



INCLUDE

eNuokkari (digital youth center)

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Northern Periphery and Arctic

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1 Good practice

1.1 General Information

- Title of the Good Practice: eNuokkari (digital youth center)
- Region / City / Municipality: North Savo & North Karelia
- Country: Finland
- Contact Organisation: Savonia University of Applied Sciences / InnoGS
- Contact Person & Role: Kalle Sievänen, RDI Specialist
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- Date of Implementation: Ongoing

1.2 Summary of the Good Practice

eNuokkari, a digital youth centre operating in Discord, responds to the challenge of long distances and dispersed youth services in Eastern Finland, especially in the North Karelia region. In rural and sparsely populated areas, young people may live far from physical youth centres, which can limit their opportunities to participate in organised activities, meet peers, or reach youth workers in a low-threshold way.

The solution is to provide a safe and moderated online space where young people can spend time, take part in activities, communicate with youth workers, and connect with other young people regardless of their location. The digital innovation lies in using Discord, a familiar communication platform for many young people, as a structured youth work environment instead of only an informal social channel.

Through eNuokkari, youth work becomes more accessible, flexible, and place-independent. It supports social inclusion by lowering the threshold for participation and offering a sense of community also for those who cannot easily access physical services. The practice is currently rooted in North Karelia, but the aim is to expand the model so that it can serve young people more widely across Eastern Finland.

1.3 Context and Challenges Addressed

- What territorial challenge or opportunity did the region face?

Eastern Finland, especially North Karelia, faces long distances between towns and youth services. This makes it more difficult for young people to access activities, meet peers, and feel connected to their local community. The region also faces the broader challenge of making rural areas attractive and meaningful places for young people to live, participate, and stay engaged.

- Why was digital innovation relevant in this context?

Digital innovation was relevant because physical distance makes it difficult to reach young people through traditional youth work alone. A digital youth centre allows youth workers to stay connected with young people regardless of where they live and provides an accessible way to offer activities, guidance, and social interaction online.

- What specific community or stakeholder needs were identified?

Youth workers identified a need for more accessible youth services and better ways to reach young people across long distances. Young people needed a low-threshold space where they could spend time, communicate with youth workers, and connect with peers. In addition, maintaining and moderating a safe digital platform requires sufficient staff resources, clear roles, continuous support, digital skills, and practical knowledge of how to use Discord effectively.

1.4 Objectives

- Youth engagement
- Digital youth work
- Improved access to youth services
- Social inclusion
- Community building
- Low-threshold participation
- Peer connection
- Youth empowerment
- Safe digital space
- Regional accessibility
- Reduced distance barriers
- Digital skills development
- Strengthened youth worker outreach
- Scalable service model

1.5 Description of the Practice

1.5.1 Activities Implemented

The practice was developed through a step-by-step process based on the needs and experiences of youth workers. The first phase included meetings with youth workers to discuss the need for a digital youth centre, previous experiences with online youth work, and the practical requirements for creating a safe digital environment.

Based on these discussions, a shared Discord server was created for eNuokkari. The server structure, channels, moderation principles, and rules were planned together to ensure that the platform would be safe, accessible, and suitable for youth work.

The next step was to invite young people and other youth workers to join the platform. This included communication and outreach to make the service visible and encourage participation. Experimental online events and activities were then organised in eNuokkari to test how young people engage with the platform and what kinds of activities work best in a digital youth work setting.

Development work is continuing, with plans to expand eNuokkari from North Karelia to serve young people across Eastern Finland. Future possibilities also include broadening virtual youth work through new digital approaches, such as virtual reality.

1.5.2 Stakeholders Involved

- Local/regional authorities
- Civil society organisations
- Youth organisations
- Businesses / SMEs
- Universities / research centres
- Digital innovation hubs
- Other (please, name) Youth

1.5.3 Resources Used

- Human resources

The practice has relied on the work of youth workers, who have contributed their professional expertise in youth engagement, moderation, and safe online interaction. In addition, representatives from the InnoGS project have supported the development process, coordination, and documentation of the practice. External experts and guest participants have also contributed to specific activities and events organised within eNuokkari.

- Technical resources

The main technical resource is Discord, which provides the digital environment for the youth centre. The practice also uses the platform's built-in tools for communication, moderation, channels, roles, voice chat, and event organisation. Additional digital tools may be used to support online activities, communication, and future development of virtual youth work.

- Funding sources (EU, national, regional, private sector)

So far, the development work has been supported through the InnoGS project budget, together with the existing staff resources of the participating youth workers. This means that the work has mainly relied on project funding and the regular salaries of youth work professionals involved in the practice.

1.6 Thematic Categorisation

A. Digital Technologies

- Digital platforms for participation
- Open data solutions
- Digital twins / GIS / mapping tools
- AI supported
- Immersive tech (VR/AR) for community engagement
- Gamification
- Other (please, name)

B. Co Creation Methodologies

- Digital platforms for participation
- Participatory design
- Living labs
- Citizen assemblies
- Hackathons
- Digital consultation tools
- Collaborative prototyping
- Other (please, name)

C. Youth / Minority Groups Engagement

- Digi Tailored outreach to youth tal platforms for participation
- Inclusion of minority or marginalized communities
- Capacity-building for underrepresented groups
- Mentorship or ambassador programmes
- Co creation activities specifically targeting these groups
- Other (please, name)

1.7 Results and Impact

1.7.1 Quantitative Results

- Number of participants

At the time of reporting, the eNuokkari Discord server has **101 members**. The number is expected to change as new young people, youth workers, and other participants join the platform.

- Number/percentage of youth or minority participants

At the time of reporting, approximately **77 participants are young people**.

- Digital tools deployed

The main digital tool deployed is a dedicated **Discord server** for eNuokkari.

- Data/outputs generated

The practice has generated a working digital youth centre model.

1.7.2 Qualitative Results

The full potential of eNuokkari has not yet been reached, as the practice is still being developed and expanded. However, the initiative has already demonstrated strong potential to improve participation, inclusiveness, and youth empowerment in rural and sparsely populated areas.

By providing a shared digital space, eNuokkari can bring together like-minded young people who might otherwise have limited opportunities to meet due to long distances. It also creates a low-threshold connection between young people and safe, supportive adults, including youth workers and, when relevant, parents or guardians.

This strengthens the sense of community and makes youth work more accessible beyond physical locations. The platform can support activities that young people themselves are interested in and want to participate in. In the longer term, eNuokkari can also provide a channel for young people to express their needs, share ideas, and take part in developing their own living environments and local communities.

1.8 Innovation and Added Value

- What is innovative about the approach or technology?

The innovative aspect of eNuokkari is the use of Discord as a structured, moderated, and purpose-built digital youth centre. Instead of treating Discord only as an informal communication tool, the practice adapts it into a safe youth work environment with rules, roles, channels, activities, and direct access to youth workers. This makes youth services more flexible and accessible in rural areas where physical distances can limit participation.

- How does it differ from traditional community engagement?

Traditional youth work and community engagement often rely on physical youth centres, local events, or face-to-face meetings. eNuokkari removes some of these location-based barriers by allowing young people to participate from where they are. It also meets young people in a digital environment that is already familiar to many of them, making participation more low-threshold and continuous rather than dependent only on occasional physical activities.

- What elements could inspire replication by other EU regions?

Other EU regions facing long distances, dispersed communities, or limited youth work resources could replicate the model by creating moderated digital youth spaces using familiar platforms. Key transferable elements include co-design with youth workers, clear rules and moderation practices, low-threshold digital participation, online activities for young people, and the possibility to connect local youth services across municipal or regional borders. The model can also be further developed with new digital tools, such as virtual reality, to support more immersive forms of youth work.

1.9 Lessons Learned

- What worked well?

Setting up the Discord server was relatively straightforward, and the platform could be adapted to the needs of eNuokkari with suitable channels, roles, rules, and moderation structures. However, this does require some technical understanding and practical knowledge of Discord. Young people have also joined the server when the service has been actively promoted to them, which shows that the platform can reach its intended users.

- What challenges were encountered?

Activating both young people and some youth workers on the server has been challenging. Some young people may not want to, or may not feel confident enough to, start discussions independently. For youth workers, the main challenges are related to staff resources and practical skills in using the platform. Once these challenges are addressed, the server is expected to become more active and community-driven. Support for digital skills is needed not only for youth workers, but potentially also for young people.

- What would you do differently?

More support and guidance should be provided to youth workers on how to use Discord in youth work. This includes practical training, examples of activities, and support for moderation and engagement. These aspects can still be improved, as the practice was intentionally started on a small scale. The aim is to gradually expand the server and test different types of activities to see what works best for young people and youth workers.

1.10 Transferability and Scalability

- Which aspects can be replicated elsewhere?

The eNuokkari model can be replicated in other rural and sparsely populated regions that face challenges in reaching young people through physical youth services alone. Key transferable elements include the use of a familiar digital platform, a moderated online youth space, clear rules and roles, youth worker and/or safe adult presence, low-threshold participation, and online activities designed around young people's interests. The step-by-step development process can also be replicated: identifying needs with youth workers, setting up the platform, inviting young people, testing activities, collecting feedback, and gradually expanding the service.

- What conditions (resources, policy environment, partnerships) are needed for transfer?

Successful transfer requires committed youth workers and/or safe adults, sufficient staff resources for moderation and activity planning, and practical digital skills related to the chosen platform. Youth workers need guidance and training in how to use Discord or a similar tool safely and effectively. Clear rules, safeguarding practices, and moderation responsibilities are also essential. Strong partnerships between municipalities, youth services, schools, youth organisations, and project actors can support outreach and long-term sustainability. A supportive policy environment is also important, especially one that recognises digital youth work as part of public youth services and allows resources to be allocated to online community building.

1.11 Links and Supporting Materials

- Link to eNuokkari's Discord server. The language used on the server is Finnish, and joining the server requires a Discord account.
 - <https://discord.gg/aKWTsfQvp3>