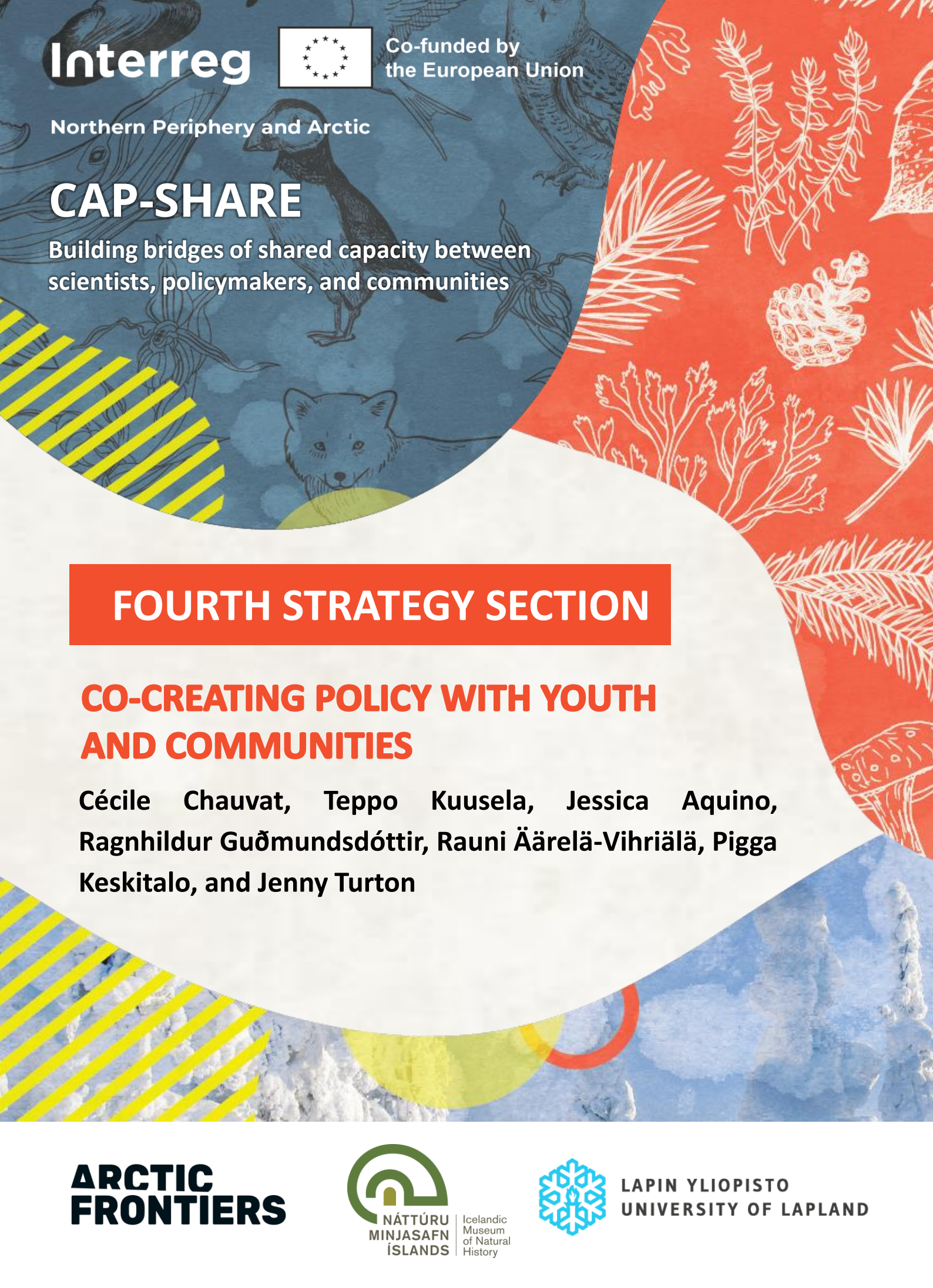




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Northern Periphery and Arctic

CAP-SHARE

Building bridges of shared capacity between
scientists, policymakers, and communities

FOURTH STRATEGY SECTION

CO-CREATING POLICY WITH YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

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**ARCTIC
FRONTIERS**



Icelandic
Museum
of Natural
History



LAPIN YLIOPISTO
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SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

Building Bridges of Shared Capacity Between Scientists, Policymakers, and Communities (CAP-SHARE) is an Interreg NPA project that aims to strengthen collaboration between stakeholders for biodiversity conservation. In 2024 and 2025, CAP-SHARE held a series of four online workshops about biodiversity actions on the local level in the Arctic, with the goal to co-develop a model for effective collaboration towards biodiversity preservation and climate resilience within Arctic communities. This fourth and final workshop focused on co-creating policy with youth and communities. It gathered diverse stakeholders from around the Arctic to share their experiences, knowledge, and insight on the theme of strengthening collaboration with policymakers for community development and biodiversity conservation. This document will outline results from the discussions held during the workshops, how they relate to broader opportunities for strengthening capacity sharing in the Arctic, and what this means for the development of the CAP-SHARE model.

INTRODUCTION

The third 2030 target of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) is to ensure that at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland, freshwater, marine, and coastal areas are effectively conserved through policy and action, while recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including rights over traditional territories¹. The target prioritizes the protection of areas of “particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services”, emphasizing that such natural areas must be well-defined in policy. Measuring biodiversity by counting species is one of the main tools used today to define high-biodiversity areas, which are prioritized for conservation. However, biodiversity is not only a matter of species richness but also of relationships between lands, waters, humans, animals and future generations. Arctic Indigenous Peoples, including Sámi, Inuit, Kalaallit, Chukchi, Nenets and many others, engage with biodiversity through diverse cultural, legal and governance traditions. Furthermore, the current practice of defining high-biodiversity areas shows a gap in Arctic conservation, where species diversity is typically low while diversity within species is higher than average². In other words, some Arctic regions should be

considered, “of particular importance for biodiversity”, despite a relatively low diversity of species. Bridging this gap requires more diverse processes to make informed decisions in the Arctic, including transnational and transdisciplinary collaboration as well as effective participation and, when appropriate, shared governance and decision-making authority of local communities in decision making³. Conservation policy must be properly informed by many factors to improve conservation outcomes⁴. These include the regional context of ecosystem functions, along with local knowledge, and the biodiversity links to the livelihoods and well-being of communities⁵. Biodiversity governance in Indigenous territories should be guided by the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) as articulated by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)⁶. Furthermore, equitable participation in decision making is necessary for justice in biodiversity conservation, as highlighted in target 22 of the GBF, which aims to:

“Ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, respecting their cultures and their rights over lands, territories, resources, and traditional knowledge, as well as by women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities and ensure the full protection of environmental human rights defenders” (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022).”

The primary aims of the online workshop were to: 1) bring together diverse stakeholders to discuss and share experiences on how more effective collaboration between policymakers and local stakeholders can improve policymaking; and 2) to understand current actions for biodiversity protection locally, and at larger scales in an Arctic context. A particular focus was placed on youth, as they are a crucial stakeholder group to engage for successful long-term biodiversity management⁷. Youth are already contributing to solutions and are important partners in shaping sustainable futures. However, youth are often only recognized as future problem solvers, and they are often tokenized and underrepresented in high-level policy-making⁸. Similar concerns have been raised regarding Indigenous participation, where consultation does not necessarily translate into influence over decision-making. Particular attention should be thus given to Indigenous youth, who

often navigate multiple governance systems and hold important roles in sustaining cultural continuity and land-based knowledge. Additional barriers exist for policy engagement of youth in rural and Arctic communities, highlighting the need for context-specific, ethical, and inclusive engagement practices.

CO-CREATING POLICY WITH YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

This CAP-SHARE online workshop was held online on April 29th, 2025, and was co-led by the Icelandic Museum of Natural History, the University of Lapland, and Arctic Frontiers.

Ragnhildur Guðmundsdóttir began the online workshop by describing the importance and uniqueness of Arctic biodiversity and why focusing specifically on biodiversity protection is a priority. The workshop continued with a panel discussion moderated by **Ronja Wedegärtner**, a biologist with expertise on science policy in the Arctic and project leader for the WWF Arctic programme. The three panellists were **Líf Magneudóttir**, Reykjavík city councillor, who focused on her experience as chairman for the health-and-environment committee and the work that has been done on biodiversity and climate change actions within the city of Reykjavík; **Annakaisa Tikkinen**, who works with the Finnish Education Employers Association and specializes in education policy; and **Jan Marco Müller**, who gave a more global perspective through his experience as Team Leader of Global Approach, Multilateral Dialogue and Science Diplomacy within the Director-General Research and Innovation at the European Commission.

Figure 1 highlights the main conclusions from the panel discussion. See the full description of speakers and presentations, as well as a recording of the presentations [here](#)⁹.



Figure 1: Keynotes from the panel discussion, "Policymakers collaborating with youth and communities".

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Knowledge gained from the online workshop

The questions used for the panels mirrored the questions that were posted in the second part of the workshop. This allowed time for local stakeholders to reflect on their own experience and bring their knowledge to the discussion.

1. What are the barriers to meaningful youth participation in decision-making?
2. How could co-operation between policymakers, scientists, and youth be made more effective in decision-making?
3. What needs to happen (what are the next steps) so that we can see change in actions for nature conservation as regional development?
4. How do we establish and maintain good relationships between scientists, youth and policymakers that are based on trust?

In the second part of the workshop, participants were divided into three breakout rooms, with one or two facilitators from the project group and one panellist in each room. The following discussion outlines opinions expressed by workshop participants, with added support from literature and concrete examples to highlight the relevance of the discussion in the current context of Arctic collaboration for biodiversity.

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES: Barriers to meaningful youth participation in decision-making

Insufficient structural support:

- Authorities often call for youth participation without providing resources, official roles, or mechanisms for real influence. The reason might be that youth are missing an official status in policymaking, as well as a representative who serves as a connection between youth and policymakers.
- Tokenism persists, partly due to the perceived lack of economic value in youth voices.

Challenges in engagement:

- Youth show declining civic interest, disconnection from local communities, and political passivity (e.g., low voter turnout).
- Social media use and lack of effective engagement methods, especially in education, limit empowerment on biodiversity issues.

Systemic and communication gaps with policymakers:

- Decision-making occurs in silos, balancing multiple factors (social, economic, scientific) with institutional inertia and outdated policies.
- Policymakers work best with timely, clear, and narrative-driven communication—short, impactful “elevator pitches” rather than technical presentations. Youth benefit from access to support, training, and opportunities to communicate recommendations in this way.

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES: More effective co-operation between policymakers, scientists, and youth in decision-making

More effective youth engagement:

- Young people should have greater access to information, opportunities, and support that enable meaningful participation in decision-making. Further, civic education may help with developing skills in community engagement. It is possible to share methodologies that target these multifaceted issues. For example, projects that work with youth to help them develop community engagement skills and connect them with future employers where they can learn on-the-job skills¹⁰, or practices that offer opportunities for direct engagement between youth and MPs, such as the youth parliament in Finland¹¹.
- Youth leaders, youth workers, educators, and community organisations play an important role in creating pathways for civic engagement, for example through informal and non-formal education¹².

Moving from consultation to recognising youth as partners in decision-making:

- Better platforms to feature the voices of youth locally and on a wider scale are crucial. Although youth are already present at some policy events, it is important to find ways to get more high-level policymakers and decision makers in the room to take youth perspectives into account.
- Training with policymakers and politicians to strengthen equitable partnerships with youth.

More holistic capacity sharing in decision-making:

- The Arctic is a multicultural and multilingual place; therefore, effective methods for communication between diverse groups with different backgrounds to share ideas are needed in decision-making processes. Effective methods for communication between diverse groups with different backgrounds to share ideas are needed.

- Equitable processes with full representation that recognize the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples and are inclusive and responsive to youth and local communities, can lead to more effective climate change adaptation and biodiversity conservation.

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES: Next steps for change in nature conservation as regional development

Breaking information silos

- It is necessary to break silos in policy and in science. For example, encouraging transdisciplinary collaboration with the conservation sector. Biodiversity conservation encompasses not only economics, ethics, and values, but also Indigenous knowledge, cultural connections to the land, and community stewardship. The topic needs to be made mainstream and accessible. Transdisciplinary collaboration allows us to create not just a bridge between communities, scientists, and policy makers, but a network of interconnected bridges.
- A powerful tool for capacity sharing is working with people who can be the intermediaries, who can help connect scientific evidence and policy priorities, and therefore can facilitate cooperation.
- Incorporating science institutionally throughout structures, such as advisory councils, academies, and chief science advisors within each ministry, can facilitate uptake of scientific evidence into policy.
- Training for science students in science communication can facilitate information sharing at the local level.

Steps to recognise youth as participants in policymaking

- Youth-led events that are intergenerational and engage policymakers, scientists, and early career people, such as youth conferences and panel discussions that are based on multidisciplinary knowledge sharing—not just youth talking at youth.
- Setting up more youth councils and ensuring that youth councils have recognised roles and meaningful influence within policymaking processes. For example, projects such as Youth

Together for Arctic Futures¹³ or the Polar Early-Career Youth Summit¹⁴ aim to represent diverse voices of arctic youth in policy and research priorities, but the uptake of recommendations needs to be improved. Creating protocols and solutions to make sure that diverse youth groups are represented beyond those who are highly politically engaged. It is important to remember that young people are not a monolith, and therefore, youth across different stakeholder groups must be involved in biodiversity conservation.

Training for youth workers, youth leaders, and educators

- Formal civic education training for youth workers, youth leaders, teachers, and educators can help in raising awareness about young people's right to participate in the process of decision making and civic engagement.
- Incorporating intercultural tools in education is necessary to raise awareness for teachers and educators on how to work in Arctic contexts. For example, incorporating different types of knowledge into formal and informal education, creating links in science curriculum, or activities with local knowledge and Indigenous methodologies.

DISCUSSION OUTCOMES: Next steps for change in nature conservation as regional development

Building trust

- It is important to consider that trust is slowly built over time through transparency, honesty, confidentiality, and personal relations. It should be built in an equal and bidirectional way. To build trust, it is important to create safe spaces that support the development of trust through dialogue that will help with equity in policymaking with scientific and community input.
- People or organizations can serve as links between different stakeholder groups and act as bridges of trust at the local level. To facilitate communication, those who are trusted by local communities and institutions can be identified as a point of contact for policy makers.

Roles in decision making

- Bottom-up decision making must be facilitated, for example, by showing that young people and communities can make important impacts in policy.
- If evidence or recommendations are not considered, policy makers should communicate why these decisions are being made. Acknowledging input and being transparent about why some things are implemented, while others are not, could have a positive impact on long-term trust building.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Political apathy in youth, and lack of incentive and support to engage youth, are two facets of a vicious cycle that affects youth confidence in their capacity to influence their own future¹⁵. For example, youth have felt that their voices are not being considered in policy¹⁶. Therefore, next steps for youth engagement need to be implemented in a way that does not rely on youth already being civically engaged but instead finds youth where they are and shares capacity.

It cannot be optional to listen to the youth. Talks and conference sessions designed as opportunities for youth to concretely participate are rarely attended by policymakers, and larger events such as UN global youth conferences and forums overwhelmingly feature “high-level” speakers in plenary sessions, with few opportunities for youth input and intergenerational dialogue¹⁷. Youth parliaments and committees must be recognized in policy as necessary participants in the political process from regional to international levels.

Supporting the professional development and mutual learning of community workers, coordinators, and knowledge brokers should be a priority to ensure that communication between communities, scientists, and policymakers is efficient while building relationships of trust¹⁸. Trusted, dedicated points of contact for communities should be identified.

CONCLUSIONS

Interdisciplinarity and intergenerational collaboration, facilitated by education, transparency, and trusted intermediaries, must be implemented at all levels of the decision-making process for biodiversity conservation. This is crucial to ensure equal representation and justice in policy and land management, as well as to access accurate knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about the future of arctic regions, ensuring better conservation outcomes.

Effective biodiversity governance in the Arctic requires not only participation but also recognition of Indigenous rights, self-determination, and Indigenous governance systems. Indigenous Peoples should be engaged not merely as stakeholders but as rights-holders with distinct political, cultural, and legal relationships to lands, waters, and biodiversity. Future capacity-sharing initiatives should therefore support Indigenous-led decision-making, respect Indigenous data sovereignty, and ensure that collaboration is guided by principles of reciprocity, relational accountability, and Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

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