

Expanding natural capital through cultural planning: Experiences from the JTF project in Ilomantsi, Finland

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**Bog 2.0. Vitality in Ilomantsi
via comprehensive
sustainability -
Just Transition Fund Finland
(JTF) project**

- Aim: To get rid of the energy use of peat but in ways that no one suffers more than others.
- In the beginning, the project plan included a cultural collaboration without cultural planning.
- Culture guides the direction of change and how the value of nature is understood.



Ilomantsi

Quick Overview



Approximately
4,500 inhabitants

Ageing population

3172km² area

The easternmost
municipality of
the European
Union

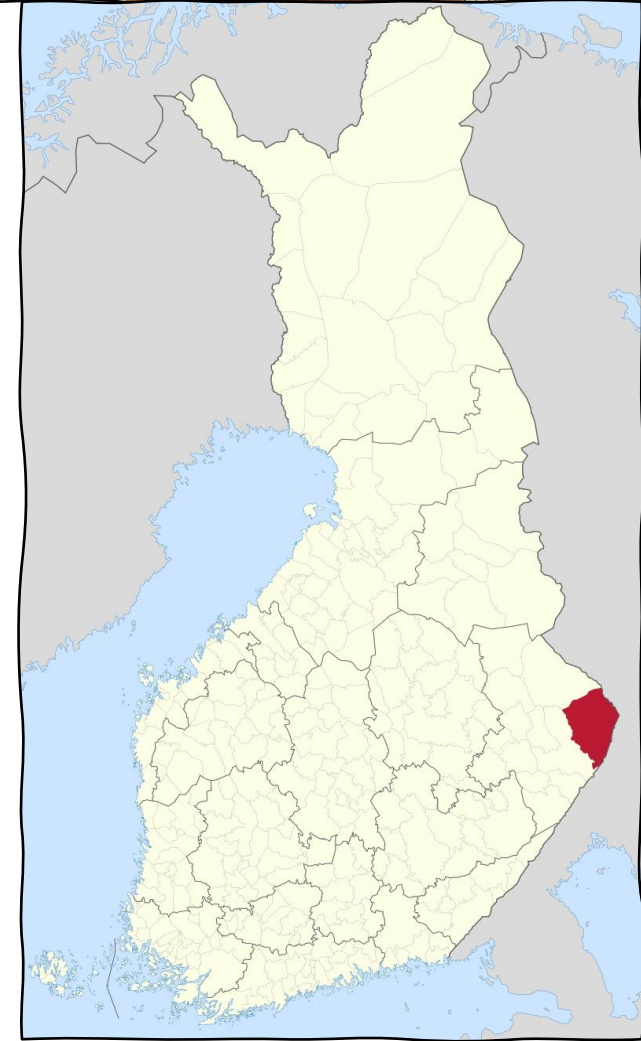
100 km of
common border
with Russia

Known for
Karelian and
Orthodox culture

A heated peat
issue (still energy
use, activated
carbon)

Division of work:
Services 73%,
Manufacturing 17%,
Agriculture 9%,
Public sector 42%, private
sector 40%,
entrepreneurship 16%

Large state land
ownership



Background: Contested bogs in Irish Midlands

- Rapid transition in peat production since 2019/20.
- Failure to recognize the intertwined problems that followed.
- What is needed: Comprehensive sustainability
 - Long-term and multidisciplinary development with clear perceptions of past, present and future.
- ***Contested bogs in Ireland: a viewpoint on climate change responsiveness in local culture*** Häyrynen, Simo / Caitriona Devery & Aparajita Banerjee (2021) https://www.ucd.ie/peat-hub-ireland/t4media/367_Contested%20Bogs%20In%20Ireland.pdf





Comprehensive sustainability

- No use to focus only on one sector or group of people.
- The interdependence of the different pillars of sustainability transition must be recognized and the interfaces of 'silos' must be sought.
- Often easier said than done – that's why comprehensive sustainability must be scaled locally (e.g. UN – *The Critical Importance of SDG Localization*)

Path dependent culture in a polarized situation

- Ilomantsi's role within the national resource strategy has remained consistent for decades.
- Path dependence constrains future development and provides strong social license to operate.
 - Public hearings are well-organized but formalized and exclusive
- **The cultural dimension of path dependence resembles Williamsian selective tradition**

The public cultural image is shaped by centrally organized pluralism (including Karelian culture, war history, and the valorization of resource production), while other cultural trajectories remain specific to distinct groups

Expanding nature value pathways through a cultural lens

How to get **behind the public curtain?**

Interviews Long-term residents, returnees, recent incomers, summer residents

“Well, maybe I have the wrong view on this, but... I know this might be a wrong answer from me...” (H6)

Digging alternative traditions: History cards

To make the local cultural history related to the bog a more visible part of local self-understanding and to create a more diverse historical image

The findings were used for...

- School projects at schools and in the field
- Integrated theatre and short film by a local theatre group.
- Cultural branding of SMEs

Gentle cultural transition: Widening - not changing the path

Paw Stories (a subproject)

Branding alternative uses of the bog

- **Paw Stories workshops**
 - With the experts of the folk poetry, the wild food and the cultural history of the bog and the bear
- **Paw Stories online**
 - Entrepreneurs introductions on the website and social media of Karhufestivaali – Bear Festival. Altogether over 20: café-restaurants, painters, artisans, hostels, farmers, tour guides etc.
- **Service designer to develop the services of the entrepreneurs**
- Paw Stories exhibitions, Pop-up village event (Sultsina 2.0), animal-themed stone painting workshop for the public
- **Christmas market** at Möhkö 7.12.2025, Paw Stories products



Concluding remarks

Comprehensive sustainability requires

- Open communication, participation and shaking established ways of thinking
- Identifying and resolving both the old and the new injustices emerging as a result of the transition
- Community-empowering cultural reconstruction.
- Patience with setbacks.

Comprehensive sustainability provides

- * Multidisciplinary competence of change
- * Long-term widening of nature capital: including recreation, health, well-being, cultural production.
- * Profound socio-cultural connection with the National Restoration plan



Thank you!

- Any sense for the local community or the cultural planning?
- How to proceed?
- Journals or publications forums for this approach?

