
Cycling Tourism in Selected Baltic Sea Regions

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article characterizes the development of bicycle tourism in Europe and presents examples of best practices found in the Baltic regions. The primary aim of the article is to analyze the significance and development of bicycle tourism in selected Baltic regions. The article attempts to answer the following questions: 1. Which Baltic region has the most developed bicycle tourism? 2. What are the biggest challenges associated with the development of bicycle tourism in the Baltic regions? 3. What are the differences in the quality and coherence of cycling routes in the selected Baltic regions?

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research methods applied in the article include a critical literature review, the case study method, and participant observation. The most important sources of data and information include: 1. An analysis of existing data (including reports, strategies, statistical data, and scientific publications) related to the area and subject of the research. 2. Participant observation conducted in locations with high concentrations of tourist activity.

Findings: The result of the article is the identification of actions undertaken in selected Baltic states and regions. It highlights that bicycle tourism in the Baltic Sea regions serves as an excellent example of the potential of sustainable tourism to support regional development, build environmental awareness, and promote cultural exchange.

Practical Implications: The analysis and evaluation conducted in the article revealed that, thanks to well-developed cycling infrastructure, such as the EuroVelo 10 route, and diverse landscapes—from coastlines to historic cities—these regions are becoming increasingly attractive to eco-conscious travelers. However, a challenge for the development of bicycle tourism in the Baltic Sea regions is the standardization of cycling route travel standards. The main issues include disparities in infrastructure standards between individual countries, an insufficient number of accommodations tailored to the needs of cycling tourists, and the need for better promotion of the region on the international stage.

Originality/Value: The topic of bicycle tourism addressed in the article is an important issue for European Union countries.

Keywords: Bicycle tourism, Baltic Sea regions, European Union, EuroVelo 10 route.

JEL codes: R11, Z32, Z38.

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1. Introduction

Bicycle tourism is one of the most popular forms of active tourism. Its diversity is determined by the features of the visited area, the type of routes traveled, as well as the motives for practicing it. The bicycle has been an integral part of both Polish and European culture for over a century. Bicycle tourism is promoted within the European Union, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, when the bicycle became the only mode of transport recognized as friendly to both the climate and environmental protection.

The aim of this article is to analyze the significance and development of bicycle tourism in selected Baltic countries. In this article, it is assumed that bicycle tourism in the Baltic regions is becoming increasingly popular. To explore this, the following research questions are posed:

- In which Baltic region is bicycle tourism most developed?
- What are the biggest challenges associated with the development of bicycle tourism in the Baltic regions?
- What are the differences in the quality and coherence of cycling routes in selected Baltic regions?

The structure of the article includes an introduction, which presents the importance of bicycle tourism in Europe. It then provides examples of best practices and cycling policies in selected Baltic countries and regions. The article concludes with findings and a discussion based on the conducted observations and literature studies.

2. The Significance of Bicycle Tourism in Europe

Bicycle tourism refers to travel in which the main mode of transport is a bicycle. In Europe, bicycle tourism is becoming increasingly popular, both among locals and international tourists. In the literature, bicycle tourism is primarily described as a form of sustainable travel that promotes health and social integration while reducing the negative impact on the environment (Lumsdon, 2000; Ritchie, 1998; Ciascai, Dezsi, and Rus, 2022).

Furthermore, studies show that cycling tourists leave a smaller carbon footprint and have less impact on the natural environment (Dickinson, Robbins, 2008). For this reason, the development of bicycle tourism aligns with the concept of sustainable development, which aims to minimize tourism's impact on nature and increase tourists' responsibility for the environment (Hall and Page, 2014; Kropinova, 2020).

The growing interest in a healthy lifestyle, increasing environmental awareness, and the development of cycling infrastructure also provide a foundation for the further growth of this form of tourism.

Many scientific studies highlight the positive impact of bicycle tourism on local economies. Research conducted in countries such as Germany, Denmark, and France shows that cycling tourists contribute to job growth in sectors such as hospitality and accommodation services (Pucher and Buehler, 2008; Gross and Grimm, 2019).

The current level of bicycle use as a mode of transport brings benefits to EU member states amounting to 150 billion euros annually. Investments in cycling projects have a very favorable benefit-to-cost ratio, generating an additional approximately 650,000 jobs. It is predicted that bicycle use will increase by 50% by 2030. It is estimated that annually, tourists in the EU undertake around 2.3 billion cycling trips, with a total economic value of 44 billion euros (Unlocking EU Funds For Cycling Investments, 2020).

As early as 2015, EU member states signed a declaration titled “Bicycles as a Climate-Friendly Mode of Transport.” In 2023, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on 16th February 2023, regarding the development of an EU cycling transport strategy, which led to the signing of the European Declaration on Cycling Transport by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU on 3th April 2024 (EU Official Journal C.2024.2377). The declaration means that cycling transport has been recognized as a key part of the European transport strategy.

The document highlights the added value that bicycles bring to the EU economy. It includes commitments to create cohesive cycling networks, improve connections with public transport, and ensure safe parking and access to electric bicycle charging points.

This document is compatible with the “EU Cycling Strategy: Recommendations for Delivering Green Growth and Effective Mobility by 2030,” developed by the European Cyclist Federation (EFC). The document also indicates a shift in the approach to cycling travel, the creation of modern and safe cycling infrastructure, and the need for appropriate regulations to improve the use of cycling transport.

Among EU countries, the Netherlands has the most bicycle lanes per 100 square kilometers, with a rate of 93.3 km/100 square kilometers. Finland, on the other hand, has the most bicycle lanes per 10,000 inhabitants, with 41.1 km. In comparison to other EU countries, Poland ranks roughly in the middle for both indicators. Of course, the densest cycling networks are found in the most urbanized areas. However, it is an undeniable fact that appropriate density and quality of cycling transport networks also attract more tourists, who can conveniently travel recreationally through urban areas, explore them on two wheels, and reach urban and suburban tourist attractions (Polska turystyka rowerowa w pigułce, 2024).

Bicycle tourism is one of the key factors in the cooperation between Baltic states. The most developed country in this regard is Denmark, which has one of the best-developed cycling networks in the world (Nilsson, 2019). This includes the well-

known Danish network “Nationale Cykelruter” (National Bicycle Routes), which offers tourists safe, marked routes. Sweden and Norway have developed numerous long-distance cycling routes, such as “Sverigeleden” and “Kystriksveien,” which connect cities and regions. Finland, on the other hand, is investing in cycling routes through its numerous lakes and green areas.

One of the countries where bicycle tourism has been rapidly developing in the last decade is Poland. The country’s geographic and natural diversity makes it possible to engage in a wide range of cycling activities, from urban and lowland cycling tourism, accessible even to the least experienced cyclists, to riding on hilly routes, which are more challenging but also more attractive, such as in the lake districts and coastal areas, and ending with mountain trails.

Poland does not have a national strategic document concerning cycling policy. Such regulations are increasingly common at the regional and local levels. Issues related to bicycle tourism are also included in documents such as the Transport Policy (including national policy), Regional Transport Plans, as well as in Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans adopted in many Polish functional areas, agglomerations, cities, and municipalities. Additionally, there are various cycling concepts, often detailed plans for the development of networks (usually transport but also tourist-related).

3. Baltic Sea Cycle Route- EuroVelo 10

The European Union supports the development of long-distance EuroVelo cycling routes, a project of the European Cyclists’ Federation (EFC). Thanks to this network of cycling routes, it is possible to travel by bike across the entire European continent as well as locally.

The EuroVelo routes are designed for both long-distance cycling tourists and local residents commuting, for example, to work, providing a variety of cycling experiences. The EuroVelo routes are constantly evolving, with some sections fully developed, others under development, and some still in the planning phase. In creating EuroVelo, existing national cycling routes are used, as well as new sections are being mapped that connect to other local tourist trails.

By 2024, 67% of the EuroVelo network will be ready for cycling, and 39% will have EuroVelo signs. Since 2023, over 2,000 km of EuroVelo routes have been developed. In 2024, the number of marked routes increased, with coverage growing by 5% compared to 2023 across the entire network, with nearly 1,700 km of new sections marked with EuroVelo signs in 24 countries (EuroVelo Route Development, 2024).

The Baltic countries are working together to develop infrastructure and promote cycling routes as part of EuroVelo 10 (Figure 1), which helps increase the number of

tourists traveling longer routes that span several countries. EuroVelo 10 runs along the Baltic Sea coast, connecting the capitals of Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, and Denmark, as well as several Hanseatic cities.

Figure 1. The course of the Eurovelo 10 bicycle route



Source: <https://en.eurovelo.com/ev10/>.

A challenge for the development of bicycle tourism in the Baltic Sea regions is the standardization of cycling route travel. The main issues include differences in infrastructure standards between countries, an insufficient number of accommodations tailored to the needs of cycling tourists, and the need for better promotion of the region on the international stage. Additionally, in some areas, seasonality and weather conditions pose problems, affecting the length of the cycling tourism season.

The areas around the Baltic Sea have distinct historical and geographical features. Local routes can deepen visitors' understanding of these features or present entirely new narratives related to the route. To achieve this, it is worth using storification as a story-based design approach. Storification is the process of applying story structure, tools and techniques to an existing message, but also to a business, strategy and so on.

The use of such an approach can significantly enhance the overall experience of the route, create value, and make the service more memorable for cyclists. By weaving engaging stories into the route, we can evoke emotions and establish deeper connections between cyclists and the places they discover.

EuroVelo 10 is the first marked section of electric vehicle routes in Finland. The marking process was carried out in collaboration with the Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency, the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centre), as well as municipalities and other stakeholders. This process began as a pilot project, during which the route from the capital Helsinki to the historic city of Turku was marked.

The entire section spans 257 km and passes through cities and rural areas on various types of roads. The Finnish road network is divided into three categories, each managed by different entities. The Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency is responsible for maintaining and developing the national road network, along with the regional ELY centres. Municipalities are responsible for the urban street network, while associations managing private roads oversee private and forest roads.

EV 10 runs along roads classified in all three categories, so the marking process required cooperation between the local ELY centre, municipalities, and private road maintenance associations. The pilot project showed that involving municipalities and other stakeholders, such as regional and local tourism organizations, early in the planning process is beneficial, as they have the best knowledge of local roads, landmarks, and services.

4. Bicycle Tourism in the Baltic Regions – A Case Study

Bicycle tourism and the approach to cycling policy in the Baltic countries are varied. The characteristics of cycling policies and examples of best practices in selected countries (regions) of the Baltic are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of Best Practices in Selected Baltic Regions.

SWEDEN
<p>In Sweden, the key document concerning the development of cycling routes is the report by the Swedish Transport Agency (Transportstyrelsen) titled “Cykelleder för rekreation och turism.” The updated 2021 document serves as the foundation for the development of cycling routes across the country and is an important tool in dialogues with municipalities. Creating a route from scratch takes several years and depends on many factors, including the number of individual road managers that need to be contacted. A crucial element is strong political support and long-term commitment. The development of cycling routes is a long-term investment, so all agreements must be made on a long-term basis, including plans for maintaining all parts of the route.</p> <p>Individual road owners can be both an obstacle and an opportunity. If their support is gained, it can facilitate the process, for example, by enabling faster decision-making. Private roads are often attractive routes with low traffic volumes, but opposition from the owner can be a serious issue. Concerns of private road owners regarding traffic density in front of their homes are common, and personal conflicts with municipal authorities can also affect the project. Therefore, gaining social acceptance is crucial in planning cycling routes.</p>

The Skåne region (southern Sweden) has successfully developed several popular cycling paths in recent years. One of the successes is the Sydkustleden (the south coast trail), which has been nominated for the title of best cycling path in Europe in 2024. Some sections of the route run parallel to EuroVelo 10.

FINLAND

In Finland, private roads can play a key role as part of the cycling tourism route, offering alternative paths to services or public transport. The update to the Private Roads Act in 2019 has made it so that creating new routes on private roads no longer requires a special permit. Despite this legal clarity, it is recommended to consult with private road owners when developing a cycling tourism route. This proactive approach helps prevent conflicts arising from the increasing number of cyclists. Ultimately, the success of a cycling tourism route depends on community support and social responsibility. These factors often outweigh strict adherence to Finnish law, highlighting the importance of cooperation and understanding between all stakeholders involved in the development of these routes. In Finland, road authorities and property owners along the route—especially those with private roads—can be contacted to address any challenges. This communication often takes the form of letters. To date, approximately 490 road management bodies and landowners have received such letters in connection with the publication of the first 23 cycling routes, covering a total distance of about 5,000 kilometers.

SUMMER BIKE BUS LINE IN GDAŃSK (POLAND)

Since 2021, bike line number 612 has been operating in Gdańsk during the summer months on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, approximately every 80 minutes. It is an express line, meaning the buses stop only at three designated stops. Line 612 can carry up to 28 bicycles (up to 8 inside the bus and up to 20 on a trailer). Loading and unloading bicycles onto the trailer is done under the supervision of the driver. The 612 bike line is primarily aimed at cyclists, but other residents are also welcome to use it. Regular fares apply on line 612, and bicycle transportation is free of charge.

BICYCLE FRIENDLY PLACES IN WESTERN POMERANIA (POLAND)

West Pomerania is a region in the north, bordering the Baltic Sea and the Federal Republic of Germany to the west. It is a cyclist-friendly region where intensive actions are being taken, such as the creation of extensive cycling paths (one of the most important being the EuroVelo 10 route), the organization of cycling events, adapting transport to cyclists, and developing specialized maps and apps. In 2022, West Pomerania launched the Cyclist-Friendly Places system. This innovative initiative aims to boost cycling tourism by recommending places where cyclists can comfortably spend the night, store their gear, and repair necessary equipment. Participation in the system is free and voluntary. The system goes beyond accommodation, covering categories such as dining establishments, tourist attractions, tourist information points, and other commercial and service facilities. These facilities must provide cyclist-friendly amenities, such as safe and free bike parking, the ability to transport bike trailers and non-standard bicycles, and visible information about nearby service points and bike shops. The enrollment for the recommendation system is ongoing, so new facilities, after a formal assessment and field verification, are added to the expanding group of certified Cyclist-Friendly Places in the

West Pomerania Voivodeship. The verification of the facilities is carried out every two years. Currently, there are 132 Cyclist-Friendly Places in West Pomerania, with 46 of them along the EuroVelo 10 route (as of 08.11.2024).

CYCLIST-FRIENDLY APPLICATION IN WESTERN POMERANIA (POLAND)

In West Pomerania, a special app has been launched by the Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, containing detailed descriptions of trails, tourist attractions, monuments, and nature, enriched with photographic retrospectives and 3D models of protected animal species. The app can be downloaded for free from Google Play and the App Store. The app promotes regional bicycle tourism, aligning with the region's focus on ecology, a healthy lifestyle, and active recreation. It enhances the convenience, interest, and safety of cycling trips throughout the region, offering hundreds of kilometers of trails and comprehensive mobile service. The app navigates designated routes and provides information beyond the trails, including various map overlays and an open API interface for route services, allowing users to generate their own cycling routes.

Source: Own elaboration based on "Turystyka rowerowa w regionie Morza Bałtyckiego. Strategie rozwoju regionalnego i najlepsze praktyki z Finlandii, Szwecji, Estonii i Polski" ([https://www.prot.gda.pl/\(10.11.2024 r.\)](https://www.prot.gda.pl/(10.11.2024 r.)))

Bicycle tourism in the Baltic countries is at different levels of development, but for each country, it is an important element of transport policy. It should be noted, however, that within a given country, areas directly along the Baltic Sea are more developed than areas not directly adjacent to the sea (as is the case in Poland). In the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, bike trails along the Baltic Sea are better developed than those deeper inland.

Similarly, in the Pomeranian Voivodeship, some bike routes in the interior of Kashubia are less cohesive and poorly marked. A strong point of bicycle tourism in the Polish regions is the low cost of accommodations, gastronomy, and affordable service prices. A weak point is the lack of coherence in routes, often requiring cycling on public roads. The modern bicycle infrastructure with good signage and rest stops is characteristic of the coastal regions of Sweden (e.g., Skåne) and Denmark (e.g., Lolland-Falster).

The Baltic regions strive for continuous development of bicycle routes, for example, through the EU initiative EuroVelo 10. To this end, joint EU-funded projects are being implemented under the Interreg South Baltic program for the years 2021-2027.

The project "Bike across the Baltic – Improving bicycle tourism around the Baltic Sea (BAB)" aims to develop the EuroVelo 10 bike route running through all nine countries of the Baltic Sea region. The project focuses on selected sections of the route in the partner countries: Estonia, Finland, Poland, and Sweden. The project implementation period is from 2023 to 2025. Another project related to bicycle tourism is "Baltic Biking Upgrade (BBU)".

Baltic Biking UPGRADE (BBU) is an Interreg South Baltic co-funded project aiming to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) along the southern part of EuroVelo 10 – Baltic Sea Cycle Route. The nine partners, covering six countries, will seek to assist the SMEs in developing bicycle-friendly services as well as in creating cycling tourism products and offers. Baltic Biking UPGRADE (BBU) officially started on 1 September 2023 and will run over a three-year period (2023-2026).

Led by Pomorskie Tourist Board, the project involves 6 countries – 5 being along the South Baltic part (Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark, Germany) of EuroVelo 10 – Baltic Sea Cycle Route and Belgium, where European Cyclist Federation is based. These five SBA countries cover more than 4,900 km of the route, out of a total of 9,100 km, meaning more than half of the route.

BBU will address some significant challenges of SMEs located in the South Baltic Area of EuroVelo 10: lack of knowledge, underdeveloped bicycle-friendly standards, services and offers, as well as a lack of a solid business network and partnerships with relevant peers, including international stakeholders.

The main goal of the project is to assist SMEs in creating attractive bookable offers and successfully reaching out to foreign markets. For this purpose, several actions will be set up: dedicated training on creating new offers targeting an international audience, guidelines on how to start, a dedicated campaign to market the new offers, and an invitation to join the EuroVelo 10 network in the South Baltic Area.

BBU will allow for the roll-out of more and better bicycle-friendly services along EuroVelo 10, with new products and offers for cycling visitors. The ultimate aim is to make the area more visible in the international cycling tourism market and to strengthen the development and management of the route thanks to closer transnational cooperation.

5. Discussion and Summary

Bicycle tourism plays an important role in the development of European countries, particularly the Baltic countries. These countries actively invest in cycling infrastructure to attract tourists and promote eco-friendly forms of travel. Bicycle tourism in the Baltic Sea region serves as an excellent example of the potential of sustainable tourism in supporting regional development, raising environmental awareness, and fostering cultural exchange.

With well-developed cycling infrastructure, such as the EuroVelo 10 bike route, and diverse landscapes—ranging from coastlines to historic cities—these regions are becoming increasingly attractive to eco-conscious travelers. Key actions to support the development of bicycle tourism in the Baltic regions include: the development of bike rental services and shared bike systems, national cycling policies, improving

bicycle access to public transport, expanding the network of cycling routes, building and modernizing cycling infrastructure, improving route signage, developing networks of cyclist-friendly places, promoting bicycle tourism, building bike parking lots, shelters, and racks, as well as improving the accessibility and quality of cycling tourism information.

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