

The Role of Design in the Raising of the Quality of Recreation on the Baltic Sea Coast, the Region of Kurzeme

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Abstract. This article aims at exploring the current situation on the Baltic Sea coast, in the region of Kurzeme, with regard to billboard, guidance and facilities. The field investigation results and the survey of local community and government show the need for radical change.

We have considered examples of global environmental facilities, their installation and functions, and also analysed their compliance with the rules of good design and sustainable development. It has been concluded that it is highly important to inform and involve the coastal communities and the local government officials in the process of improving the situation. Besides, the material has been collected on how similar situations have been solved in other countries. On the basis of the results, general guidelines have been devised showing what is needed to improve the current situation for the area to be comfortable and convenient for both tourists and the local residents.

Keywords: long-term dimensional development, design, increasing the quality of life

INTRODUCTION

The Baltic Sea coastal region is very diverse and varied – starting with the wild seashore of West Kurzeme, which is barely affected by the civilization, and finishing with one of the most popular and modern resorts of the Baltics – the tourist-favoured Jurmala. In the middle of this area, there are ancient Livonian settlements, steep shores of Jurkalne, small fishermen harbours along the shore of the Gulf of Riga, wide, sandy, unusual and rocky beaches, and the ice free, modern harbours of Liepaja and Ventspils. With their enormous cultural heritage and the wide variety of nature, the shores of the Baltic Sea impress every visitor (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The Cape of Kolka [1]

The development of a region is possible, if a well-grounded and thought out plan is made, which is based on a thorough research of the particular field. Frequently, these development plans do not include the analysis of design and its functionality, which means that these projects neither consider people's feelings, nor improve fields of human resources, which support the project's successful and effective implementation. As design incorporates psychological, economic, ergonomically functional and, lately, also ecological aspects, it can be said without hesitation that design is an integral part of increasing the quality of life and improving tourism.

It has to be taken into account with regard to the seacoast, because it is a place, which is visited by numerous tourists, both local and foreign ones, and it is important to them for the journey to be convenient and comfortable. The coastline of the Baltic Sea is the Latvia's business card, which impresses every visitor; therefore, it must be clean, orderly, ecologic and easy to use, so that the increasingly more people would like to return here again. The coastline is so diverse and interesting that anyone – a vacationer, a biota researcher or an athlete, can find something to do here (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Steep shore of Jurkalne [2]

During the research of this paper in August 2010, a questionnaire was conducted where data from 103 respondents were collected, of which 69 were women and 34 men. The average age of the respondents was 30.7.

The respondents were asked whether they often visit the coastline of the Baltic Sea, to which the majority responded – a couple of times a year. From the results of the questionnaire,

it can be concluded that people are interested in how the coastline looks like and what happens there. If the majority of the respondents gave a negative answer, it would raise the question whether we appreciate what we own. This is one of the reasons why we must keep this area facilitated, well-developed and more open to the society, so that people would wish to visit the region not only a couple of times a year, but almost every weekend (Fig. 3).

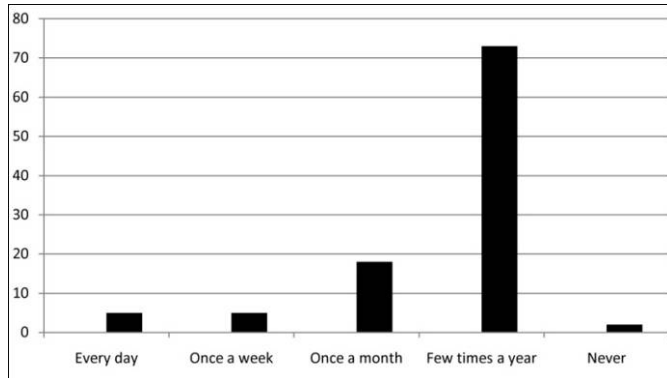


Fig. 3. The respondents' answers to the question on the Baltic Sea visit frequency [18]

The cultural heritage and natural variety on the coasts of the Baltic Sea form a significant part of the Latvian culture. Without it, a successful development of our country would be impossible. It is one of the most important things we have to pass to the next generations to increase the quality of our lives.

To improve the economic level of this region, people must be encouraged not to leave the cities and the countryside. It is necessary to enhance the level of design in utilitarian objects, environment objects, informative signs, which would indicate historical research, pride of sight-seeing objects of a particular region, their reconstruction and restoration. It would motivate people not only to stay in the region for aesthetic reasons but would also encourage the employment of local craftsmen and other professionals in developing the region.

CURRENT SITUATION ON THE BALTIC SEA'S COASTAL REGION

The current situation of environmental objects, signs of sightseeing objects and public restrooms in Kurzeme does not indicate to availability of a functionally successful and united tourism development plan. Mainly, there are no systemized signs of tourism objects which would inform people about their locality and also encourage people to see beautiful, historic and valuable objects.

Eleven rural municipalities in Kurzeme along the coastline have been visited by us, starting from Jurmala and finishing with Grobina, and three regions in Vidzeme – Salacgriva, Limbazi and Saulkrasti. There certainly are different signs of sightseeing objects in the regions, but they are all mostly located in the largest cities, for example, in Kolka, Ventspils, Liepaja and Jurmala. Most of these signs show the direction to the nearest objects, rarely to the beaches or other nearby seaside objects. Mainly, they can only be used on a small scale. Also the signs are mainly located in the city centres, but

outside the centre, only the signs of street names are used (Fig.4).

Besides, the signs are quite boring, inconspicuous and even repulsive. In most cases, they do not follow any principles and are made of environmentally unfriendly materials.

The situation with information stands is similar. They are located in specially protected areas; some are in coastal cities and on main roads. Currently, most of these stands are stylistically similar, not appalling to the public, with massive tops and frameworks that look like they would not hold the whole construction (Fig. 5). Another thing, which is typical of most of the stands, is that it is hard to orient oneself in the large amount of information on these stands (Fig. 6).



Fig. 4. Signs in Liepāja [3]



Fig. 5. Information stand in Engure [17].

When questioning the respondents about the amount of information to be placed on such stands, the responses let us conclude – the information should be as laconic as possible and should include more images, because people do not like to spend time standing in one place to read loads of information. This is one of the main reasons why no one wishes to use the existing information stands. The creators of these stands, certainly, have tried to do their best and educate the society,

but it must be done in a more interesting and attractive manner.

By now, two conclusions have been reached on why the information stands are similar in all coastal cities. One of them is that in 2007 a unified style was developed for specially protected nature preserves, with guidelines given on how to create signs and information stands ("Īpaši aizsargājamo...", 2007). In these guidelines, it is clearly defined what kind of materials must be used and what kind of construction these objects may be. Even colours and font sizes/formats are defined. This style does not allow any offsets. At times it seems that the creators of this style have not heard about the word 'design' and have no idea how it could affect the improvement of the coastline and increase the number of visitors (Fig. 7).

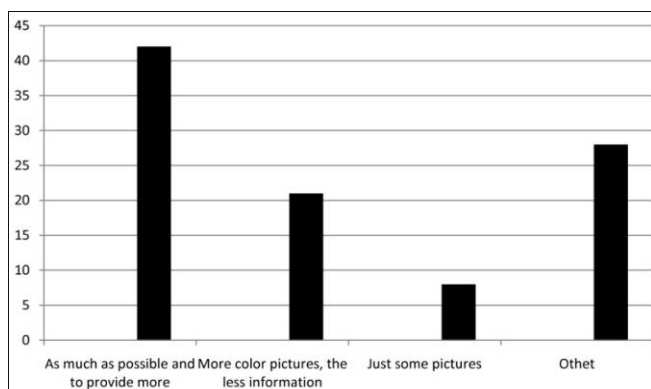


Fig. 6. Respondents' answers on the amount of information on hoardings [18]



Fig. 7. Respondents' answers on the amount of information on hoardings [4]

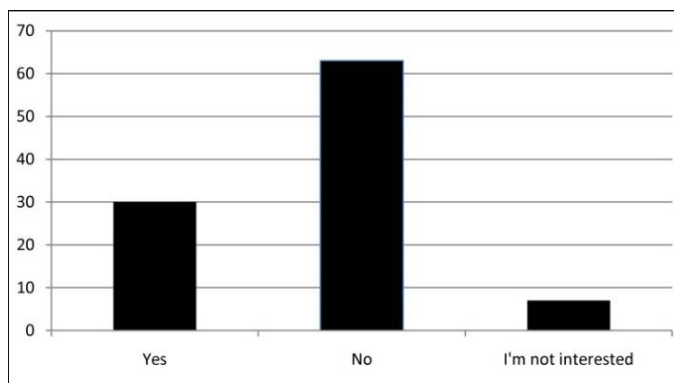


Fig. 8. Respondents' answers on information stand incidence of the Baltic Sea coast [18]

Another explanation why the signs in all cities are so similar, differing only in colour, is that there are only a few companies in Latvia that design, manufacture and set up these signs and information. Since the main marketing strategies of

these companies are mainly focused on being the leader in this area, diversification of these signs remains in the background (Kvalitātes...; Sia Troja...). As smaller companies are more interested in individual orders, they do not offer regional governments their proposals to create more interesting and captivating signs. Every entity must be involved, no matter if it is a large or small company, and they must be motivated to create objects with legible design (AV Multimedia...; Ceļā norādes...), for the coastline of the Baltic Sea to be special for all of its inhabitants.

Respondents were also asked to provide their opinion on the amount and frequency of signs in the region. It is not surprising that only twenty-nine out of one hundred and three respondents have seen signs and information stands. This is one of the reasons why the current situation must be changed (Fig. 8). Not only local people, but also tourists and local travellers, must be given a chance to get some information about the local cultural heritage and natural variety, as well as how unique and unprotected the region is. If we want to preserve the coastal area as it is for the next generations, we have to learn to protect everything in these areas, especially biotopes that are being destroyed and degraded by our inconsiderate walking and driving.

The current situation does not really indicate that anyone is concerned about the coastal area's holistic perspective and design; the existing commodity rather scares visitors away, than attracts them. Public restrooms also indicate to this concern, as they are one of the most important components for anyone – tourists and locals – to feel comfortable, because everyone wishes to take a walk through the forest without worrying what someone might leave behind.

The coastal areas of Kurzeme do not have a unified system; therefore, this causes problems not only for tourists but also for owners of coastal territories and forests.

To favour the regional development, travelling must be easy and comfortable.

PUBLIC RESTROOMS/ UTILITIES

It is needed to activate the problem with public restrooms in Latvia, because the existing situation indicates that this field is unsystematic and does not provide the necessary service. The problem should be tackled by providing contemporary solutions and offers of public restrooms that would be based on analysis of the current situation, people's responses, researches of environment-friendly and long-lasting technology, as well as indicating good design, material technology, ergonomic and psychological analysis.

The territory studied is the Baltic Sea coastal area of Kurzeme. The total length of the coastline is 430 km. There are coastal cities – Ventspils, Liepāja, Engure, Mersrags, Roja, Kolka, Mikelornis, Jurkalne, Pavilosta, Bernāti, and certain sightseeing objects in between the cities (Fig. 9).

The Kurzeme's coastal areas do not have a unified public restroom system, which causes problems not only for tourists, but also for owners of coastal territories and forests.

In order to enhance regional development, travelling must be easy and comfortable.

The answers of the questionnaire respondents affirm that there is a lack of public restrooms, especially contemporary ones. One hundred and seventy-five people have been surveyed, with their average age being 27.5.

When analysing the responses, it is clear that in the Baltic Sea coastal region of Kurzeme people have neither seen nor used any contemporary public restrooms. Respondents were also asked in which regions they have come across public restrooms; one fifth of the respondents have not seen any restrooms at all, which also indicates to the lack of these facilities (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9. The territory that was looked at [15]

6. Vai atpūtas brauciena laikā esiet sastapies ar mūsdienīgām, estētiskām un modernām sabiedriskajām labierīcībām?

Jā	51	29.1%
Nē	124	70.9%
iesniegto atbilžu summa	175	

Aptaujāto 175 respondentu vidū visvairāk izvēlēta atbilde ir "NĒ".

Fig. 10. Responses on the occurrence of utilities [19]

4. Kuru Kurzemes piejūras pagastu vai novadu teritorijās esiet sastapies ar sabiedriskajām labierīcībām? (vairākas atbildes iespējamas)

Mērsraga pag.	4	1.4%
Rojas pag.	9	3.2%
Kolkas pag.	22	7.9%
Ventspils nov.	49	17.5%
Jūrmalas nov.	47	16.8%
Jūrkalnes pag.	13	4.6%
Pāvilostas nov.	17	6.1%
Liepājas nov.	55	19.6%
Nīcas nov.	1	0.4%
Nevienā no minētajām	53	18.9%
Cits	10	3.6%
iesniegto atbilžu summa	280	

Fig. 11. Responses to the question of how many utilities have been seen in the regions [19]

8. Vai Latvijā nepieciešamas mūsdienīgas sabiedriskās labierīcības?

Jā	168	96%
Nē	7	4%
iesniegto atbilžu summa	175	

Aptaujāto 175 respondentu vidū visvairāk izvēlēta atbilde ir "JĀ".

Fig. 12. Responses on the need of contemporary utilities in Latvia [19]

Almost all respondents (96%) replied affirmatively to the question whether Latvia needs new modern public restrooms (Fig.12).

The results of the questionnaire prove that the coastal area of Kurzeme needs modern public restrooms. It is confirmed not only by the results of our questionnaire, but also by the analysis of the current situation with travelling in these areas.

The images below show the most common restroom types – the dry type ‘heart shanty’ ones (Fig. 13), which are neither technologically and stylistically contemporary, nor aesthetic (in public performance), nor ecologic. Another type includes movable plastic cabins, which are most commonly placed during public mass events or at certain places as needed (Fig. 14). The positive thing about these cabins is that they are easy to transport, maintain and use, although they are even less aesthetic than the dry-type ones and absolutely lack any style in terms of developing tourism in the coastal region and, therefore, do not improve the overall situation.



Fig. 13. Classic ‘heart-shanty’ type [16]

The analysis of the situation, as well as the results of the questionnaire, certainly confirm the fact that the coastal area of Latvia is a region where the quality of life needs to be improved, tourism must be developed and innovative projects must be implemented. One of the aspects that would improve the tourism development is implementing contemporary and systemized public restrooms, which would create civilized possibilities to perform natural functions, as well as favour the region’s economic development, by involving to some extent the local workforce in manufacturing and setting up the public restrooms.

WORLD EXAMPLES

In order to have a better understanding of the nature of the design and its introduction in the coastal areas, so that everyone's life is improved and brought to the standard of living of the overall society, global examples of environmental design and amenities areas have been analysed. Much attention has been devoted to good design terms, which have been long used and promoted worldwide. If we wish to do well in the Baltic Sea coastline area, we have to understand how a good design thesis works. Therefore, sixty different environmental objects made of metal, wood, plastic and recycled materials have been analysed. This has been done with the help of online retrievable images.

Utility of the product – The product must serve a clearly defined purpose, both basic tasks and additional functions. The most important task in design is to improve the utility of the product. The utility is one of the points distinguishing good designs from an artwork, because design has a mission that should be noticed. The proposed object can be very innovative, previously unseen and admired, but, if it is not clear to whom and why this object is created, then it will remain only for the critics and art experts as an appealing thing.



Fig. 15. Eduardo Srur Interesting peaces [10]

Aesthetics – Cosmetic product quality is an integral part of the utility of the product (Ulme). An aesthetic design means exact designed details of the product, subtle nuances, harmony and balance along with all visual elements of the product. The product may consist of a million small parts, but the main rule is that all parts must be of a good quality, manufactured and put together in such a way that the junctions cannot be seen. We have to think about every slight detail that is needed in all the affected facility aesthetics. The object should be created with such a quality that no one would ask whether it is located in the right place and whether it is at all necessary. All small things create the aesthetic quality of a good design.

Product's easy perception – Good design allows the product's easy perception. This makes the product's structure and composition understandable. The optimal design ensures the apprehensibility of the product's use system and saves the user's time to study lengthy and tedious user manuals (Ulme).

It is better to create objects from many parts which are easy to understand, rather than objects with one component which are complex and incomprehensible to people. It is one of the design missions to facilitate people's everyday life, because the world is full of unnecessary and boring things. The objects must be such that their function is understandable even from a distance. As an example, David Byrne's bicycle stands have interesting forms, but they are so simple that there is nothing other than bicycles that people can place there, but, thanks to these sites, the city's image has become more colourful and more functional (Fig. 15).

Design non-intrusiveness – Details which provide the non-intrusive criterions are the facility management tools. They are neither decorative objects, nor works of art. Their design should always be neutral, they may not be visible, but they must emphasize the practical application of the product. They hold together whole objects, but may not be visible. All components are set up, so that there would be no question as to why they are there and whether they are able to hold the object on the ground. The object must be designed in such a manner that there are no questions whether the object is strong enough and made for all climatic conditions.

Honesty - Honest design cannot be qualified as more innovative, efficient or valuable signs. Product design should not affect users and buyers, or manipulate with them (Ulme). The design must bear a certain mission, and it should be read by looking at the object. Its features must be subordinate to the particular mission; it is not desirable that an object's look is inconsistent with its features. Everything has to be consistent, that is the only way the object could qualify for the fair design title (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16. High-voltage pole, Dietmar Koering [11]

Classics and modernity – A good design is timeless. Things that are not too advanced never age. This is the main difference between a good product design and trivial objects that are made for general public and pollute the world with unnecessary and fugitive cases (Ulme).

The depth and detail – the integrity of an image. A good design means the consistency of the product up to its smallest details. Thoroughness and accuracy are synonyms for the product and its features, which is how the product must be seen by its user.

Accessibility (Ulme). The whole product must be consistent with its mission, all the components and features must be subordinate to the idea that the author wants to transfer to the public. This is one of the most difficult points to be achieved, because it is easy to figure out the appearance, sometimes also the functions, but it is not always as easy to put them together, so that they would complement each other. This argument is not often achieved in designing objects, because their appearance is not consistent with the function.

Ecology and Sustainability – The design must aim at environmental protection and prudent use of raw materials. This means not only taking into account the direct pollution, but also consideration of the visual pollution and destruction by natural hazards (Ulme).

Currently, ecology and sustainability are the vogue in every area of life. But the design is what the public can really be affected by when using products and services that are environmentally friendly, only the product concept must be developed so that its functions would support this idea. As such, Primary Totem is made up of waste found on the coast of Sydney, which proves that we throw out a lot of things that could be used to design good products. The use of such materials would sharply reduce the price of the product, we only need to understand what are the materials that could be used (Fig. 17).

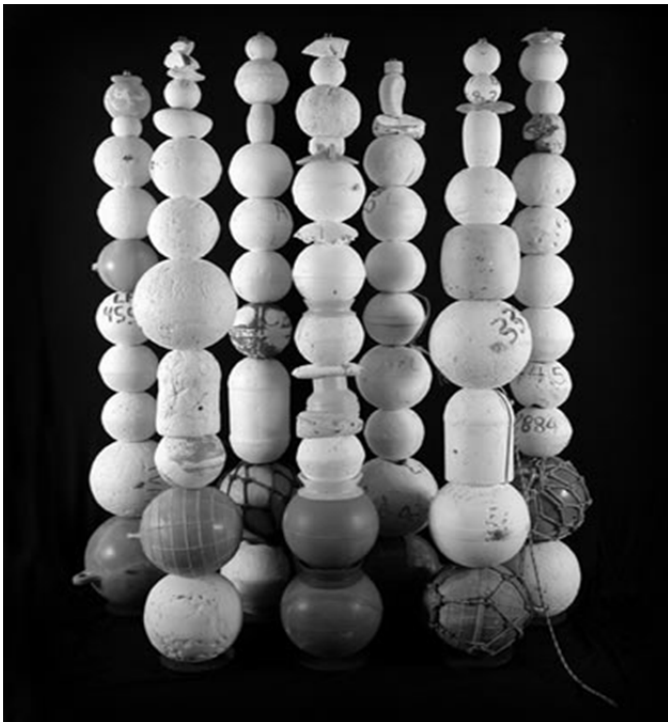


Fig. 17. Primary Totems, John Dehlsen [12]

A good design is as little as possible. Back to the purity and simplicity. We have to choose things that are simple and have to be modified to achieve something new (Ulme). Gathering all the information we can come to the conclusion of how to distinguish art from a good design. There is probably only one answer – functionality.

If the object is designed to perform a certain function and meets all the conditions – it is a good design, but, if it only satisfies these conditions, and it is difficult to understand its function and why it is installed, we have to start thinking about works of art.

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL INTRODUCTION OF DESIGN IN THE BALTIC SEA COAST

In order to improve the current situation, it is necessary to think and create the same style and design elements to all amenities on the Baltic Sea coast. Every environmental object should be designed with the idea to blend with the surroundings, but they also have to be interesting enough to attract everyone's attention, so it is best to build them involving marine themes, in order to create the region's reputation.

Environmental objects need to comply with almost all good design criteria, since the only way to distinguish the subject of a good design from works of art is to make the function easy to understand.

Objects must be built from ecological, eco-friendly materials, best of all from wood scraps, as it is the material Latvia is rich with, and we should be proud of it. So, it is also a part of the cultural heritage, which belongs to Latvian people. Timber products are an ecological material that would show our nation's attitude to sustainable development, as it is one of the most important things that need to be taught and made clear to the contemporary society. It is important to design objects from scraps of various materials, as it would dramatically reduce costs, which is now crucial for everyone. It seems that at present only such objects could be promoted, as none of the local governments would pay any attention to expensive and exclusive items. The main criterion for them is that they need to be as cheap as possible.

It is needed to talk and discuss with the county governments about the important design issues and their significance in enhancing the quality of life, so that with time everyone would include new design objects in their development plans, thus increasing amenities of everything located on the coast. Everyone should be given the opportunity to install in their area the same style elements of utilities, signs, information stands and facilities, as this will promote both cultural heritage and natural diversity. Promoting the same style information stands, signs and facilities, an opportunity will be given also to local craftsmen, as many families will be provided with additional finances, thereby creating a sense that local residents are needed to improve the situation. They will be motivated to stay in their small, but interesting farmsteads.

Of course, the items are necessary to be created not only on the coastal areas, but also in nearby cities and on highways,

thereby making the objects visible. The society must be trained to adapt to design facilities in order to enable them to identify the purpose of these objects from a distance. But it should also be made as a surprise to the public, local residents and tourists, so that they would desire to come closer, take a look at and use the services.

The Baltic Sea coastline is a fragile, but special area that needs to be protected. This can be done by creating convenient and comfortable travel and leisure opportunities for the community. Enough information should be provided about what is available there and why it is so special. This can be achieved by promoting environmental facilities that meet the conditions of good design and teach everyone the basic principles of sustainable development.



Fig. 18. Environmental object on the Baltic Sea coast. Source: made by the author.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the information on the current situation with signposts, information stands and facilities in the Baltic Sea coastline has been summarised. The situation presents no evidence for a common development plan and thus currently causes unpleasantness for leisure travelling, as well as burdens the local communities.

Signs and information stands are mainly located in protected nature areas, which may be explained by the fact that guidance management plans have been issued with recommendations for their implementation. This is why, all information stands currently look the same – standing on two or three base poles and covered with a roof.

Another reason for the current situation is the fact that there are only a few companies in Latvia that deal with signs and information stands, and these companies turn their attention more to road signs, and not to information stands as design elements.

The current situation of environmental objects in the world has also been investigated. All the surveyed sites have been analysed for good design principles, in order to have a better understanding of what items should be offered in the Baltic Sea coastline. General guidelines have been developed of what needs to be done to improve the current situation, so that everyone would understand and value how much power a design has and that it includes more than just an outstanding look. It is a tool which could improve the citizens' quality of life and make the Baltic Sea's coastal area an ecological, sustainable and, primarily, recognizable and dynamic region.

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Andra Ulme, Kristiāna Pavasare, Elīna Tetere. Dizaina loma dzīves kvalitātes celšanā Baltijas jūras piekrastes rekreāciju zonās Kurzemes reģionā.

Šī raksta mērķis ir izpētīt esošo situāciju Baltijas jūras piekrastē informācijas stendu un norāžu jomā, infrastruktūras inženierkomunikāciju pieejamību rekreācijas areālā, pierādot nepieciešamību pēc krasām pārmaiņām. Raksts veidots kā zinātnisks pētījums par Baltijas jūras piekrastes labiekārtojuma esošās situācijas analīzi un, konstruktīvu priekšlikumu formā izteiktu situācijas uzlabošanai paredzētu mērķtiecīgu pasākumu piedāvājumu. Rakstā aplūkoti pasaules piemēri vides labiekārtojumu jomā un progresīva dizaina integrēšana dabas ainavā, respektējot ilgtspējīgas attīstības principus Darba ietvaros 2010. gada augustā tika veikta aptauja, kuras laikā tika aptaujāti 103 respondenti, no kuriem 69 bija sievietes un 34 vīrieši. Vidējais aptaujāto vecums 30.7 gadi. Rakstā uzrādītas respondentu atbildes uz nozīmīgākajiem pētījumam jautājumiem Izmantojot kvalitatīvās un kvantitatīvās pētījumu metodes, raksta autori guvuši ieskatu arī par infrastruktūras attīstību un pieejamību Baltijas jūras Kurzemes piekrastes daļā. Latvijas piekrastes pieejamība raksturojama kā nedraudzīga civilizētam lietotājam, jo ne tikai labierīcības, bet arī norādes uz tūrisma objektiem, rekreācijas zonām, unikālajiem dabasskatiem nav pietiekami daudz un tās ir fiziski un estētiski neatbilstošas mūsdienu prasībām. Latvijā esošo situāciju sabiedrisko labierīcību jomā, kura nav sistematizēta, sakārtota un nenodrošina nepieciešamo pakalpojumu. Tomēr šo vajadzību, iespējams aktualizēt, integrējot vienotu mūsdienīgu sabiedrisko labierīcību piedāvājumu, kurš balstīts uz esošās situācijas analīzi, iedzīvotāju aptauju rezultātiem, labai draudzīgu un ilgtspējīgu tehnoloģiju pētījumiem, kā arī laba dizaina pazīmju, materiālu, tehnoloģiju, ergonomikas un lietotāju psiholoģijas analīzi.

Darba ietvaros tika izstrādātas galvenās vadlīnijas vides objektam, kas pildītu informācijas stendu un norāžu funkciju Baltijas jūras piekrastē.

Андрa Улма, Кристиана Павасаре, Елина Тетере. Роль дизайна в объектах окружающей среды для повышения качества рекреации на побережье Балтийского моря в регионе Курземе.

Цель статьи: исследовать существующую ситуацию на побережье Балтийского моря в области информационных стендов и указателей, доступности инфраструктурных инженерных коммуникаций в рекреационном ареале, доказав необходимость перемен в данной области.

Статья анализирует существующие элементы благоустройства и даёт предложения мероприятий для улучшения ситуации. Рассмотрены примеры со всего мира в области благоустройства среды и интегрирования прогрессивного дизайна в природный ландшафт, принимая во внимание принципы долгосрочного развития. В рамках исследования, были проведены опросы респондентов и проанализированы их ответы на более важные вопросы, которые характеризуют состояние инфраструктуры на Латвийском побережье.

Доступность побережья можно охарактеризовать как недружелюбную по отношению к пользователю, так как не только не хватает указателей зон и объектов рекреации, но и их качество не отвечает современным требованиям. Существующая ситуация не обеспечивает необходимые услуги, требует систематизации проблем и разработки решений. Решением может быть интегрированное, современное предложение предметов благоустройства, которое отвечает запросам посетителей мест рекреации, дружелюбно по отношению к природе и основывается на исследованиях долгосрочных технологий, принципах хорошего дизайна, анализе материалов, эргономики и психологии пользователя.

В рамках статьи было разработано руководство по созданию объектов среды, выполняющее роль информационных стендов и указателей.