Highlights of the Virtsu Smart Village Strategy

Estonia



About Virtsu

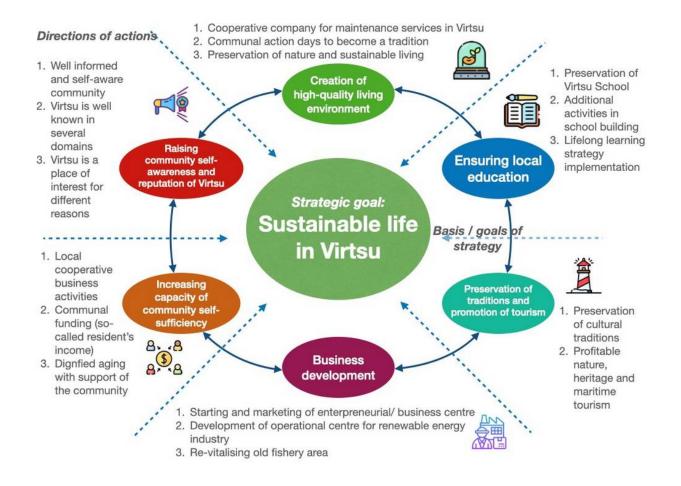
The Virtsu borough is situated on the western coast of Estonia on the Virtsu peninsula, surrounded by the Baltic Sea. Virtsu was originally an island that became a peninsula in the 19th century as a result of land uplift and the construction of a road dam. The local municipality center Lihula is located 25 km away from Virtsu. The state main road to Saaremaa Island passes through one side of Virtsu, to the ferry harbor where gravel, peat and wood chips are exported.

Today, Virtsu has close to 500 inhabitants, living in mixed dense and rural-type habitat areas. Fifty percent of the population is elderly people and this proportion is slowly increasing. Virtsu is still home to many abandoned old fishery industrial buildings from the Soviet era, which co-exist side by side with an old manor building remains dating back to 1459, and a small medieval seaside castle ruins.

Challenges	Assets
* Location at the coast :(✓ Location at the coast :)
 Elderly and ageing population 	✓ Open community and active development society
⊁ Few jobs, no new ones	✓ Wind energy funding for community projects
 Very few business opportunities 	 Stable jobs thanks to the harbor
Lack of vacant living spaces	✓ Good local basic school and kindergarten
Increased condition of the municipality's outskirts	✓ Stable energy supply, good roads and high-speed
Poor environmental appearance - several	internet connection
abandoned buildings in poor condition	✓ Existence of vacant real estate for construction
× Lack cooperative spirit	 Beautiful and diverse seaside nature
 Unknown to general population (except the 	 Endured cultural traditions
harbor)	✓ Existence of a cargo port
 Risk of young people leaving 	 Potential new jobs in the new business center
 Risk of community activism is wearing off 	(due to open 2021-2022)
 Risk of islolation and lack of investments 	✓ Free space in school building to establish a
	training center
	 Restored historical objects and the nature may
	become a tourist attraction
	 Potential revitalisation of the old fishery area
	 Potential cooperation with the wind farm
	operator to create renewable energy center
	 Production and use of solar energy and hydrogen

Key challenges & assets

Main objectives of smart village strategy



Objective 1: Creation of high quality living environment

Objective 2: Ensuring local education

Objective 3: Preservation of traditions and promotion of tourism

Objective 4: Business development

Objective 5: Increasing capacity of community self-sufficiency

Objective 6: Raising community self-awareness and reputation of Virtsu

What is smart?

In Virtsu we say: "A smart (village) is a local act of a common sense!"

Community Participation in Strategy Development

The Virtsu Development Society has conducted many public meetings on various topics of the local life, to identify mindset of the community and the needs of the residents of Virtsu. Based on these, the development plans and visions have been created and modified earlier. Development of the new smart village strategy was also started by informing the locals about the process and everyone was offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the vision, goals, SWOT analysis and activities. A large number of local people have either expressed their views in these meetings or corresponded with the drafters of the strategy.

Links to other strategies

The Virtsu Smart Village Strategy is well in sync with all strategies from the local municipal level to higher regional (Pärnu County 2035+ and Leader), Estonian national and European levels. Some of these alignment highlights are:

✓ European Green Deal: green lifestyle, lifelong learning and sustainable economy play an important role in the Virtsu development strategy. Raising community awareness of pollution and waste issues, improving the share of renewable energy, creating a better living environment by preserving the natural environment.



- ✓ Cork 2.0 declaration guidelines: in terms of promoting knowledge and innovation, Virtsu's goal is to maintain high-quality local education in cooperation with other educational institutions; investment in the viability of rural areas is linked to the creation of a planned business centre; we are encouraging local co-operational entrepreneurship and crowdfunding, by setting the business goals towards common prosperity of the community.
- ✓ The Virtsu smart village strategy is strongly intertwined with the development plans of the regional LEADER action groups in our region. The planned activities in Virtsu help to implement the priority activities of the LEADER at the local community level.

What smart actions are currently implemented?

At this stage, the largest and most influential activity for the Virtsu community is the planning of new entrepreneurship and business centre in the middle of the borough, which will inhabit its first client and one of the biggest employers in the municipality – K.MET metal wire factory – in early 2022. This centre will also be the potential base of the new renewable energy operational and training centre for the wind energy industry active around Virtsu, and site for power to hydrogen plant and storage facility.

All these new opportunities are aimed towards creation of new jobs and attraction of more young and active people. Active and cooperative people will be fuelling the sustainable life in Virtsu.

A smart action that we are planning...

The next big change planned by smart village strategy to be implemented and a challenge to overcome in people's mindsets in Virtsu would be the establishment of cooperational business and communal funding association, which would create additional income for the residents of Virtsu and build up sense of success and joint effort within the community. It would also create the supportive network for dignified ageing.

For that effort, some external expertise and support from SR21 project is needed.



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