

**Invitation**

**Interreg**  Co-funded by  
the European Union  
**Aurora**

**Webinar Bridging Youth and Regional Development Through Dialogue**



**30.3.2023**



**14:00-16:00**

(Finnish time)

## **How to Bridge Youth and Regional Development?**

Report of the Launch Webinar of an Interreg Aurora Project

**KAINUUN LIITTO**



# Content

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>The Timeout discussion model</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Calotte Academy, School of Arctic Dialogue</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>High North Dialogue</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>General Discussion</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Q&amp;A During the Seminar</b> .....	<b>10</b>

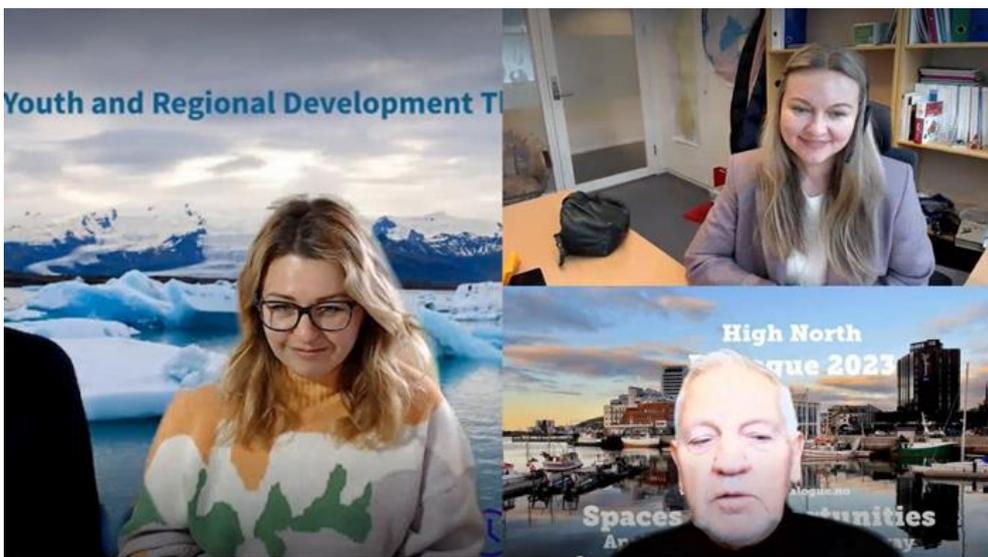
# Preface

On 30th March 2023, the project “Bridging Youth and Regional Development Through Dialogue” arranged a webinar for youth and experts. There we heard interesting speeches on building dialogue and participation by experts from the Dialogue Academy, Calotte Academy and High North Dialogue. More importantly, there was plenty of time reserved for discussions between and after the presentations. Many important questions were brought up to discussions by the audience, giving the organizers food for thought and some concrete ideas on what to do next.

During spring 2023, the Regional Council of Kainuu together with the Council of Oulu Region and Nord Universitet from Norway is carrying out a small-scale project called “Bridging Youth and Regional Development Through Dialogue”. The aim is not only to give a voice to the younger generation during the project, but to prepare them for future participation. The project offers a platform for young people to practice dialogue skills, expand networks locally and transnationally, and to build a common ground for new initiatives.

In the long run, the goal is to find ways to increase dialogue between youth and the experts working within regional development and enhance youth participation in regional development. As the project only lasts some months, it is seen as the first step towards this goal. The further actions will be built on the experiences gained from this project and the recommendations written together with the youth.

The first visible action of this mini project was a webinar arranged on 30th March 2023. Youth and experts from Finland, Norway and Sweden were invited to the event, where we heard interesting speeches on building dialogue and participation. Based on those, we hope to launch fruitful discussions with the participating youth about the current situation and about what could be done to improve it.



Picture: a screenshot taken during the webinar

# The Timeout discussion model

Kai Alhanen, Director of Dialogue Academy, first shared their view on dialogue in general. It is different from debate, in which the goal is to find the best argument, or from negotiation, aiming at an agreement. In dialogue, the aim is not in finding unanimity, but in creating better understanding. All these forms of communication have their own time and place in the society.

Dialogue is **equal conversation** aiming at gaining a **better understanding** of the topic discussed, about the other people participating the discussion, or about themselves. People see things differently, based on their own experiences, and it is quite interesting and useful to learn understand those, and not just trying to push your own point of view. A good dialogue builds trust and enhances creativity.

In the modern, complex world with complex problems and heated discussions, we definitely need more dialogue. A lot of people have lost their faith and **trust in the democracy**, the democracy is in a crisis at the moment. We need **new ways of participation** and dealing with things, to keep democracy alive and to renew it. Luckily, we seem to be going through a "dialogue movement" right now, at least in Finland.

[The Timeout discussion model](#) sets **ground rules** and gives **practical tools** for equal and respective dialogue between the participants, even if they represent diverse groups, opinions, and discussion styles. The model is free to use, and the materials are available online and may be used without prior training or experience and modified as seen feasible. The Dialogue Academy though offers training related to dialogue, especially for the public sector and the third sector. The model was developed in Finland, but the materials are available also in Swedish and English, so the method has been spreading also outside the country.

The discussions after Kai Alhanen's presentation dealt with the places and times the model is and may be used. It was agreed that there is a time and place for using every method. Sometimes we need to debate, negotiate, or mediate more than to create understanding. So, in some situations, dialogue is not the suitable tool or the only tool. However, the Timeout model is these days used in quite many places and for many purposes.

There are good experiences from some Finnish municipalities, for example, of arranging dialogues between the leaders and the **young people, even with children**. Dialogue has given the decision makers a deeper understanding of the youth/ children's point of view and allowed them to make better decisions.

There are also more Timeout discussions where politicians participate, and discussions inside the different ministries in Finland, aiming to find more sensitive and efficient ways to do their work. One interesting example is the newly published publication on vast [national immigration dialogues](#). The topic of dialogue raised many comments and questions that may be seen on the last pages of this report.

## TIMEOUT

# Calotte Academy, School of Arctic Dialogue

Lassi Heininen, Professor Emeritus, and founder of the [Calotte Academy](#) gave a presentation concentrating on open discussion and dialogue in the academia. The Calotte Academy is sort of a case study of that field. The philosophy behind the event is, that science is never objective, but always subjective. It matters who's doing the research, and what the topic is. Science is more than laboratories and meetings, it's also about the people and the environment. In other words, there's always also **the social relevance of science**. This is a challenge and rather much the starting point for the Calotte Academy.

The Calotte Academy is a **travelling symposium** in the European arctic, so it's very **international**, regarding both the participants and the locations. There is a group of scholars and (mostly early-career) scientists from **different academic fields**, who get to participate and present their research and to meet local audiences and experts. The goal is to **promote interplay** between science and politics, as well as western science and the knowledge of indigenous communities in harsh conditions.

There have been 30 annual gatherings already, with hundreds of presentations in more than ten different locations. The main method of Calotte Academy is **open discussion and dialogue** building on each other's arguments, with the general elements of dialogue. For professional training, there are also simulations of timely international negotiations related to relevant world politics.

Events like this wouldn't be possible without an **inspiring and open atmosphere**. In addition to the need for dialogue, you need to create that kind of atmosphere for it to happen. It has been found imperative to **allocate enough time** for open discussion right from the start of event planning. The main principle is to have at least the same time for discussions as is used for the presentations, if not more. This allows a certain psychological process to occur among the audience. As people know that there'll be plenty of space for discussion, and as they listen to each other speak, their minds start to work. At some point during the event, they'll speak their minds, make questions or comments. This leads to lively discussion, generating knowledge, insights, and solutions. The dialogues are of open-ended nature, continuing after the event.

After Lassi Heininen's presentation the audience was curious about the **selection criteria** the Calotte Academy uses, as there are annually plenty of applicants from young professionals and scientists. It was stated that it's quite important for the applicants to show their own approach and contribution to the topic handled. Also, the subjectivity and/ or objectivity of science raised some fruitful discussion. Even though there are certain laws of nature and mathematics, for example, it's an interesting point of view to consider that it's always the human beings who are making the science, so there's always a personal choice of topic and the point of view in each research.



# High North Dialogue

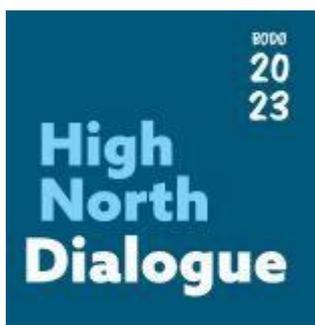
Director Frode Mellemvik from the High North Center at Nord University presented their action-oriented point of view on dialogue. The [High North Dialogue](#) has long traditions, since it started about twenty years ago. Originally, the event idea started from a practical need. There was a group of students who studied the development of energy sector in the Norwegian High North, which was facing many conflicts at the time, between fisheries, oil and gas producers, tourism etc. The dialogue concept was tried as a solution for the students to understand the real interests between the different parties.

The first High North Dialogue took place on the famous Hurtigruten ship line, and the students would stop and visit different parties along the route. The trip was popular among students and produced very interesting reports but was an expensive way to arrange the activity, so a new format had to be sought for the dialogue event. Now, the High North Dialogue is a conference week in Bodø.

The main topic of this event is always **business in the Arctic**, considering the different perspectives and the tensions, conflicts, and common interests around the topics. So, the business is seen more broadly, also including local communities, societal development and so on. Students are very important in this dialogue and are a key target group of the conference week and involved in each of the topics and sessions. The **event week** is full of interesting, high-level programme.

In addition to the interesting seminars/plenary sessions, there are many **side events** with more possibilities for dialogue. **PHD courses** are arranged, and some students are invited to work on **scenarios on different topics** during the conference week and the best scenario is presented to the large conference. Also, a person who has done a lot for the development of the Arctic, a **High North Hero**, is awarded annually, as well as one **High North Young Entrepreneur**. This year, a **High North Dialogue Academy** for young people from around the world will take place for the first time with their own programme for the week and with specific sponsor funding. What's special about the High North Dialogue is that since the emphasis is on the young, there are a lot of new participants on each conference week. They learn a lot, have the chance to meet the high-level people and create networks.

Also, after Frode Mellemvik's presentation, the audience was eager to ask about the concrete **selection procedures** related, this time regarding the best scenarios mentioned above. It was stated that it doesn't matter if the scenario is positive or negative, but the best background work and argumentation is the key here.

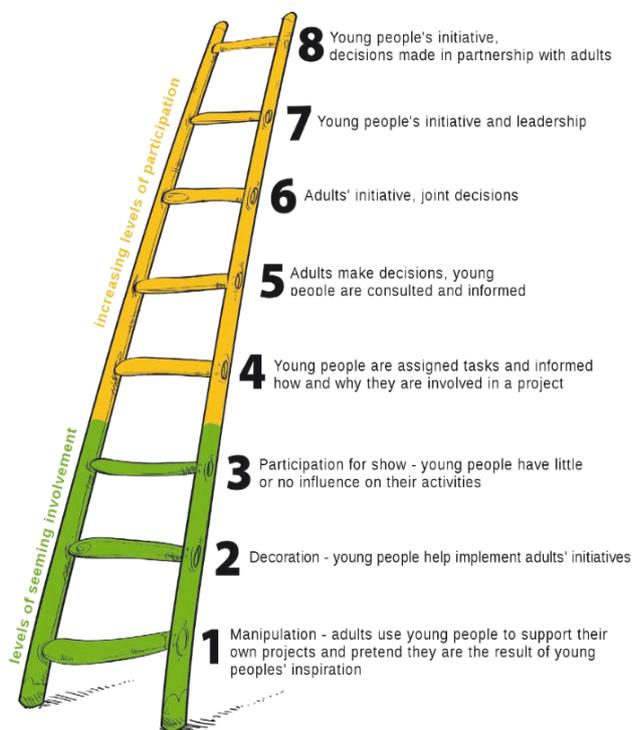


# General Discussion

The effects of the **recent pandemic** raised discussion, and it was agreed having had a double effect on our democratic society. On the other hand, it showed some really dangerous tendencies of mental isolation and loneliness, misinformation etc. Then again, it made us realize how valuable it is to come together, to find support and trust from each other and find ways how to deal with uncertainty together. Dialogue is a very effective way of gathering people together and helping them to deal with uncertainty, and we have very interesting results due to the [Lockdown dialogues with Finnish Government](#), which were kept going for two years.

The participation of young people, and especially the role and effort of the public sector was an interesting topic for several participants. There certainly seems to be some sort of a gap between the authorities and the youth. In general, the youth need to be taken into consideration better than they currently are. Many times, even if invited to participate, the youth are left feeling like they were used as a sort of "decoration" in the participatory processes, and not really taken seriously and having made an impact on any decisions.

The ways to develop youth participation should perhaps start by going where the youth are and starting the discussions on topics that are relevant to them. As the dialogue builds up trust and understanding on both sides of the process, it'll be easier to deepen the interaction and cooperation and engage the youth in the planning processes. For example, the regional development experts could go to educational institutions and ask the youth how they feel about their life in the region and such topics that are relevant to them. In that way, you may learn many interesting things and broaden your professional viewpoint and find new ways to work with the youth. The methods should be changing along with the society and the situation in question. Also, it is necessary to reserve enough time for the dialogue in general. In any seminar, it would be fruitful to have at least the same time for dialogue as there is for the presentations.



Picture: Roger Hart's ladder of young people's participation.

According to the fruitful discussions during the online seminar, Roger Hart's ladder of youth participation describes quite well the current situation that this Interreg Aurora project is starting from.

Briefly, the youth should not be used as a decoration in regional development processes but considered as an asset.

Creating the trust and understanding and finding the right methods require effort, but finally the work is bound to pay off.

If we work on the long term, we can achieve a situation where the youth are active to make initiatives and can make decisions together with adults.

As a general conclusion, the regional developers and politicians should:

1. create enough space for genuine dialogue in regional development

2. approach the youth in their natural habitat first to start building engagement

3. find out what's important and relevant to the youth, as well as their motivations, and plan their approach accordingly

4. find out the right channels and methods together with the youth

5. be systematic on their youth engagement and work on the long term

6. really, genuinely listen to the youth

7. communicate better so that their processes and decisions are visible and understandable

8. consider changing their point of view, building common ground with the youth, and not seeing them as subjects to be activated

9. make the politics an inviting and a safe place for the youth

10. prove that they aren't just saying nice things but really plan to act

# Q&A During the Seminar

Are there any disadvantages in using Timeout method?

There is a time and place for using every method. Sometimes we need to debate, negotiate, debate, or mediate more than to create understanding. So, in some situations, dialogue isn't the suitable tool or the only tool.

How can dialogues between youth and regional leaders contribute to the development of the region? In terms of that how can youth perspectives be incorporated into regional development planning?

There are very good experiences from some Finnish municipalities of arranging dialogues between the leaders and the young people, even with children. Dialogue has given the decision makers a deeper understanding of the youth/ children's point of view and allowed them to make better decisions.

Is the Timeout method used in politics in Finland?

Yes, a little bit. We're having more and more Timeout discussions where politicians participate, and discussions inside the different ministries in Finland, aiming to find more sensitive and efficient ways to do their work. One interesting example is the newly published publication on vast [national immigration dialogues](#). So, it is used that there's still a lot of work to do.

Lassi Heininen: you said that science is subjective. Did you mean particular sciences that specialize in people and things that are subjective in general, or all of them? I think for example physics is a very objective science, because the point of view doesn't affect the laws of physics.

This is a very fundamental and a very much debated question in science. I meant that science is subjective in that way that human beings are doing the research and the science. It is these days very much discussed if the Artificial Intelligence could make science. Not yet, even if there are on-going discussions if we should stop developing AI because it's becoming too clever, so there are dangers. People decide what is the relevant topic for them and they do research on that topic. Of course, there are laws of nature and mathematics and so on. As it comes to social sciences, there are theories made by human beings, that are all subjective. The point here is not about the objective and subjective, it is that it's not determined and given from above. It is something that we create and something that we have to develop all the time.

I looked at some of the material that the academy is offering, and the yearbooks, and I was really impressed by the amount and the diversity of the topics, and the backgrounds of the research styles and the abstracts the scientists presented there. My question is, how and on what basis is the procedure to pick among the abstracts?

The normal academia procedure is that you have to be fair and equal when you select participants to different conferences, seminars, or other academic events. The Calotte Academy also gives out small grants to the participants. There is an open call with the push ratio efficient enough to receive enough applications from potential participants. As we read the applications, our main criteria are the content and the information value of the half-page or maximum one-page abstracts. In addition to or even instead of the description of the current situation on the text, the focus should be on delivering the reader with an

understanding of the point and the aim of the writer, and their own contribution to the topic. If the content is good, and the academy interesting and fits into the annual theme announced, the abstract may be chosen.

You mentioned the best scenarios. Do you mean "best case scenarios"? Because there could also be "worst case scenarios," or likely or unlikely futures. How do you select the scenarios to be presented?

It's a tough task. We have representatives from different organisations in the jury, listening to the students' presentations and giving votes. The selected scenarios are not necessarily painting the nicest picture or the worst picture, but they are expressing the work and the analyses they have done the best. So, it is the best justified and argued ones, and you can see all the good, the bad and the ugly things in the selected scenarios.

In your presentation you mentioned the crisis of democracy and the importance of dialogue in it. How do you weigh the role of the past global pandemic for these two things?

The effects of the pandemic had a double effect on our democratic society. The pandemic made us realize how valuable it is just to come together and to find support and trust from each other. And it also emphasized how important it is that we find ways how to deal with uncertainty together. How we go, step by step, forward in this situation when things are changing in an unknown way. And dialogue is a highly effective way of gathering people together and helping them to deal with uncertainty. And we have interesting results on that because, with the Finnish government, we initiated the Lockdown dialogues, which we kept going for two years.

But on the other hand, the pandemic also showed that if you isolate from each other, as we were supposed to do, and spend a lot of time online, at least some of us become quite isolated, also mentally. And a lot of bad things can happen through that development. And again, in order to counter those dangerous tendencies of misinformation, conspiracy theories and loneliness, we need more space where people may come together in a different way. And it emphasized the need for not just coming together physically, but also for creating more dialogical online encounters.

How do you think we can use the timeout model to persuade international students to contribute to the regional development where they are living?

It is not always the most fruitful thing to invite the people to come and be involved in the development processes that are going on at the moment. We should go where the people are and be interested in their opinions of the situation. How do they see the life they are living at the moment? In this case, how do they see their life living and studying in this foreign environment? Then, dialogue may be used to get deeper into their experiences. From there, it will be easier to build ways to engage them through the things that are relevant to them.

How and where could we create the places for dialogue? Would it be possible to create discussion between young people and adults at schools, because school is the place where we reach young people for sure. How can we ensure that the voices and perspectives of marginalized youth are included in regional development dialogues?

As the Timeout method was being developed, also methods of inviting people were developed. Especially when we want to engage people that are not necessarily active already, we really need to go to where they are, and we need to start by asking them. Not necessarily by asking them what they want to do but how they see their lives and the world and the environment they are living in. There is also another level that happens when you invite people to dialogue. When you are in a dialogue, it's not just about your individual point of view, but it's also about building up a larger and more nuanced understanding together.

When we think about young people and how they want to be active, and what is relevant to them, we need dialogue also as a part of the process to make them become more aware of what they actually do want to do. Because in many situations, if we ask them how they want to be engaged, people of any ages many times say that they don't know. But when you go into dialogue and you start to talk about how they see their life, what is important to them, and they listen to other people talking about how they see the similar topic, usually the motivation and the ways to be active and engaged start to emerge.

Schools are a good place, for example, from that point of the view that the young people of certain ages are there. It is their environment, one of their environments. Dialogues with youth have been arranged in youth centres or libraries, and there are lots of ways to go to the places where young people would naturally be. And then, of course, we have many online platforms that can also serve as places for dialogue.

It's super important to go to the places where the people naturally are, at first. In the next step, you may invite the people somewhere else. The culture of how to reach the young people is really localized, so you it's always useful to think who the people are, who already have contacts to the young people, and to cooperate with them in a way that benefits both parties. With marginalised groups, there usually are some NGO's that are working with them. And, if you have reached some of your target group, you could always ask them for advice on how and in what channels to reach more people.

You also need to be open and respectful towards different kinds of opinions to really listen to them. Listening and then taking actions according to what you have heard, on the other hand, is the key to gaining trust and building future cooperation. New methods can be found and implemented together when you listen to each other. Sometimes the officials are too stuck with their old ways of thinking, and they either need to refresh their ways or perhaps send out some younger colleague instead, who appeals to the younger audience and encourages them to open up.

**You mentioned the need for having enough time for discussion, to build upon and reach a conclusion. Do you believe there is a rule of thumb for how much time you should devote for discussion?**

I do not think there is a certain time, but there should be enough time. Enough for the people in the audience to think about what they have just heard and about what could be their own contribution to that. A question or a comment or sharing their own experiences on that matter. According to our experiences, the maximum time for an expert presentation is fifteen minutes and then we would like to have 20-25 minutes for discussion after each presentation.

**What will be our first step to influence the youth to make a huge impact on regional development?**

It is problematic to use the word "huge" here. Because we can start with really small steps that can actually make a bigger change in the future, but we need to take practical steps. And we hope that with help of this particular project we are taking these steps towards the right direction. The impact will not immediately be huge, anyway, since the planning processes are long. The key is to be systematic and keep on building the dialogue.

In Kainuu, we are looking at the West and North now, and we have these cooperation partners. Also, the Barents Youth Council was mentioned. In addition to that, we have good instruments like the Interreg programs, making it possible for us to plan and implement some actions. Like with this Aurora project this spring, which made it possible to cooperate with the High North Dialogue and learn from them. We have a lot to learn from you.

For Kainuu region, there definitely need to be more opportunities created for different audiences, especially easier ones, to participate on the planning. We need to create a system of how to present the planning processes for young people, to make them interested. And, as has been said during this event, there needs to be enough space for dialogue in general. We want to engage the youth and we welcome any ideas and initiatives. As said, we can go on with small steps together.

This is a real and a fundamental question in the current situation in our modern societies. The democracy is absolutely in a crisis. The decision makers do not listen to what the people are saying, particularly the young people. There are some

general ideas and methods how you can do it, and one is of course to listen. But how do you do that? How do you start to listen – what does it mean? And where are the young people? You have to find them. Because you cannot expect them to come to you. You have to go to them.

Then, what are the issues in which they are interested? And what would they like to know more about? Because motivation is the driving force here, also for us who are doing the research. We are motivated and curious to know more and find solutions. Young people are also curious to know more. You have to find them, listen to them, and assist them to find the channels to make their voices heard. In our political institutions, which are fragmented on the one hand, and on the other hand quite stable, it is not so easy to find the mechanisms and channels via which the young people may be heard.

It is a challenge for the young people to participate and for the institutions to engage the young. It is important to have programs, arenas and instruments contributing to that purpose and to facilitate this. There may be different approaches like NGO's, youth councils, municipalities and regional councils, youth participation in conferences such as High North Dialogue to share their perspectives.

### Comment About Politics

The average age of decision makers is high, especially in Kainuu. We need more young people included in all forms of governance and they need to be heard. And more young people who are willing to dive into politics. Building a better dialogue in politics is important, we need a better culture in communication, something that is more appealing to young people. And saying, "they need to be heard", we also need to LISTEN too, which is a different thing.

I think many young people do not attend to the events that they are invited to, because we have noticed that many of them are just because it is in the law that young people need to be listened to. Then in the reality it does not affect things in any ways. So, we just spend our time and talk about our concerns, but actually no one does anything based on the things we are saying.

This is an unfortunate situation – youth really is too often seen as a kind of a "decoration", invited to participate because it's obligatory, without really paying much attention to them or to the fact, how are we going to use their experiences and the results we get from them. Sometimes the activities taken may be more concrete and sometimes more abstract and/ or taking time to implement, but we need to pay more attention to the matter.

Also, sometimes it's worthwhile to change your attitude and point of view just a bit. Instead of inviting young people in "to be activated subjects", it's more fruitful to sit down as a circle of people from different backgrounds and building common ground.

Sometimes it's also about communicating about the decisions. We should somehow track the decision-making process to see how young people's voice was heard, what was used with the knowledge and what was the outcome, if any. And enhance direct communication so that this information is fed back to young people.

It's up to us to act based on this event and prove that we really mean what we say! We definitely need more dialogue and will be inviting people soon again to discuss these issues. And the decision makers will definitely get the memo!

**Interreg**



Co-funded by  
the European Union

**Aurora**

