



**Interreg**



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Northern Periphery and Arctic

# 25 years of cooperation

...CONNECTING THE DOTS

30<sup>th</sup> September  
to 2<sup>nd</sup> October  
Bodø, Norway

## Celebrating 25 years of transnational cooperation in the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic

The Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a conference in Bodø, Norway. This event will showcase the programme's achievements and the impact of NPA projects on northern and peripheral communities in the Arctic and near-Arctic regions, before exchanging ideas and exploring what the future Interreg NPA could look like.

### Delivering change, one step at a time

The conference will highlight how the NPA has evolved over 25 years, and how transnational cooperation has contributed to regional development, resilience, and sustainability in Northern Periphery and Arctic communities.

By bringing together participants from across the programme area, as well as Scotland and Northern Ireland, the event will showcase how Interreg NPA delivered change through projects that connect people and communities across vast distances.

### The building blocks

On the first day, the conference will primarily highlight Interreg NPA projects' impacts, where transnational cooperation marks the starting point in a longer journey of learning, growth, and lasting change.

### Dialogue about the future

On the second day, Interreg NPA invites various actors supporting cooperation in the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions to join a dialogue with the programme and its projects, exploring how we can do even more together in the future.



Norwegian Ministry  
of Local Government  
and Regional Development



Nordland  
COUNTY COUNCIL



NORD  
University



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## CONFERENCE AGENDA

### CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF INTERREG NPA

TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2025

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#### 9:00-16:00 *Project meetings*

Interreg NPA projects partnership meetings.

#### WELCOME RECEPTION

18:00 – 19:30, Stormen Library

Storgata 1A, Bodø, Norway

Join us for a special evening to start the celebration together! It will be a moment to *start connecting the dots* between people, places, and the stories that have shaped 25 years of Interreg NPA.

- Mr **Svein Magnar Øie Eggesvik**, Chair of the Nordland County Government, Norway
- Mr **Eirik Fiva**, Former Interreg Monitoring Committee member, Nordland County Council, Norway
- Ms **Annika Blomster**, Interreg NPA Programme Director, Västerbotten County Administrative Board, Sweden

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

NORD University Campus

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On the first day, the conference will primarily highlight Interreg NPA projects' impacts, where transnational cooperation marks the starting point in a longer journey of learning, growth, and lasting change. The new call for projects will be launched at this occasion!

**8:00 – 8:30** Transport from Radisson Blu Hotel to NORD University campus  
Venue: Universitetsalléen 11, 8026 Bodø, Norway

**8:30 – 9:00** Registration

**9:00 – 9:30** **Opening remarks**

Welcome address from Ms **Hanne Solheim Hansen**, Rector of NORD University

Opening remarks from State Secretary Mr **Emil Raaen**, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development

Message from Mr **Slawomir Tokarski**, Director European Territorial Cooperation, Macro-regions, Interreg and Programme Implementation, DG Regio, European Commission

**9:30 – 10:30** **How it all started**

This session looks back at the origins and evolution of the Interreg NPA. Key people involved in shaping the programme will share insights and reflections through interviews and discussion.

Facilitated by Christopher Parker, Interreg NPA, and Maxi Nachtigall (former Interreg NPP JS and MC Swedish representative).

Contributions from:

- Mr **Moray Gilland**, Head of Unit for Macro-regions, Transnational, Interregional and External Cooperation, and Enlargement, Former NPP Desk Officer – DG Regio, European Commission



- Ms **Iiris Mäntyranta**, Former Programme Director for Interreg Nord 2014-2020 and for Interreg Aurora 2021- 2027
- Mr **Jan Edøy**, Special Adviser, Norwegian Ministry of Regional Development, NPP MC member, Norway
- Mr **Jim Millard**, Former Senior Official, Scottish Government, NPP MC member, Scotland
- Mr **Gerry Finn**, Former Director or Northern and Western Regional Assembly, NPP MC member, Ireland
- Ms **Hanna Dóra Hólm Másdóttir**, Senior advisor at the Icelandic Ministry of Infrastructure, Iceland

**10:30 – 11:00**      **Coffee break**

**11:00 – 12:00**      **Insights on the impact of transnational cooperation**

This session will present findings from recent analyses and research, highlighting how transnational cooperation and Interreg NPA benefits rural regions and examine what the legacy of Interreg NPA means for the future of territorial cooperation.

**Integrating rural and economically weaker regions into European cooperation: lessons from Interreg B Programmes (2000–2020)**

Mr **Jens Kurnol** (Online), Head of Division for European Spatial and Urban Development, Federal institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and spatial development (Germany)

**From impact to insight: Evaluating Interreg NPA's legacy and future directions**

Ms **Irene Mc Master**, Principal Knowledge Exchange Fellow in the European Policies Research Centre, European Policies Research Centre (EPRC) Scotland

**12:00 – 13:30**      **Lunch**

**13:30 – 16:30**      **Parallel sessions – The building blocks**

Over the years, Interreg NPA projects have laid important foundations for future initiatives, the building blocks. In many cases, projects acted as testbeds for new ideas, which were later scaled up and integrated into regional and national policies and implementation frameworks which continue to shape ongoing efforts.

In these project-run theme-focused sessions we showcase the projects that acted as building blocks and delivered positive impacts in NPA areas.

Three blocks of parallel sessions will take place, with participants invited to attend one session per block.

Descriptions of each project session are available at the end of the agenda.

**16:30 – 17:00****Launch of the 6th call for projects**

The terms of the last call for main project applications will be presented at this event and the call officially launched.

- Ms **Lisbeth Nylund**, Chair of the Interreg NPA Monitoring Committee - Specialist Director for High North Development, Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development
- Mr **Christopher Parker**, Programme Manager for Project Development, Interreg NPA Secretariat

**18:00**

Arranged transfer from NORD Campus to Wood Hotel

Venue: Wood Hotel, Fjellveien 187, Bodø, Norway

**18:30 – 22:00****Conference dinner and entertainment**

All guests are invited to a conference dinner in the impressive settings of the Wood hotel. Expect some entertainment and surprises...

**22:00**

Arranged transfer to Radisson Blue Hotel

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

### DAY 2: DIALOGUE ABOUT THE FUTURE

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER 2025

Radisson Blu Hotel

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On the second day, Interreg NPA invites various actors supporting cooperation in the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions to join a dialogue with the programme and its projects, exploring how we can do even more together in the future.

**9:00 – 9:30**

#### Opening remarks

Ms **Claude Véron-Réville**, Special Envoy for Arctic matters,  
European Union External Action Services

**9:30 – 11:00**

#### The future of cooperation in the Northern Periphery and Arctic

##### EU Arctic Policy, achievements and outlook

Mr **Vassilis Dokalis**, Legal and International Relations Officer at the  
Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries in the  
European Commission (online)

##### Interreg post 2027 – What to expect in the next programme period

Mr **Petri Koistinen**, Policy Coordinator at the Directorate-General  
for Regional and Urban policy (DG REGIO), European Commission

##### Interreg NPA consultation, beneficiaries' expectations

Ms **Kirsti Mijnhijmer**, Head of Secretariat, Interreg Northern  
Periphery and Arctic

**11:00 – 12:00**

#### Coffee and lunch boxes

**12:00 – 14:00**

#### Parallel sessions: Emerging topics

Theme-focused session prepared by NPA projects and other key  
NPA organisations to present topics that have recently gained  
attention in response to evolving challenges and needs in NPA  
regions.

Two blocks of parallel sessions will take place, with participants  
invited to attend one session per block. Descriptions of each  
project session are available at the end of the agenda.



14:00 – 14:30

Coffee Break

14:30 – 15:30

**Closing Panel: How does cooperation in the Arctic and Northern Periphery moves on from here?**

This panel explores how transnational cooperation can best respond to the diverse, place-based needs of the Arctic and Northern Periphery communities. Panellists will reflect on how cooperation structures already existing across the region can build on synergies and collaboration to achieve meaningful long-term impacts.

Mr **Nils Kristian Sørheim Nilsen**, Director of Northern Norway European Office, NSPA (Northern Sparsely Populated Areas Network), Norway

Ms **Halla Nolsøe Poulsen**, Director NORA, (Nordic Atlantic Cooperation), Faroe Islands

Mr **Travis O Doherty**, EU Programmes Liaison Officer, Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), Ireland

Ms **Pia Pitkänen**, Senior Advisor of regional development, Regional Council of North Karelia, Finland

Ms **Daria Makhotina Gudnason**, Advisory member of the Arctic Youth Network

Mr **Gorm Vold**, Chief Advisor for Nalik Ventures, Greenland

15:30

**Closing remarks**

17:30 – 20:00

**Thank you and goodbye party**

Bådin brewery, Tolder Holmers vei 6, 8003 Bodø, Norway

One more opportunity for having a good time together and share good vibes before leaving Bodø!

Interreg NPA will provide light refreshments and entertainment. An optional beer tasting is also available for purchase.

## EXPERIMENTAL EXHIBITION

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

From 13:30 to 16:30

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#### Landscape, knowledge and traditions from Gaskelaante

Led by Kevin Denham, Jamtli Museum, Sweden – Project DACCHE

Use XR glasses to experience over 1000 years of Gaskelaante, as the landscape is changed over time – both by humans and by nature. Enter the virtual landscape and ‘touch’ the objects! Perhaps you will see a South Sámi hunter skiing by!

Welcome to an extraordinary exhibition that combines cutting-edge digital technology with the cultural landscape of Gaskelaante – ‘the land in-between’ in the South Sámi language – a vast area that stretches from Trøndelag in Norway to Jämtland in Sweden. People have visited and lived in this area for over a thousand years. Its history includes the Sámi, Vikings, Caroleans, kings, farmers, traders, hunters and tourists.

The green transition’s search for renewable energy sources is also bringing increased global conflict, including here in Gaskelaante. This exhibition aims to raise awareness of its importance and fragility, in a world that is affected by both climate change and the consequences of the green transition.

## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 1: From 13:30 to 14:30

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In these project-run theme-focused sessions we showcase the projects that acted as building blocks and delivered positive impacts in NPA areas.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### **From Awareness to Action: Ten Years of Tackling Marine Plastic Pollution in the NPA Region,**

Led by Niko Hänninen, University of Oulu, Finland – Project CIRCNETS

Marine plastic pollution hit the headlines roughly a decade ago with pictures of marine animals tangled in fishing gear. The NPA was quick to pick up this topic and to support a project called Circular Ocean, which aimed to look at this problem closely, and develop solutions and opportunities to support reuse of end-of-life fishing gear.

This brought the problem into limelight, and within the Interreg sphere, winning the People's choice award at RegioStars 2016. The project was followed by Blue Circular Economy (also a RegioStars finalist) with a more systematic view on the business potential of end-of-life fishing gear. Parallel to these projects, circular economy has gained importance, the SUP directive has been passed and then a new CIRCNETS project has emerged. Like threads in a net, each NPA-funded project has built on the last—strengthening a network of innovation and policy that advances circular solutions and extended producer responsibility in tackling marine plastic pollution

#### **Empowered NPA Communities: Driving Resilience Through Digital Innovation**

Led by Jose Manuel San Emeterio, ERNACT, Ireland – Project INNOCAP

Public sector organizations in the NPA area recognize the need for innovation to provide high-quality, sustainable services. With growing challenges such as an aging population, high service costs for small, dispersed communities, and digital skills gaps, adopting transformative solutions is vital. The COVID pandemic reinforced the crucial role digital technologies play in community resilience.

This session explores the path taken by several NPA projects (IMPROVE, EMERGREEN, DISTINCT, ARCTIC PACER, INNOCAP, MINDSET) in harnessing digital innovation to enhance public services. It will showcase the impact of advanced technologies such as

AI, IoT, and VR/AR, demonstrating how they can drive meaningful change when integrated with inclusive approaches where communities are empowered and actively participate in shaping solutions.

By leveraging digital transformation, NPA regions can build resilience and secure a more sustainable future.

### **Tourism in the Making: Building Blocks from 25 Years of NPA Projects**

Led by Ari Laakso, University of Lapland, Finland and Steve Taylor University of Highlands and Islands, UK – PROJECTS SAINT, SCITOUR, RETURN

This session traces how NPA-funded tourism projects have served as building blocks in the region's evolving approach to tourism, from early efforts to develop sustainable tourism as a new livelihood model to today's focus on protecting communities and nature amid rising visitor pressure in tourism hotspots.

Over 25 years, tourism priorities have shifted: digital tools were introduced to enhance visitor experiences and promote responsible travel, and more recently, attention has turned toward regenerative tourism that actively improves local conditions.

Participants will explore how NPA projects have addressed emerging challenges and opportunities, such as slow adventure and scientific tourism, while fostering ethical, culturally sensitive tourism in NPA communities. The take-home message: tourism in the NPA is constantly evolving, and through shared learning and collaboration, it has become a platform for innovation, resilience, and community-led change.

### **Visit to NordLab, Center for Crisis Management and Collaboration**

Center for Crisis management and collaboration – Nordlab focuses on practice-based research and education in preparedness, societal security and collaboration, and contributes to Nord University's thematic focus area in societal security.

In the autumn of 2024, Nordlab was expanded to 500 square meters and consists of modern facilities with advanced technology that enables the implementation of various types of exercises, research activities, teaching, as well as networking and user dialogues with emergency response actors and industry

## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 2: From 14:30 to 15:30

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In these project-run theme-focused sessions we showcase the projects that acted as building blocks and delivered positive impacts in NPA areas.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### Responsible and Regenerative Tourism Approaches in Northern Periphery and Arctic

Led by Timo Rui, Karelia University of Applied Science, Finland – Project GLOW 2.0

Excessive and misdirected artificial lighting at night, light pollution, is increasing across the globe at a rate of about 10% annually (Kyba et al. 2023), making it the greatest threat to natural darkness, darkness of nature.

Over 80% of the world and almost 90% residents of Europe can no longer experience natural darkness (Falchi et. al 2016); a rapidly diminishing natural resource even in a sparsely populated countries, cities and towns. Without darkness, ecological, cultural, scientific, aesthetic, economic, health, and wellness values from darkness and dark skies are lost (Stone 2017). Energy costs are also significant (Eklöf 2023).

The session will engage participants on ways Interreg NPA GLOW2.0 partnership assisted enterprises and organisations across participating NPA regions enhance sustainable growth and competitiveness for dark months of the year, using darkness of nature and Dark Sky as additional elements for diversifying the tourism package, and means of safeguarding natural assets.

#### Empowering Social Care and Healthcare: Technology for Workforce Wellbeing

Led by Susanna Leskinen, Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Finland and Nick Timmons, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland - Projects Tech2Heal and RemoTED

The Tech2Heal and RemoTED projects explore how technology and digital solutions can improve the wellbeing and performance of social and healthcare professionals, especially in rural and remote areas. By integrating digital tools into healthcare settings, these projects aim to enhance professional wellbeing, quality of care, and service accessibility.



**Northern Periphery and Arctic**

Drawing on the experiences and knowledge from past Interreg NPA initiatives, these projects continue to build on the foundations of innovation, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing. The session will focus on the benefits of adopting technology in social and healthcare work environments and how it can transform the way professionals care for others.

Key questions addressed will include: How can technology enhance the way we work to improve people's lives? and How can technology be effectively adopted in the workplace to better care for others?

**Creative journeys: Strengthening the cultural and creative economy in the NPA**

Led by Ian Brannigan, Western Development Commission, Ireland – Project N-LITE

This session explores the impact of Interreg NPA funding on the creative economy in the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions. Through projects like Creative Edge, Creative momentum, Spot-lit, and N-LITE, the programme has connected creative entrepreneurs, expanded market reach, and advanced innovation in cultural and literary tourism.

Join us in an immersive experience to discover how these projects have stimulated economic growth, and promoted the cultural landscape of the Northern Periphery communities.

**Visit NOATUN Labs at Nord University**

NOATUN is Norway's most modern laboratory building, newly opened at Nord University. During your visit, you will get a guided tour of the facilities supporting research and education in areas such as aquaculture, marine biodiversity, veterinary science, and biotechnology. *Walking distance within Nord University.*

## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 3: From 15:30 to 16:30

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In these project-run theme-focused sessions we showcase the projects that acted as building blocks and delivered positive impacts in NPA areas.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### The ROADEX network – for better rural roads

Led by Per Otto Aursand, Norwegian Public Road Administration, Norway, ROADEX Network

ROADEX has been a series of technical co-operations between a range of roads organisations across Northern Europe on matters concerning the management of low volume rural roads.

The themes covered by ROADEX research is among others drainage, heavy trucks, road materials, maintenance and rehabilitation of roads. A series of demonstration projects on these themes have been conducted and reported. The main ROADEX solution is precise surveys to map the weak sections, focus in on them and design 'fit for purpose' structures and treatments.

Several findings with a high potential to increase productivity and savings have been made without compromising quality. Results have been published in a range of reports and e-learning lessons on [www.roadex.org](http://www.roadex.org). The results are not limited to northern peripheral areas and rural roads, but can also be implemented on high-capacity roads and on a global basis.

#### From pilot to practice: scaling innovation in energy efficiency

Led by Bjarne Lindeløv, Nordland Research Institute, Norway – Project HYBES

The session would explore how Interreg NPA funding empowers communities in the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions to test innovative solutions in real-world settings, manage associated risks, and scale successful initiatives.

Featuring projects like e-Lighthouse and HYBES, it would examine how these initiatives have enhanced energy efficiency and promoted sustainable practices through pilot implementations. Participants will learn how transnational collaboration and strategic

support facilitate the transition from experimental projects to impactful, scalable, and concrete solutions.

### Social entrepreneurship - essential for regional development in the Northern Peripheral and Arctic

Led by Yvonne von Friedrichs, Mid Sweden University, Sweden – Project MERSE

Social entrepreneurship is a rapidly emerging form of entrepreneurship that has gained ground in Europe. Cross-border cooperation within the MERSE project has made it possible to compare country-specific regional conditions for social entrepreneurship in rural areas.

The session explores the conditions for rural social enterprises in five regions of the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions and highlights the barriers and opportunities for social enterprises. Measuring results and impact is repeatedly highlighted as a central challenge in the field of social entrepreneurship. Lack of clarity about social impact and long-term savings in society limits social enterprises' opportunities for external financing and sustainable establishment in the market.

Although it is well known that social entrepreneurship usually results in good things and fills gaps in society, the conditions for this type of entrepreneurship vary despite the great growing interest in society

## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 2: EMERGING TRENDS

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 4: From 12:00 to 13:00

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Theme-focused session prepared by NPA projects and other key NPA organisations to present topics that have recently gained attention in response to evolving challenges and needs in NPA regions.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### **Increasing youth engagement in biodiversity decisions: the importance of relations to water and landscapes**

Led by Katrine Opheim, Arctic Frontiers, Norway – Project CAP-SHARE

In this session we will present the first-year results of CAP-SHARE: Building Bridges of Shared Capacity Between Scientists, Policy Makers and Communities. We will specifically focus on the integration of youth, local and indigenous knowledge into decision making. From sharing stories, youth expressed the importance of water bodies (rivers, lakes, coasts and oceans), landscapes (tundra, forests and fells) and how they connect young people across boundaries and cultures.

Through videos of panel discussions and intergenerational knowledge sharing, the outcomes from the first year of the project will be shared. A representative from Norway, Iceland and Finland will share a first-look at the model for capacity sharing for youth in decision making. We would also welcome the input from other NPA projects on the results.

The goal is to share ideas for future collaboration and continued development of Arctic and Northern Periphery Areas, for sustainable biodiversities.

#### **Challenge Drive Collaborations - Empowering Europe's Future through Youth**

Led by Umair N. Mughal, Nord University, Norway – Project NORDIC BRIDGE

Challenge-Driven Collaborations apply multi-stakeholder, transdisciplinary approaches to co-create solutions for shared societal challenges. This session will highlight how digital platforms like the Nordic Bridge Project—a digital collaboration tool connecting Norway, Finland, Iceland, and Ireland—can facilitate engaging challenge drive collaboration by engaging youth and researchers in contributing to societal challenges. The aim is change the youth from being passive recipients of research funding or

policy into active partners, tackling real-world issues through knowledge valorization. Participants will explore how cross-border platforms foster equitable access, regional resilience, and sustainable impact in remote and rural contexts.

### **Sustainable SMEs: Supporting the transition to more sustainable businesses**

Led by Kirsi Knuuttila, Jamk University of Applied Sciences, Finland – Projects Sustainable SMEs and TARGET CIRCULAR

*(Title and content under development)* This session combines the expertise and learnings from Sustainable SMEs and TARGET CIRCULAR projects working with SMEs experiences, challenges, and good practices when transitioning to more sustainable business practices and sustainability reporting.

### **Arctic Urban-Regional Cooperation: Advancing sustainable development at the local level through international cooperation**

Led by Maja Wolland Blomberg, High North Centre for the Arctic Urban-Regional Cooperation

This panel will delve into the role that transnational cooperation plays in advancing sustainable development at the local level in the Arctic using the Arctic Urban and Regional Cooperation (AURC) as a lens to look at what works, what doesn't and what we should do more of.

Through the AURC they work together in a structured action planning process to transfer knowledge, share best practices and find solutions on topics that include attracting people to the North, addressing skills and workforce challenges, creating more liveable cities, fostering culture and building business opportunities as well as promoting sustainable tourism strategies.

The AURC is component of the EU-funded Support to EU Arctic Policy (SEUAP) project.

### **Visit Joint Rescue and Coordination Center, Bodø**

Led by Mikel Dominguez Cainzos, Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Norway – Project NAMRO

Get an inside look at the JRCC, where real-time emergency responses are coordinated across land, sea, and air. Hear how critical operations are managed and lives are saved in the Arctic - now strengthened by the Interreg NPA funded NAMRO project, which supports more efficient and coordinated mass rescue operations. Walking distance from the Radisson Blu.



## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 2: EMERGING TRENDS

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 5: From 13:00 to 14:00

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Theme-focused session prepared by NPA projects and other key NPA organisations to present topics that have recently gained attention in response to evolving challenges and needs in NPA regions.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### Youth engagement: Youth Together for Arctic futures project

Led by Daria Makhotina Gudnason & Julia Morales-Aguirre, Arctic Youth Network

This European Union funded project aims to support Arctic and European youth with knowledge, skills and opportunities to work towards implementing good climate and nature policies for the Arctic. In their session, Arctic Youth Network a consortium partner, will share experience of youth engagement in the project.

#### Sustainable Arctic Development: What's next?

Led by Andrey Kazakov, High North Centre, Norway

This session will explore current and future trends for sustainable Arctic development based on the results of the Arctic Business Index project (previously known as Business Index North). Through the expert panel the session will address the following questions. What is the socio-economic and business outlook for the Arctic? How to overcome overreliance on natural resources and promote Arctic innovations? What are possible scenarios for economic cooperation in the Arctic? And is it still possible to develop the Arctic in a sustainable way?

#### IoT Meets AI: Transforming Energy Data into Actionable Insights

Led by Elena Bezborodova, AIM Centre, Ireland – Project ARCTIC EDGE and Kirsu Knuutila JAMK University, Finland, Sustainable SME

This is a hands-on, high-impact workshop designed to show how to turn energy and weather data into powerful, real-world insights. The workshop will demonstrate how to use IoT sensors, cloud tools, and generative AI to create smart dashboards and

reports. The session will showcase what can be done with energy data, and how to feed it into AI tools that generate instant summaries for reporting and compliance.

The goal is to demonstrate emerging trends empowering SMEs with the tools and know-how to turn raw data into stories that inspire action. The session provides a fresh perspective on how technology, particularly IoT and AI, can make sustainability insights, faster, and more impactful. Through real-life examples and smart dashboards there will be a showcase of how emerging tools can turn raw energy data into meaningful, automated insights.

### Using gamified digital tools and methods to co-create solutions to regional issues

Led by Ásta Olga Magnúsdóttir, University of Iceland, Iceland, Tapio Alakörkkö, Region Vasterbotten, Sweden and Mariia Hämäläinen, Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Finland – Project InnoGS

The InnoGS team offers a playful session for strategy makers, project leaders and anyone interested in exploring how game thinking can help us connect the dots, reach out to youth and inspire community based innovation.

Play is more than entertainment - it's how we learn, connect, imagine, and build bridges across differences. In this session, we explore play and how game thinking can help us create inclusive digital strategies, develop processes and support diverse communities.

We will reflect on our own experiences with play as children and adults — and look at how play shows up today in digital spaces and innovation.

- What do games really mean to younger generations?
- How can gameplay support cross-generational dialogue?
- How can play become a tool for inclusion, creativity, and expression?

We will show examples from each of the consortium countries, share how we inspire and learn from each other and explore opportunities within this space.

## CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

Meet the speakers

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#### **Hanne Solheim Hansen**

*Rector, Nord University*

Originally from Denmark, Hanne Solheim Hansen completed her studies in Norway and has held leadership roles in higher education since 2009. She began as Dean at the former Nord-Trøndelag University College, later serving as Vice-Rector and Head of Studies. In 2017, she became Vice-Rector for Education at the newly established Nord University, and in 2019 she was appointed Rector. Under her leadership, the university has strengthened its academic communities, increased research activity, and expanded international collaboration to ensure education and knowledge at the forefront of global developments.



#### **Sławomir Tokarski**

*Director for the European Territorial Cooperation, Macro-regions, Interreg and Programmes Implementation - Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission*

Sławomir Tokarski has held senior positions in the European Commission since 2004, when he joined as a Cabinet member to the Commissioner for Regional Policy. He has since led key units across DG MARE, DG Enterprise, and DG GROW, covering economic policy, defence and maritime industries, and industrial innovation. From 2016 to 2021, he served as Director for Industrial Policy and Innovation in DG GROW. Since 2021, he has been Director at DG REGIO, overseeing European Territorial Cooperation, macro-regions, Interreg, and programme implementation.



### Moray Gilland

*Head of Unit for Macro-regions, Transnational, Interregional and External Cooperation, and Enlargement - Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission*

Moray Gilland is Head of Unit for Macro-regions, Transnational, Interregional and External Cooperation, and Enlargement in the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy at the European Commission. He has worked in the Commission for more than 25 years, including the last 13 as a Head of Unit. In his previous post, he led the Commission's work on the preparation and negotiation of the 2021-2027 EU cohesion policy regulations; and was Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Danuta Hübner and Commissioner Paweł Samecki.

Moray Gilland was European Commission Desk Officer of the Northern Periphery programme Interreg IIIB 2000-2006.



### Iiris Mäntyranta

*Former Programme director for Interreg Nord 2014-2020 and for Interreg Aurora 2021- 2027*

Iiris Mäntyranta, former Programme director for Interreg Nord 2014-2020 and for Interreg Aurora 2021- 2027, has been working with EU-funding and administration during the last 20 years before her retirement in 2024.

Born in The Torne Valley, a border region between northern Finland and Sweden, cooperation and especially cross- border cooperation has been important for her.

Iiris Mäntyranta has played a key role in shaping and advancing the Arctic cooperation initiative a network of 5 EU cooperation programmes operating in the European Arctic.



**Jan Edøy**

*Special Adviser, Norwegian Ministry of Regional Development*

Since 1986, Jan Edøy has worked extensively with international relations for the Norwegian Government, including 18 years in Brussels.

He served as a regional policy counsellor at the Norwegian Mission to the EU, a National Expert at the European Commission (DG REGIO), and Director of the Oslo Region European Office.

Since 2019, he has been Special Adviser at the Ministry of Regional Development, actively engaged in ESPON, TA2030, Interreg programmes, and international election observation missions with OSCE, UN, and UNDP.

Jan Edøy served as the Norwegian member of the NPP monitoring committee between 2007 and 2014.

**Jim Millard**

*Former Senior Official, Scottish Government*

James Millard has extensive experience in European funding and regional policy, having worked for the Scottish Government from the late 1990s until recently.

He spent several years in Brussels representing Scottish interests, including as part of the European Affairs Division and later overseeing the Highlands and Islands Structural Funds programmes.

He also served as a National Expert to the European Commission and provided evidence to parliamentary committees on EU funding.

Throughout his career, he played a key role in managing and coordinating EU structural programmes for Scotland and participated actively over an extended period in EU Interreg programmes; in particular the Northern Periphery and Northern Periphery and Arctic programmes.



**Gerry Finn**

*Former Director of Northern and Western Regional Assembly, Ireland*

Gerry Finn has served as Director of Community & Enterprise with Roscommon County Council (1999), and later as Director of the Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly (2000–2015) and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (2015–2016), focusing on EU funding and regional economic planning.

He represented Ireland on several Interreg programmes, including Northern Periphery and Arctic, Atlantic Area, Ireland–Northern Ireland–Scotland, and Interreg Europe.

Mr. Finn has also held leadership roles such as Chairperson of the Western Development Commission, the Audit Committee of the Special EU Programmes Body (Peace Programme), and the Audit and Risk Committee for the Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board.

**Hanna Dóra Hólm Másdóttir**

*Senior Advisor at the Icelandic Ministry of Infrastructure, Iceland*

Hanna Dóra Hólm Másdóttir is Senior Advisor at the Icelandic Ministry of Infrastructure specialising in regional development, innovation, and public policy. With over two decades of experience in public administration, she has worked extensively on policies supporting rural communities, entrepreneurship, and sustainable growth.

Between 2006 and 2012, she served as Iceland's representative on the programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) and PMG of the Northern Periphery Programme (NPP), helping shape its early direction and impact. She currently represents Iceland in the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Development and Planning (EK-R) and serves on the Bureau of the OECD Regional Development Policy Committee (RDPC). Her expertise spans regional policy, innovation, international cooperation, and project and crisis management.

**Christopher Parker**

*Programme Manager for Project Development,  
Joint Secretariat, Interreg NPA*

Christopher Parker started his work with the Northern Periphery Programme when it was known as the Article 10 pilot project “Nordic – Scottish Cooperation” and from 2000 known as Northern Periphery Programme Interreg IIIB.

Since then, he has continued to work principally developing, supporting and promoting Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic projects.

**Maxi Nachtigall**

*Desk Officer, Division for regional development  
and rural development, Swedish Ministry for  
Rural Affairs*

With a strong foundation in European cooperation, Maxi Nachtigall served as Desk Officer for the Secretariats of the Interreg Northern Periphery Programme (2007–2010) and Interreg Europe.

At the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), Maxi Nachtigall worked as an Adviser for Sustainable Development, and later as Policy Area Coordinator for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region at the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, deepening her expertise in multilevel governance and regional collaboration.

Currently at the Swedish Ministry for Rural Affairs, she continues working on issues related to sustainable, regional, and rural development, with a particular focus on EU Cohesion Policy.

**Jens Kurnol**

*Head of Division for European Spatial and Urban Development, Germany*

Economist. Passionate about European and neighbourly cooperation, the Northern Seas, and using empirical facts.

Currently working as Head of Division for European Spatial and Urban Development at the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) with a focus on territorial cohesion in the EU, transnational cooperation around the Baltic Sea, and cross-border relations with Poland.

**Irene McMaster**

*Principal Knowledge Exchange Fellow in the European Policies Research Centre, Scotland*

Based at EPRC for 25 years, Dr Irene McMaster has extensive experience of working on Cohesion policy planning, management, implementation and reform. She specialises in cross-national research on INTERREG and transnational cooperation. She has just completed the preparation of an overview report on Interreg Consultations for the post 2027 period on behalf of the European Commission.

Over successive programme periods, she has led evaluations of the, e.g. Northern Periphery and Arctic, North Sea and Interact Programmes. She has worked numerous comparative research projects and provided expert advice on territorial cooperation across Europe, particularly in relation to cooperation in the high North, around the North Sea Region, and Irish Sea. She also works regularly on regional development policy in Norway and Ireland.



**Emil Raaen**

*State Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in Norway*

Emil Raaen is serving as State Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in Norway.

Raaen political career includes two terms on the Trondheim City Council, as chief municipal executive in Bjugn and later in the merged Ørland municipality, and as advisor to county mayor Tore O. Sandvik.

Originally from Nardo, Raaen has lived most of his life in Trondheim. Beyond politics, he also worked in education as a teacher and inspector. He is actively involved in sports as a handball coach for Strindheim Sports Club.

**Lisbeth Nylund**

*Specialist Director for High North Development, Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development*

Lisbeth Nylund has been working for several years with Nordic and European transnational and cross-border cooperation in the High North. She has served as Norwegian member of the Monitoring Committee in the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic programme since 2013.

Lisbeth Nylund believes the Interreg NPA programme offers unique opportunities for partners across the European Arctic and North-Atlantic area to cooperate and share experiences and knowledge.

## CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

### DAY 2: DIALOGUE ABOUT THE FUTURE

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER 2025

Meet the speakers

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#### **Claude Véron-Réville**

*Special Envoy for Arctic matters, European Union External Action Services*

Claude Véron-Réville is, since September 2024, Special Envoy for Arctic matters and Head of Division for Western Europe.

Prior to that, she occupied different managerial positions in the EEAS Human Resources Department. Previously, she worked several years on the Eastern Europe and Russia files as Deputy Head of the Russia Division in the EEAS and Deputy Head of Division for Eastern Partnership, the OSCE and Regional Organisations, including the Northern Dimension and BEAC.

Between November 2011 and August 2013 she was posted as a European exchange diplomat (Transatlantic Diplomatic Fellow) in the US State Department in the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova Office and in the Russia Office.



#### **Vassilis Dokalis**

*Legal and International Relations Officer at the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries in the European Commission*

Based in Brussels, Vassilis works on issues related to international ocean governance, law of the sea, and the Arctic and has contributed to the development and implementation of legal frameworks, international agreements, and cross-border governance initiatives.

Vassilis key responsibilities include policy work and negotiations on the Law of the Sea and marine environmental protection, the representation of the European Commission in multilateral fora and bilateral exchanges and active engagement in shaping and implementing the European Union's Arctic Policy.



**Petri Koistinen**

*Policy Coordinator at the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban policy, European Commission*

Petri Koistinen is Policy Coordinator at the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban policy (DG REGIO) at the European Commission.

Petri is responsible for the Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic programme and the EU Macro-regional Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

**Kirsti Mijnhijmer**

*Head of Secretariat, Interreg NPA*

Kirsti Mijnhijmer has worked for the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic transnational programme since 2008, where she worked a decade as a communications manager, leading several major projects, including developing the NPA Programme document and implementing an electronic monitoring system. Since 2018 Kirsti Mijnhijmer is the dedicated Head of Secretariat for the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic programme. Between 2018-2021, Kirsti coordinated a network of EU cooperation programmes in the Arctic, mandated by the Joint Arctic Communication 2016. Currently, this collaboration continues with Interreg Aurora. Both programmes contribute to the EU Arctic Policy, by funding projects that make a difference for people in Arctic communities.



### Travis O'Doherty

*Interreg NPA Regional Contact Point, Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), Ireland*

As a Contact Point for EU funding programmes, Travis facilitates access to EU funding and participation in research and innovation. Travis provides guidance, support, and information on all aspects of EU-funding and manages the NWRA EU funding network. Other duties include Chairing NPA Regional Appraisal Group meetings with key regional stakeholders.

Travis is a Monitoring Committee member on the Interreg Atlantic Area programme, and an Associate Monitoring Committee Member of the Interreg Europe programme. In a previous role, Travis provided the National Contact Point for the URBACT EU funding programme. With 13 years' experience in EU funding, Travis has managed 15 EU and nationally funded projects and provided the Contact Point for 3 EU funding programmes.



### Pia Pitkänen

*Senior Advisor of regional development at the Regional Council of North Karelia, Finland*

Pia Pitkänen is Senior Advisor of regional development at the Regional Council of North Karelia, Finland. She has been a member of the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme's Regional Advisory Group since 1999 and has twice served as a project manager in NPA projects.

Today, her work focuses on regional development programmes and international cooperation, with a strong emphasis on fostering sustainable growth and partnerships.

**Nils Kristian Sørheim Nilsen**

*Director of Northern Norway European Office, NSPA (Northern Sparsely Populated Areas Network)*

Nils has held an amazing variety of roles in his life, beginning work at 13 as a newsagent. His career spans 10 years at SAS, 2½ years as a radio journalist, and roles as project manager in Karlsøy, development manager in Tolga, and marketing and information manager at Hålogaland Theater.

He has also been a doctoral student, led projects on salmon derivatives and internationalization at Innovation Norway, and served as political advisor and city councilor in Tromsø.

Before his current post, he directed the Regional Business Association of Tromsø/Troms Chamber of Commerce.

Since October 2017, he has been director of the North Norway European Office.

**Daria Makhotina Gudnason**

*Advisory member of the Arctic Youth Network*

Daria Makhotina Gudnason holds a Master's degree in Nordic Urban Planning Studies and brings extensive expertise in organizational development, strategic fundraising, and youth engagement.

Her work has focused on strengthening and scaling youth organizations, with a particular emphasis on long-term sustainability and capacity building.

She currently serves as an advisory member of the Arctic Youth Network, where she contributes to the development of strategic frameworks, programmatic expansion, and a clearly articulated vision for the organization's future.



**Gorm Vold***Chief Advisor, Nalik Ventures, Greenland*

Gorm has been an advisor for Nalik for five years and has extensive knowledge of entrepreneurship and innovation development in Greenland. He has strong insight into Greenlandic business development and the wider ecosystem of business and public relations.

Many projects in this field are supported through relevant programmes from the EU and the Nordic Council of Ministers, in addition to national initiatives, and Gorm has been an active participant in these networks for several years.

Gorm also serves as Greenland's national contact point for the EU Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPA) and for the regional cooperation programme NORA under the Nordic Council of Ministers.

**Halla Nolsøe Poulsen***Director of NORA, Nordic Atlantic Cooperation*

Previous Head of Faroese Representation in Iceland with a demonstrated history of working in the international and diplomatic affairs industry. Strong community and social services professional skilled in International Relations, Public Administration, Political Science, Politics, and Policy Analysis.

She previously served as Chair of the Faroese Gender Equality Committee. From 2015 to 2023, she was a Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Industry. Prior to that, she worked as a Senior Adviser at the Nordic Council Secretariat from 2007 to 2015.



**Thomas Solhaug Baker**

*Advisor, International office of Nordland County Council, Norway*

Thomas Solhaug Baker works in the International office of Nordland County Council, providing advice and assistance on participation in Interreg NPA and other programmes. He has also worked as a European financing adviser for the Bodø2024 European Capital of Culture, where he managed international mobilities and secured funding for cultural projects.

Today, his work focuses on supporting the development of international projects, promoting the internationalisation of culture in Bodø and Nordland, and carrying out other duties pertaining to Nordic and European cooperation.