Cycling tourism – Opportunities for regional development in Baltic Sea region

Benchmarking tool and best practices from Finland, Sweden, Estonia and Poland

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Interreg Baltic Sea Region

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SMART GREEN MOBILITY

BAB

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Introduction: Cycling tourism supports sustainable mobility and vitality in the region

Cycling tourism is a growing business in Europe. Baltic Sea countries are becoming more popular among tourists who seek active holidays, such as cycling tourists. Many Baltic Sea countries have developed cycling routes and tourism in their region, but internationalization of the business is still lacking. Local routes need to be elevated to international standards. This guide aims to help local and regional authorities and other cycling route developers think about the entire cycling tourism business in the region and how to realize its potential.

This tool mainly concerns long-distance cycling routes, such as EuroVelo, where cyclists spend several days. EuroVelo routes work as internationally known cycling tourism products that can attract tourists to certain areas. A well-developed EuroVelo route serves as a guarantee for a good cycling destination, thus the principles of EuroVelo development can be applied to other cycling routes. Functional, continuous cycle routes in the municipalities and regions also promote the use of bicycles in everyday mobility, serving local citizens as well.

The guide reflects the European Certification Standard (ECS) guidelines, which are designed for EuroVelo routes and other cycling routes by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF). Compliance with international standards in the development of regional cycle routes can attract international tourists to the region, as tourists can be confident that the cycle routes are of high quality and have the necessary services. This guide is developed in compliance with the ECF's necessary criteria, which can be observed in more detail here. In addition, wider aspects of cycling route development have been considered to provide useful guidance and tips. ECF coordinates EuroVelo development at the European level. At the national level, the development of EuroVelo routes is coordinated by National EuroVelo Coordination Centres and Coordinators (NECC/Cs).

The guide also features best practice cases from around the Baltic Sea region, bringing in concrete examples of route development in different regions. Route development is handled from a holistic perspective, starting from preparation, such as building an overview of regional potential, finding attractive stories and places to create a unique cycling experience, and finding the right people and organizations to cooperate with. It also gives concrete advice for the development of long-distance cycling routes based on the ECF standards concerning infrastructure, services, and communication.

The goal is to present the cycling route development process from the starting point to future development and maintenance planning. There are several actors involved in the entire process. Local and regional authorities play a crucial role in the entire process of cycling tourism development.

Focus on right issues - Test your competence first!

You can test your competence on cycling tourism development with the self-assessement tool that was developed in the project. You can analyze your capacity on cycling tourism development. The results will give you insight on which parts of this guide you should concentrate in.

Download the Excel-based tool from the project web page: https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/bab/#output-1

Cycling tourism and route development as a cooperative process

This chapter focuses on the general issues that need to be considered when initiating cycling route development. Developers need to have an overview of cycling possibilities, other nature-based tourism opportunities, and the accessibility of the region and the planned route with public transport. It's also important to clarify responsibilities between different authorities and actors. Utilizing existing information, such as feedback related to tourism and/or outdoor activities, provides insight into the strengths of the area. Finally, understanding the different rules and regulations affecting the implementation of cycling routes must be taken into account, as well as social acceptance. A well-developed cycling route serves tourists and locals as both an everyday cycling path and a recreational route. Therefore, route development requires cooperation among several actors, paving the way for a good cycling route that can gradually develop into a regional tourist attraction.

Best practice: Developing The South Coast route in Skåne, Sweden

Region Skåne has successfully developed several popular cycle paths in recent years. The Skåne cycle path is nominated for best cycle path in Europe on 2024.

The South Coast route in Skåne has been opened 2019 and the development of the route was relatively fast process. Lina Jönsson from region Skåne has given her insight on the development process for this Best practice. She started working with the region in 2017, when a preliminary study for the route was already done.

Some parts of the South Coas route run parallel to Eurovelo. Since the opening the municipalities say that they have received an increased number of cyclists, and they see that the number of cyclists has increased. This is good news not only for tourism, but also for public health. One of the goals for the project was to boost public health.

In Sweden the Swedish Transport Administration's report (Transportstyrelsen, Cykelleder för rekreation och turism) about route development for cycling is the main guiding document. It was updated in 2021 and is the basis of all rout development in Sweden. This document is the key factor in dialogue with the municipalities. Time wise it takes a few years to create a route if you start from scratch. It depends on many factors, like how many individual road managers do you have to deal with.

A solid political backing and long term commitment is key to success and a good place to start. Cycle route development is a long term investment, therefore all agreement's need to made on long term basis. This involves the plan for maintenance of all the parts of the route.

The individual road owners are the biggest obstacle but at the same time an opportunity, because if you have them with you, it can ease the work flow with faster decision as an example. Private roads are often attractive routes with low traffic density. If an individual road keeper opposes the route passing their land you have a big problem since they have an unreasonably strong power. A common concern is "I don't want hordes of people outside their house". There are also examples of personal irritations towards the municipality that can be taken out on a project like this. This is a good example why it is important to gain social acceptance when planning cycling routes.

Overview of the current situation

Whether you are starting to develop the first cycling route in the municipality or region or updating existing routes, this guide can help you plan, implement, and enhance the quality of the route. A baseline study on the existing routes in the area should be done at the beginning. These can be EuroVelo or other international routes, regional and local routes, as well as general cycling paths for regional mobility. Also, other outdoor facilities, such as hiking routes, can have facilities that cyclists can utilize. The overview should also include mapping the responsible

organizations of the routes, as well as services and points of interest along them. This is beneficial, as the planned route can be integrated with an existing cycling route or other attraction to form alternative routes and options.

Route mapping can be done in different ways. Digital tools, such as heatmaps from different cycling or outdoor sports apps, can be utilized to identify popular outdoor activity areas.

Route accessibility with public transport

Mapping the public transport connections and their possibilities is also important to make the route accessible for users. To promote sustainable travel in the context of cycling tourism, cyclists should not need to use a private car to access the route. Public transport also creates more flexibility for users as, for example, longer routes can be used as day trips if public transport serves this purpose. Therefore, the baseline study should include existing public transport connections and their accessibility to and from the planned route. Public transport providers should be informed about the cycling route to give them the opportunity to provide or enhance their capacity for carrying bicycles on board. The best practice from Poland on page 9 provides insight into how public transport can serve cycling tourists.

Resourcing & responsibilities

Proper resources for route development and maintenance are vital for the longevity of the route. Agreeing on the responsibilities for maintaining infrastructure and communication materials must be done during the planning phase to create a long-lasting, high-quality route that can become well-known over time. The maintenance responsibilities need to be clearly defined within organizations to avoid situations where nobody is accountable due to personnel or organizational changes. Sufficient funds must also be reserved for development and maintenance. This helps responsible staff plan the usage of resources and utilize them efficiently. Each country has different ways of distributing road maintenance, but in general, all relevant authorities should be informed about the development early on to avoid conflicts regarding road usage, signposting, or other issues.

Longer routes are more resource-intensive. Therefore, the route can first function on a smaller scale and later be expanded. It can also be integrated with other cycling routes, such as EuroVelo or other regional routes, to increase the length and user potential. Other activities along the route, such as hiking paths, swimming opportunities, and sights, can be incorporated into the route and create synergies with services, such as toilets and resting areas. This type of approach is introduced in the Best practice on page 8 – Signposting EuroVelo 10 in Finland.

Monetary support for promoting cycling is usually available through national and EU funds. The European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) has collected country-specific information in all 27 EU countries. You can access the database here https://www.ecf.com/unlocking-cycle-investments. National support mechanisms are often connected to national programs and strategies for cycling and other mobility or tourism development. They should be consulted before applying for funding for development projects.

Utilizing and collecting feedback

Feedback is a valuable source of information, especially when developing existing routes and services where feedback is available. Different types of feedback can be collected and consulted. For example, if the municipality or region has gathered feedback on citizens' needs regarding recreational activities or existing services, that information can be useful for cycling route development. Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) may also possess valuable data on the needs and expectations of tourists. Assigning a functional feedback channel for a cycling route is beneficial, as it serves future development and provides insights into maintenance requirements.

Permissions, regulation and social acceptance

Long-distance cycling routes utilize road networks designed for various types of road users, including motor vehicles and pedestrians. Therefore, the route must take these factors into account and comply with national rules and regulations. It is crucial to identify, early in the development process, which authorities need to be involved in cycling route planning. This ensures that the route, signposting, and other elements align with national legislation and rules. In some countries, guidance regarding relevant legislation and rules already exists. If not, route

developers can request or create such guidance to establish national standards and guidelines for cycling route development.

Additionally, social acceptance should be considered. Even if a route alignment complies with laws and regulations, it may still cause conflicts. For instance, if the route passes through popular recreational areas, original users may feel that cycling tourists are encroaching on their space. Therefore, cooperation, an overview of the current situation, and discussions with users are necessary to ensure a smooth cycling experience and prevent any unintended offense to other users.

When determining the best route alignment, it's essential to consider scenarios where the route intersects private roads and land. In such situations, involving the owner(s) becomes crucial to ensure access to these private areas. Typically, an agreement can be reached with the landowner(s) regarding land usage for cycling and signposting.

Best practice: Utilizing Private Roads in Cycle Tourism Routes in Finland

In Finland, private roads can play a crucial role as part of a cycle tourism route, offering alternative paths to services or public transportation. The 2019 update to the Private Roads Act brought much-needed clarity regarding the authorization for using private roads.

Previously, the concept of "regular use" had led to numerous legal disputes. However, this term was removed from the law, and the decisive factor now revolves around whether road usage significantly impacts maintenance costs. As a result, agile development of new cycle routes on dirt and gravel roads has become feasible. Importantly, creating new routes on private roads no longer requires specific authorization.

Despite this legal clarity, it's advisable to consult with private road owners when establishing a cycle tourism route. This proactive approach helps prevent conflicts arising from the growing number of cyclists. After all, encountering an irate landowner or disgruntled road user is not conducive to an enjoyable cycling experience.

Ultimately, the success of a cycle tourism route hinges on community support and social responsibility. These factors often outweigh strict adherence to Finnish law, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and understanding among all stakeholders involved in developing these routes.

A route planner's role is crucial in designing a cycle tourism route that allows tourists to move seamlessly, make stops, and find suitable overnight accommodations—all while minimizing any disturbance or inconvenience to local residents. However, even the best-laid plans can encounter hiccups. When issues arise, communication becomes essential.

In Finland, road authorities and property owners along the route—especially those with private roads—can be approached to address any challenges. This communication often takes the form of letters. So far, approximately 490 road authorities and landowners have received such letters in connection with the publication of the first 23 cycle routes, covering a total distance of about 5,000 kilometers.

In about 25 cases, the route alignments have been adjusted based on the requests of road or landowners. This flexibility allows for agile modifications, particularly when it comes to digital route information. By making adjustments on a digital map, planners can ensure that the route remains socially acceptable and harmonious with the local community.

Cooperation is the key

A well-designed cycling route is a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders. While public authorities play a key role in initiating route development and assuming maintenance responsibilities, creating a truly functional and appealing route necessitates cooperation from several other parties.

These essential actors include:

1. **DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations):** DMOs contribute significantly to the marketing of cycling routes once they are implemented and services are available for tourists. They assist in identifying

the best channels for storing, providing, and disseminating route information, ensuring effective communication with diverse markets. To maximize their impact, DMOs should be involved from the planning phase, offering insights into market expectations.

2. **Service Providers, Residents, and Route Planning Consultants:** Collaborating with local service providers, residents, and experienced route planning consultants enhances the route's quality. Their input helps address challenges and seize opportunities along the way. By engaging these stakeholders early, potential issues can be proactively managed.
3. **National Cycling Promoting Agencies and NGOs:** These organizations offer valuable information and support. Their involvement aids in gathering and sharing relevant data, identifying potential partners, and ensuring a successful collaboration.

Figure 1: Cyclists at the Archipelage trail in Finland. Picture: VisitFinland

Good cycling route – Unforgettable experiences, smooth riding and cyclist friendly services

Unique selling points of the route - Stories, themes and scenic landscapes

Tourists are drawn to specific destinations because of their unique features. To make a cycling route stand out and attract users, it's essential to consider what interesting elements the route has to offer. These could include captivating stories, thematic experiences, or breathtaking scenic landscapes.

For instance, the EuroVelo 10 route follows the Baltic Sea shoreline, connecting the capital cities of Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, and Denmark, as well as several Hanseatic cities. The areas around the Baltic Sea boast distinct historical and geographical characteristics. Local routes can deepen visitors' understanding of these features or present entirely new narratives related to the route.

Storification — a story-based service design approach — can enhance the overall experience, create value, and make the service more memorable for cyclists. By weaving engaging stories into the route, we can evoke emotions and connect riders to the places they explore.

The cycling route is a way to guide the cyclists to the unique attractions and make them more accessible. While the cycling route serves as a guide to unique attractions, it's crucial to ensure ease of navigation. Cyclists should be able to enjoy the ride without worrying about discontinuities, crossings, services, or points of interest. Proper signage and clear markings are essential.

Communication materials should provide sufficient information before the ride, helping cyclists prepare for each daily section. In the next chapter, we'll delve into the different aspects that must be considered to guarantee a smooth cycling experience according to European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) standards. These aspects include infrastructure, effective communication, and essential services.

Additionally, we'll explore best practice cases from the Baltic Sea region, offering practical examples for the route development process.

Dividing the route into sections

The EuroVelo network, developed by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF), offers a comprehensive system of long-distance cycle routes that crisscross Europe. These routes cater to both long-distance cycle tourists and local commuters, providing a diverse range of cycling experiences. Let's delve into the key aspects of EuroVelo routes:

Route Structure:

EuroVelo routes are divided into daily sections, typically spanning 15 to 90 kilometers. These daily sections serve as manageable segments for cyclists.

Additionally, minor sections within the daily route can be even shorter (0.2 to 5 kilometers) if needed. These minor sections provide specific details about road characteristics, traffic, surface quality, width, and the scenic appeal of the landscape.

The division into smaller sections benefits both tourists planning their trips and route developers analyzing infrastructure, services, and communication along the way.

Daily Sections:

Each daily section starts and ends at a destination where cyclists can find essential amenities such as accommodation, restaurants, and public transport services.

These sections allow cyclists to pace their journey, explore local attractions, and rest comfortably each day.

Minor Sections:

Minor sections provide detailed information about specific parts of the route.

They describe road types, traffic speed, road surface conditions, width, and the overall attractiveness of the surrounding landscape.

By breaking down the route into minor sections, cyclists can better plan their rides and understand the nuances of each segment.

EuroVelo routes are continually evolving, with some sections fully developed, others under development, and a few still in the planning phase. The EuroVelo network aims to enhance the quality of cycling experiences across Europe, encouraging both leisurely exploration and practical commuting. More detailed information on the European Certification Standard here https://pro.eurovelo.com/download/document/ECS-Manual-2021_online.pdf.

Infrastructure

Safety

When developing cycling routes, safety and accessibility are paramount. Here are some considerations to enhance the cyclist's experience:

Traffic Volume and Seasonal Fluctuations:
The primary goal is to find routes with the lowest traffic volume. This ensures the safety of cyclists.

Consider seasonal variations—some routes may experience higher traffic during specific times of the year.

Prioritize safety by avoiding busy roads whenever possible.

Alternative Routes:
Explore alternative options to reach services, public transport, or other attractions.

Sometimes, taking a slightly longer route can lead to a safer and more enjoyable experience for cyclists.

Mixed Traffic vs. Separate Cycling Roads:
In low-traffic environments, consider allowing cyclists to share the road with other vehicles (mixed traffic).

Alternatively, provide a separate cycling road alongside busier routes. While this ensures safety, keep in mind that mixed-traffic routes may offer more attractive landscapes.

Addressing Crossings:
Crossings pose potential dangers for cyclists. Avoid them whenever possible.

When crossings are necessary, ensure proper signage to guide cyclists safely.

If there are hazardous crossings along the route, address them in the route description for daily or minor sections.

Riding smoothly – Continuity, road surface, route guidance, ascend and descent

For a good cycling experience, the route should be smooth. Unnecessary stops or areas where the bike should be led or carried should be avoided. Nature formations, such as rivers, man-made structures, such as railroads or prohibited zones may pose challenges for the route planning as usually existing infrastructure needs to be utilized to overcome these obstacles. If a proper overview of the potential route is conducted, it helps to recognize the potential obstacles and possibilities to overcome them. The infrastructure to overcome the obstacles should be suitable for cyclists. In case the cyclist needs to stop and get off the bike it needs to be indicated clearly and in good time in the signposting and maps.

Although some cyclists are looking for challenges, typically long-distance cycling routes should avoid extreme ascends and descends. Good rule-of-thumb is to keep the ascent meters of the daily section under 1000 m. Steep ascends can require getting off the bike, disturbing the smooth cycling experience. As cycling in hilly conditions is more difficult, they should be taken into consideration when planning daily sections. Daily sections on flat surfaces can be longer than on a difficult terrain.

Road surface is also important and needs to be communicated in advance so that the cycling tourist can choose the best bike for the expected conditions. On long distance routes, different types of road surface can be expected. In general, it should be possible to ride on the road surface during the local cycling season under normal weather conditions. Usually, roads paved with asphalt or other hard material are favored, but gravel roads can also be used if in good condition and with hard surfaces. This can improve the attractiveness and safety of the route, as the gravel roads often have lower traffic volumes. Avoid surfaces that are not suitable for cycling.

The signposting of the route must be in line with the national standards and laws. The signposting should include the route symbol, such as EuroVelo, but it can also include other symbols and information, when necessary, if it is according to national standards. Digital guidance is also important and is gaining more significance. Digital guide with a downloadable GPX track should be available on EuroVelo routes. Sometimes only digital guidance is enough, and it creates more possibilities for e.g. alternative routes, indicating points of interests and services. However, EuroVelo routes need to always have physical signposting.

What to remember when planning the route and infrastructure

Obstacle-Free Route:

Minimize unnecessary stops or areas where cyclists need to lead or carry their bikes.

Be aware of natural formations (such as rivers) and man-made structures (like railroads) that may pose challenges.

Utilize existing infrastructure effectively to overcome obstacles.

Clearly indicate signposts and maps where cyclists need to dismount or stop.

Avoid Extreme Ascents and Descents:

Long-distance cycling routes should generally avoid extremely steep ascents and descents.

A good rule of thumb is to keep the ascent meters of daily sections under 1000 meters.

Steep climbs may require cyclists to dismount, disrupting the smooth riding experience.

Consider hilly conditions when planning daily sections—flat surfaces allow for longer sections.

Road Surface Considerations:

Communicate road surface information in advance so cyclists can choose suitable bikes.

Different road surfaces may be encountered on long-distance routes.

Favor roads paved with asphalt or other hard materials.

Gravel roads can also be used if they are in good condition and have hard surfaces.

Gravel roads often have lower traffic volumes, improving both attractiveness and safety.

National Standards and Laws:

Signposting must adhere to national standards and legal requirements.

These standards ensure consistency and clarity for cyclists across different countries.

Route Symbol and Additional Information:

The primary signpost (e.g. EuroVelo route symbol) should be recognizable to cyclists.

When necessary, additional symbols and information can be included, as long as they align with national standards.

These supplementary signs may highlight local attractions, services, or safety information.

Digital Guidance:

Digital guidance is becoming increasingly important for cyclists.

EuroVelo routes should offer a downloadable GPX track through digital platforms.

A dedicated mobile app (such as the EuroVelo app) provides step-by-step guides for specific routes.

Digital tools enhance navigation, provide real-time updates, and offer interactive features.

Physical Signposting:

While digital guidance is valuable, physical signposting remains essential.

Cyclists need visible and reliable signs along the route.

Physical signs ensure safety, especially in areas with limited mobile network coverage..

Best practice: EuroVelo 10 signposting in Finland

EuroVelo 10 is the first signposted part of EV routes in Finland. The signposting process was done together with the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency, the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centre) and municipalities and other stakeholders. The process was implemented in three stages to utilize lessons learned along the way. The signposting runs currently from Vaalimaa in the Eastern border to Vaasa on the West coast.

The process started as a pilot project where the route was signposted from the capital city Helsinki to the historical city of Turku. As the entire EV 10 route, this 257 km strip runs through cities and countryside, on varying types of roads. The Finnish road network is classified in three categories which are under the responsibility of different authorities: highways, municipal street networks and private roads. The Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency is responsible for the maintenance and development of the state-owned road network together with the regional ELY Centres. Municipalities are responsible of the municipal street network and private road maintenance associations administrate the private and forest roads. The EV 10 runs on roads classified in all three categories so the signposting required cooperation between the local ELY Centre, municipalities, and private road maintenance associations. Good practices on how to operate with the private roads were established during the pilot. The pilot was initiated by the Transport Infrastructure Agency who was also managing the project. The signposting was implemented by the local ELY Centres. The municipalities along the way were involved already in the pilot but not as much as in the second and third stage.

The pilot showed that it is beneficial to involve municipalities and other stakeholders, such as destination marketing organizations, early in the planning of the route alignment as they have the best knowledge of local roads, sights and services. As the involvement of the stakeholders was not as strong in the pilot, it has been signposted according to the initial EuroVelo alignment. However, it is possible to make minor changes to the alignment, which were implemented in the second and third stage thanks to advice from the stakeholders. The realignment made local services and attractions more accessible and to enhance safety and riding experience.

The signposting process concerned only the EuroVelo route. Local sights, services or public transport stops were not included in the signs. This made the process more straight forward, giving the municipalities possibility to add the additional signs later. The municipalities can further develop the EV 10 route in their area e.g. by erecting signs for local attractions and services.

Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency has also published a manual for signposting the EuroVelo routes in Finland. Functional instructions will help signposting the rest of the EuroVelo routes in the country.

Local and national public transport integration and accessibility

Public transport is an integral part of cycling route infrastructure and accessibility. This section focuses on both local and national public transport, while international connections are discussed elsewhere (see page 16). To ensure that the route is accessible and attractive for tourists, it should be seamlessly connected to the public transport network. Here are some key considerations:

1. **Public Transport Connections**:

The cycling route should be well-connected to both local and national public transport services.

Public transport connections should allow for bicycle transportation during the local cycling season.

2. **Daily Sections and Transport Stops**:

Ideally, daily route sections should begin and end near public transport stops or stations.

If this is not feasible, public transport stops should be available at least every 150 kilometers along the route.

Communication materials should provide information about public transport options and whether bicycles can be carried on board.

3. **Accessibility Standards**:

Access to public transport stops and stations should meet the same accessibility standards as the overall route.

Cyclists should be able to cycle to the station, and the need to carry bikes should be minimized.

Integrating public transport effectively enhances the overall cycling experience and encourages more people to explore the route using sustainable modes of transportation.

Best practice: Summer bicycle bus line in Gdańsk

From 2021, bicycle line 612 on the Śródmieście SKM - Sobieszewo route operates during the summer on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays approximately every 80 minutes. This is an accelerated line so that the buses will stop only at three stops: "Śródmieście SKM", "Brama Żuławska" and "Sobieszewo". On line 612 it is possible to transport up to 28 bicycles (up to 8 on the bus and up to 20 on the trailer). Loading and unloading of bicycles on the trailer is under the driver's supervision.

Bicycle line offer 612 is addressed primarily to cyclists, but this does not exclude its use by other residents. You can also reach Sobieszewska Island by lines 112, 186 and N9. Cyclists have several kilometres of bicycle routes at their disposal on Sobieszewska Island; from there, they can continue their bicycle trip along the EuroVelo 10 / 13 route to the Vistula Spit, up to the border with Russia.

Regular fares apply on line 612. Bicycle transport is free. Read more: https://www.gdansk.pl/wiadomosci/Ze-Srodmiescia-na-Wyspe-Sobieszewska-od-dzisstartuje-sezonowa-linia-autobusowa-612-dla-rowerow,a,199424 (pics: ZTM Gdańsk)

Services

On a long-distance cycling route, services are essential to make the route appealing for larger variety of cycling tourists. Many existing services suits for cyclists as they are, and small adjustments can make them even more attracting. It is important to communicate about the different types of services along the route to ensure they can be found and utilized. Cycling tourist are usually not the only customers or users for the services and therefore synergies between different service providers, organizations etc. should be considered.

Long-distance cycling routes often go through towns and cities, but also long stretches can be located on the countryside. Especially on the Nordic part of the Baltic Sea area, the countryside is sparsely populated. It may thus be impossible to ensure accommodation, food, bike maintenance and public transport in such areas. This

must be communicated clearly to help the cyclists plan their stay and pack necessary items for the sections with less services.

Accommodation, food, drinks, and rest areas

On a long-distance cycling route, services play a crucial role in making the route appealing to a wide variety of cycling tourists. Clear communication about the different types of services along the route ensures that they can be found and utilized effectively.

Accommodation: The daily sections usually start and end in place where accommodation and preferably also food and drinks are available. The accommodation can be a camping site, B&B, hostel or other reasonably priced accommodation service and it should be located near the route (e.g. max. within a radius of 5 kilometers from it).

Food and drinks: Since cyclist consume a lot of energy on the way, food, drinking water and other beverages and rest areas should be available during the daily section. This can be e.g. a shop, café, kiosk, or restaurant. In sparsely populated areas it can be good to consider different types of solutions, such as self-service to provide snacks and beverages or even bike maintenance equipment.

Bookable options: The services can also be adjusted to bookable cycling holiday options. These options can include other activities and services, such as bicycle rental, touring in local places of interests or other activities available on the region. Tailoring existing experiences for the cycling tourists can increase the number of visitors in local attractions.

Bike maintenance and rental: As the cyclists, the bicycles also need services along the way. Each daily section should preferably have a bike repair workshop, bike shop or self-service options for spare parts or bicycle repair self-service station available. The other service providers can also provide basic bike repairing tools and spare parts could be included in their services. The availability of these services should also be communicated clearly to help the tourists to prepare with the equipment needed on the route.

Additional services: Various services can be designed or provided to the cycling tourists. The service providers, active entrepreneurs, associations etc. can design their own services to the cycling tourists to earn extra income. The cyclists may need additional transportation and storage services for the bicycles or other belongings. Different tourism-related services, such as guides, and self-service or travel packages can be adjusted towards the cyclists. These services should be brainstormed together with the local stakeholders to find the best solutions for the region.

The additional services should be communicated clearly on the materials that provide information on the route and attractions around it. This benefits the tourist when planning their trip as well as service provides, as the tourist can book or reserve time to utilize the additional services.

Figure 2: Cyclist friendly signs show cycling tourist they will find necessary sevices from the location.

Best practice: Recognize Cycling Friendly Places in western Pomerania, Poland

Western Pomerania, one of the 16 Polish regions, launched its "MPR" (Miesjce Przyjazne Rowerzystom – Cycling Friendly Place) system in 2022, cementing its status as a cyclist-friendly region. This innovative initiative aims to boost bicycle tourism by recommending places where cyclists can comfortably stay overnight, store their gear, and repair essential equipment. Participating in the system is free and voluntary, and 106 places labelled with "MPR" signs were recommended for cycling tourists in 2024, mainly SMEs, places and offers. You can see them all here: https://rowery.wzp.pl/miejsca

Cyclist-friendly establishments can receive distinctive labels such as signs and stickers and will be prominently featured on electronic and paper maps issued by the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. The "MPR" badge and Western Pomerania logo serve as a guarantee for travelers, signaling safe resting places with facilities for bike storage, luggage storage, minor repairs, and helpful information for active tourists.

Western Pomerania is the region with a long-standing commitment to being cyclist-friendly, with efforts spanning the creation of extensive bike paths (one of the most important one being the EuroVelo 10 cycling route), organization of cycling events, adaptation of transportation for bicycles, and the development of specialized maps and applications. Specially prepared maps, available on the website https://rowery.wzp.pl/ and in the mobile app) showcase routes and attractions and highlight establishments where cyclists can expect tailored services, including the option to purchase a single night's accommodation. This, for example, answers the demand and unique needs of cyclists who often require only a brief stay during their journeys, especially in popular tourist destinations.

The recently adopted Regulations of the Cyclist-Friendly Places Recommendation System in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship outline criteria for accommodations in the "Accommodation Facilities" category. Requirements include the capacity for at least four tourists to stay for one night, secure and accessible bicycle and luggage storage, free provision of tools for basic repairs, and up-to-date information on nearby bicycle services and shops.

The system extends beyond accommodation, encompassing categories like Catering Facilities, Tourist Attractions, Tourist Information Points, and Other Commercial and Service Facilities. These establishments must provide cyclist-friendly amenities such as secure and free bicycle parking, the ability to transport bicycle trailers and non-standard bicycles, and visible information about nearby service points and bicycle shops.

The primary objective of the Cyclist-Friendly Places Recommendation System is to develop and promote a service system for bicycle tourists, inspire local businesses to create cyclist-friendly offerings, enhance competitiveness, foster collaboration, and elevate the tourist appeal of the region. Facilities meeting cyclists' needs gain the MPR recommendation, subject to systematic verification and adjustments to meet tourism market standards.

Participation in the Cyclist-Friendly Places system is voluntary and free, with associated costs covered by the West Pomeranian Voivodeship budget. The West Pomerania Voivodeship operates the scheme with the suport from Zachodniopomorska Tourist Board (DMO).

For detailed information and recruitment announcements, interested parties can refer to the websites www.turystyka.wzp.pl, www.rowery.wzp.pl, and the region's social media channels. Promo clip: https://youtu.be/i9E-jWpuk-U

The MPR scheme is associated with an app that provides all the information cyclist needs in the region. More about the app on page 14.

Communication

The previous section already stressed the importance of proper communication about the route. Communication has several purposes: it works as marketing material, helps the tourists plan their trip already before the trip, prepares them for different route conditions and provides information on services and other attractions on the way. Digital and printed materials are important as well as signs and information boards. They serve the cyclists in different stages of travel: choosing the destination, planning the trip and while cycling. Cooperation with service providers, other regions, DMO's etc. is important to make the communication efficient and comprehensive.

Best practice: Creating Self-Guided Navigation and Audio Tours for Cyclists

For touring cyclists, effective navigation during their trips is crucial. Whether you're seeking the best road surfaces, scenic routes, or essential points of interest (POIs) like water sources and food stops, having the right information at your fingertips matters. Since cyclists have diverse needs, Estonian company CityBike has created digitally guided routes with all these details.

CityBike sets up the routes in the following phases:

1. Map Work:
    - We start with a route idea that we want to present to cyclists. It could be a daily ride or a multi-day journey, ranging from forest trails to easygoing city routes.
    - We draw the route on a digital map, using various map applications. The key output is a GPX file, which can be easily shared and transferred to different apps.
2. Actual Riding and Landscape Work:
    - While planning on a computer screen is straightforward, the real work happens during the actual ride.
    - We prefer to make corrections while cycling. Using a GPX file, we download it into both the Navicup App and Garmin Edge 1040 simultaneously.
    - Having two devices running in parallel ensures precise data collection. On average, we cover about 10 km per mapping km.
    - During the ride, we make detours, check alternatives, and adjust the route as needed.
3. Route Corrections:
    - Back at the computer, we review the route and make further adjustments.
    - Sometimes, certain routes don't make sense or aren't feasible due to real-world conditions (traffic, road closures, etc.). In such cases, we may need to start from scratch.
4. Adding POIs to the Map:
    - We use the Navicup.com app, following a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for inserting vital information into our digital map.
    - POIs include:
        - Sights: Landmarks, historical sites, and natural wonders.
        - Museums: Information about opening hours, exhibits, and ticket details.
        - Shops: Bicycle shops, repair centers, and other relevant stores.
        - Facilities: Public toilets, rest areas, and water sources.
        - Food and Beverages: Cafés, restaurants, and grocery stores.
    - Each POI can have additional details, such as pictures, external links, and alerts.
    - For larger areas, entering the vicinity triggers audio information about the POIs.

By combining accurate route planning, real-world riding experience, and comprehensive POI data, we aim to enhance cyclists' self-guided journeys.

Digital communication

Digital communication plays a crucial role, especially when attracting tourists from abroad. The cycling route's webpage or other digital platforms should contain essential information about the entire route and its daily sections. It's essential to make this information available in both the national language and English.

The digital communication material should include:

general description of the route

length of the route

estimated duration for the entire section and daily sections

road surface

suitable bike

description on the daily sections

map of the route

downloadable GPX track

Information on how the route is signposted

information about accommodation and food services

points of interest

public transport connections

The information should be easily accessible and readable on a smartphone. Good communication material also includes information on suitability of the route for different target groups. In addition, the route information needs to be accurate and include all additional information, such as challenging sections, accessibility.

Once the information is on place, it needs to be followed and updated whenever needed. Giving responsibility and securing resources for this is very important if the route is marketed to cycling tourists. The digital communication tools, such as web pages but also different apps, give opportunities to share information on the services and other attractions along the route. Promoting the additional aspects along the route can make it more attractive which encourages the tourists to spend more time on the region. Therefore, to achieve a successful tourism product, the communication must be taken seriously.

Best practice: Cyclist Friendly app in Pomeranian region, Poland

Everything a two-wheeled traveller needs is now available in a special app launched by the Marshal's Office of Western Pomerania. Detailed descriptions of routes, tourist attractions, monuments, and nature are enriched with fascinating photo retrospectives and impressive 3D models of protected animal species. The app can be downloaded for free from Google Play and the App Store. The app promotes regional cycling tourism, aligning with the region's focus on ecology, a healthy lifestyle, and active leisure. The app, a result of months of work, enhances the convenience, interest, and safety of cycling trips across the region, offering hundreds of kilometers of trails and a comprehensive mobile application.

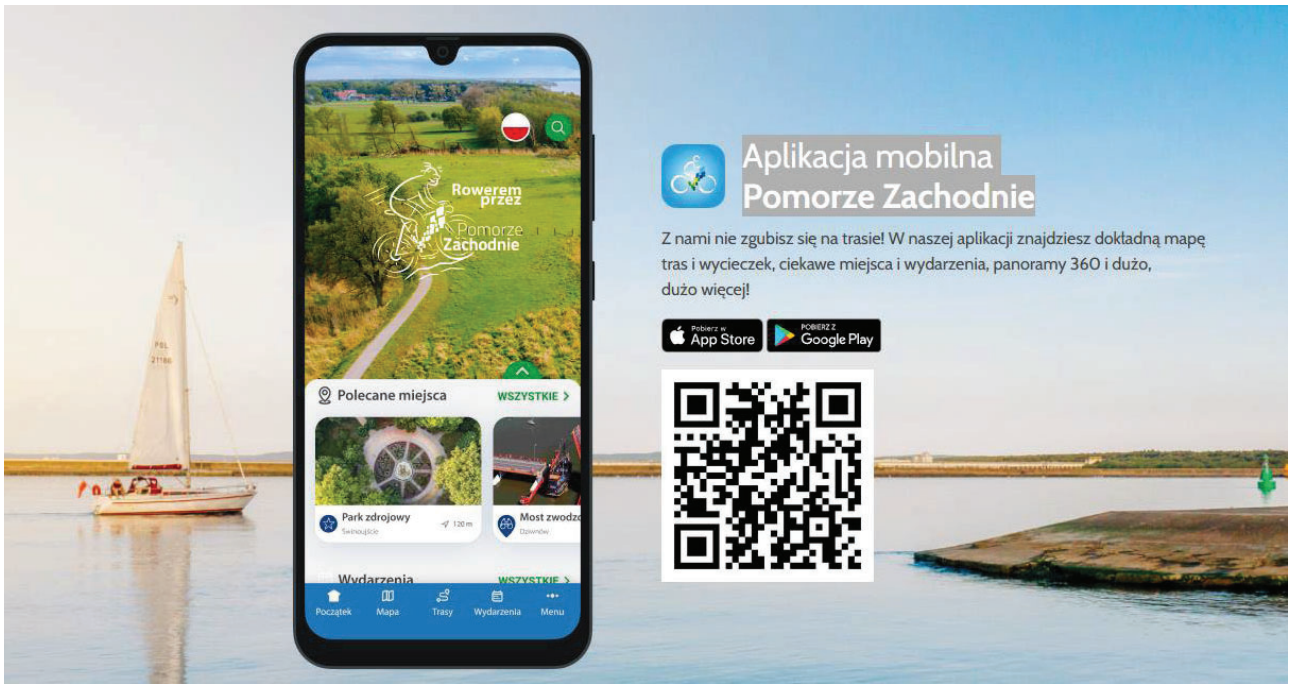
The impetus for creating this modern app, designed to explore the most beautiful corners of Western Pomerania, came from the long-distance cycling route around Lake Szczecin. This nearly 300-kilometre cross-border loop, another project promoted by local governments - the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and the Greifswald District - has been captivatingly described and photographed for the application. The project has been continually enriched with new places and features, covering over 1400 km of routes. The app navigates along designated trails and provides information beyond the paths, including various map overlays and an open route service API, enabling users to generate their own cycling routes. The "Pomorze Zachodnie" app is a user-friendly and multifunctional guide to the region. It offers easy access to "recommended routes," "recommended places," and upcoming events such as concerts, performances, exhibitions, and sports events.

The electronic map points to around 9,000 points of interest (POI), similar to popular navigation apps. There are 3,937 points and the database is still increasing. The app highlights landmarks, architectural treasures (e.g., the Szczecin Philharmonic), natural wonders (Jasne Błonia and the Spa Park in Świnoujście), technological marvels (e.g., the lighthouse in

Świnoujście or the railway water tower in Trzebież), sports facilities, and tourist attractions. The app also recognizes places friendly to cyclists as part of the MPR recommendation system introduced in 2022 and is open to ongoing submissions.

The app pinpoints the locations of campsites, tent areas, railway stations, tourist information points, and other valuable facilities during the journey. Additional features include 3D panoramas, a handy encyclopedia of plants and animals, and captivating photo retrospectives – archival photos of objects and places along the route. The app also offers outdoor games, turning your smartphone into a tool

for exploring the "Natural Nooks" of Karsibór Island, touring Nowe Warpno (kids game) and more. The application includes an audioguide in Polish, German, and English that provides information about cycling routes and the most interesting places in Western Pomerania. Descriptions are also prepared in these three languages.



Printed communication and information boards

Cycling tourist still rely on offline communication, such as printed maps and information boards, as they help planning and understanding the overall route. A guidebook or detailed printed map should be available for the route. Information boards can be utilized along the route and preferably there is one on every daily section. Several services and attractions can be added on the information boards to make them useful for variety of users and visitors. The maps and information boards need frequent updates and therefore the upkeep and maintenance responsibilities must be defined clearly. Also, combining digital and physical communication e.g. by utilizing QR codes can be useful for sharing further information and to help with keeping the information up to date.

Public transport: link within and between the Baltic Sea countries

Public transport is a vital component of cycling tourism. Whether cyclists are coming from neighboring regions or other countries, the bicycle is often just one mode of transport on their journey. Therefore, connections to and from the cycling route should be carefully considered and effectively communicated to ensure route accessibility. Public transport options provide cyclists with more opportunities and flexibility along the route. The ability to carry a bike on board and reserve a place for it is crucial for travel planning. Additionally, highlighting connections from rural areas to larger transport nodes can enhance the overall experience.

In the Baltic Sea region, there are excellent connections between countries. This creates exciting possibilities for tourists to explore multiple countries by bike in the region. However, clear communication about ferry connections is essential to assist tourists with their planning.The needs of cycling tourists can be discussed with the ferry and harbor operators to assure they are aware of the customer group.

Figure 3: Examples of existing ferry routes on the Barltic Sea

Best practice: Journey planners

Several Baltic Sea countries have national and regional digital journey planners. In Sweden, Samtrafiken Ab is operating Resrobot, a journey planner that targets covering the entire country and all modes of public transport from trains to the underground. They also aim to make public transport tickets combinable, saleable, and distributable in Sweden. The work is still ongoing. Samtrafiken Ab is owned by public and private owners.

In Finland and Estonia, the public transport offer is combined to Matka.fi service, operated by The Finnish Transport and Communications Agency Traficom. It is possible to plan a door-to-door journey in Finland and Estonia with the Matka.fi when public transport is available. It does not yet include all public transport operators but it is possible for the companies to add their services. It is not possible to buy ticket from this service.

Both of the services are good examples of making the national and cross-border transport easier. However, they don't yet have the possibility to include carrying bicycle on the trip.