

Finding solutions for the urban shrinkage

# Integrated Action Plan



Saldus Municipality  
2025

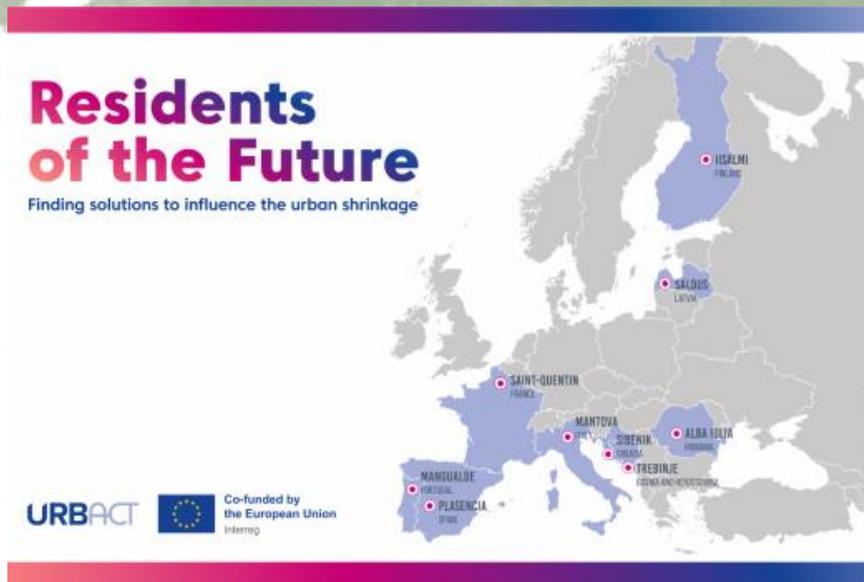
# URBACT drives change for better cities

Since 2002, URBACT has been driving change all over Europe by enabling the cooperation and idea exchange amongst cities within thematic networks, by building the skills of local stakeholders in the design and implementation of integrated and participatory policies, and by sharing knowledge and good city practices.

## URBACT IV (2021 - 2027)

For the period 2021-2027, URBACT IV builds on the legacy of past Programmes and includes even more opportunities for cities to make positive change. The current Programme integrates the crosscutting EU priorities of digital, green and gender-equal policymaking into its activities.

The programme is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with a budget of EUR 79 769 000, by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance with a budget of EUR 5 000 000 and by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument with a budget of EUR 2 000 000 for the period 2021-2027.



URBACT IV ACTION PLANNING NETWORK "Residents of the Future – Finding solutions to influence the urban shrinkage"

NETWORK ACRONYM: "Residents of the Future"

LEAD PARTNER: City of Šibenik, Croatia



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# SECTION I



## A Foreword from Chairman of the Council

It is with great pleasure that I address you, as you delve into the pages of Saldus Integrated Action Plan and as we look together towards a future where Saldus continues to be not just a good town, but a thriving home for all.

We know our town as nice and calm place, a place where everything you need for a good life is within reach: schools, sports, shops, culture, and places for work. Our neat and clean environment, nestled in the heart of Kurzeme, truly sets us apart. We boast excellent sports infrastructure, arguably the best for a town of our size, and a vibrant cultural scene, including the oldest Rock Festival in Latvia, "Saldus Saule".

While Saldus offers so much, we acknowledge the challenges of depopulation, particularly as young people seek wider perspectives, higher education, and increased opportunities in bigger urban centres. This is why our focus within the URBACT project "Residents of the Future: Finding solutions to influence the urban shrinkage" is firmly on creating an even more attractive and sustainable Saldus, a place where everyone can envision a prosperous future.

A cornerstone of our strategy is the robust support for small entrepreneurship growth. We understand that entrepreneurship is a key player in our town's prosperity. By providing a nurturing environment and tangible support for entrepreneurs to develop their ideas, we can significantly improve our general environment – fostering more job options, better living spaces, and increased income for our residents. Our municipality is committed to providing a good space and support for these vital endeavours.

Furthermore, ensuring suitable and affordable housing is paramount. We want Saldus to be a place where individuals and families can comfortably settle down, knowing they have a good home that meets their needs. This commitment to accessible housing goes hand-in-hand with our efforts to create a welcoming community, where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

Economic diversification is already progressing well, and while branding has been a focus for the past six years, we know there's still work to be done. We understand that big things change slowly, but our dedication remains unwavering. By prioritizing the growth of small businesses, ensuring affordable housing, and fostering a truly welcoming community, we are laying the groundwork for a Saldus where all residents can thrive, contribute, and find their sweet and good life right here at home.

**Māris Zusts**

**Chairman of Saldus Municipal Council**

# 01 BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

Saldus Development programme for 2022-2028 has a Strategic part, Action Plan and Investment Plan, where all parts are intertwined to tackle general challenges and **improvement** areas, that would ensure improved quality of life, availability of services, and living space, as well as promoting a diverse and innovative entrepreneurial environment. In addition, it has a **Strategy for Sustainable Development 2022-2038** with 4 strategic goals focused on a **happy society and families**, a **diverse, accessible, safe environment**, smart and **open governance**, and the development of a **high-value entrepreneurial** environment and the competitiveness of industrial territories. In the previous URBACT network where Saldus took part, I Place, Integrated Action Plan was focused on two priorities: introducing a dynamic entrepreneurship environment, looking at Saldus' potential as a "Green Town" and creating sustainable community development based on the engagement of citizens. In this network, "**Residents of the Future**", Saldus continues what has been done before and goes further.

This IAP brings to the centre of attention improvements in **three areas of intervention:**



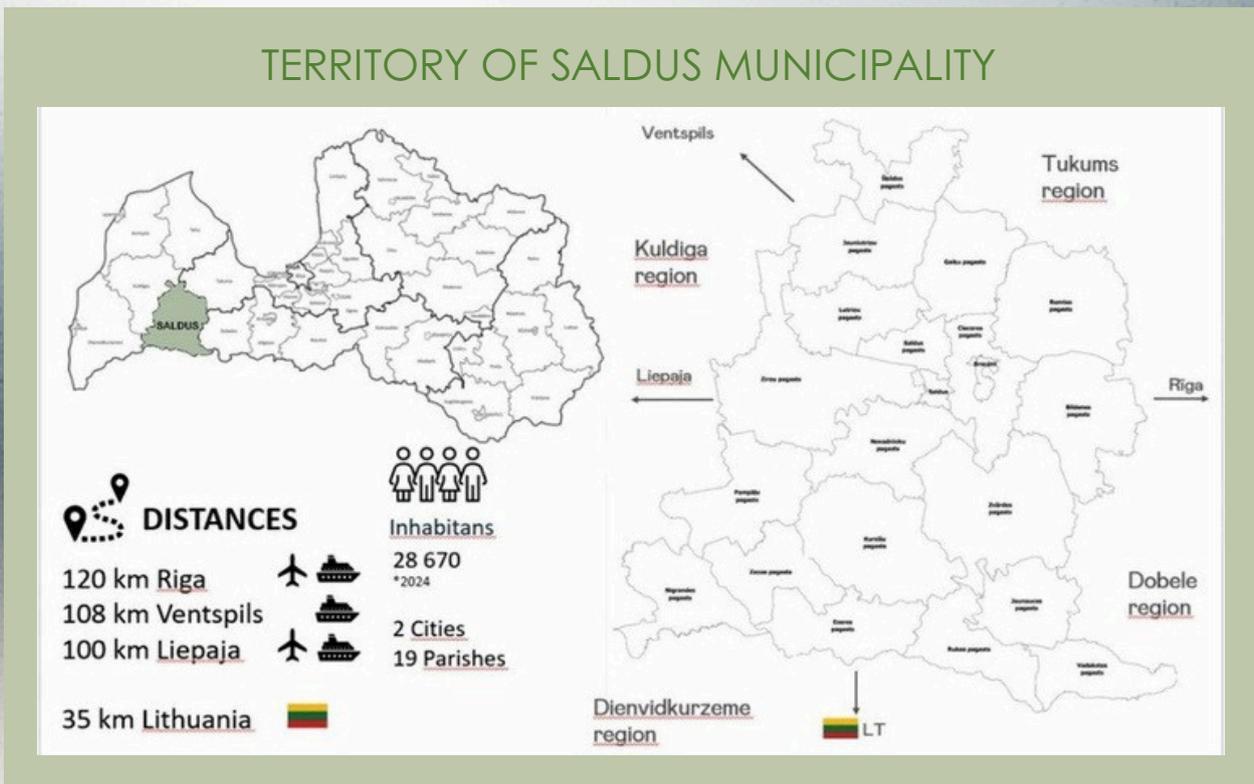
**Small entrepreneurship growth**  
**Suitable and affordable housing**  
**Community**



Small cities often face **challenges** such as population decline, economic stagnation, and a loss of vitality. By addressing these three factors simultaneously, we can address the root causes of shrinkage and create a sustainable future for Saldus town.



## 1.1. City profile



The **first reference** about Saldus is dated in 1253. Nowadays the municipality includes two towns - Saldus and Brocēni, and 19 rural territories, with a total of 28 670 (as of 2 January 2025, according to the Central Statistical Bureau). Town is **surrounded by forests, rivers and lakes**, with numerous opportunities to have adventure and contact with nature. Town centre offers many opportunities, especially to the children to play in the public gardens or to practice sports.

Saldus Municipality is situated in the **south-western part of Latvia**, Kurzeme. It has numerous neighbours: it borders the Republic of Lithuania in the South and several other Latvian municipalities from other sides. Saldus town, a regional centre, is about halfway on the route from Rīga (120 km) to the Western coastal city of Liepāja. It is in the historical Duchy of Courland that **today** is known as the **Kurzeme Planning Region**. It is an area with a history of allegiance to, or occupation by, the neighbouring empires. It suffered from upheaval during the wars of the 20th century after being occupied by Germany or the Soviet Union on several occasions. Kurzeme was always a rural and agricultural region with a strong tradition of trade via the two strategically located ice-free ports in the Baltic, Ventspils and Liepāja. Saldus has **historically** been a **market town** and the hub of a **food-producing area**. It has developed competencies in food processing, wood processing and construction. The unemployment rate is moderate (an average of 5,0 % annually). The local economy is quite diverse. There has rarely been in history one or two large companies or factories that dominated the local economy; therefore, in an economic crisis, if one company fails, there are no major layoffs of local employees that could have a crippling effect on the entire local economy.

Since the restoration of Latvia's independence, drastic changes have occurred in **demographic** processes. As was found in the research conducted by the Demographic Centre of the University of Latvia in 1998 (Demographic projections of Latvia: 1998 – 2025), since 1988, the birth rate **in Latvia** has been continuously **decreasing**. The main reasons for this were the material difficulties of a large part of the population, the increase in unemployment, as well as changes in value orientation, the decline in the role of the family, etc.

As we see now, the **prognosis** made in 1998 was **too optimistic**. Instead of prognosed number of populations in Saldus region in **2025 – 35 381** inhabitants, there were **only 28 274** persons (01.01.2025.). Reasons are various. Emigration after joining the EU in 2004 had a relatively large impact on the decline of numbers. Immigration on the other hand is one of the lowest in EU (In 2021, Latvia had 13 000 immigrants, which is only 0.3% of all migrants into EU).

The **birth rate** currently is one of the lowest during the years of independence. In October 2024, the number of newborns registered in Latvia during a month for the first time was less than a thousand according to preliminary data published by the Central Statistical Bureau. Demographic statistics for Saldus Municipality in 2024 show a **dissatisfying** trend. Number of newborns per year was 191, the number of deaths - 386.

Indicators	Base year	Related strategic objectives	Base indicator	The long-term result to be achieved in 2038.	Source
Population at the beginning of the year	2021.	So1	27 110	Preserve the base value	CSP

Strategy for Sustainable Development 2022-2038 of Saldus Region states population growth as one of the most significant indicators of the overall development. This is a crucial demographic indicator, signifying the human capital and potential of a municipality or region. Population size influences economic development, demand for services (education, healthcare, social services), labour force availability, and overall viability. The goal “to retain the base value” by 2038 shows a realistic approach, considering current demographic trends in Latvia (aging population, emigration). This IAP follows the same “cautious optimism” approach. The primary priority is to maintain the existing population count, which itself is a significant challenge in many Latvian regions, including Saldus. Retaining the base value means successfully addressing issues that contribute to population retention and attraction, such as job opportunities, services, and quality of life.

There is no doubt that the number of newborns is closely related to the living conditions of young families, including living space. Survey conducted in October 2024 in a scope of “Residents of the Future” project showed that 57,3% of survey respondents found difficult to find housing for rent or purchase, 61,37% considered significant portion of housing being in a poor condition. Majority of municipality-owned flats are outdated and lacking in amenities. After restoration of independence in 1991 no new residential buildings were built in Saldus by municipality. In recent years, some private initiatives have been directed towards solving the housing issue, with the construction of 56 new apartments in Brocēni and Saldus. Right now, 77 new apartments are being built by private companies. However, this is not enough to meet the growing demand for modern and affordable housing.

## 1.2. Policy context

What is the shrinking of cities and why is the town of Saldus currently dealing with this topic common to many small towns across Europe?



Shrinking cities refer to urban areas experiencing a substantial and sustained population decline, often accompanied by economic and infrastructural challenges. The phenomenon can occur for various reasons, such as deindustrialisation, changing economic structures, suburbanization or demographic shifts./ BASELINE STUDY, P.8

What makes a city good for living is first of all decent jobs, affordable housing, schools and kindergartens for children, the proximity of nature, leisure and recreation opportunities. But the intangible assets are just as important - quality of life, the balance between family life and work, strong social relationships, and high level of security for citizens. As it was concluded in the working paper "Small and medium-sized towns and cities: policies strengthening their role in achieving active, inclusive, and functional territories" (ESPON, April 2024), to be able to retain population and attract new residents, the local policy pathways ought to focus on certain intervention areas:

- ✓ **access to and quality** of the housing stock, the rehabilitation, regeneration and re-functioning of **public buildings**, as one of the pre-requisites to achieve an **attractive and multifunctional space** able to attract inhabitants and investors,
- ✓ **Business development** and **innovation** are significant preconditions for boosting local economies, securing jobs, attracting investments, and retaining talent,
- ✓ **connectivity** to major nodes in the international and national transport corridors,
- ✓ Culture, education, and social services are often used as markers for **quality of life**.

This IAP will directly focus on 3 intervention areas - small entrepreneurship growth, suitable and affordable housing, and active local community, that are consistent with the Courses of Action, defined in

**ACTION PLAN OF SALDUS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2022-2028:**

Course of Action	Action	Resulting indicator
<b>RV1 Community</b>	R4.4 Community integration and strengthening the sense of belonging	Maintained remote contact with residents who have left abroad, informing about developments in the region and promote opportunities for cooperation. Provided effective support to residents who return, integrating them into the life of the region, especially students in educational institutions. Information section for those who want to return has been developed and implemented on the municipality's website. Support measures provided for children who start school. In-person consultations have been provided to residents who have returned; a sense of belonging to Saldus region has been promoted.
<b>RV8 Housing Stock</b>	R23.3 Evaluate options to develop new municipal rental housing	An assessment of the demand for new municipal rental apartments in the region has been carried out. New rental housing has been created for various groups: young families, specialists, etc.
<b>RV13 Development of the business environment</b>	R41.2 Improve consulting and accessibility of information on available support R41.4 Support tools for new entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurship support specialist and business incubator activities in Saldus have been ensured. Number of entrepreneurs who have received consultations has increased. Unified, up-to-date information on available support for business in the municipality is available. Analysis of the business environment has been carried out.

**Key topics** that run through the “Residents of the Future” project thematic content will also be considered when planning the IAP objectives and actions:



## 1.3. Strengths and weaknesses

What **Saldus can offer**, and what are the town's current challenges on its way to an image as a place that supports a healthy lifestyle and innovation, capable of attracting talent, new residents and business investments?

In this section the territorial capital and existing major challenges are being assessed.

### MAJOR CHALLENGES

#### THE TERRITORIAL CAPITAL

- relatively good geographical location on a highway A9 Rīga-Liepāja to reach other biggest cities (ports) in Latvia - Rīga, Liepāja, Ventspils,
- moderate unemployment rate – an average of 5,0% annually,
- relatively homogeneous population, about 87% of inhabitants are Latvians,
- good Internet coverage,
- healthy and diverse natural environment,
- compact, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly city,
- good leisure time provision (sports, recreation, cultural activities),
- friendly and very well-prepared city for families to have children,
- active NGOs with a high participatory potential,
- local competence to succeed in obtaining EU funds.

- continuously decreasing population (more than by 22% since 1990),
- decline of the young and young-adult population, which move to larger cities and abroad,
- low number of businesses per 1,000 inhabitants - 39,3 (76,4 in the country average),
- scarce number of start-ups and emerging companies which could offer qualified jobs,
- average gross salary is lower than the country average (1125 EUR compared to 1549 EUR (2023 data)),
- scarce offer of housing to rent or to buy,
- weak city branding, insufficient recognition and visibility of the city in the national context,
- lack of higher education institutions which could attract young people,
- poor cooperation, and underestimated potential to attract young specialists to the city from the local vocational school,
- relative absence of entrepreneurial attitudes,
- foreign language skills could be an extra challenge in integrating new residents, especially from different countries,
- a scarce offer of nightlife and entertainment opportunities.

## 02 SHRINKING CITIES

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Here are some considerations when thinking about shrinking cities: economic challenges; social impact, including a reduced sense of community, increased poverty rates, and challenges in maintaining social services; positive environmental impact, such as lower energy consumption and a smaller ecological footprint. As the population decreases, cities also have to pay attention to spatial planning and revitalizing efforts - attracting new industries, investing in cultural and recreational amenities, and fostering a welcoming environment for residents and businesses. In some cases, shrinking can have a positive impact on an overall quality of life, meaning lower crime rates and more relaxed lifestyle for residents (Baseline study, p.8)

### 2.1. Importance, relevance, solutions

Saldus is **located between the biggest cities** of the Kurzeme region (Liepāja, Ventspils) and the capital Rīga as well but is not near proximity to them.

Therefore, it must be ensured that **Saldus is a place that provides everything its residents are looking for** and is also known for that on a national level.

As said before, balance between family life and work, and strong social relationships are important indicators of a good life. **Home, job** and **“the third place”** – the place beyond home and work where people can build human relationships and relax in good company (Dopitova M. Social Engagement and Rural Newcomers. Socialni studia / Social Studies 2/2016) are like three cornerstones, all equally important for people when they must choose a city or another as a place to live. The quality of these three factors determines whether residents will stay, those who left - return to the city, or new residents will come. These factors are intricately linked.

**Affordable housing** allows residents to stay in the community, consume local goods and services, and contribute to the local economy. A **strong job market** provides the means to afford housing and participate in community life. A **vibrant community**, in turn, attracts new residents and businesses, further strengthening the local economy and creating a more **desirable living environment**. That being the case, it is essential to pay attention in this IAP to those three cornerstones, or in other words, intervention areas of this plan.

#### 2.1.1. Support measures for small entrepreneurship growth

Nowadays traditional industries in Saldus region are forestry and wood processing, construction, agriculture, metal and food industries, retail and wholesale. Large companies, SMEs and home producers all play their role in the overall regional economy. Historically Saldus was recognised for arts and trade, so maybe it would be purposeful, through this IAP to analyse and experiment with this potential also nowadays? What if we create a **more supportive environment and preconditions to small businesses emerge**? What if we try to foster **entrepreneurial spirit and mindset in locals**?

In this IAP focus is on the small entrepreneurship promotion, because in order to promote the creation of new jobs in small towns, a comprehensive approach is needed, which includes both large companies and small and medium enterprises. By providing SMEs with the necessary support, cities can strengthen the regional economy and improve the quality of life of the population. **National policy measures are important but active involvement of local government is crucial.** Small businesses can contribute to greater economic diversity and enhance resilience during crises. The positive benefits include:

- ✓ **Income generated from various sources,**
- ✓ **Increased development and utilisation of local resources, strengthened social capital and community collaboration,**
- ✓ **Environmental sustainability,**
- ✓ **A stepping stone for job opportunities for women outside of the public sector.**

### 2.1.2. Suitable and affordable housing

The availability of affordable and suitable housing is a critical factor in attracting and retaining residents in a city. When individuals and families are looking for a place to live, they often consider several factors, including job opportunities, quality of life, and, most importantly, the housing market.

Affordable housing ensures that individuals and families of varying income levels can find a place to live within their means. When housing is affordable, it allows people to allocate more of their income towards other essential needs such as food, healthcare, and education. This, in turn, can contribute to a higher quality of life and a stronger local economy. Suitable housing refers to homes that meet the specific needs of residents. This includes factors such as size, location, and amenities. When housing is suitable, it can improve residents' overall well-being and satisfaction with their community. **Cities with a strong supply of affordable and suitable housing are more likely to:**

- ✓ **Retain existing residents:** Affordable and suitable housing can help to prevent residents from moving to other cities or communities,
- ✓ **Attract new residents:** People are more likely to move to a city where they can find a place to live that meets their needs and budget,
- ✓ **Promote economic growth:** When people can afford to live in a city, they are more likely to spend money on local businesses, which can help to create jobs and stimulate the economy,
- ✓ **Improve quality of life:** Affordable and suitable housing can help to create a more stable and inclusive community.

### 2.1.3. More open and welcoming community

At the same time, as previously mentioned, intangible contributions to society are equally valuable. For instance, creation of new knowledge, fostering innovation, preservation of local cultural values, and strengthening of social bonds are indispensable for long-term growth. **As one of Saldus' challenges is a close-knit community that is difficult for outsiders to enter, the ultimate goal would be to create a more welcoming and inclusive community.** It's essential to create conditions for people to meet, both locals and newcomers. Strengthened connections among locals and newcomers could foster inclusivity, integration, and community cohesion. Brought together, newcomers would gain a sense of belonging, while locals could benefit from diverse perspectives and fresh ideas. Events that encourage collaboration on community-driven initiatives would reduce tensions and dispel stereotypes by promoting open dialogue.

## 2.2. Brief summary of the project “Residents of the Future”

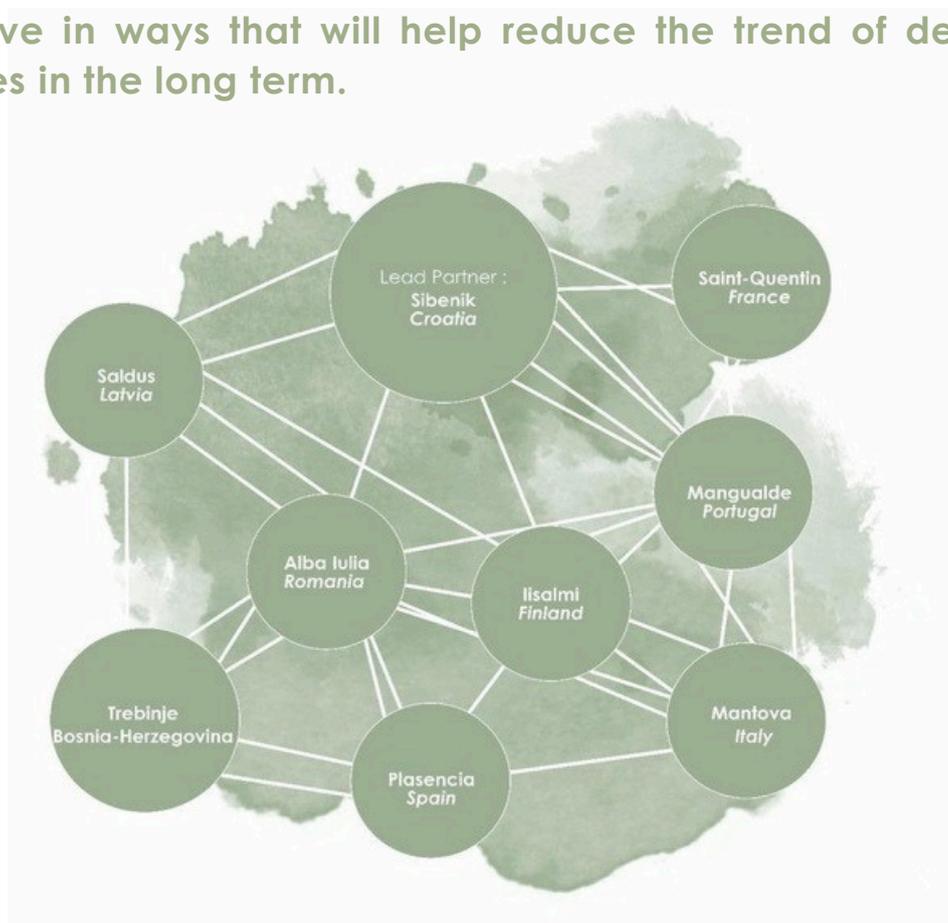
“Residents of the future” is an Action Planning Network who addresses the issue of urban depopulation within small and medium-sized cities. By focusing on digital transformation, economic diversification and city branding, it explores innovative approaches towards evolving trends in work, lifestyle and communication, to enhance the cities’ attractiveness for prospective investments and inhabitants. The network enables cities to redefine their advantages in comparison to larger metropolitan areas, and develop holistic, citizen-centric solutions that support demographic revitalisation and sustainable urban growth.



Project aims to create a network of cities to jointly find answers to the challenge of urban depopulation and to develop an action plan taking into account the following aspects:

- ✓ **digital transformation,**
- ✓ **economic diversification,**
- ✓ **city branding,** and
- ✓ **social development of cities.**

The task is to find solutions to make cities attractive, recognizable and competitive in ways that will help reduce the trend of depopulation of small cities in the long term.





## NETWORKING ACTIVITIES:

- **6 partner meetings** in different cities (Sibenik, Saint-Quentin, Mangualde, Alba Iulia, Islamabad, Mantova) with **experience exchange, training** and **capacity building**. In addition, various topics were discussed in depth under the guidance of experts ensuring broad scope of **transnational learning**.
- **As a result** of the networking activities, **profiles** of all **9 cities** were developed, **communication** plans prepared, at least 3 articles published and, in the end, a **digital tool** created for further dissemination of the project results and findings.

## LOCAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES:

- Each partner organized a **local action group (ULG)** in its city, bringing together people from different sectors and areas of interest to create the broadest and most comprehensive view of the development potential of its place.
- **As a result** of this activity, local action groups prepared an Integrated Action Plan (**IAP**) for each of the partner cities; tested **small-scale measures** that could help cities retain residents and attract new ones; organized "Open the doors of the city" events (**open door days**) each in their own city, as well as each of the partners recorded three **residents' stories**, the aim of which is to show how their city is perceived by people who have left some time but returned, local residents and newcomers.



The ability of local government to retain and attract population depends on quality of life and liveability while liveability depends on economic, social, cultural, geographic and environmental issues.

/ LEAD PARTNERS REPRESENTATIVES NIKOLINA GRACIN & PETAR MIŠURA/

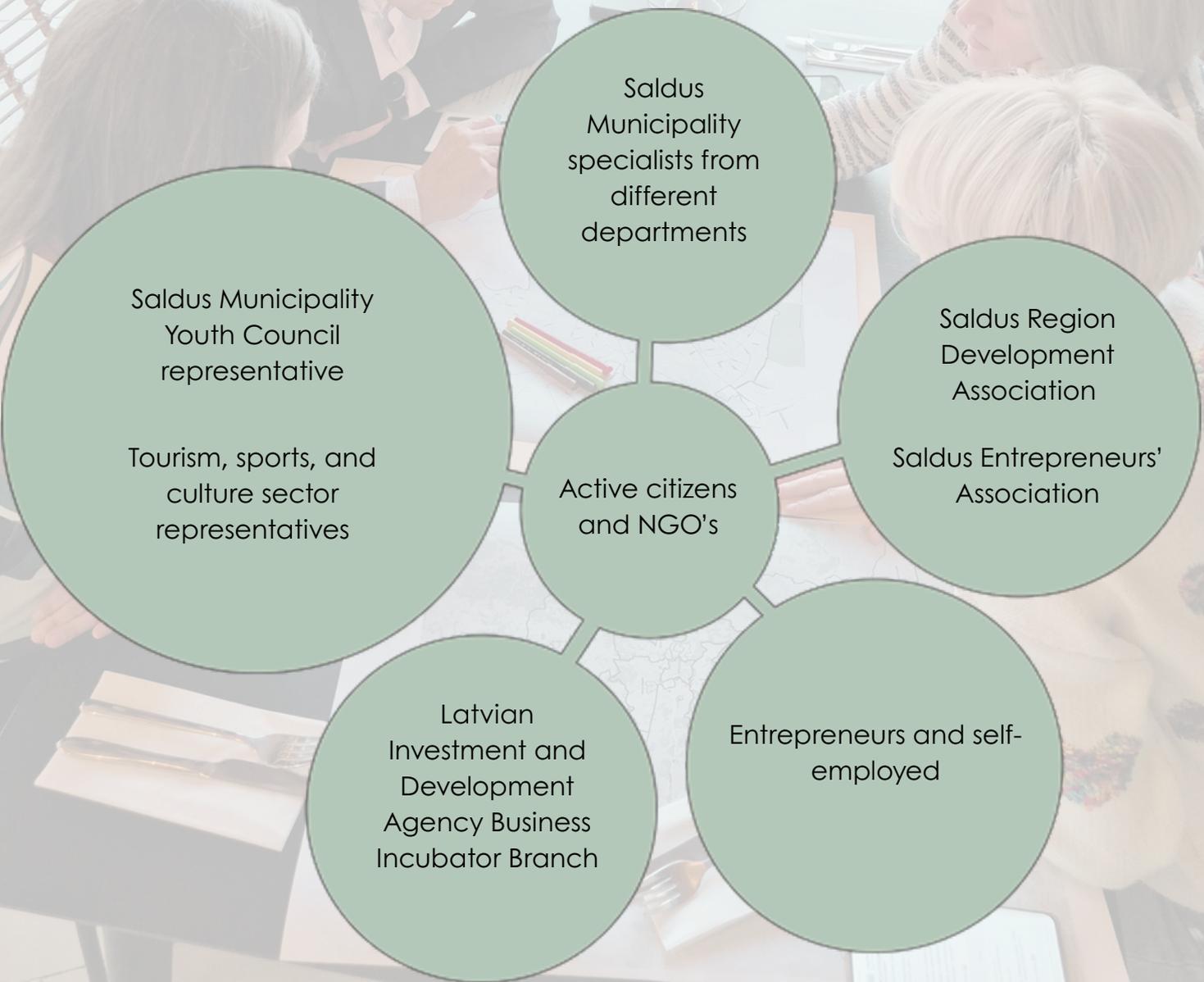
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## PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE IAP

### 3.1. URBACT Local Group

As one of the first steps during the project implementation, URBACT Local Group (ULG) was set up gathering all relevant local stakeholders to get different opinions and experiences, thoughts and ideas. The main objective of the ULG was to bring around the table different interests and different perspectives to frame problems and agree on policy priorities and design concrete solutions to address these problems in the most efficient way. ULG was involved not only to listen to their views, but also, they were invited to actively participate in the planning and organization of Testing Actions, and in the creation of Integrated Action Plan

#### Local stakeholders that were included in the Saldus ULG group:



Starting with the very first one, which took place during the City Visit of Lead Partner and Lead Expert in August 2023 in Saldus, in total, 8 ULG meetings were held during the project implementation period. Saldus Municipality has previous experience and good practice in the involvement of stakeholders on relevant topics regarding sustainable urban development. These activities already brought plans to life through an integrated and participatory approach.

An additional positive effect from this approach is fostering a sense of belonging among community members. This IAP was also elaborated using participatory and integrated approach in many levels and aspects:

- ✓ Stakeholder active engagement in defining priorities and potential solutions,
- ✓ Coherence with existing documents and policies,
- ✓ Sustainable approach in urban development (IAP addresses economic, social and environmental objectives),
- ✓ Integration over time, planning short, mid- and long-term solutions,
- ✓ Sectoral integration (employment, living conditions, social well-being),
- ✓ Complementary types of investment including both « hard » and « soft » investments.

As a result, ULG co-produced Integrated Action Plan, embedding the knowledge and lessons drawn from their own competence, learnings from the Testing Actions, and experience exchange taking place during the network's transnational seminars. Work on development of the IAP began with a situation analysis using the Problem Tree method. Based on the findings, ULG formulated intervention areas and their corresponding Strategic Objectives. Later, based on participants' areas of expertise and interests, the group was divided into three smaller thematic groups to make work more effective.

Using Brainstorming method these groups (5-7 people) prepared a range of activities in three areas:

✓ **Support measures for small entrepreneurship growth,**

✓ **Suitable and affordable housing,**

✓ **More open and welcoming community.**



## 3.2. Role and impact of transnational learning

One of the core aspects of the URBACT method is transnational exchange and learning **between cities**. Throughout the IAP production process, all partners could take advantage of the network opportunities to share, check and review progress together.

The network-level exchange provided space to discuss, experiences, challenges and solutions. The 1st **peer-to-peer** review session was organised during a transnational meeting in Mangualde, October 2024, the 2nd in Iisalmi, June 2025. During all IAP development processes, essential was **one-to-one** support from the **Lead Expert**.

Last but not least, input from learning opportunities on **topics** strongly related to the main challenge of this network, which took place during transnational meetings as well as online seminars:

- ✓ Investment attraction,
- ✓ Attracting digital nomads,
- ✓ Promoting and supporting remote work,
- ✓ Economic diversification and resilience,
- ✓ Digital transformation,
- ✓ City branding,
- ✓ Housing Funding strategies for IAP`s,
- ✓ Quality of life and city attractiveness, etc.



### 3.3. Testing actions

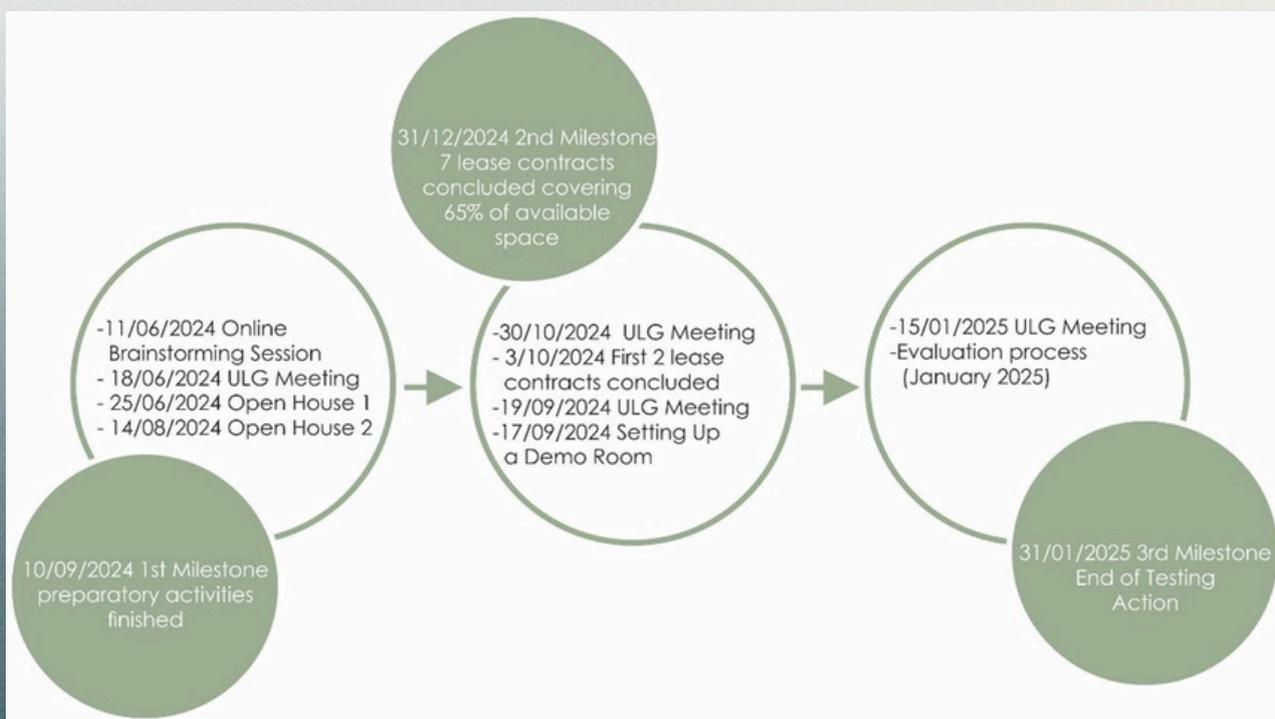
Decisions about testing actions were made in early stages of project implementation on the local level. After analysing **local challenges** revealed by Baseline Study, stakeholders of ULG decided on **two** Testing Actions, which afterwards informed the final planning of actions of IAP.

#### 3.3.1. Testing Action: Former school premises transformed into a small business community centre

To promote development of entrepreneurship and create supportive environment for it in Saldus Municipality, pilot activity has been launched in premises owned by the Saldus Municipality – the former Sātiņi school premises were transformed into a small business community centre. The project was called "SĀTIŅI WORKSHOP". This pilot yielded crucial information, enriching the design of a number of subsequent activities under Intervention area 1 "Small entrepreneurship growth".

#### TESTING ACTION "SĀTIŅI WORKSHOP" FRAMEWORK

<b>Challenge/priority</b>	No community, office and production space for small entrepreneurs but abandoned municipality buildings
<b>What if we...?</b>	What if we opened doors of a previously running school, but currently abandoned building to small entrepreneurs to create community?
<b>Test idea in the sentence</b>	Promote entrepreneurship by creating an opportunity to develop the former Sātiņi school building and its surroundings into a small business community centre - "Sātiņū DARĪTAVA"/ "SĀTIŅI WORKSHOP"
<b>Success indicator</b>	At least 7 lease contracts concluded covering at least 50% of the building



Testing Action has undeniably left a **positive impact** on the local environment, the city's recognition, and its people. It has fostered sustainable development, enhanced the city's image, and generated positive changes in the daily lives of residents. The results demonstrate the trial's **successful** implementation and its potential to serve as a **model** for other cities:

- Effective use of empty public (municipality-owned) building, providing space for entrepreneurship.
- Strengthening the regional business support system,
- Positive media coverage of Saldus Municipality, emphasising an innovative approach to promoting regional development,
- Encouraged the formation and start-up of new businesses,
- Improved local community cooperation and mutual support.



### KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE TESTING ACTION

- 💡 If you have an idea - you should try it! URBACT provides the opportunity to test.
- 💡 Learn by doing - experimenting means doing something no one has done before.
- 💡 Accept change in plans, adapt, and find new approaches if necessary.
- 💡 You can't say no one needs it until you've tried it!



### 3.3.2. Testing Action: Cycle of events to encourage more open and welcoming Saldus community

Idea behind this Testing Action was to test a cycle of events to encourage more open and welcoming Saldus community. Regular small community events (once in every three weeks) were organized where locals and newcomers could participate in collaborative activities and discussions to see if it fosters a more inclusive environment. This Testing Action provided valuable insights that informed the development of future activities under Intervention area 3 "Community".

#### TESTING ACTION "MORE OPEN AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY" FRAMEWORK

##### Challenge/priority

A close-knit community that is difficult for outsiders to enter.

##### What if we...?

What if we gathered open-minded residents and newcomers to create a space for exchanging ideas, ultimately fostering a more open and welcoming community?

##### Test idea in the sentence

Organize regular small community events (once in every three weeks) where locals and newcomers can participate in collaborative activities and discussions to see if it fosters a more inclusive environment.

##### Success indicator

At least 12 persons involved in the action and 2 ideas developed; emerging cooperations.



**September 26, 2024**

ULG Meeting. Identification of key challenges and barriers to community development.

**October 17, 2024**

Workshop sessions focused on brainstorming solutions and actionable initiatives.

**November 7, 2024**

Nightly walking tour around Saldus to explore the town's atmosphere and discuss urban improvements.

**December 5, 2024**

Workshop sessions continued, further refining community-driven ideas.

**January 21, 2025**

Finalizing and structuring the proposed initiatives to be included in the IAP.

## Challenges Identified:

During several meetings, participants focused on identifying key challenges hindering community development and inclusivity in Saldus. The main challenges include:

- Lack of a printed or digital booklet with information on local institutions and services.
- Absence of a mentorship program to help newcomers integrate.
- Lack of a "Saldus Flavour Basket" with local products for newcomers.
- No systematic effort to identify and welcome new residents.
- Insufficient municipal support for local transportation within Saldus.
- Underutilization of natural resources.
- Lack of attractiveness in multi-apartment residential buildings, failure to develop distinct neighbourhood identities.
- Lack of innovative approaches and tolerance in the community.
- Conservative societal attitudes limiting progress, provincial mindset and limited exposure to external experiences.
- Stereotyping and rigid public perceptions.
- Weak public image and branding of Saldus, no defined local lifestyle model.
- Limited life-long learning opportunities.
- Limited mobility options for residents.
- Shortage of suitable housing options.
- "Small-town syndrome" restricting growth and ambition.
- Insufficient open socialization spaces, lack of nightlife options.



## KEY TAKEAWAY



**To ensure that innovative ideas are implemented, there is a need for a dedicated motivator or facilitator, an "engine", who can consistently encourage and guide individuals, helping them transition from ideas to implementation.**

# SECTION II

# 04 Overall vision

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The vision of the IAP has been developed by the ULG. It is based on the expectation that the IAP, together with Saldus Development Programme 2022-2028 will serve as the strategic basis for bringing positive change into the intervention areas already identified. In addition, the IAP is seen as a tool that brings together local stakeholders and creates a platform for them to coordinate and work together to adequately respond to local challenges. That being the case, the vision statement of the IAP is

## Saldus – Where Effort and Belonging Shape the Future!

Tracking progress toward Saldus becoming a place where work, home, and community truly harmonize involves a multi-faceted approach, blending tangible measurements with insights into local sentiment. To measure work-life integration and **economic vitality**, indicators like **employment** rates across various sectors should be watched. The number of **new businesses** springing up and changes in average **income** would offer insights into economic dynamism.

Progress in quality of **home** and living would be evident in metrics such as housing **affordability** and the **availability** of homes, ensuring Saldus is accessible to all. It is also suggested to examine access to green spaces and parks per person. Lower crime rates would reflect a sense of safety and **security** within the home environment, while increased public transport usage would indicate better **connections** between homes and all other parts of the town. Surveys would complement this by capturing residents' feelings of belonging and contentment with their living situations.

For **community cohesion** and well-being, volunteerism rates and attendance at local cultural and community events should be measured, as these reveal the strength of **social bonds**. Growth in memberships for local associations and clubs would signify diverse and active engagement. Furthermore, it is preferable to gather qualitative data through community forums and direct conversations, listening to residents' perceptions of connection and collaboration within Saldus.

**By combining these diverse qualitative and quantitative approaches, Saldus can maintain a clear picture of its journey towards a harmonious future, allowing for informed adjustments to ensure work, home, and community truly thrive together.**

# 05 Intervention areas and strategic objectives

Each strategic objective of the Integrated Action Plan corresponds to one of Courses of Actions from Action Plan of Saldus Development programme 2022-2028 and relevant areas where the direct impact is planned.

Intervention area	No.	Corresponding Course of Action (see p.9)	No.	Strategic Objective
	1	RV13 Development of the business environment	SO1	To foster the growth of small entrepreneurship in Saldus by providing accessible resources and creating a supportive business environment that encourages innovation and long-term success.
	2	RV8 Housing Stock	SO2	To create better living conditions for residents by providing them with affordable and quality housing, thus contributing to the promotion of social well-being, reducing social tensions, and creating a sustainable urban environment.
	3	RV1 Community	SO3	To develop an open and inclusive community in Saldus that actively welcomes newcomers by fostering social connections, supporting grassroots community initiatives, and providing a strong local support network and tools for integration. The municipality will serve as a facilitator, empowering residents to initiate regular community-led events and activities that encourage participation and a sense of belonging.

**Additionally**, a number of areas were identified by the ULG where there would be **positive benefits** from the realization of all three Strategic Objectives of this IAP. It is expected that combining place-centred and people-centred interventions via improved entrepreneurship support, better housing situation and more active and inclusive environment, sustainable beneficial changes will be encouraged also in these areas of intervention:

SO1	SO2	SO3
Attracting	young	people
Sustainable	urban	growth
<b>Economic diversification</b>		<b>Culture and entertainment</b>
<b>Women's employment</b>	<b>Redevelopment of public buildings</b>	
Promotion	of local	resource
City	branding	
<b>Small entrepreneurship growth</b>	<b>Suitable and affordable housing</b>	<b>Community</b>

# 06 Actions



## Intervention area 1: Small entrepreneurship growth

Specific Objective	Action No.	Action	Timeframe
SO1	SO1.1	Testing of small entrepreneurs' community centre model in municipality owned premises – previous Sātiņi school building; transfer of good practice on a local scale, to other municipalities in Latvia, and URBACT	2024-2026
	SO1.2	Sustainable infrastructure developments in previous Sātiņi school building	2025-2027
	SO1.3	Launch of grant program for young entrepreneurs to start their first business in Saldus Municipality	Yearly activity/ First call to apply -2026
	SO1.4	Design of Saldus region economic profile for the investment attraction	2026
	SO1.5	Annual event – Saldus region entrepreneurs forum "Charged for Growth"	Yearly activity/ First event in 2025
	SO1.6	Creation of a full-time position in Saldus Municipality "specialist for business support"	2026
	SO1.7	Establishment of a small entrepreneur's association	2025
	SO1.8	Annual award program for small entrepreneurs of Saldus region	Yearly activity/ 1st within 2026 budget

**Digital transformation** will contribute to the achievement of the Strategic objective SO1 by encouraging small businesses to adopt new technologies, improving internet connection and mobile communications in the small entrepreneur's community centre and providing Saldus region economic profile online. This goal also enhances **city branding** by showcasing Saldus as a dynamic, innovative, and business-friendly city. By providing accessible resources and support, it promotes **equal opportunities** for all residents, regardless of gender, to start and grow a business.



## Intervention area 2: Suitable and affordable housing

Specific Objective	Action No.	Action	Timeframe
SO2	SO2.1	Infrastructure improvements in territories planned as future residential neighbourhoods, private and municipality owned	2025-2026
	SO2.2	Public auction of municipality owned land in Nākotnes residential block; 2 new multi-storey residential buildings construction by private investor	2025-2028
	SO2.3	Identification of plots of land owned by the municipality for the construction of rental houses in accordance with the spatial plan; publication of information on the municipality's website	2025-2026
	SO2.4	Reconstruction and rent-to-own auction of renovated apartments for young specialists	Yearly activity/ 1st within 2026 budget
	SO2.5	Reconstruction of the former service hotel into a building of 32 social apartments	2025-2026
	SO2.6	Support for young families to purchase a single home in the form of deferred payment for up to 5 years, with a down payment of 20% and an annual interest rate of 6%, when purchasing an apartment from the municipality	Continuously
	SO2.7	Examination of buildings owned by the municipality that can be released/optimized, and rebuilt into residential buildings	2026

Strategic objective SO2 can be supported by **digital transformation** through the development of smart city solutions, such as digital platforms for the vacant properties, transparent communication channels for residents, and the implementation of energy-efficient solutions for smart homes.

By prioritizing quality and affordable housing, Saldus positions itself as a caring and **inclusive city**, a brand that is highly attractive to potential new residents and families.

Access to **affordable and safe housing** is a critical component of **gender equality**, as housing insecurity can disproportionately affect single mothers and women in low- income households. By ensuring equal access to housing, this goal provides a stable foundation for women to pursue educational and career opportunities, thus improving their economic security and overall well-being.



## Intervention area 3: Community

Specific Objective	Action No.	Action	Timeline
<b>SO3</b>	SO3.1	"Mentor for Newcomer" mentoring program providing a person – mentor who individually helps new residents to get settled	2025 (approbation phase)
	SO3.2	Case study through qualitative interviews with newcomers	2025
	SO3.3	Creation of system (methods, ways) for municipality to obtain information about new residents in its territory	2025
	SO3.4	Adult interest-based education classes at Saldus children's music and art schools	Continuously starting from 2026/2027 school year
	SO3.5	An informal gathering place with a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere for organizing events, with the aim to strengthen community bonds and a sense of belonging	2027
	SO3.6	NGO, existing or newly established, whose mission is "One Stop Shop" for newcomers in Saldus	Continuously starting from 2026
	SO3.7	Prime Disco Party Saldus – regular events for residents over 25 years old	Continuously

Strategic objective SO3 is advanced by using digital tools to build community. Examples include online forums, social media groups, and a dedicated app for community event calendars and volunteer sign-ups. It also involves creating digital resources for newcomers, such as an online guide to local services and integration programs, making information easily accessible.

An inclusive and welcoming community is a powerful branding asset. This goal helps to brand Saldus as a friendly, diverse, and vibrant city. The active participation of residents and the success of community-led initiatives become compelling stories that attract new people and businesses looking for a place with a strong social fabric.

SO3 directly contributes to gender equality by ensuring that community initiatives and support networks are inclusive of all genders. It actively encourages the participation and leadership of women in community-led projects, empowering them to take on active roles and ensuring their voices are heard in community development processes.

# SECTION III

# 07 Action planning details

Following a collaborative process, 22 distinct activities were identified across three key intervention areas. From this comprehensive list, the URBACT Local Group has strategically selected three priority actions within each intervention area. These nine chosen activities represent the most critical and impactful steps to be implemented to achieve our overarching objectives, encompassing a balanced mix of short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions to ensure both immediate progress and sustainable change.



## Intervention area 1: Small entrepreneurship growth

SO1 To foster the growth of small entrepreneurship in Saldus by providing accessible resources and creating a supportive business environment that encourages innovation and long-term success.

	SO1.2 Sustainable infrastructure developments in previous Sātiņi school building
Main objective	To ensure small entrepreneurs' community centre continuous functioning through building's infrastructure improvements
Implementation steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical Planning and Documentation</li> <li>• Securing Funding and procurement</li> <li>• Implementation of Construction and Infrastructure Improvements</li> <li>• Monitoring and Community Involvement</li> <li>• Final Evaluation and Maintenance Integration</li> </ul>
Timeframe	2025-2027
Responsibilities	Main: Saldus Municipality Involved: Novadnieki rural territory administration, entrepreneurs' community (NGO)
Costs and funding	Costs: 86 540 EUR Funding: 68 040 EUR Saldus Municipality budget, 18 500 EUR LEADER
What would success look like	Fully functional community building serving local entrepreneurs. Increased usage of the space for workshops, training, and business collaboration. Active participation from local entrepreneurs. Enhanced sense of local identity and rural economic activity. Building maintained and used sustainably beyond 2027
Risk mitigation	Timely planning and timeline buffers will help us manage potential delays in procurement and funding. Early technical assessments will reduce the risk of unexpected construction challenges and help control costs. Continuous dialogue with the community will maintain engagement and ensure the space meets local needs. Phased implementation and budget oversight will help us stay flexible and responsive to risks as they arise
	SO1.4 Design of Saldus region economic profile for the investment attraction

<b>Main objective</b>	To create a comprehensive, visually appealing, and data-driven economic profile of the Saldus region that effectively showcases its business opportunities, key sectors, workforce potential, infrastructure, and support systems, to attract domestic and international investment.
<b>Implementation steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define scope, goals, and key audiences</li> <li>• Identify key stakeholders (municipality, LIAA, local businesses, potential industrial parks, etc.)</li> <li>• Data Collection &amp; Analysis Profile Structure &amp; Content Development Design and Layout</li> <li>• Publishing digitally on Saldus municipality and investment-related websites &amp; Promotion</li> <li>• Testing, feedback collection</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	2026
<b>Responsibilities</b>	<p>Main: Saldus Municipality Involved:  Data Gathering: Saldus Municipality, Central Statistical Bureau, LIAA  Content Writing: Divided among specialists (e.g. one per section)  Layout and Visuals: Team members skilled in basic design tools  Promotion &amp; Distribution: Saldus Municipality, LIAA and regional partners</p>
<b>Costs and funding</b>	No additional funding required - All tasks will be completed using existing staff time and free tools
<b>What would success look like</b>	Positive feedback from target users (investors, state institutions, entrepreneurs). Use of the profile in 10+ investment meetings or promotional events within 12 months. Increased investor inquiries or visits to the region. Improved visibility of Saldus in national/international investment platforms.
<b>Risk mitigation</b>	Timely planning and coordinated cooperation will help to meet internal deadlines and avoid delays. Close collaboration with official data providers will ensure the profile contains accurate and up-to-date information. Early engagement with stakeholders will secure input, increase relevance, and foster ownership.
<b>SO1.6 Creation of a Full-Time Position in Saldus Municipality: "Specialist for Business Support"</b>	
<b>Main objective</b>	To strengthen Saldus Municipality's capacity to support local economic development by creating a full-time position dedicated to assisting entrepreneurs, coordinating business-related initiatives, and facilitating investment and cooperation opportunities.
<b>Implementation steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline a detailed job description, qualifications, and expected outcomes</li> <li>• Identify reporting lines and integration within the Development Department</li> <li>• Recruitment and Hiring</li> <li>• Onboarding and Integration</li> <li>• Start full-time operations, offering services to businesses, organizing networking events, supporting project applications, and acting as a liaison with institutions like LIAA, while not duplicating the same tasks</li> <li>• Set up regular performance monitoring and community feedback mechanisms</li> </ul>

<b>Timeframe</b>	2026
<b>Responsibilities</b>	Main: Saldus Municipality  Involved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR Department (recruitment and administrative setup)</li> <li>• Local business stakeholders (feedback and cooperation)</li> <li>• LIAA and business support organizations (collaboration)</li> </ul>
<b>Costs and funding</b>	Estimated Annual Salary: 21 000–25 000 EUR (depending on experience and scope) Funding Source: Saldus Municipality budget
<b>What would success look like</b>	A known and accessible point of contact for businesses within the municipality. Increased satisfaction among entrepreneurs regarding municipal support. Measurable increase in business support activities (events, consultations, partnership facilitation). Improved coordination with LIAA, LEADER groups, and funding bodies. Stronger visibility of Saldus as a business- friendly municipality
<b>Risk mitigation</b>	Well-prepared justification and benchmarking will help secure political and administrative approval.  Clear expected results from the beginning will ensure the position delivers measurable results.



## Intervention area 2: Suitable and affordable housing

SO2 To create better living conditions for residents by providing them with affordable and quality housing, thus contributing to the promotion of social well-being, reducing social tensions, and creating a sustainable urban environment.

	SO2.1 Infrastructure improvements in territories planned as future residential neighbourhoods, private and municipality owned
<b>Main objective</b>	To construct necessary infrastructure, including roads, parking facilities, water supply networks, and sewerage systems, in areas identified for upcoming residential development on both private and municipal properties in Saldus town and adjacent areas
<b>Implementation steps</b>	2025 - 2026: Construction of water supply and sewage system in Oškalni village Reconstruction of Parka Street in Druva village Reconstruction of Blaumaņa street in Saldus  2026-2027: Reconstruction of Nākotnes street and 3 parking spaces Construction of a new section of Nākotnes street in Saldus

<b>Timeframe</b>	2025-2027
<b>Responsibilities</b>	Main: Saldus Municipality Development Department Involved: Real Estate Department, Finance Department, local rural territories administrations
<b>Costs and funding</b>	Total cost: 4 858 000 EUR Funding: Saldus Municipality budget, State Treasury loan for local government priority measures
<b>What would success look like</b>	Planned works completed within three years, creating opportunities for further development of the housing stock in Saldus town and adjacent areas
<b>Risk mitigation</b>	Timely planning and coordinated cooperation
	<b>SO2.4 Reconstruction and rent-to-own auction of renovated apartments for young specialists</b>
<b>Main objective</b>	To provide affordable and accessible housing options for young specialists through the reconstruction and rent-to-own auction of renovated apartments, thereby attracting new talent and residents to the municipality
<b>Implementation steps</b>	Reconstruction of 2 municipally owned apartments, every year starting from 2026. Following rent-to-own auction of renovated apartments
<b>Timeframe</b>	Yearly, starting from 2026
<b>Responsibilities</b>	Main: Saldus Municipality Real Estate Department Involved: Development Department
<b>Costs and funding</b>	Costs: 60 000 EUR each year Funding: Saldus Municipality budget
<b>What would success look like</b>	Reconstructed 2 municipally owned apartments every year starting from 2026. Following rent-to-own auction of renovated apartments for young specialists organized. Two new residents/ families attracted.
<b>Risk mitigation</b>	As this is a new initiative, the starting point is crucial when it comes to convincing decision-makers to grant funding

	SO2.7 Examination of buildings owned by the municipality that can be released/optimized, and rebuilt into residential buildings
<b>Main objective</b>	To examine municipally owned buildings for their potential to be released or optimized and redeveloped into residential buildings, and to compile the findings into a comprehensive database available online for the needs of municipality as well as private investors
<b>Implementation steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination of buildings</li> <li>• Evaluation of Data, Decision Making, Database Preparation</li> <li>• Publishing the Database on the Website &amp; Information Campaign</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	2026 (and following information updates each year during the 1st half of year)
<b>Responsibilities</b>	Main: Saldus Municipality Real Estate Department Involved: Development Department engineering specialists; communication specialists
<b>Costs and funding</b>	No additional financial resources necessary
<b>What would success look like</b>	Examination process is completed until July 2026; the database is available online on Saldus Municipality website <a href="http://www.saldus.lv">www.saldus.lv</a> from September 2026. Responsible persons have been identified, and a system has been created for how the database will be updated
<b>Risk mitigation</b>	The main risk is related to investing time and resources into a database that nobody uses. Therefore, communicating the value proposition clearly is crucial, as well as keeping users informed about new features, improvements, and any changes to the database



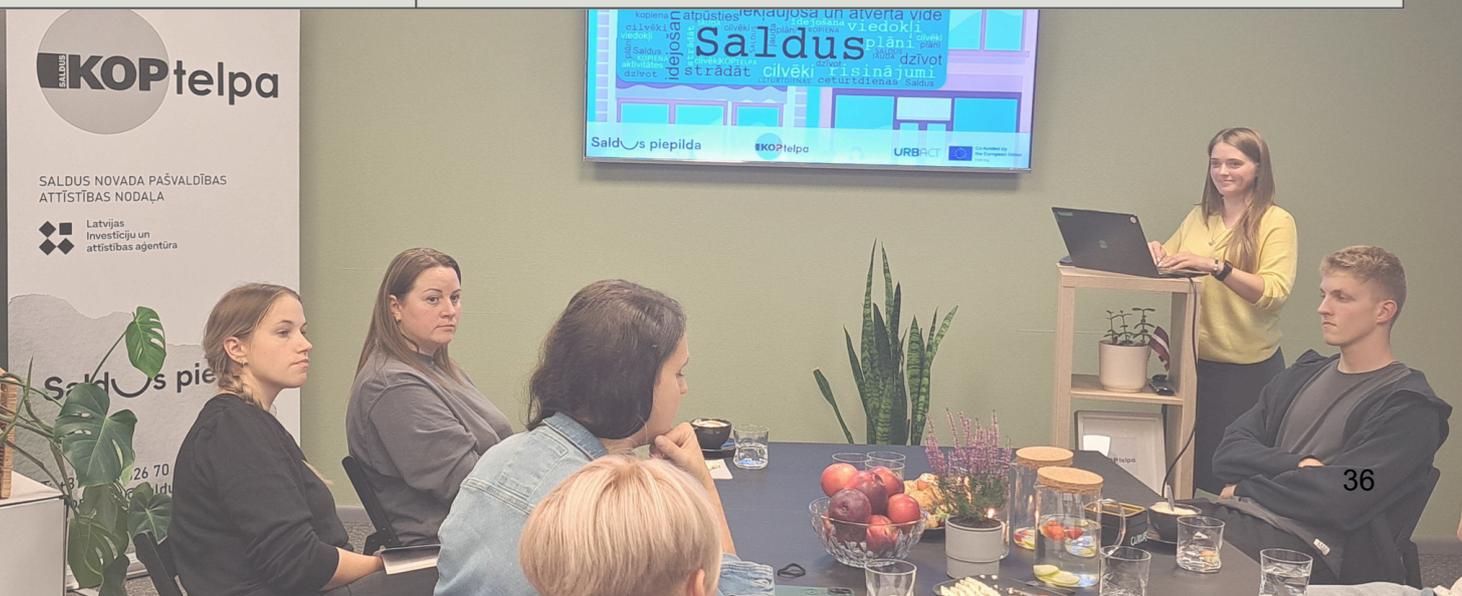
### Intervention area 3: Community

SO3 To develop an open and inclusive community in Saldus that actively welcomes newcomers by fostering social connections, supporting grassroots community initiatives, and providing a strong local support network and tools for integration. The municipality will serve as a facilitator, empowering residents to initiate regular community-led events and activities that encourage participation and a sense of belonging.

	SO3.1 “Mentor for Newcomer” mentoring program providing a person – mentor who individually helps new residents to get settled
<b>Main objective</b>	To develop and validate the model of activity whose goal is to facilitate the successful integration of newcomers into the Saldus community by providing individualized support and connecting them with local resources

<b>Implementation steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Foundation &amp; Design</li> <li>• Pilot Implementation &amp; Feedback</li> <li>• Refinement &amp; Approval</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	2nd half of 2025 (approbation phase)
<b>Responsibilities</b>	Main: APN project team Involved: ULG
<b>Costs and funding</b>	EUR 400 (APN project budget)
<b>What would success look like</b>	Program is recognized as a valuable resource and approved by stakeholders. Newcomers feel welcomed and integrated, successfully access local services, mentors are satisfied with their experience
<b>Risk mitigation</b>	As program success depends on both parties' interest, risk is mentors or mentees losing interest, failing to meet, or not actively participating. Program administrators should schedule regular, non-intrusive check-ins (e.g., monthly surveys, brief phone calls) with both parties to identify challenges early and offer support. Secure funding and resources in time for program future implementation (e.g., municipal support, project funding) and build partnerships with local organizations
<b>SO3.4 Adult interest-based education classes at Saldus children's music and art schools</b>	
<b>Main objective</b>	To expand the community outreach and utilization of Saldus Children's Music and Art Schools by providing accessible, high-quality, interest-based education classes for adults, thereby fostering lifelong learning, enriching local cultural engagement, and generating additional revenue for the institutions
<b>Implementation steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a diverse initial curriculum, outlining class structures, learning outcomes, required materials Instructor recruitment</li> <li>• Assessment and preparation of the school's facilities</li> <li>• Targeted marketing campaign reaching adult audiences in Saldus and surrounding area</li> <li>• Establish an efficient registration system</li> <li>• Launch the first set of classes</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	Continuously, starting from 2026/2027 school year
<b>Responsibilities</b>	Main: Saldus Children's Music and Art Schools Involved: Saldus Culture, Tourism and Sports Centre
<b>Costs and funding</b>	A fee-based activity

<b>What would success look like</b>	The program consistently attracts and retains a diverse group of adult learners, enriching their lives through music and art while significantly increasing the schools' community engagement and financial sustainability. This would establish the schools as vibrant, inclusive cultural hubs for all ages in Saldus
<b>Risk mitigation</b>	Low enrolment & financial non-viability is arguably the most significant risk because if not enough adults sign up, the program won't be sustainable and could even incur losses for the schools. To mitigate this risk, before launching, conduct surveys or focus groups within the Saldus community to identify specific interests, preferred timings, and willingness to pay. Start with a diverse pilot offering of classes
	<b>SO3.2 Case study through qualitative interviews with newcomers</b>
<b>Main objective</b>	To gain a deep, nuanced understanding of the initial settlement experiences, challenges, and successful adaptation strategies of newcomers in the local community through qualitative interviews, thereby informing the development and refinement of more effective support programs and integration initiatives
<b>Implementation steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization of initial online survey</li> <li>• Conduct in-depth qualitative interviews using a semi-structured or open-ended approach</li> <li>• Data analysis &amp; thematic identification</li> <li>• Report and disseminate the findings to relevant stakeholders</li> <li>• Prepare practical recommendations for a policy development</li> </ul>
<b>Timeframe</b>	2nd half of 2025
<b>Responsibilities</b>	Main: ULG Involved: APN project team
<b>Costs and funding</b>	EUR 300 (APN project budget)
<b>What would success look like</b>	Case study yields rich, actionable insights into newcomers' experiences, revealing both common challenges and effective coping mechanisms. This would lead to the development of new, highly targeted initiatives that genuinely address the real-world needs of new residents, ultimately enhancing their integration and well-being in the community
<b>Risk mitigation</b>	The main risk is that there are no clear ways established in the municipality for obtaining information and reaching newcomers. To solve this risk involvement of stakeholders from different sections would be crucial.



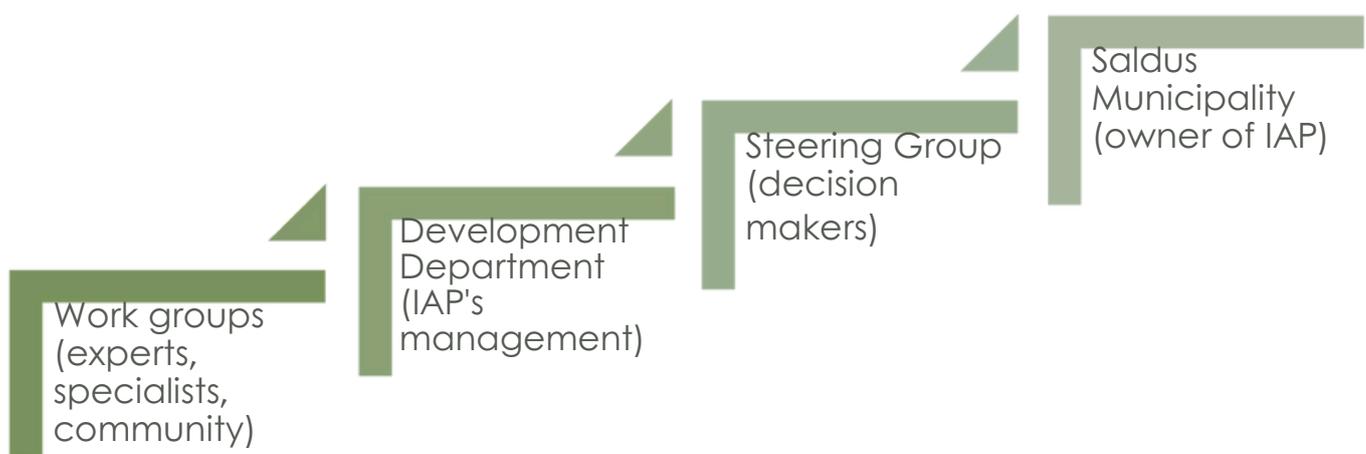
# SECTION IV

# 08 Implementation framework

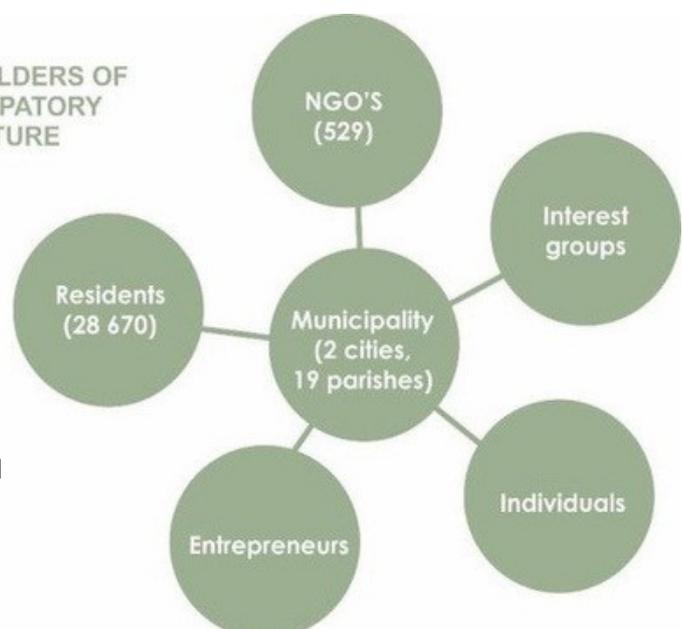
## 8.1. Governance process

Saldus Municipality, as owner and responsible local authority, has been identified as the key player for the overall governance of this IAP. Upon the successful implementation of project “Residents of the Future”, Integrated Action Plan will be formally transferred to the Development Department of the Municipality. This department is the designated authority responsible for overseeing and managing all planning documents within local government.

This ensures the plan's long-term integration into the municipality's strategic framework and continuous monitoring. The governance of the IAP's implementation therefore will be as follows:



### STAKEHOLDERS OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE



A cornerstone of the governance philosophy is an active involvement of the community. Saldus is proud to have well-established traditions of civic participation in the region, and these will continue to be vital to the IAP's ongoing governance.

Regular opportunities for public input, feedback, and participation will be maintained, ensuring the plan remains responsive to the evolving needs and aspirations of our residents. This commitment to citizen involvement fosters transparency, builds ownership, and ultimately contributes to the sustained success of our collective efforts.

## 8.2. Monitoring

Municipality Development Department will ensure yearly IAP implementation monitoring process. Monitoring a planning document is crucial to ensure that activity, program, or strategy stays on track, achieves its objectives, and adapts to changing circumstances. Comprehensive steps for effectively monitoring a planning document will be:

- Revisiting IAP yearly to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the overarching goals in each of intervention areas, specific objectives, and expected outcomes.
- For each specific objective, choosing specific, measurable indicators.
- Clearly assigning roles and responsibilities for data collection to specific individuals or teams (Head of Development Department responsible for assigning roles).
- Data collection, comparing actual performance against the planned objectives and targets.
- Based on the analysis, defining and implementing corrective actions (working groups consisting of municipal specialists and stakeholders organized on specific topics).
- If significant changes to the original Integrated Action Plan are required (e.g., scope changes, budget adjustments, timeline revisions), following a defined change management process established in Saldus Municipality, at the same time ensuring all stakeholders are informed and agree.

The following indicators are intended to measure the implementation of the plan, specifically, for each of the strategic objectives:

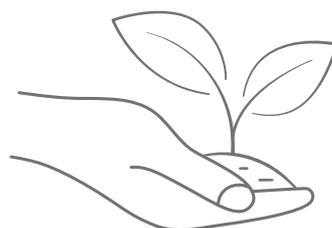
<b>Intervention area</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Strategic Objective</b>	<b>Monitoring Indicators</b>
<b>Small entrepreneurship growth</b>	<b>SO1</b>	To foster the growth of small entrepreneurship in Saldus by providing accessible resources and creating a supportive business environment that encourages innovation and long-term success	No. of new small and micro-businesses emerged EUR of external financing attracted No. of consulted business owners (by municipality specialist)
<b>Suitable and affordable housing</b>	<b>SO2</b>	To create better living conditions for residents by providing them with affordable and quality housing, thus contributing to the promotion of social well-being, reducing social tensions, and creating a sustainable urban environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EUR invested by municipality and private investors in the infrastructure developments in residential areas</li> <li>• No. of renovated/ auctioned municipality-owned apartments per year</li> <li>• Improvements in residents' satisfaction</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<b>SO3</b>	To develop an open and inclusive community in Saldus that actively welcomes newcomers by fostering social connections, supporting grassroots community initiatives, and providing a strong local support network and tools for integration. The municipality will serve as a facilitator, empowering residents to initiate regular community-led events and activities that encourage participation and a sense of belonging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of individually supported new residents in "Mentor for Newcomer" program</li> <li>• System created in Saldus to obtain up-to-date information about new residents</li> <li>• Improvement in overall wellbeing and satisfaction with life in Saldus</li> </ul>

### 8.3. Securing Funding for Planned Actions

No doubt, funding is a crucial factor for implementing planned actions of this IAP. Necessary calculations have been completed, and it's clear that the largest financial burden will still fall on the municipal budget of Saldus Municipality (own resources as well as loans). Therefore, it's essential to identify appropriate and available external funding sources to alleviate this strain and ensure the successful realization of this plan's goals. This plan covers a period of approximately 3 years, and initial calculations by each Strategic Objective (intervention area) are as follows:

#### Strategic Objective SO1

	Total amount in EUR	Municipality budget, EUR	External funding, EUR	Private sources, EUR
SO1.1	12 000	2400	9600	
SO1.2	62 490	47 790	14 700	
SO1.3	90 000	90 000		
SO1.4	0	0	0	0
SO1.5	36 000	7200	28 800	
SO1.6	75 000	75 000		
SO1.7	15			15
SO1.8	7500	7500		
	283 005	229 890	53 100	15



#### Strategic Objective SO2

	Total amount in EUR	Municipality budget, EUR	External funding, EUR	Private sources, EUR
SO2.1	4 858 000	2 186 100	2 671 900	
SO2.2	10 000 000			10 000 000
SO2.3	0	0	0	0
SO2.4	180 000	180 000		
SO2.5	2 250 000	640 000	1 610 000	
SO2.6	0	0	0	0
SO2.7	0	0	0	0
	17 288 000	3 006 100	2 673 510	10 000 000



#### Strategic Objective SO3

	Total amount in EUR	Municipality budget, EUR	External funding, EUR	Private sources, EUR
SO3.1	400	80	320	
SO3.2	300	60	240	
SO3.3	0	0	0	0
SO3.4	36 864		22 120	14 744
SO3.5	10 000	9000	500	5 000
SO3.6	9 000			
SO3.7	16 800			16 800
	73 364	9140	27 680	36 544

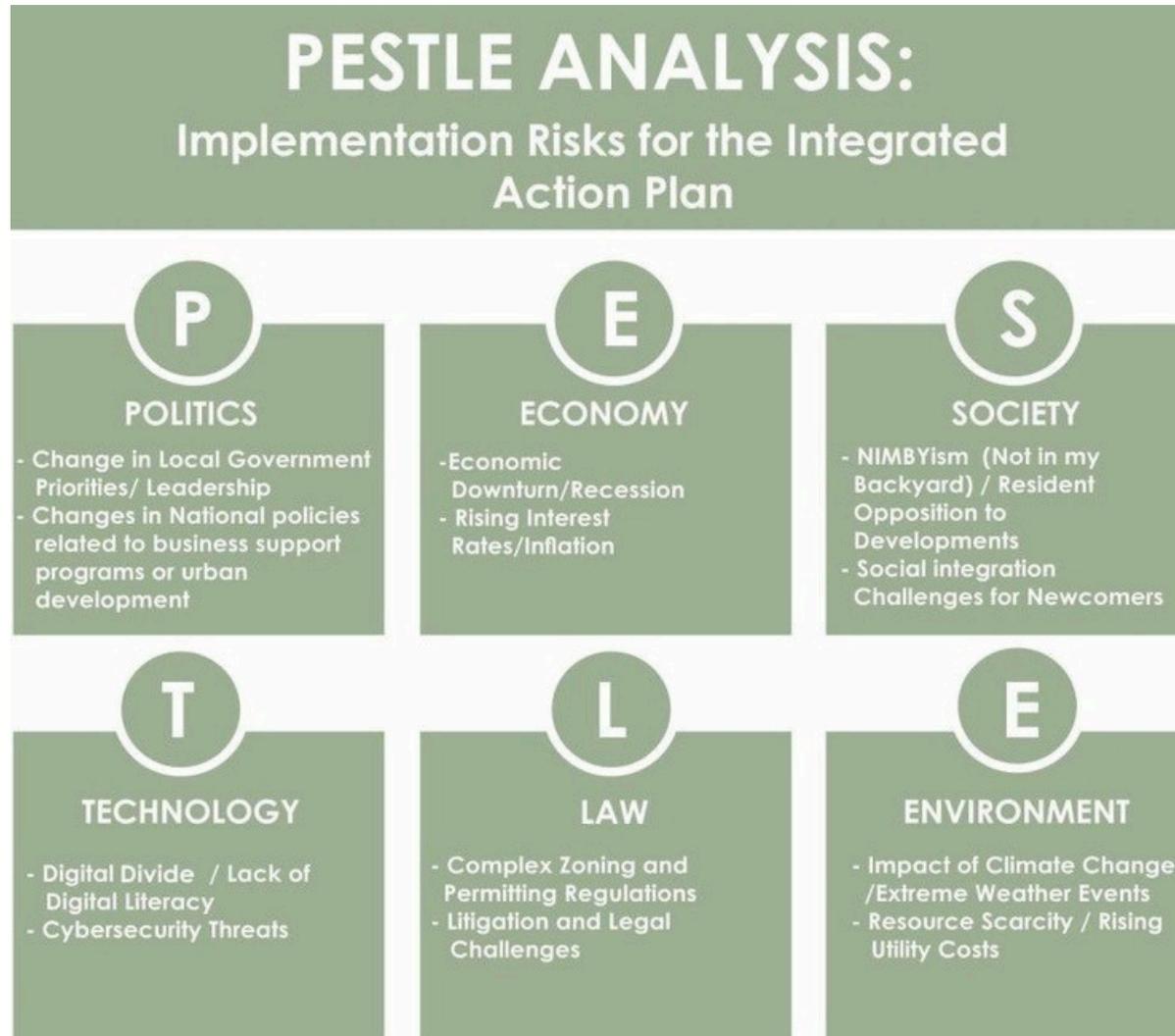


## Possible sources of external funding for the period 2025-2028

Funding instrument	Description
<p><b>European Territorial Cooperation- INTERREG</b></p> <p><b>Relevant for Actions:</b> <b>SO1.3, SO1.4, SO1.6, SO1.8, SO2.4, SO3.3</b></p>	<p>INTERREG programs available in Latvia, Kurzeme region for the period 2021-2027:</p> <p><i>Interreg VI-A Estonia-Latvia Programme 2021-2027</i></p> <p>Priority 2 - Jointly and smartly growing businesses, Specific objective RSO1.3. Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments.</p> <p><i>Interreg VI-A Latvia-Lithuania Programme 2021-2027</i></p> <p>Priority I Capacity building and people-to-people cooperation Specific objective 1.1 Other actions to support better cooperation governance (ISO6.6)</p> <p><i>Central Baltic Programme 2021-2027</i></p> <p>Programme Objective 1 - More exports by SMEs</p> <p>Programme Objective 2 - More new scaled-up growth companies</p> <p>Programme Objective 6 - Improved employment opportunities on labour market</p> <p>Programme Objective 7 - Improved public services and solutions for citizens</p> <p><i>Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021-2027</i></p> <p>Programme objective 1.1 Resilient economies and communities</p>
<p><b>LEADER</b></p> <p><b>Relevant for Actions:</b> <b>SO1.2, SO3.4</b></p>	<p>LEADER in Latvia – an opportunity supported by the European Union to implement your ideas in rural areas. Support for local development initiatives that promote the sustainability of rural communities, improve the social situation in rural areas, create a favourable environment for living, entrepreneurship and the development of rural areas within the framework of the CAP SP is provided by implementing the LEADER approach. The following activities are eligible for support locally in the territory of Saldus region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Local economic strengthening initiatives</li> <li>· Community strengthening and local development initiatives</li> </ul>
<p><b>EEA/Norway Grants Programme in Latvia "Civil Society Fund"</b></p> <p><b>Relevant for Actions:</b> <b>SO3.4, SO3.5, SO3.6</b></p>	<p>The EEA/Norway Grants Programme "Civil Society Fund" could tentatively start its work in 2026 and is a continuation of the "Active Residents Fund" programme. The total funding for the programme for Latvia is planned at 9.88 million.</p>
<p><b>State Culture Capital Foundation</b></p> <p><b>Relevant for Actions:</b> <b>SO3.4</b></p>	<p>The aim of the State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF) is to promote a balanced development of creativity in all the branches of art and preservation of the cultural heritage in the country in conjunction with the guidelines of the state cultural policy.</p> <p>The SCCF announces and administers culture projects' competitions, allots lifelong grants for culture and arts workers for their life achievement in development of culture and art and gives financial support to short term educational, creative or scientific travels abroad.</p>

## 8.4. Risk assessment, prioritisation and mitigation strategies

**PESTLE analysis** was used by ULG to carry out a risk assessment of the implementation of this IAP as the PESTLE provides a **structured** way to identify the external factors that could pose risks to Integrated Action Plan's implementation.



Type of Risk	Description	Impact	Severity	Likelihood	Mitigation
	A municipal election or a change in key leadership positions could lead to a shift in political priorities, potentially de-emphasizing one or more intervention areas or reallocating funding away from the plan.	Loss of momentum, reduced funding, stalled projects, need for re-evaluation and potential re-approval, loss of stakeholder trust.	High	Medium to High	Embed the plan's objectives and key strategies into long-term municipal strategic documents that transcend individual political terms. Build strong public support for the plan.
	Changes in national policies related to housing subsidies, business support programs, immigration, or urban development could impact the availability of funds or create conflicting regulatory environments.	Reduced external funding opportunities, increased regulatory burden, legal challenges, need for plan adaptation.	Medium to high	Medium to high	Reduce reliance on a single source of funding. Establish a dedicated mechanism for tracking proposed changes in legislation. Develop multiple scenarios for how policy changes might impact IAP. For each scenario, identify potential impacts and pre-plan alternative approaches.
	A general economic slowdown could lead to reduced municipal revenue (from taxes), decreased consumer spending (impacting small businesses), and higher unemployment, affecting both entrepreneurship and housing affordability.	Budget cuts for the plan, reduced demand for new businesses, decreased ability of residents to afford housing (even if "affordable" options are built), increased social welfare needs.	High	Medium (cyclical, unpredictable timing)	Reduce reliance on a single funding stream (e.g., municipal budget). Explore national grants, EU structural funds, private sector partnerships etc. Adjust scope or timeline based on economic conditions. Prioritize initiatives with lower upfront costs or higher immediate returns.
	Increases in interest rates can make borrowing more expensive for housing developers and entrepreneurs, while inflation drives up construction costs and operational expenses for businesses.	Increased costs for housing projects (making them less affordable or financially viable), higher barriers to entry for new entrepreneurs, erosion of purchasing power for residents.	High	Medium to High	Design projects with flexible phasing, allowing for scaling up or down based on economic conditions. Encourage "financial literacy" programs for local entrepreneurs to help them understand hedging strategies, cost management, and diversification of funding.
	"Not In My Backyard" attitude. Existing residents may oppose new housing developments (especially affordable housing or	Project delays, public protests, legal challenges, strained community relations, inability to implement	High	High	Start engagement processes very early in the planning phase. Clearly communicate the benefits of the plan and specific projects. Showcase success stories of

	<p>denser constructions) or business initiatives (e.g., noise, traffic, change in character) due to concerns about property values, congestion, or neighbourhood aesthetics.</p>	<p>planned housing solutions, business developments, or newcomers' integration.</p>			<p>newcomers contributing positively to the community.</p>
	<p>Despite efforts for a "welcoming community," cultural misunderstandings, language barriers, or pre-existing social tensions could hinder the effective integration of newcomers, impacting community cohesion.</p>	<p>Creation of parallel communities, limited participation of newcomers in economic/social life, potential for social friction, failure to achieve a truly "open and welcoming" community.</p>	<p>Medium to High</p>	<p>Medium to High</p>	<p>Establish dedicated centres or programs that provide newcomers with essential information. Organize cultural exchange events, workshops, and community festivals that celebrate diversity and encourage interaction between new residents and locals.</p>
	<p>If support for small entrepreneurship relies heavily on digital tools, e-commerce, or online training, a significant portion of entrepreneurs or residents (especially older generations or some newcomers) may lack the necessary digital skills or access.</p>	<p>Limited effectiveness of digital support programs, exclusion of certain entrepreneurial groups, slower adoption of modern business practices.</p>	<p>Medium to High</p>	<p>Medium to High</p>	<p>Offer a mix of digital and non-digital support for entrepreneurs and community members (e.g., in-person workshops, paper guides alongside online resources). Ensure that any digital platforms or tools developed/ related to the IAP implementation are highly intuitive and accessible to people with varying digital skills.</p>
	<p>Increased reliance on digital platforms for municipal services, community engagement, or small business operations creates vulnerabilities to cyberattacks, data breaches, or system failures.</p>	<p>Loss of sensitive data, disruption of services, reputational damage, financial costs for recovery.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Implement a multi-layered security approach. Conduct mandatory, regular cybersecurity training for all municipal employees. Provide clear guidelines and best practices for small businesses using municipal digital platforms. Offer resources or workshops on basic cybersecurity for entrepreneurs.</p>
	<p>Existing or new local zoning laws, building codes, and complex permitting processes can significantly delay or complicate affordable housing construction and the establishment of new businesses.</p>	<p>Increased development costs, project delays, discouragement of potential developers/entrepreneurs, legal disputes.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Establish a cross-departmental task force within the municipality focused specifically on fast-tracking permits and approvals for projects aligned with the IAP. Publish user-friendly guides, checklists, and flowcharts for all relevant permitting processes.</p>

	<p>Stakeholders (e.g., residents, (e.g., residents, environmental groups, competing businesses) might launch legal challenges against specific projects or policies within the plan.</p>	<p>Significant project delays, injunctions or cancellations of initiatives, reputational damage.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium to High</p>	<p>Obtain all necessary permits and approvals in advance. Identify potential allies among stakeholder groups, engage in strategic partnerships to build broader support for the plan and its objectives.</p>
	<p>Increased frequency or intensity of heatwaves, floods, storms, or other climate-related events could damage existing housing, disrupt business operations, and strain city infrastructure.</p>	<p>Damage to infrastructure and buildings, increased maintenance costs, displacement of residents, business interruptions, higher insurance premiums for housing.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Medium to High</p>	<p>Invest in green infrastructure solutions to mitigate urban heat island effect, improve stormwater management, and enhance air quality. Encourage and support small businesses to adopt sustainable practices.</p>
	<p>Increased costs or reduced availability of essential resources like water, energy, or construction materials due to environmental factors or policy changes could impact the financial viability of housing and business operations.</p>	<p>Damage to infrastructure and buildings, increased maintenance costs, displacement of residents, business interruptions, higher insurance premiums for housing.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Medium to High</p>	<p>Conduct public awareness campaigns on responsible resource consumption. Promote waste reduction, reuse, and recycling initiatives for construction and other sectors. Facilitate networking opportunities for businesses to share knowledge on resource management.</p>

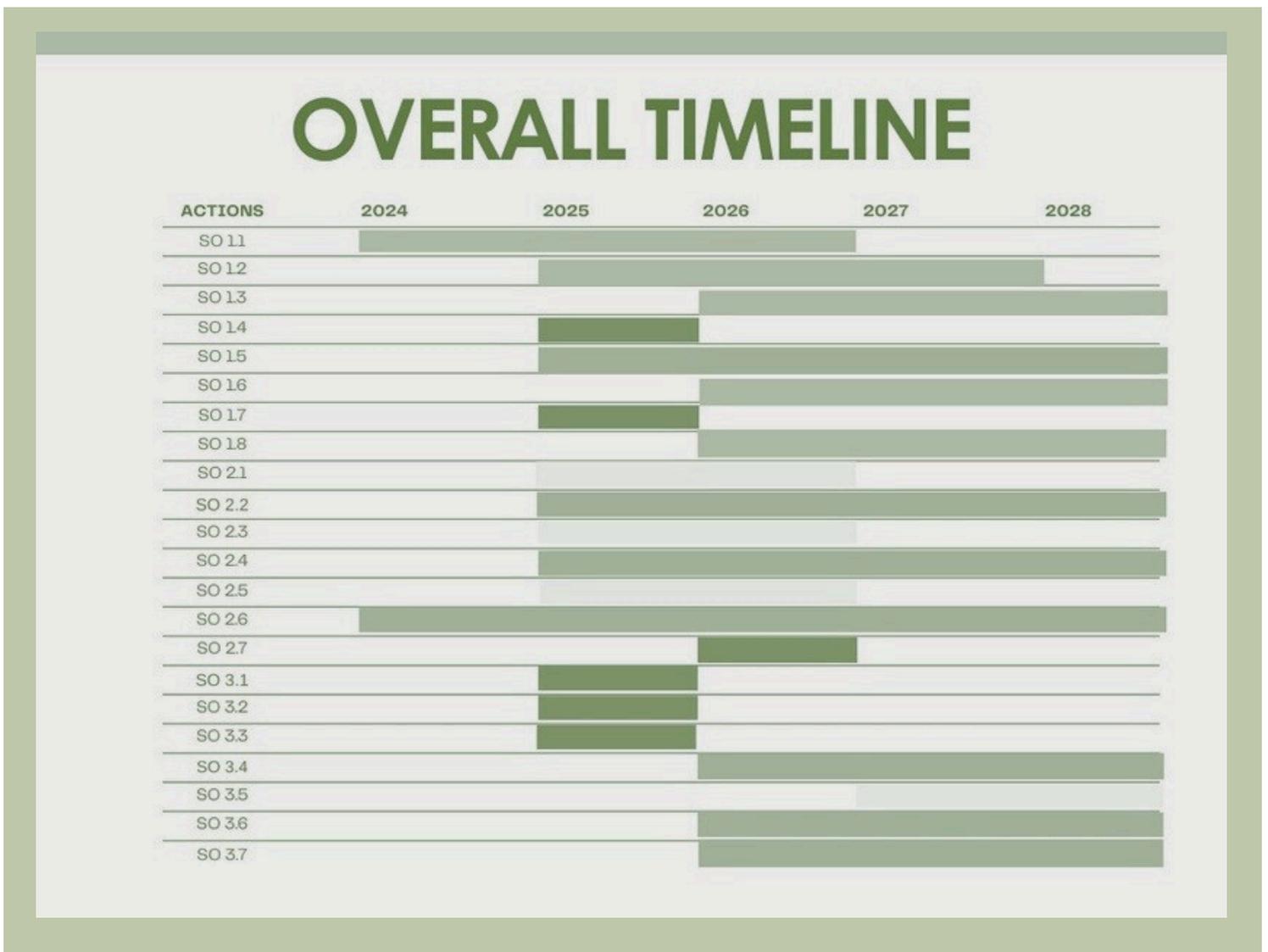


## 8.5. Timeline

This chapter provides the overall timeline for the planned actions to ensure IAP's integration over time, planning **short** (1 year), **mid-** (2-3 years) and **long-term** (more than 3 years) solutions. The overall timeline spans from 2024 to 2028, indicating a multi-year, strategic plan. Prioritization is guided by the plan's internal logic, while also considering a cost-benefit ratio. Many actions run concurrently, suggesting a **complex**, integrated plan where various components need to progress in parallel.

Actions under **Strategic Objective 1 (SO1)** involve a mix of early, foundational activities and several very long-term, sustained efforts that **extend** throughout (and even **beyond**) the majority of the plan's duration. The staggered starts suggest that some actions might build upon others or become relevant at different points. Most actions under **SO2** kick off around mid-2025. Many of these actions run for **extended periods**, particularly until the end of 2028. This indicates that Specific Objective 2 involves sustained implementation and ongoing activities.

Actions under **SO3** generally **start later** in the overall timeline, primarily from mid-2025 to mid-2026. Some actions are relatively short, starting mid-to-late 2025 and concluding by early 2026. They could be initial assessments, planning phases, or **quick-win** initiatives, followed by a more sustained implementation phase.



## 8.6. IAP's Communication Strategy

The goal of this Communication Strategy is to ensure that the public, businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other stakeholders are informed about the IAP's goals, activities, and benefits, and are actively engaged in its implementation.

Strategy Components	Description
<b>Target Audiences</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Municipal Staff and Council Members:</b> Internal communication to ensure a unified understanding and support for the plan.</li> <li>2. <b>Residents:</b> The broadest audience that needs to be informed about upcoming changes and opportunities.</li> <li>3. <b>Businesses and Investors:</b> Information about planned projects and support mechanisms.</li> <li>4. <b>NGOs and Community Organizations:</b> Engagement in discussions and project implementation.</li> <li>5. <b>Media:</b> A key channel for disseminating information to the wider public.</li> </ol>
<b>Implementation Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Responsible:</b> Specialist for Business Support and Communication with Community (Development Department), Municipality PR Specialist.</li> <li>• <b>Supervision:</b> Deputy Chairwoman for Business, Society and NGO Cooperation.</li> </ul>
<b>Key Messages and Narratives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Vision and Goals:</b> "The IAP is the roadmap for our city's/municipality's future."</li> <li>• <b>Benefits:</b> "The IAP will foster economic growth, improve quality of life, and create new jobs."</li> <li>• <b>Engagement:</b> "Your opinion matters! Participate in discussions and help shape our future together!"</li> </ul>
<b>Communication Channels and Activities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Digital Channels:</b> Municipality website (dedicated section for IAP with an easy-to-perceive information) &amp; Facebook page (regular updates).</li> <li>2. <b>Media:</b> press releases (about IAP approval, launch of mayor projects, public consultations), interviews.</li> <li>3. <b>In-Person Events:</b> public consultations, "open the doors of the city" events etc.</li> </ol>
<b>Communication Timeline</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Initial Phase:</b> Information about the plan's development.</li> <li>• <b>Approval Phase:</b> Widely announced plan's approval by the council.</li> <li>• <b>Implementation Phase:</b> Regular updates on project progress and achievements, and report on results.</li> </ul>
<b>Measuring Success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of <b>visitors</b> to the dedicated section on the municipal website.</li> <li>• Number of <b>attendees</b> at public consultations.</li> <li>• Reach and <b>engagement</b> of <b>social media</b> posts.</li> <li>• Number of <b>publications</b> in the media.</li> </ul>

## Resources

1. Residents of the Future: Baseline Study. December 2023
2. Saldus Region Development Programme for 2022-2028
3. Saldus Region Sustainable Development Strategy 2022-2038
4. Working Paper / Small and medium-sized towns and cities: policies strengthening their role in achieving active, inclusive, and functional territories. April 2024
5. Dopitova M. Social Engagement and Rural Newcomers. *Socialni studija / Social Studies* 2/2016
6. Demographic projections for Latvia: 1998 – 2025. Demographic Centre, University of Latvia. 1998
7. Demography of Europe – 2024 edition. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2024>
8. URBACT IV Action Planning Networks 2023-2025. Integrated Action Plan. Guidelines for networks. July 2023
9. Shrinking Cities. European Commission, January 2022.  
<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC126011>

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