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The VR studio

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1 The VR studio

1.1 General Information

- Title of the Good Practice: VR-studio
- Region / City / Municipality: Härnösand municipality
- Country: Sweden
- Contact Organisation: Technichus
- Contact Person & Role: Mats Gradin, business developer
- Email / Website: Mats.Gradin@harnosand.se
- Date of Implementation: 2022

1.2 Summary of the Good practice

The VR Studio is a dedicated physical space equipped with advanced Virtual Reality technology and staffed by trained personnel. Here, both employees and citizens can access guided VR experiences that ensure a safe, accessible, and meaningful introduction to immersive technology. The presence of expert staff enables tailored sessions, technical support, and facilitated discussions that connect the experience to practical learning goals.

Using this approach, the VR Studio introduces an innovative method for learning and engagement. Primarily used for internal training within social services, it allows professionals to step into realistic, simulated environments to practice decision-making, empathy, and communication in complex scenarios without real-world risk.

1.3 Context and Challenges Addressed

- What territorial challenge or opportunity did the region face?

The region faced the challenge of ensuring continuous competence development within the public sector in a way that was both effective and accessible. Traditional professional training methods were often expensive, time-consuming, and lacked realism. In sectors such as social services, staff deal with sensitive and complex situations daily, yet conventional classroom-based methods provided limited opportunities to practice decision-making, empathy, and communication in an authentic way.

Additionally, geographical and scheduling constraints made external training less accessible and harder to scale for larger teams. This created a risk of uneven skill development, with some employees missing critical learning opportunities.

- Why was digital innovation relevant in this context?

Digital innovation was crucial because traditional training methods were expensive, time-consuming, and geographically challenging, especially in a rural region where long travel distances often create barriers to professional development. There was a clear need for a more accessible, cost-efficient solution that could deliver high-quality, realistic learning experiences without requiring staff to leave their municipalities.

Virtual Reality (VR) technology addressed these limitations by offering immersive, interactive simulations of real-life situations in a controlled and safe environment. This allowed staff—particularly in social services to practice decision-making, empathy, and communication in scenarios that are hard to replicate in conventional classroom settings.

- What specific community or stakeholder needs were identified?

The primary need identified was to provide public sector employees—especially in social services—with more accessible, cost-effective, and realistic training opportunities. Traditional training often required long-distance travel, making it expensive, time-consuming, and difficult to scale across departments. There was also a strong demand for methods that go beyond theoretical learning and allow staff to develop practical skills such as empathy, communication, and decision-making through realistic experiences.

Managers and municipal leaders expressed the need for innovative tools that could be integrated into everyday operations to ensure continuous competence development despite budget and location constraints. Additionally, there was a desire for a solution that could support staff well-being by preparing them better for challenging real-world situations, ultimately improving service quality for citizens.

1.4 Objectives

- Skills
- Cost-efficiency
- Accessibility

1.5 Description of the Practice

1.5.1 Activities Implemented

We began by establishing a dedicated VR studio, creating a physical space equipped with high-performance computers, VR headsets, motion sensors, and a VR floor. Our first step was to ensure technical readiness by installing hardware and software and designing the room for flexibility and safety.

Next, we focused on building internal capacity. We trained our staff to operate the equipment and facilitate guided sessions so every experience could be meaningful and linked to real learning objectives. In parallel, we selected and developed VR scenarios tailored to the challenges our employees face in social services—situations that require empathy, communication, and decision-making.

After this, we ran pilot sessions with small staff groups to test content, user experience, and technical functionality. Feedback from these sessions helped us refine both the scenarios and the delivery process.

Finally, we integrated VR training into our internal competence development programs as a recurring method and established routines for continuous evaluation, ensuring our VR studio remains relevant and impactful over time.

1.5.2 Stakeholders Involved

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

1.5.3 Resources Used

- Human resources

The implementation and operation of the VR Studio relied on staff from the municipality combined with expertise from the municipal science center, Technichus. Municipal staff contributed with knowledge of internal training needs, particularly in social services, while Technichus provided technical support, including installation, maintenance, and VR facilitation. This collaboration ensured both domain-specific relevance and technical excellence during setup and delivery.

- Technical resources

The VR Studio was equipped with high-performance computers, advanced VR headsets, VR floor systems, and motion sensors. These tools enabled the creation of fully immersive and interactive environments where real-world scenarios could be simulated safely and realistically. The physical space was designed for flexibility to allow different types of VR experiences and training setups.

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

The initiative was primarily financed through municipal funds, with investments covering hardware, software, and staff training. This allocation ensured the VR Studio could be established as a long-term resource integrated into internal training strategies.

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
- Number/percentage of youth or minority participants
- Digital tools deployed
- Data/outputs generated

1.7.2 Qualitative Results

The VR Studio has significantly improved organizational capacity and quality of service within the public sector by introducing immersive, hands-on training experiences. Staff in social services have reported feeling more confident and better prepared to manage complex and sensitive situations after VR sessions,

which allowed them to practice decision-making, empathy, and communication in a safe and realistic environment.

The initiative has also enhanced knowledge accessibility, particularly in rural municipalities where traditional training often required long travel and high costs. By offering local, technology-driven training, the VR Studio reduced barriers to professional development and created more equal learning opportunities across departments.

1.8 Innovation and Added Value

- What is innovative about the approach or technology?

We introduced a new way of delivering professional training by using Virtual Reality to create fully immersive and interactive learning environments. Instead of relying on traditional classroom-based methods or static e-learning, we allow staff to step into realistic scenarios where they can practice responses and develop critical skills in a safe and controlled setting. What makes our approach innovative is the way we combine advanced VR technology with practical competence development in a local context. In a rural region like ours, where training often means long travel and high costs, the VR Studio brings high-quality, scenario-based training directly to our municipality. This reduces barriers, saves resources, and makes learning more engaging and effective.

- How does it differ from traditional community engagement?

Unlike traditional classroom-based training, which often relies on lectures or role-play exercises, the VR Studio provides fully immersive and interactive learning experiences. Instead of reading case studies or watching videos, staff can enter realistic virtual environments where they actively experience and respond to complex social situations in a safe and controlled setting.

- What elements could inspire replication by other EU regions?

The concept of establishing dedicated VR studios for internal public sector training is highly replicable. It offers an accessible, cost-efficient way to deliver realistic, immersive learning experiences without long travel or high costs. A proven example is Fundão, which created its own VR studio after collaboration in the Metacity project, showing that the model can be adapted by other EU regions.

1.9 Lessons Learned

- What worked well?

The combination of advanced VR technology with skilled, trained staff proved to be the key success factor. The technology alone does not guarantee effective learning; having personnel who can design relevant scenarios, guide participants, and connect experiences to real professional challenges made the VR studio a truly impactful tool.

- What challenges were encountered?

One major challenge was implementation across the organization. It proved difficult to reach all departments and ensure that staff understood the value and practical benefits of VR-based training. Overcoming skepticism and integrating the solution into established routines required significant communication and change management efforts.

- What would you do differently?

We would focus even more on early and broad organizational anchoring. This includes clearly communicating the benefits of VR training, involving managers from the start, and creating internal ambassadors to promote the practice. A stronger communication strategy and structured integration into training plans would help ensure quicker adoption and long-term sustainability.

1.10 Transferability and Scalability

- Which aspects can be replicated elsewhere?

The core concept of establishing a VR studio for internal public sector training is highly replicable. Key elements include:

- A dedicated physical space equipped with VR technology (headsets, computers, sensors).

- Development or selection of VR scenarios tailored to local training needs.
- Training staff to facilitate sessions and connect experiences to learning goals.

These components can be adapted to different organizational contexts and scaled based on resources.

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

- Resources: VR equipment (headsets, sensors, computers), a dedicated space, and funding for setup and maintenance.
- Human capacity: Staff trained to operate technology and facilitate learning.
- Partnerships: Collaboration with tech providers or local innovation hubs for technical expertise and content development.

1.11 Links and Supporting Materials

- Website vr-studion.se



