

Briefing Note

Shared Roads, Shared Realities: Insights from the Calotte Academy's Journey 2025

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Calotte Academy 2025 unfolded as a shared journey across the European North. In 2025, the Calotte Academy gathered around the theme *“The Future of Europe – A Northern Point of View”*. Over six days, the Academy moved from Rovaniemi to Luleå and through Kautokeino, Hetta, Inari and Sodankylä, travelling across the borders of the European Arctic. During that week, the Academy held 28 presentations in nine sessions across seven locations. Over the week, students, scholars, Indigenous representatives and local actors spent long hours on the road and in discussions, sharing meals, landscapes and perspectives.

The travelling format shaped the atmosphere in meaningful ways. Instead of meeting in a single conference room, the group moved through the region it was analysing. Conversations that started in the sessions kept going on the bus, over dinner, and even during quick breaks outside in the cold northern air. The Academy's mobility created a sense of continuity between places, people and ideas.

The journey began in Rovaniemi, where the first morning set an attentive, reflective tone. Snow drifted outside the windows as discussions opened with Europe's shifting geopolitical environment. Participants explored how Russia's war in Ukraine and China's strategic positioning have reshaped the Arctic's political landscape. These themes quickly connected to the impacts felt most immediately in Sápmi, where militarisation and climate change intersect with land use and reindeer herding. Hearing Sámi perspectives grounded global politics in the everyday realities of northern communities.

Energy policy brought a more personal dimension. Examples from Indigenous communities in North America and Greenland illustrated the long-lasting consequences of energy infrastructure and highlighted that the green transition, while necessary, does not automatically lead to fair

outcomes. These reflections gained additional depth when considered in the Arctic context, surrounded by the landscapes that will be directly affected by future decisions.

At the end of the first day, we stopped by Santa Claus Village to relax after all the serious conversations. What was meant to be a quick visit turned into a funny and memorable moment: a real taste of the “serious snow business” in Lapland and a clear reminder of how big mass tourism is there. On the way back, our conversation shifted again when someone pointed out that Rovaniemi Airport, now Finland’s second busiest, handles both civil and military flights. It showed how the Arctic can be both a place of winter wonders and, at the same time, a region of real strategic importance.

The next phase of the journey took the group across the border to Luleå. The night sky offered us northern lights show, and a soft snowfall set the tone as we shifted our attention to the European Union’s Arctic role during the next session. Presenters described the EU as an influential but sometimes uncertain regional actor, navigating relationships with autonomous territories such as Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. Discussions on fisheries, energy and research cooperation revealed the complexity of these interactions.

A presentation on autonomous vessels introduced questions about how emerging technologies will reshape the Arctic. If unmanned ships can navigate independently, what does that mean for responsibility, sovereignty or security? This theme resonated strongly as participants reflected on how technological change influences political dynamics.

Luleå also offered space to compare northern experiences globally, including North American borderlands and Indigenous perspectives on mobility and identity. These contributions broadened the sense that the Arctic is connected to, rather than separated from wider global patterns.

Travelling deeper into the North, the road to Kautokeino marked a shift into Sápmi. Here the Academy addressed Indigenous rights within the homeland of the Sámi people. Presentations detailed the pressures reindeer herders face from climate change, mining and competing land uses. Discussions also examined the legal and political constraints on Sámi governance in Finland, including the still-pending ratification of ILO 169. As EU interest in critical minerals grows, the gap between European ambitions and Indigenous land rights became increasingly clear.

Despite the challenges, speakers also emphasised resilience, cultural continuity and cross-regional solidarity. These reflections reminded the group that while pressures on Indigenous communities are real and cumulative, so is the capacity for adaptation and self-determination.

Moving south again, the Calotte Academy reached Hetta, where discussions focused on local industries and energy projects. During this stage of the journey, visits to both Enontekiö Airport and UTAC Ivalo, a company providing vehicle and tyre testing facilities in extreme Arctic conditions, offered clear examples of how tourism, infrastructure, and community identity intersect in the region. The airport visit reminded how even relatively small facilities can play an important role in maintaining connectivity across the Arctic.

In Inari, attention moved to Russia, considered both a key geopolitical actor and a former scientific partner. One presenter summed this shift in relations up by referring to it as “a Western–Russian strategic partnership with a bright future behind it.” Several presentations described the disruption of Arctic research networks since 2022 and the uncertainty surrounding future cooperation. The

topic prompted broader reflection on the role of science diplomacy and the difficulty of rebuilding trust in politically tense times.

The final academic stop, Sodankylä, brought the conversation back to local governance. The municipality's Climate Roadmap 2035 illustrated how northern communities make practical decisions in the face of climate change, biodiversity concerns and mining proposals. These local strategies tied the week's overarching themes to the realities of everyday life in Arctic towns.

Along the journey, a multi-round role-play simulation added another layer to the experience. Built around the theme *"The Future of Europe between Green Transition and Militarization – Learned Lessons from Arctic Cooperation,"* the role-play game was framed as negotiations under the UN Security Council. It invited participants to step into the roles of different actors. Taking on the perspectives of governments, NGOs, companies and Indigenous organisations made the complexity of Arctic decision-making feel tangible. Issues that looked simple on paper became far more emotional and political when experienced from the inside.

As the week went on, certain themes kept coming back. Arctic cooperation continues, even though global crises, climate pressures and geopolitical tensions increasingly affect the region. Indigenous rights remain central, as Sámi communities face overlapping pressures from land use, militarisation and environmental change. The green transition creates opportunities but also risks repeating extractive patterns unless communities themselves shape the process. Local and global dynamics intertwine constantly, and meaningful dialogue, particularly the kind made possible by the Academy's travelling format, remains essential.

Each session of the Calotte Academy had its own rapporteur, who recorded the main ideas and key points from the presentations and discussions. This overview of the Academy's journey builds on those participant-written summaries. The full programme, route and session abstracts are available at this link [CA2025 programme](#).