

## Destination Lifecycle and Visitor Management – The Example of Põhja-Kõrvemaa Landscape Reserve, Estonia

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The destination lifecycle concept is a widely used framework employed in the tourism area. The question is whether a protected wilderness area's lifecycle is similar (where a visitor's behaviour is not influenced by commercial tourism enterprise services but by the recreation facilities management provided by nature conservation and forestry institutions). Põhja-Kõrvemaa Landscape reserve provides an excellent opportunity to investigate the destination lifecycle from its beginning with no visitors up to the status of a popular recreation area.

Põhja-Kõrvemaa Landscape Reserve was established in 1991 to the former Aegviidu military training area. The reserve lies 50-60 km east of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia and has a diverse and attractive landscape (postglacial relief, old-stand forest massive, virgin mires, numerous clean lakes). It forms a habitat for many rare and endangered animal and plant species.

For some forty years Põhja-Kõrvemaa has been strictly closed for public. After the departure of the Soviet army, Põhja-Kõrvemaa was like a white patch on the Estonian recreation and tourism map. There were very few people who knew about this beautiful area, basically no information was available, there were no recreational facilities in the area and the infrastructure was poor. More and more people discovered this area and information about the attractive area spread quickly; the number of visitors rose in some places already exceeding the natural and social carrying capacity. By today the amount of visitors has declined and also visitors' motives are different than at the beginning of the history of the landscape reserve.

The paper will concentrate on public investigations of visitors, officials, and landowners carried out from 1995 to 2003. Changes in visitors' amount and composition will be analyzed together with the area's development into a recreation area (the development of facilities, efforts to inform and educate visitors etc.) as well as changes in Estonian lifestyle in general. This paper includes a discussion and possibilities for future management of the area and predictions of how the lifecycle could continue.