

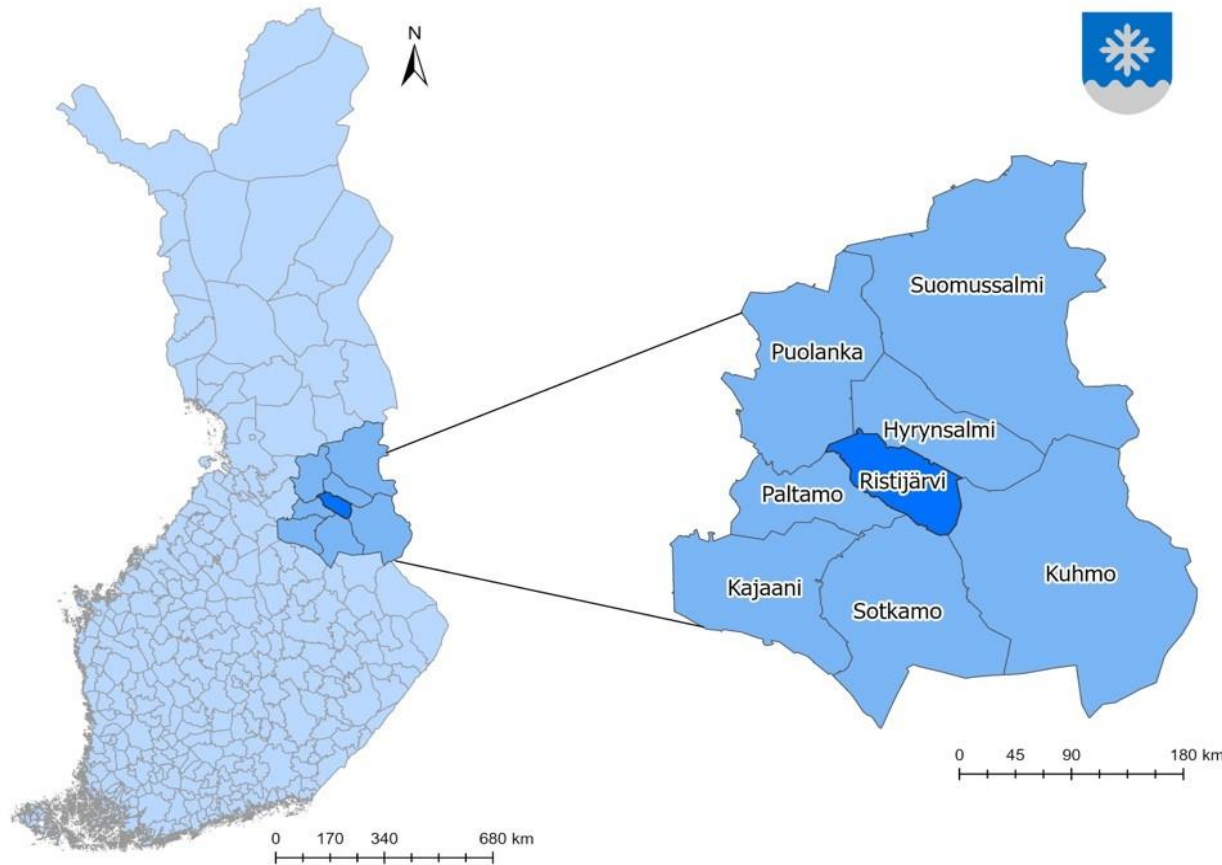


Sustainability and shrinkage in the rural community of Ristijärvi: Recommendations for future development

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Joensuu 2025

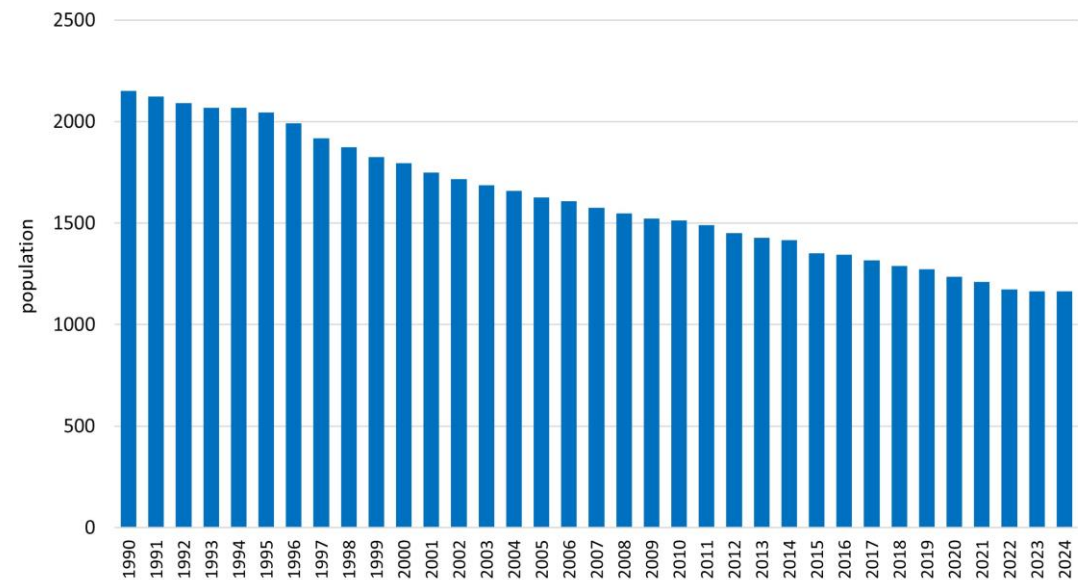
OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH AREA: RISTIJÄRVI



The location of Ristijärvi (Esri 2025)

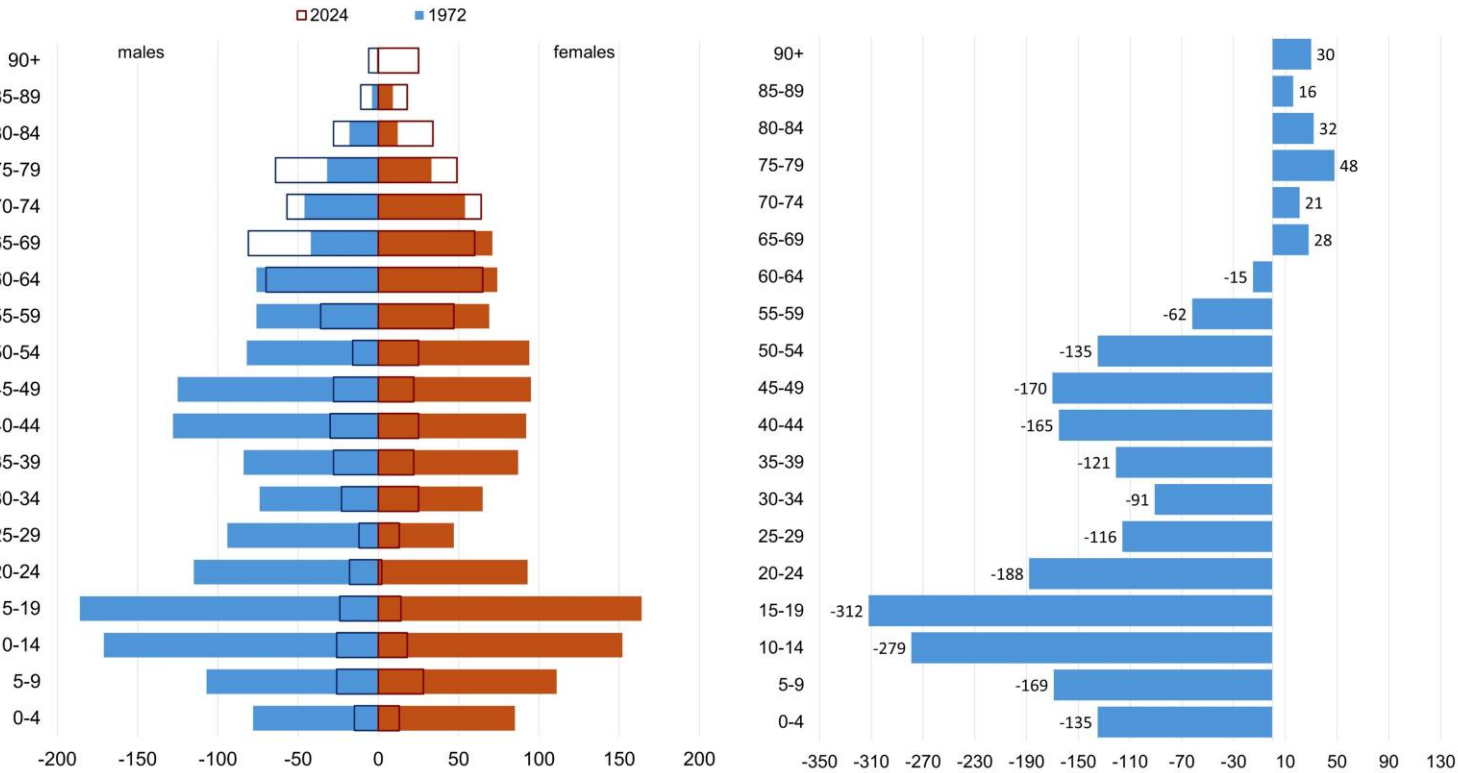
Ristijärvi

- The municipality of Ristijärvi was founded in 1867;
- Ristijärvi has an area of 898 km²;
- 1,163 inhabitants (2024) (peak 4,000+ in 1960s-1970s);
- 44 km to Kajaani (nearest city);
- Number of households 609 (329 families) and cottages 550



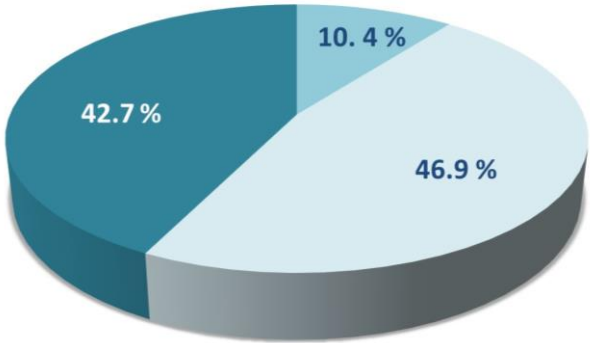
Population change 1990-2024

Population Structure: RISTIJÄRVI



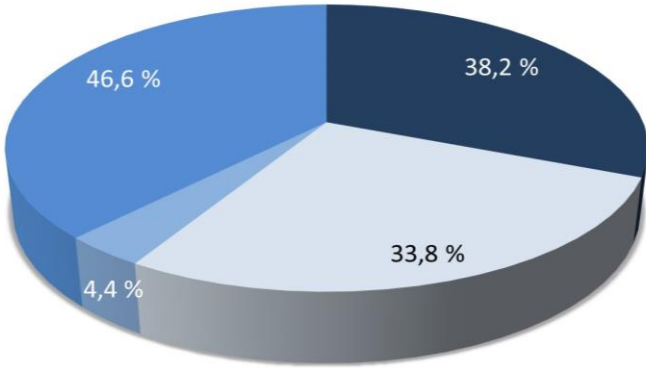
Population structure and change in Ristijärvi 1972-2024 (Source: Statistics Finland 2025)

- ❖ 12.4% worked in primary production
- ❖ 15.7% in processing
- ❖ 71.1% in services



Persons aged under 15, %
Persons aged 15 to 64, %
Persons aged 65 or over, %

Age groups (2024)



Labour force
Employed
Unemployed
Pensioners

Employment of the population (2023)

Forestry

- ❖ 70 % of Finland's area
- ❖ Forests in Ristijärvi:
 - 1050 ha owns municipality
 - approx. 4000 ha belongs to church
 - 10 ha – NATURA 2000



Main industries in Ristijärvi area

Agriculture

- ❖ Makes up 4% of the companies
- ❖ Crop farming, including traditional rye production



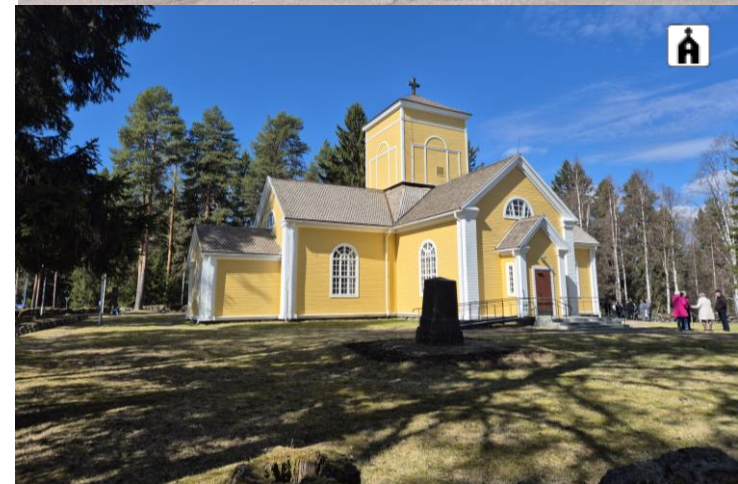
Services



- ❖ High – quality and comprehensive
 - ❖ Healthcare
 - ❖ Beauty salon
 - ❖ Flea market
 - ❖ Grocery store
- ❖ Elementary school (grade 1-9)
 - ❖ Library
 - ❖ Etc.



OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH AREA: RISTIJÄRVI



Tourist attraction in Ristijärvi area (Esri 2025)



THE RESEARCH QUESTION:

What are the current challenges and potentials for growth in the small rural community of Ristijärvi?



1. To understand the role local community engagement can play in Ristijärvi sustainable development (and potential ecotourism) through observation and participation in local events.
2. To determine the extent to which policy frameworks support sustainable development in depopulating rural communities such as Ristijärvi through analysis of relevant frameworks, namely,
 - a. HINKU Network
 - b. Energy Efficiency Agreement (KETS)
 - c. The Forest Act
3. To investigate the challenges and opportunities perceived by community members in Ristijärvi through conducting a series of semi-formal interviews, a survey, and direct observation.



RESEARCH METHODS



Literature review



Visual observation



Interviews



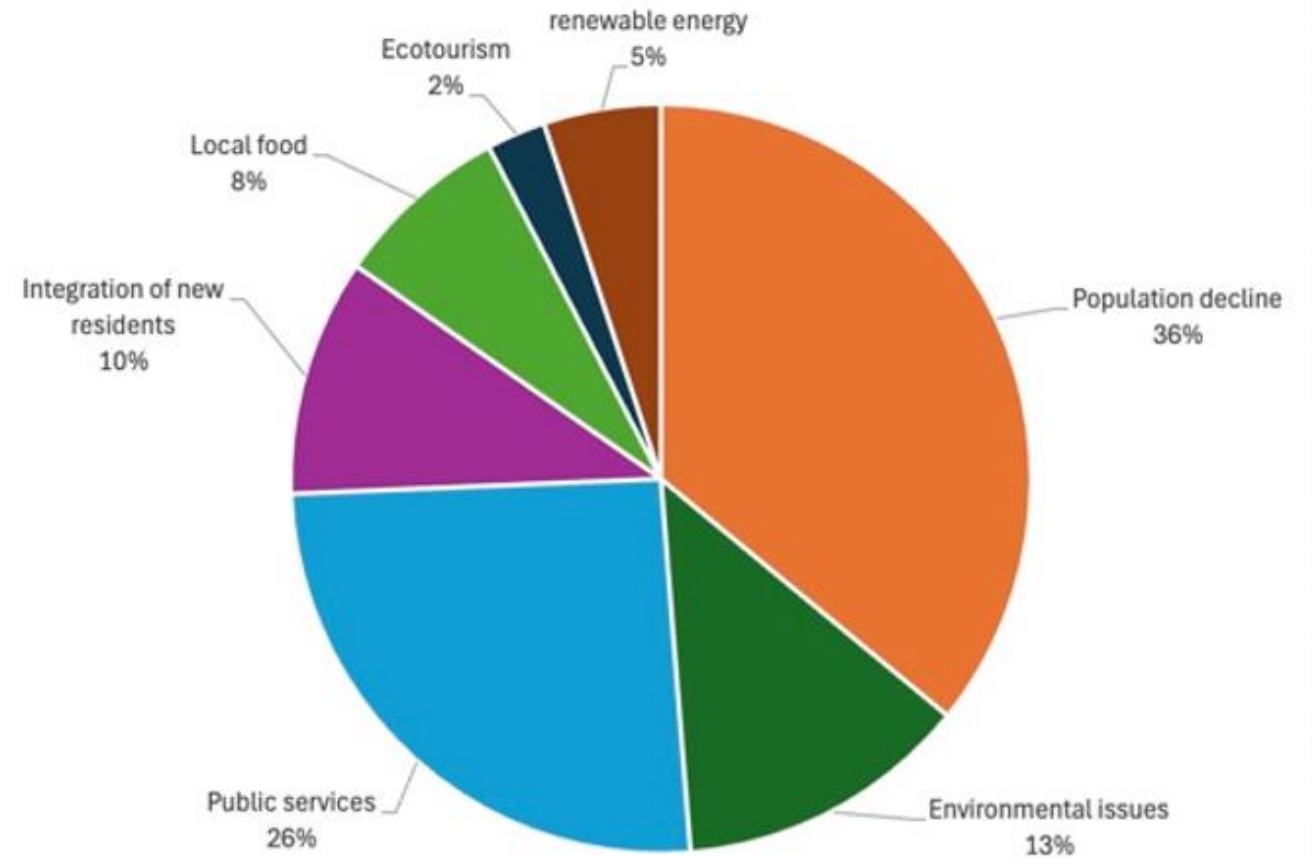
Survey



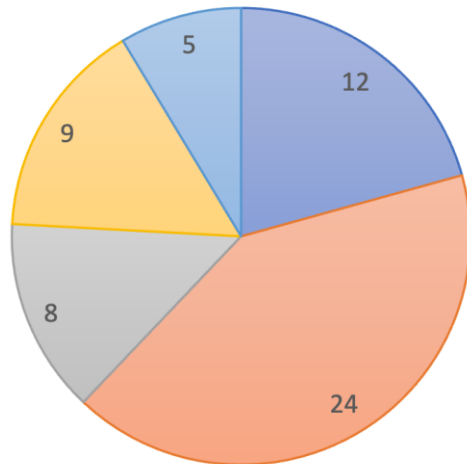
RESULTS - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Most important sustainability themes for respondents

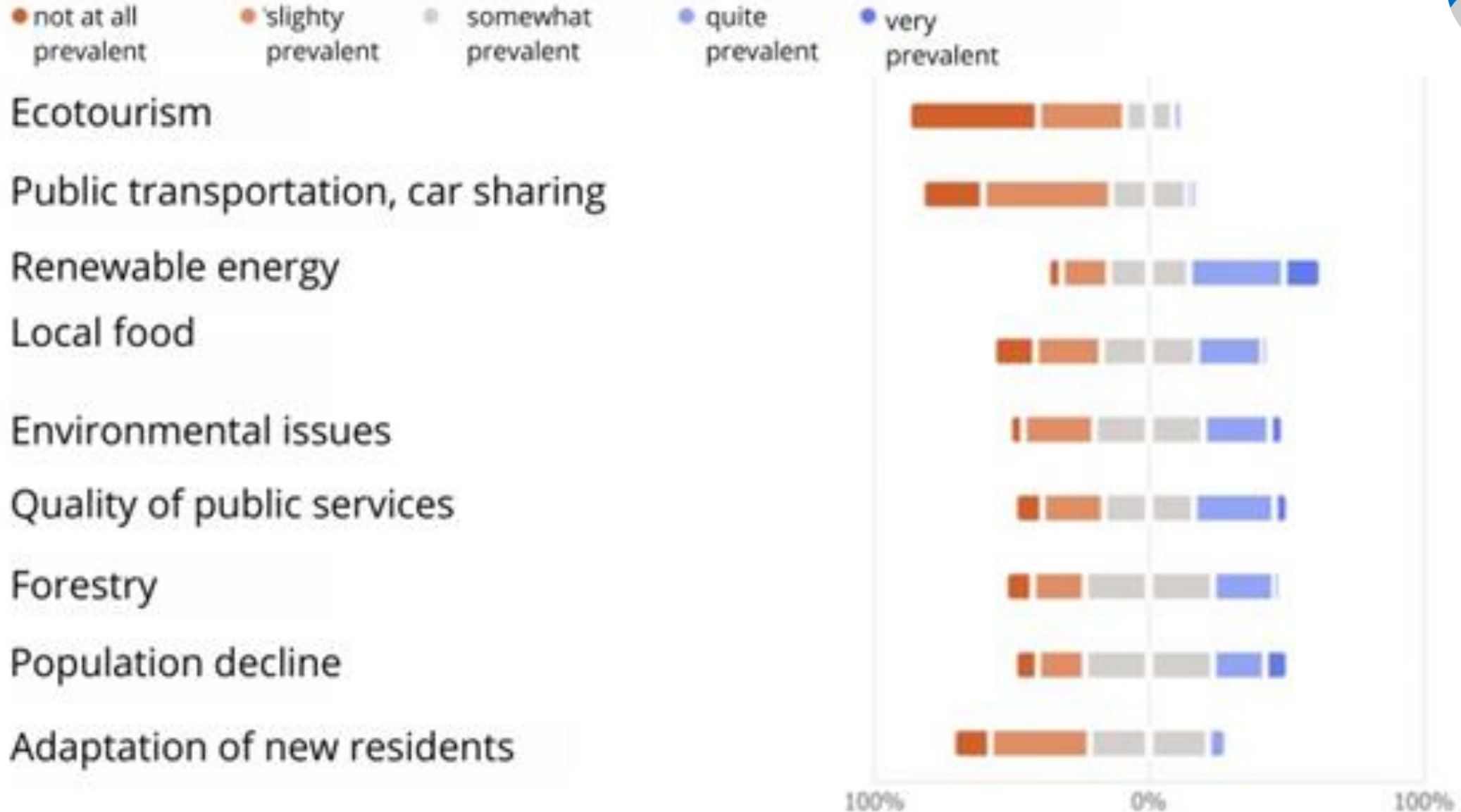


Importance of sustainable development for survey respondents

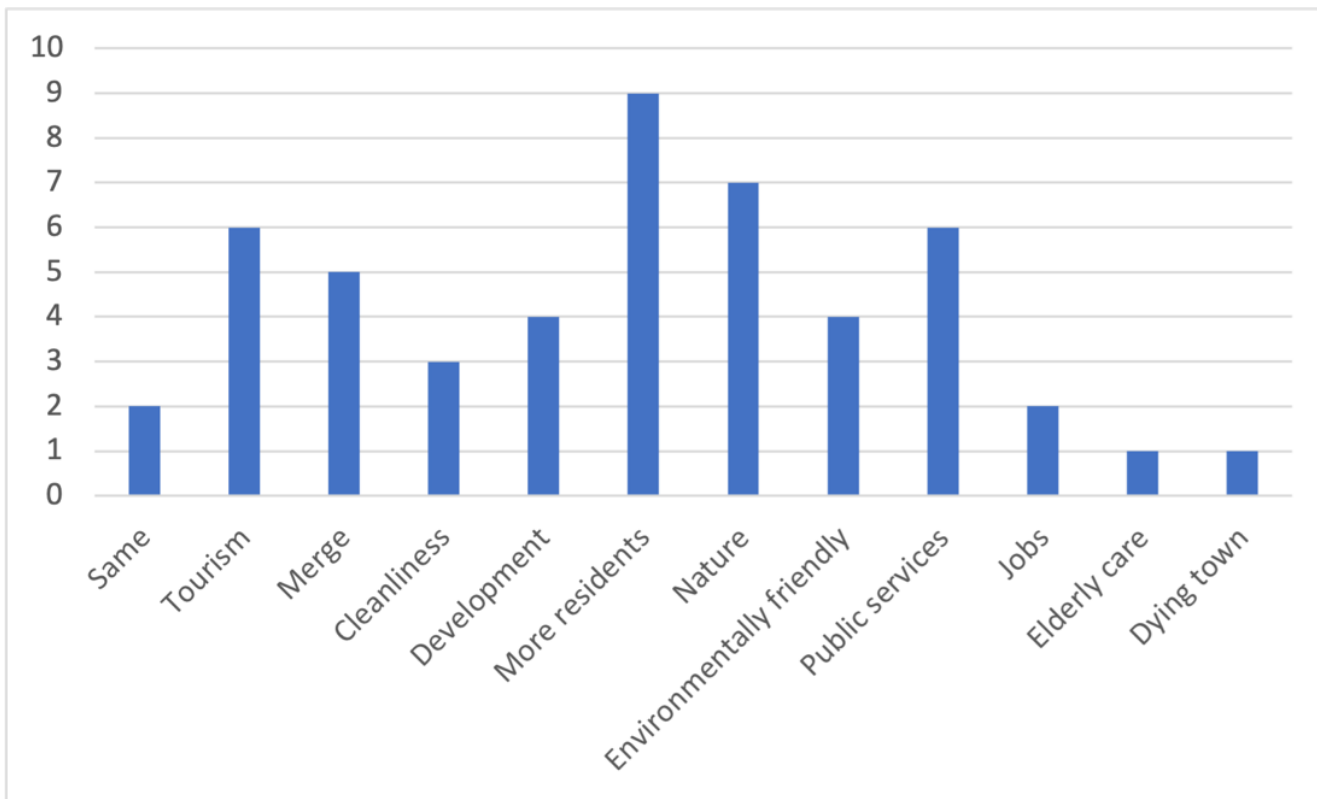


■ very important ■ quite important ■ slightly important ■ neutral ■ not important

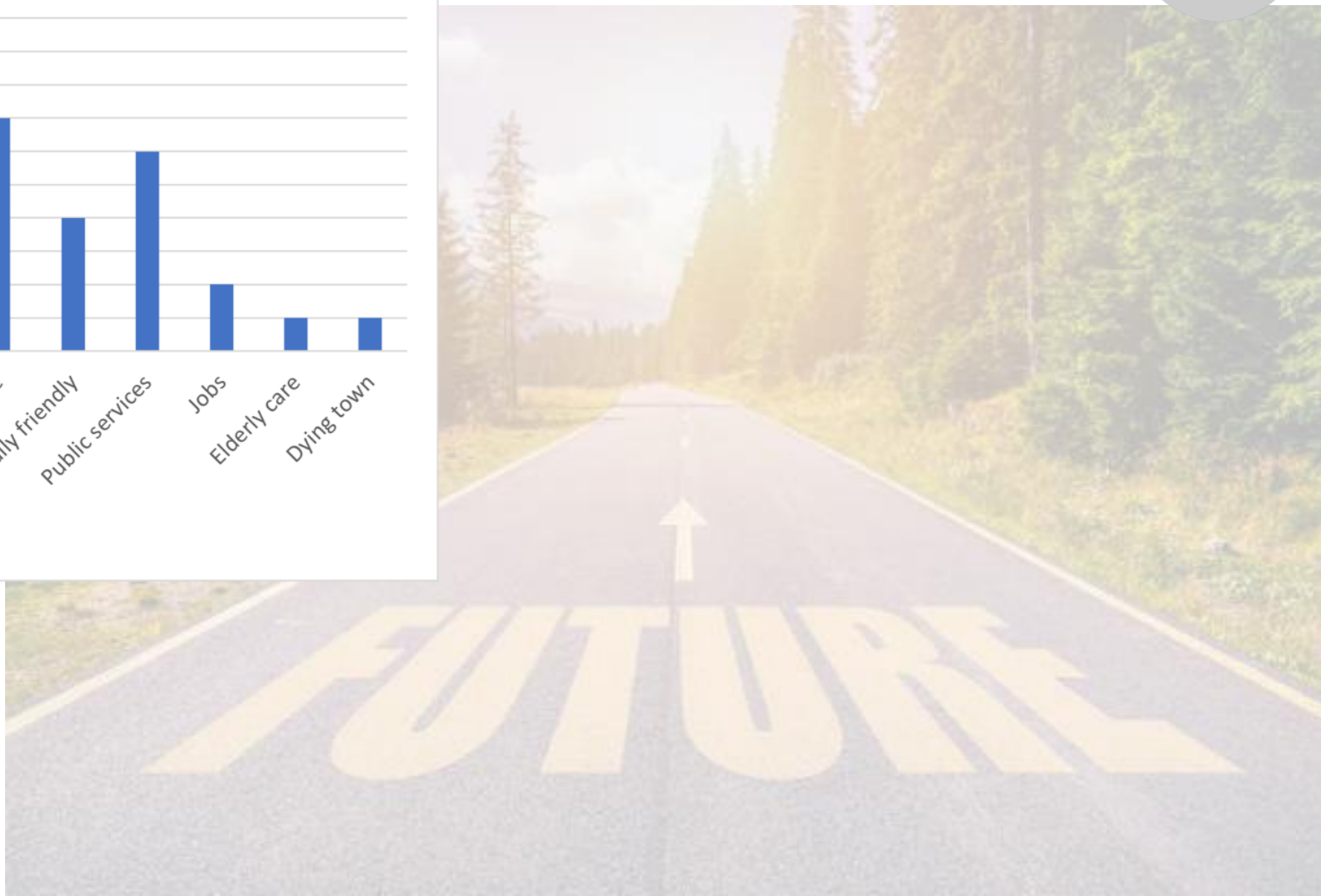
Prevalence of sustainability topical discussion during past year, 2024-2025



RESULTS – FUTURE OF RISTIJARVI



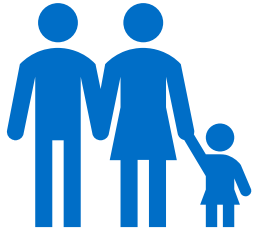
Number of mentions on survey responses when asked what respondents would like Ristijärvi to look like in 10 years.



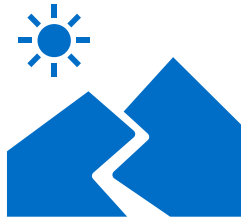




RECOMMENDATIONS



Clear focal point



Saukkovaara



Community with nearby towns



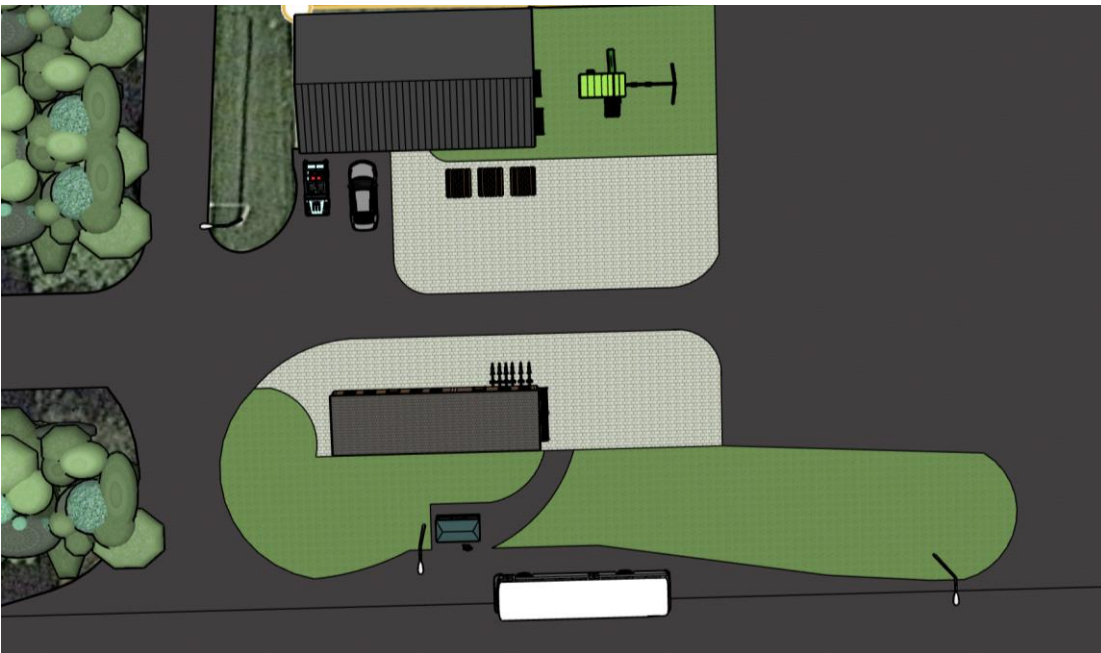
Vocational programs



Marketing



Repurpose uninhabited buildings





Conclusion

Ristijärvi has seen declining populations for many years but it is far from a dying town

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THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?