



Halfway Update

InnoGS halfway in numbers

140+

involved
target groups

25+

project activities
and events

20

project and
associated partners

10+

project-related
publications



InnoGS has reached the halfway point of its three-year journey. Over the first 18 months, the project has focused on building strong local and cross-regional communities, exploring how gamification and digital innovation can support regional development, and learning from diverse partner contexts across the Northern Periphery and Arctic area. This phase has been about laying foundations: testing approaches, engaging stakeholders, and identifying real needs on the ground.

As we move into the next 18 months, the focus shifts increasingly towards piloting solutions, scaling promising practices, and strengthening the emerging Digital Innovation District concept that connects people, skills and opportunities across regions.

18 months in – what has happened?

The first half of InnoGS has taken the project from building connections and identifying regional needs to testing approaches and shaping a shared direction for the Digital Innovation Districts.



Halfway Update

We engaged communities

Across the partner regions, ideas about place-based innovation have developed into practical activities. Finland has tested youth engagement through Game Camp 2025 and the eNuokkari digital youth space. In Sweden, Nordsken on Tour brought game culture and community activities to rural Sorsele, while Jörn has provided a setting for testing rural co-working. Ireland has strengthened game-development communities through incubator activities, Greenland launched the Greenland Gaming Discord community, and Iceland has developed its Húsavík pilot with regional actors.

Together, these activities are showing how physical and digital communities can support participation, skills and connections in different rural contexts.

Around 200 people took part in Nordsken on Tour in Sorsele showing that game-related activities can bring together different generations and groups even in a sparsely populated community.



We learned across borders

Transnational cooperation has allowed partners to learn directly from different regional ecosystems. Starting from the project kickoff in Cork in March 2025, joint learning has continued through online cooperation, international events and consortium visits.

In February 2026, partners visited Kuopio, Jyväskylä and Helsinki to explore Finnish game communities, learning environments and innovation ecosystems while jointly working on skills and policy topics. In April, cooperation continued in Galway alongside the FÍS Games Summit and visits hosted by Ardán. Partners have also tested methods together internationally, including a gamified co-creation session at the Interreg NPA 25th Anniversary Conference in Bodø.

The aim is not simply to copy good practices, but to understand how they can be adapted to different regional needs.

Digital and creative skills gaps were identified across the project regions alongside recruitment challenges and public-sector digital competence needs.





Halfway Update

We listened and identified what our regions need

InnoGS has mapped existing stakeholders, initiatives and support structures while gathering information about participation barriers, skills needs and regional development challenges. This work has connected community-level observations with wider themes such as talent attraction and retention, Smart Specialisation, public-sector digital competence, connectivity and regional resilience.

The purpose is to ensure that future pilots, services and recommendations are based on actual regional needs rather than assumptions.

89 young people shared their views through an online survey in rural Finland

highlighting barriers such as long distances, weak transport connections, costs and lack of information.



We are building the Digital Innovation Districts

The Digital Innovation District – DID – has developed from an initial project idea towards a shared framework for regional and international cooperation.

Partners first mapped the stakeholders, communities and initiatives that regional DIDs can build on. They then identified common needs such as low-threshold participation, community-building, learning opportunities, hybrid physical and digital environments, clear ownership and long-term sustainability.

At international level, InnoGS has mapped existing networks and platforms to determine where the future DID can connect actors and opportunities rather than duplicate what already exists. This groundwork now supports the next phase of development, testing and practical use.

Many functions needed for the future DID already exist – but across separate platforms, networks and programmes
which means the opportunity is to connect fragmented resources rather than build another isolated platform.





Halfway Update

What have we learned so far?

18 months of mapping, piloting and exchanging experiences have already highlighted some lessons that will guide the second half of InnoGS.

1. Local context matters

Rural regions may share challenges such as talent retention, accessibility and digital transformation, but their communities, resources and priorities differ. Good practices can be transferred, but rarely copied as they are – they need to be adapted together with local actors.

2. Communities need more than a space or platform

Physical and digital environments only become meaningful when people have a reason to participate. Low-threshold access, trust, community-building, learning opportunities, local partnerships and clear ownership are just as important as the technology or facilities themselves.

3. Gamification works best when it serves a real need

Our pilots have shown the value of game-based and participatory approaches in supporting dialogue, learning, inclusion and community engagement. The game element is not the goal itself – its value comes from making participation and problem-solving more engaging and accessible.

4. Different regions can be each other's resource

The partnership has revealed complementary strengths: from youth and NGO networks to incubation, regional innovation structures and grassroots communities. Cross-border cooperation is most valuable when one region's experience helps another address a challenge it is still working to solve.

The next 18 months

The first half of InnoGS has helped us understand regional needs, test different approaches and build the foundations for future solutions. During the next 18 months, the emphasis will increasingly move from learning to testing, transfer and uptake.

Regional pilots will continue, with lessons and good practices documented so that useful approaches can be adapted elsewhere. InnoGS will also work with public authorities, companies and other regional actors to develop and test user-centred digital services and explore how gamification can support more accessible and engaging solutions.

A major focus will be turning the **Digital Innovation District** concept into a practical international collaboration environment. The DID is planned to connect knowledge, communities and opportunities such as learning, jobs, internships, thesis projects and challenges to solve. Partners will develop guidance and training material to support its use.

The project will also move into new joint activities: online learning opportunities and transnational events where teams can respond to real societal, public-sector and business challenges and test the feasibility of gamified solutions across regions.

Most importantly, the second half is about making what we develop useful beyond the project itself.





Halfway Update

Extending our impact through INCLUDE

InnoGS is also part of INCLUDE – Clustering Inclusive Territories Driven by Digital Innovation, a 12-month Interreg Arctic clustering project running from March 2026 to February 2027.

INCLUDE brings together experiences and networks from MINDSET, InnoGS and Innovation in Urban Planning to create a transnational Community of Practice for public authorities and communities. The collaboration focuses on digital innovation, co-creation and more inclusive ways of involving people – particularly youth and underrepresented groups – in shaping their regions.

For InnoGS, INCLUDE provides an opportunity to share our methods and good practices with a wider network, learn from complementary projects and strengthen the connections between digital innovation, community engagement and regional development.



**AI has been used in the text and some of the images.*

Be part of what comes next

The progress made so far would not have been possible without our associated partners, Steering Group members, collaborating projects and the many organisations and communities involved across the regions.

As InnoGS enters its second half, **there will be even more opportunities to collaborate**. If you have a good practice to share, a regional challenge that could benefit from a gamified approach, an initiative that could connect with the emerging DID, or an idea for joint activities, we would be happy to hear from you.

Follow the next steps of InnoGS through our **website** and **LinkedIn**. Visit the **News & Events** section on our website to read the latest InnoGS articles and stories from across the partner regions.



Explore the InnoGS website

<https://www.interreg-npa.eu/projects/innogs/home>

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Best regards,

InnoGS team

