

From Scholars' Journey to the North into a School of Dialogue - History of Calotte Academy

Prof. Lassi Heininen

Summary

This is the first version of a written Calotte Academy's history, the completed version will be published in autumn 2021 as a part of the "Selected Articles from Calotte Academy" book. As history is often been told chronologically, the story starts from the first event and goes towards the present time. Each annual academy, divided into three phases, is briefly described including theme(s), route, locations and feelings, as well as a summary of presentations & discussions. After this retrospective overview the aims, methods, procedure & structure of the Academy are been analyzed, and finally, outcomes & achievements specified and discussed.

In nutshell, the Calotte Academy is an annual international, travelling symposium and interdisciplinary academic seminar on Northern & Arctic issues with high expertise and policy-orientation, as well as strong educational & training components.

The 1st event took place in May 23-24, 1991 at Jeera (of Saami Education Institute) in Inari, Finnish Lapland - and since then it been arranged annually. This makes the Academy one of the oldest still running international academic institutions on circumpolar northern issues, and the oldest with sessions located in the Arctic region. Born and raised in Inari, and acted as Inari's special higher education component, it is a perfect example of the interplay between science, politics and business, and a 'Global-Local' interference.

The Academy is, so far, been surprisingly resilient, as it has continued as an international scientific seminar and school of dialogue on a wide variety of overarching themes of circumpolar & Arctic studies addressing globally, regionally and locally relevant issues, concerns and problems.

Three Phases & Several Places

When looking chronologically the annual events of the Academy, it is possible (not planned in the beginning) to recognize the following phases within the (first) 30 years:

At 1st phase (1991-1999/2000): The Academy was established to act as a seminar of Tampere Peace Research Institute's international research project, and a platform for public discussion on relevant issues, covering security, ecology and sustainable development, between scholars and local & regional stakeholders, and also educate younger generation of journalists;

At 2nd phase (2001-2011): It acted as an international forum for scientific and policy-oriented dialogue on relevant issues – globally, regionally and locally – among members of research community and wide range of other stakeholders, and served as a regional sub-forum for the NRF & it's Open Assemblies, and an inter-disciplinary seminar for international organizations (e.g. Barents Press) and new institutes (e.g. Barents Institute);

At 3rd phase (2012-): The Academy became mature enough to act as an annual travelling symposium & 'school of dialogue' for early-career scientists (PhD candidates and post docs) from the Arctic States and Central Europe, as well as served as a forum for UArctic Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security and Arctic Yearbook brainstorming.

Among the Academy's co-organizers are Sámi Education Institute, Municipality of Inari, Arctic Centre & Faculty of Social Sciences at University of Lapland; Barents Institute & Department of Sociology, Political Science and Community Planning at University of Tromsø, The Arctic University of Norway; Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of RAS at Kola Science Centre & Faculty of Geography at The Lomonosov Moscow State University; and NRF & TN on Geopolitics and Security. It is been financially supported by Norwegian Barents Secretariat, Nordic Council of Ministers, International Arctic Science Committee, and Municipality of Inari, as well as by in-kind support of co-organizers.

Aims, Methods, Procedure & Structure

Though, substance is the most important thing, it matters what kind of procedure & structure is there - in the case of the Calotte Academy it is simple and non-bureaucratic. This unorthodox & flexible format is neither common in the scientific community nor easily taken by established academic & funding institutions.

As a unique academic 'school of dialogue' the Academy's aim and efforts are to create, promote and enhance a lively dialogue with communicators' commitment & certain prerequisites and rules. To implement this the sessions are structured based on an 'open dialogue', which is interpreted as a cumulative process with an open-ended nature and inclusivity, to engage others arguments, and focus on issue domain. Further, there is time enough for open discuss after each presentation, as well as patience among the participants to listen to others' argumentation (having expertise in other disciplines, fields and knowledge).

Each annual event consists of a core group of open-minded people and talented minds, who are interested in substance and motivated, as well as committed to open-minded dialogue. In each location, there is an active local audience.

The Academy is no exclusive club, as participants are equal as presenters - no keynote speakers – and selected based on an open call for application. No registration fee, instead of a small grant to support travelling and accommodation of early-career scientists, mostly PhD candidates.

Outcomes & Achievements

The Calotte Academy sessions in the European Arctic use to serve as platforms for scientific and other expert presentations, as well as an open and lively discussions between different stakeholders. This 'transdisciplinarity' is been successful in implementing the social relevance of science, and being attractive for early-career scientists.

As numerous outcomes of three phases and 30 years: 28 annual academies, in 19 locations in Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and Sapmi, with several hundred active participants representing more than 25 nationalities. Altogether almost 600 presentations in 160 sessions, covering all relevant northern and arctic issues and themes, and innumerable number of comments and counter-arguments, questions and answers in discussions after each presentation.

Based on the presentations and discussions Final Reports are written, also published at Arctic Yearbook, and eleven scientific books & proceedings published (English or Finnish).

More importantly, the Academy has become a method with a strong educational component (without official duties) to implement an open and cumulative dialogue with focus on an issue, allocated time, and mutual confidence & respect. As well as, its aims, methods and experimental nature has made it an open, democratic forum for academic & policy-oriented activities, an alternative model for conventional academic gatherings (often lacking of time and patience for open discussion).

A participatory approach and by nature synergistic, not against anyone or anything (except maybe narrow-minded thinking & bureaucratic structures) is been taken as a welcome addition to the spectrum of existing platforms, fora, means & methods. According to the aims and based on the methods, procedure and expertise there is a certain philosophy of the Academy consisting of participatory approach and inclusivity, implemented by open discussion as a cumulative process between relevant stakeholders; critical approach across disciplines of science and expertise, implemented by the double Interplay: between science, politics and business, and Western science & Indigenous knowledge; respect towards knowledge-building, and that an attitude matters, when building a process which is cumulative & exponential; and finally, flexibility and economical efficiency in organization.

Conclusions

Though small and rare, the Academy is been successfully acting as a school of dialogue between stakeholders, a platform & sub-forum for international research projects & conferences, and a springboard for international organizations & brainstorming meetings. As an open, independent & autonomous entity, it is implementing synergy between different expertise and stakeholders, as well as between existing organizations and networks. All in all, around the Academy there is been born an 'Ecosystem' consisting of among others Northern Research Forum & Open Assemblies, TN on Geopolitics and Security & sessions at Arctic Circle, Arctic Yearbook and GlobalArctic Project & Handbook.

In the turbulent times of world politics, when facing wicked and complex problems and being in a multi-dimensional crisis, to lean on high expertise and use unorthodox methods are needed.

Behind is an understanding that our modern societies, including northernmost societies, benefit of having constant interplay between science, politics and business – that the social relevance of science is taken literally -, and that there are new & fresh ideas, and those who produce new scientific knowledge, as rapid progress and fast changes are accelerated by crises. The Calotte Academy with serious efforts & experiences to enhance open discussion, and share knowledge and experiences with local communities, as well as bravery to believe in a dialogue as confidence-building measure, deserves to be recognized and its experiences heard and studied.