly and their building needs rights. But during our walk all such places were warmly welcomed and used.

In natural landscapes with low visitor loads the toilets and resting places may be optional, but the question of getting quality drinking water is important. There wasn't any such places (wells or taps or springs etc) which were marked or welcoming the travellers on the trails we visited. Only shops or nearby farms and houses, if anybody was at home. In more populated places and villages there are opportunities to buy water but just filling your own bottle is not possible.

Safety and support

It must also be said, that while walking long hours in remote areas with only smartphone as your guide, your battery definitely runs low and the last part of the day could be without GPS or google map support. It would be very innovative to provide for example drinking water and charging points to the hikers on the trails (pumping wells and maybe sun – batteries with multi end charging devices where there is no electricity). Google maps or GPS takes a lot of battery from phones and when we expect people to use them, we should think that without specific accumulator bank or professional devices common people should manage safely. It is also described, that information about trail and sights would come up in phones and maps by apps in future. Once again, it takes a lot of energy from the battery and in remote areas without charging possibilities, it may not last for the whole day. And when the phone is off, there is no possibility to call for help in emergency. So in all parts of the E9, in all countries, when it will run in remote places (which it does in Estonia and Latvia), we should think carefully, when we build all our information up on applications, accessible only via phones with good batteries and excellent internet connection.

Navigation

The GPX data was correct and followable, trail was also simple and therefore no problems occurred. In Slitere NP the trail was marked. The marking was well followable, enough and visible. It was not too abundant in the trail sections where there were no turns or alternatives. But on the beach near Kolka, last 10 km-s were confusing. Almost everybody missed the sign that you were still on a trail. The stickers were small. As students were not informed about them before, they didn't realise that they were trail markings and did not pay attention. And they were too small and

badly visible. We understood, that the turnings on the trail were not yet marked with signposts and signs. As some turnings were quite confusing.

Altogether the marking was good and we did not get lost. But the experience is, that people (students) did not fancy following the GPS trail and smartphones but they'd rather follow the signs in nature. As the Mobile signal was not good for some operators, the GPX trail must be supported by good signing in nature. We also found lots of signs how to get to the sea (in Slitere) but no signs how to get away from the beach. It may be natural to Estonian and Latvian population that (most of) forests are public and if even not marked so, you can enter there without any permission or trouble. For foreigners from more distant countries it may need confirmation or explanation and encouragement.

Services & sightseeing objects

To evaluate the location, visibility (including signposts to the objects from the route as well as visibility on the map) of service and sightseeing objects relevant to the hiking route.

Some aspects were described already above. As we only followed the signs and information which was available in early spring, and did not have maps or prepared itinerary, we got the info what there was. Signs were mainly in Latvian suggesting local sights or objects. There is a comment from Slovenians:

"2. DAY (Mersrags – Engure)

- The route was nice out of the national park too, but there were no signs for options to the sea or in the forest, no entrance tables with maps, no marks, no benches, no tables, no trash cans.*
- Because there were no marks we lost the route and the last 2km we walked along the traffic road.*
- We know there was a bog nearby, but there were no boards or signs for it on the route if you wanted to go see it."*

Services:

Bus connection is rather good. Accommodations and shops are there after every 20 km-s, also accommodation possibilities for single travellers. Food can be found or ordered in guesthouses or bigger villages. People seemed to be friendly and very helpful. But in more remote areas there were no services or signs from the trail. More signs from the road, which was parallel with the E9. Again the dilemma: do you walk "nose in your phone", have a good map with interesting landmarks, confirming your position or have some signs or pictograms with arrows on the road.

Awareness of the route among locals

We did 38 interviews with people in local areas. There was generally no awareness about the trails among common people. Only those, working in tourism sector (tourism info, shops) had heard about it (Fig. 1). The main source of information was the Internet and Facebook, three respondents had participated in the preparation of the route (Fig. 2). During interviews our students identified great interest and positive attitude towards the idea of E9, when they had described it to locals. They all saw it as a potential to offer services and create jobs and income.

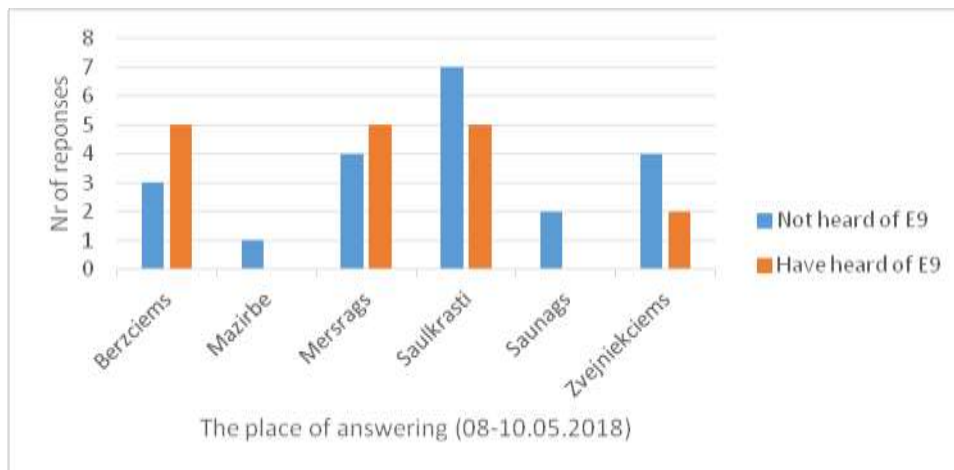


Figure 1. The knowledge among respondents about E9 or Jurtaka in early May 2018.

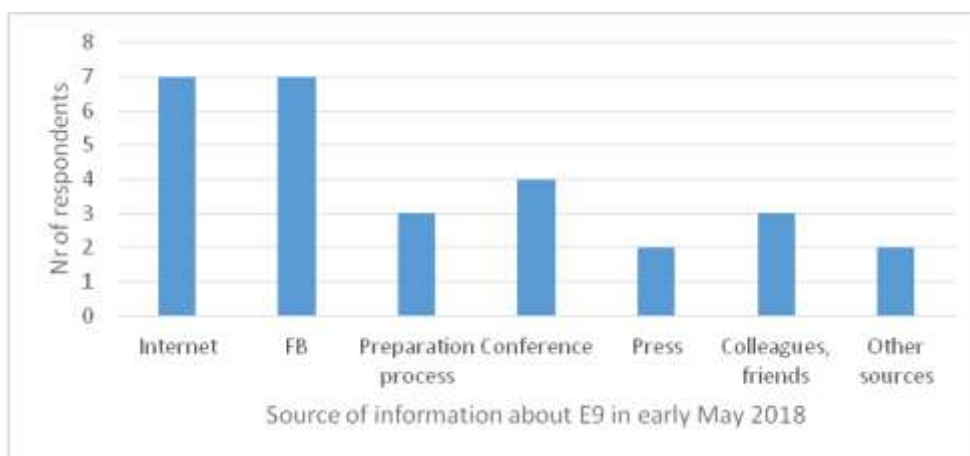


Figure 2. The Internet and Facebook are most powerful sources of information about E9 Jurtaka among survey respondents.

On Figure 3 we can see that there is a great demand on information but also that people think that they already have had an opportunity to contribute to the development of the route. We noticed also, that the real locals were more positive than those, who had second homes in the region. These people had bought the places with the idea of solitude and no trespassers and the idea of busy hiking trail passing their cottage was not welcomed. We do see a lot of possibilities to introduce the trail and its advantages to local people, who could provide all these missing services on the trail. One possibility is to create a “flagship” part of the trail, where you bring groups to test and introduce the project and there will be a need for the services and there is a promotion of this trail. The practical need and experience could bring the missing services into life and the experience could be delivered to other parts of the trail.

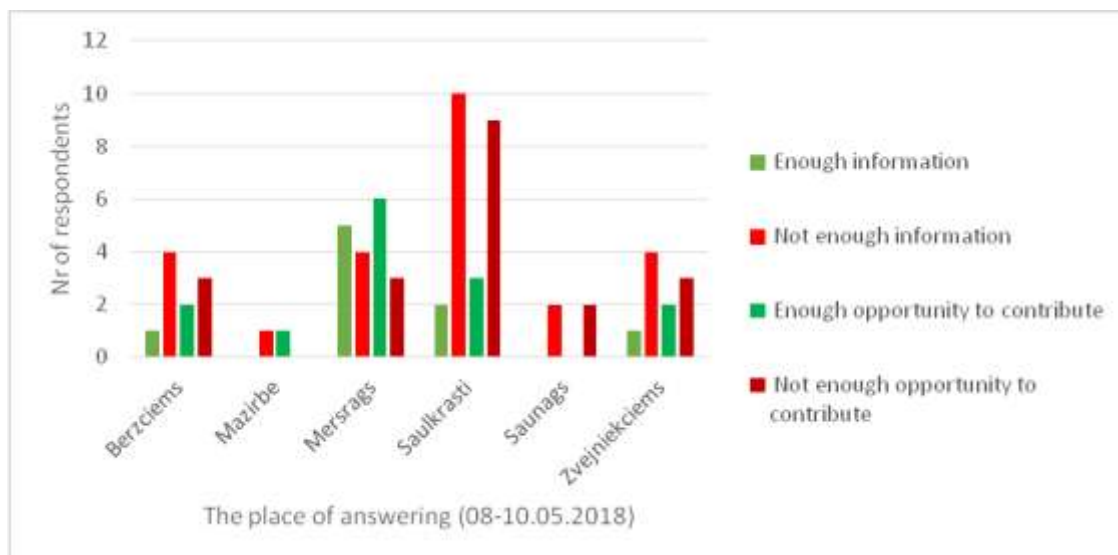


Figure 3. The information level and contribution opportunity level of respondents regarding to development of E9 or Jurtaka route during survey in early May 2018.

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APPENDIX Trail log with comments (one group)

FIRST DAY: 08.05.2018

57°41'40" N & 22°21'27" E *Lots of plastic bags in nature. A Black adder in the sun.*

We just entered the trail. No information boards- we would like some information, which village we passed. The first board we passed did not have a map of the trail. The second stop- there was a map on the information board, but information was presented too small and the languages were mixed. The toilet was not in good order.

57°41'44" N & 22°21'35" E *A pond. A swimming place, private pond? The bench is broken.*

Košrags the sign – needs some refreshment, bleached.

+ *information about accommodation, phone numbers*

+ *the trail description, what it passes*

+ *length and passing time*

+ *difficulty level mentioned*

+ *Where to rent a bike*

+ *the description of place with historical flashback*

There could be also some information about the architecture of the houses- a QR code maybe? There was an information about the houses in LV and LT, but ENG?

54°41'48" N & 22°21'38" E *The bin + bench – very OK*

The fallen tree 57°41'51" N & 22°21'39" E, very dangerous. Have to think about caretaking of the trail in future.

Also garbage on trail – beer can.

The bike road joins the vehicle road- a sign would be useful to confirm.



Figure 5. Interviewing the local. Photo Weralda Sofia Lakeman.

57°42'4" N & 22°22'38" E A private DC – is it also to use for tourists? No signs but toilet serves well in this place.

Some animals. Blind snake on the way. Maybe some signs about roe deer or moose would make trail livelier.

Accommodation 57°41'40" N & 22°21'27" E

Information board.

Pirtags? Where is it? It seems it goes somewhere aside the road. But Dundagas Novads- the bigger center somewhere further away offers a very detailed information about sights- annual festivals- all information is there.

Also information about local small entrepreneurs- breeders, farmers and craftsmen.

SIGN. Slitere National Park. Bus parking, offering places for 6 buses- good to have the information in prior- that there might be buses. There are garbage bins, but no toilet / DC in 5 km distance?!

FROM bus parking our group turned towards the sea. They are building a road here (from sand) using EU money – we interviewed the tractor driver.

There was a boardwalk with handrails to the sea. And a dead seal on the beach.

When on the shore, you can see no signs that you can turn to the village from there. You can navigate around with your own device only. There are footprints of wild boar on the shore. And a bee in hair ☺ Another footprints on the sand. Would be interesting to know about animals here?

There is a path, leading from the shore to inland, but sign private road and a warning against the dog.



Figure 4. Meanwhile the others followed the path and registered a good DC in the woods. Photo by Weralda Sofia Lakeman

57°43'28" N & 22°26'17" E

We reached back to the Jurtaka /E9. Goot to have a place for eating, maybe a garbage bin?

57°43'47" N & 22°27'29" E

Trees with traces of collecting the resin, for tarring the boats. Would be good to have explanatory board. Cuckoo and White tailed eagle. Police car passed, we greeted them.

57°43'54" N & 22°28'49" E

No signs here? Where to go?

On the shoreline no signs or marks on the trees. But interesting high banks.

SECOND DAY: 09.05.2018

57°19'39" N & 23°07'42" E

No signs or markings about E9. No marks on crossroads.

57°19'35" N & 23°07'55" E

Next crossing, no signs. When reaching the shoreline there should be an information board, how long is the trail (distances), also signs where you can come off the trail. And some DC-s?

57°18'58" N & 23°9'47" E ?

57°17'47" N & 23°9'43" E

Sensitive surface, we recommend an information board about that.

57°17'46" N & 23°9'44" E

A self- established resting place – chairs, fireplace – maybe there is a need for an organized one?

57°17'13" N & 23°9'51" E

Beautiful beach, is it allowed to swim? Maybe a sign would be useful.

NOTES OF OTHER GROUP (Nature tourists):

SECOND DAY:

No signs in the town. First part (10 km) was with no information and infrastructure. But the second half (10 km) had lots of resting and sitting places, garbage bins. The trail is good but no marks or signs. Good place for bird watching. Cormorants, seagulls, terns, ducks, goosanders, grey herons, egrets. The field of Pulsatilla.

THIRD DAY:

No signs of E9. Beautiful place with garbage bins and benches (see Fig 6). Bg swimming place. Is it official? Many places to eat, good opportunities.



Figure 6. Our student group starting from Saulkrasti. Photo Weralda Sofia Lakeman.