



Stories of Co-Design

Exploring the experiences of people's participation in the design of service provision

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Overview

The region of Kainuu faces multiple significant challenges. The remote area suffers from depopulation and has an ageing population. The Kainuu region has seen a decline in entrepreneurial activity and has the second highest unemployment levels in Finland. In order to overcome these issues an experimental project was launched in April 2014 and will continue until the end of 2017. This project seeks to bring together the municipality and other service providers together with the people who live in the area to co-design new user-driven services and business models. In essence, the project brings together citizens, public, private and third sector representative to promote wellbeing in the region and raise the quality of local service provision.

Working with a range of people from Kainuu, including young people and older people, we gathered a range of stories about what life was like in the area. In these stories, the people talked about their communities and what supported their well-being. This included digital inclusion projects, volunteering and the role of clubhouses. People also spoke about some of the problems that they faced (i.e. alcohol and exclusion) and also who provided them with support (i.e. family and friends).

Life in Kainuu

[Elizabeth](#) lives in Ristijärvi, Kainuu, which is an area where a lot of older people live. She feels that more permanent residents and entrepreneurship is what Kainuu needs in order to be revived. She describes that seniors get good care in the area but she does feel that more resources are needed for social and health care services. Due to transport issues she knows that by the time she loses her driving license, she must move into the town centre to access the things that she needs as she currently lives 22km outside of it.

The rural nature of the Kainuu region and the implications of this on mobility are one of the things that the Culture Guide activity, described by [Aila](#), is trying to overcome. The Culture Guide activity supports people to access cultural events. In Aila's story she talks about how she helped to set it up in her area of Sotkamo by getting a local association to administer the grant funding that was available for the activity. Aila got "700 euros to start the activity in the year 2014" and has helped to build its popularity. The activity is run by volunteers who act as 'Cultural Guides' and they arrange visits to the theatre and galleries for people "who don't go to events". The guide is a community member who "gives a person a ride or comes along with the person to a cultural

event". Aila is happy to be a part of this, as she believes that *"culture brings wellbeing and it belongs to everyone"*.

Participation in services

Initiatives and services that involve the people living in the region in meaningful ways in their design and delivery are at the core of the experimental programme that is being piloted in the Kainuu region. Another issue facing the aging the community is digital exclusion. [Pirkko](#) describes how digital support for pensioners is particularly needed since *"a lot of services have become online"*. Herself and other senior teachers run a group that supports people to develop digital skills such as *"how to attach a photo to a message, how to download apps [and] how to use touch screen"*. Pirkko describes how it is her own children who helped to gain these skills that she is now passing them on to others.

[Markku](#) has also been supporting seniors with IT at a clubhouse Tönäri. Although the clubhouse has some paid members of the staff, it is volunteers like him who run activities such as the IT club. In his story Markku describes how he is *"happy that [people] learn new skills"* at the sessions but also because he lives alone, volunteering give him *"an opportunity to meet other people easily"*. [Juhani](#) also goes to this clubhouse and he says it has supported him at a difficult time in his life when nothing seemed to be *"meaningful"*. He describes how he got involved in activities which enabled him to get new friends, and now he is a trusted member at the clubhouse and responsible for certain tasks such as mentoring new members. Describing his experiences of working on the co-design of services in the area, [Hannu](#) states how it is important that people *"need to have something to do"*, such as a job or hobby and have *"social communication and networks with other people"* in order to support their own wellbeing. As Hannu describes, services alone can't keep people well; people also need to *"help themselves and help the others"*. The clubhouse activities and [Aila's](#) Culture Guide initiative are representative of this reciprocal approach to service provision.

Peer support

As Hannu articulated, people need activities within their lives that support them to make social connections. [Marja's](#) story about the craft workshops she attends explains why these activities are so important to people. In her story, she tells that when she retired her husband died unexpectedly and her daughter also moved away. This left her with *"so much time and [she] didn't quite know what to do with it"*. For Marja, the workshops provided a lifeline to her and it enabled

her to get “*some order and routines into [her] life*”. As she describes, the importance of these types of groups is not necessarily the activity, but the social ties - “*People come to groups not just to craft but also to meet other people and keep up social relations*”.

In his story, a local tourist guide [Vesa](#) describes how he likes to come together with other people and that they are trying to build a strong sense of community in Kainuu. This sense of community has been particularly important in helping [Toni](#) to turn his life around. In his story, he describes how he always felt excluded. As a teenager, Toni’s parents divorced and he started to use alcohol that led to him getting into problems with society. Nowadays however, through support from his friends and his current employer he is in a better place, and now he wants to give back to society and support other young people who are experiencing the types of problems he did.

[Click here](#) to view the extracts from these stories and [click here](#) to view the feature story.

InnoSI Themes

The Local Government Act and Regional Self-Government Experiment Act underpins this new regional experiment that provides the backdrop of these stories. Promoting participative citizenship is a key part of both of these acts, and the user-centred service development that is being piloted in Kainuu is helping to achieve this. In some ways, this approach of **implementing national policy and law at local and regional levels** to create self-supporting communities is similar to the Stories of Our Neighbourhoods from The Netherlands. The key difference between them is the scope and geographies of the areas in which these social investment programmes are based.

In the other Finnish case study programme, the Youth Guarantee, the **personalisation** of the support provision was implemented by offering people choices, as the Stories of Finding Work demonstrate. In the case of the Kainuu regional experiment, personalisation is brought about in a much more bottom-up way through co-design and active participation. This process is a key part of the community projects being described in these stories. For example, [Aila](#) was instrumental in bringing the Cultural Guides programme to her area. These interventions change people’s **life courses** at different stages of their lives, such as supporting people out of [crime](#) or [reducing social isolation](#).

Summary of Insights

- Reducing social isolation:** Many of the initiatives explored in these stories support people to be more socially included, whether it be [clubhouse membership](#), [digital inclusion workshops](#), [crafting activities](#) or [cultural visits](#). These activities bring people together in social settings.
- Supporting people to support others:** The stories detail the different ways in which people are being enabled to support themselves and others in their community. A sense of pride and achievement from helping other people in their communities is found in these stories.