



# The Nest

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# Who we are

Vratsa Software Community is a group of people brought together by a common goal. We want to give equal chance to the people of one of the poorest regions in Europe. A chance for better education, a chance for a better job and a chance to stay in their hometown and live a respectable and complete life.

## **Our mission is**

*To build an IT community which provides quality education to people in Vratsa so they can access well-paid, meaningful jobs in the digital industry without leaving their hometown.*

## **Our vision is**

*As of 2022 onwards, 40 people to start career in the software industry in Vratsa every year.*

# The Problem

In the last 15 years the population of the region has decreased by 32% and youth unemployment rate is at its highest of 40%.

Without a sustainable industry, the people of Vratsa and the region are forced to relocate to the capital or go abroad to find a reasonably paid job to support themselves and their families. Finding an interesting and challenging job is also hard in Vratsa, considering that most full-time jobs are in the local government or in the services - shop staff and resellers.

This huge gap in the jobs market started when in the early 2000s one of the biggest factories in Vratsa, which provided thousands of jobs to a big part of the town's residents, closed down. Currently, the region doesn't have an industry that can support that many people, which creates the huge wave of internal immigration.



# Our Solution

We created Vratsa Software with the idea to provide quality education in the fields of Information technologies to the people of the Vratsa region, to help them master relevant skills to the software companies and to empower them to find jobs or create their own ventures in that field in Vratsa.

We are stronger when we stand together, that is why Vratsa Software acts as a unifier, a gathering point for the the ambitious people who strive to learn and grow. By bringing them together and by creating this network of digital minds, we want to attract the software and technological businesses of Bulgaria to our town and develop an industry which could contribute hugely to the town's economic development.

This journey hasn't been easy, but the roads we take aren't as steep as they used to be, when all of this started. Listed below

are some of the activities and results we have achieved over the last four years since Vratsa Software was born.



# Events

## CodeWeek Vratsa

(<http://codeweek.vratsa.net>)

Our first and biggest conference which we organized for the 4th time in 2017 is dedicated to showing the people of the region how many opportunities the IT field has to offer. The conference is held during Europe's Code Week and is a two-day event consisting of different workshops. Last year we had 15 different workshops which introduced the participants to the various professions in IT and allowed them to create something in the field they choose for themselves. Each year the conference attracts between 200 and 300 participants and it's free.

## HackVratsa

(<http://hack.vratsa.net/>)

HackVratsa is a two-day coding competition - a hackathon. It shows the mentoring companies that there are capable people in the town, which are just waiting to realize their potential. The event attracts around 40 people in 15 teams each year. The first edition was in 2016. This year the topic was "Space", allowing the teams to create solutions for the problems of the future.

## RailsGirls Vratsa

(<https://www.facebook.com/railsgirlsvratsa/>)



RailsGirls is an international format for introducing girls and women to the IT field by a two-day workshop. This event is organized for a third year by some of our alumni students with our help.

## Treasure Hunt Vratsa

(<http://hunt.vratsa.net/>)

The treasure hunt games are logical puzzles that lead to physical locations in the town, allowing teams to compete for being the first who have found the treasure. 2018 was the fourth year in a row that attracts more than 100 people to the event. The game is targeting a broader audience, allowing more people to hear about Vratsa Software and also bringing some tourists from the capital to Vratsa for a day.



## One Year Training Program

(<http://school.vratsasoftware.com/>)

Our main initiative in Vratsa Software is the one-year programming training. Each fall we take 60 to 80 trainees - both high-school students and adults, to train them so they can become programmers (developers). For the last four years, over 300 people have started this course and over 100 have graduated successfully. Almost all of the successfully graduated adults have found jobs in the IT fields. 20 of them work in the IT in Vratsa.

## Digital Marketing Course

This year we introduced a new course, adding a new profession to our portfolio. 50

people enrolled for the 4-month digital marketing course and they soon will be getting their certificates.

## PRO Academy for IT and Entrepreneurship

(<https://pro.vratsa.net/>)

This year we are organizing the second edition of our summer IT and entrepreneurship camp for high school and university students. The children work on real business cases, developing their own startups and exploring the possibilities of a real business in Bulgaria.

## CoderDojo, Telerik Kids, MindHub

We organize also different programs for kids, aged 6-13. We try to introduce logical thinking and problem-solving skills to the kids in our town early-on, gradually moving towards more programming-orientated activities over time.



# Results

Our efforts don't stop when the education program finishes. We also help the newly born programmers find their first jobs. We try to provide them with the so-needed first experience, which



would boost their career and get them hired.

The creation of job candidates for the software companies has allowed us to try attract such companies to the town. There are currently **three software companies** that have opened offices in Vratsa, because of our courses.

Thanks to our rigorous selection process and training, all of the high school students who have passed our course have been accepted to university after that and are studying IT.



# Network

For the few years we exist, we have created strong relationships with some valuable partners.

We are part of the social entrepreneurship network in Bulgaria of Reach for Change. Vratsa Software's founders are part of Teach for Bulgaria, as well as the Association of Bulgarian Leaders and Entrepreneurs.

In the Vratsa region, we have created strong ties with all high schools' headmasters, as well as the regional educational bureau. We also are supported by the mayor of Vratsa and his administration. We are partnering with local NGOs- the regional library, the local branch of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, House of Technology and Science Vratsa, the local Youth Center and so on.

In Bulgaria we are partnering with other software academies, such as Telerik, SoftUni, HackBulgaria and others. In some cases we share teaching resources, in others we use their grading system or we organize some of their courses in Vratsa, providing them with lecturers, space and access to the school system or other communication channels.

Our achievements have been recognized in multiple prestigious rankings and awards - nationally and internationally. We have won the social entrepreneurship competition of Reach for Change, the Bulgarian Association for Information Technology's educational award, the education award of the ministry of labour and social policy, the honorable Bulgarians award and the Google RISE Award. We were also included in in Forbes' 30 under 30 list for Europe in the category for social entrepreneurship.



# The Nest

As a natural step to our vision, we see two things.

First, we will enrich the professions our academy offers and allow more people to make their first steps in IT. This would happen by adding Quality Assurance and Design to the curriculum of Vratsa Software. All software companies need a QA and Design team to be successful. Apart from programming, these are the most needed abilities of the companies in Bulgaria and also require different skill set so we will be able to attract new people from the Vratsa region.

As a second step, we want to allow companies to access more easily IT specialists from Vratsa. We also want to allow freelancers from across Bulgaria and Europe to visit Vratsa, enjoy the nature and have the option to work for a week or two from the town. And last, we want the digital community that we have created in Vratsa to have a modern space which it can use to gather, work, invent and grow together. All of this is why we

want to create our own co-working space in Vratsa.

Our space would gather around 25-30 of the local tech gurus, small-company teams and digital nomads, allowing them to work in a creative environment with all their basic needs satisfied.

The space would also be used in events with diverse topics - from knowledge sharing to innovation and entrepreneurship. The space's design will also allow for use for outside purposes by third party organization. These would be the three main revenue streams of the Vratsa Co-working Space, which would quickly make the place sustainable and generating its own profit. A new employee would be hired to manage the space, attract programmers and companies, organize events and manage the outside hires.

These are the pieces of the puzzle that our society has grown to and which would allow it to grow bigger, collaborate more internally and externally and would boost its reach to the whole of Bulgaria.

The building and furniture cost of the Nest would be around 100 000 levs (around 50 000 euro). We've secured a place, thanks to Vratsa Municipality, which will be rent free. We are also supported by America for Bulgaria foundation, who will invest 10% from the total needed.

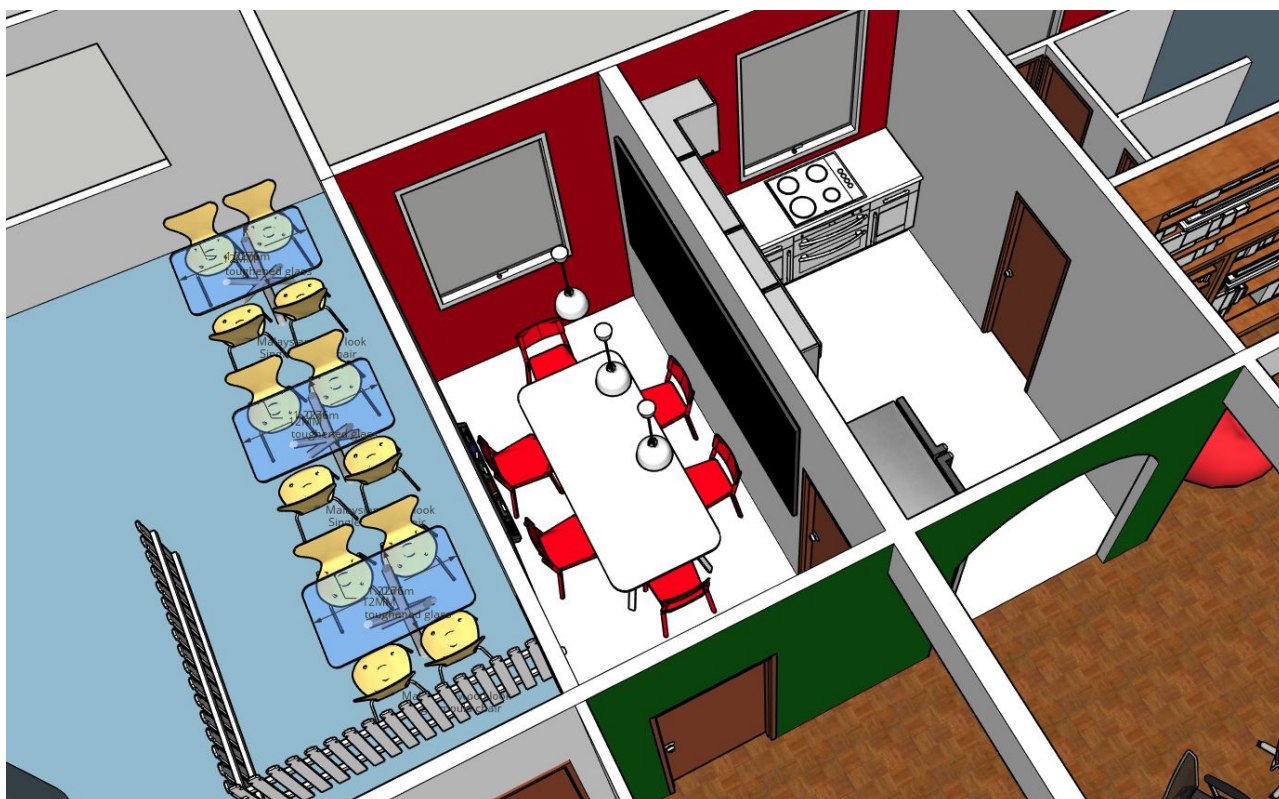


# Our Work So Far









- Meetings with founders of different co-working spaces in Sofia, Stara Zagora, Plovdiv and Samokov
- Co-working space research - prices and models

- Engaging an interior designer and an engineer and creation of a 3d visualization
- Business plan
- Securing a place rented by us