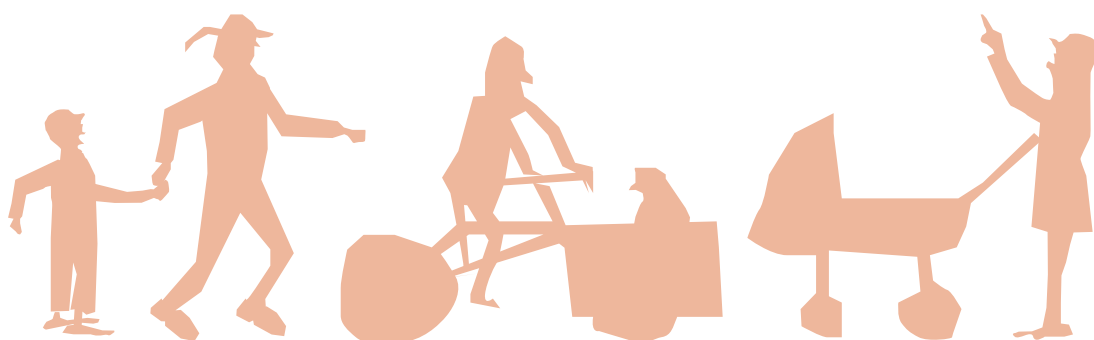


People about Longyearbyen as a physical framework

Focus group 01

Parents

MAY 2020



Background

In spring 2020 LPO Architects in collaboration with Svalbard Social Science Initiative (SSSI) initiated a project to find out how people in Longyearbyen perceive and use the town, and what needs and dreams they associate with the place.

The aim was to make different voices heard and thus contribute to knowledge about the town that can serve as a fundament for the future development of the town.

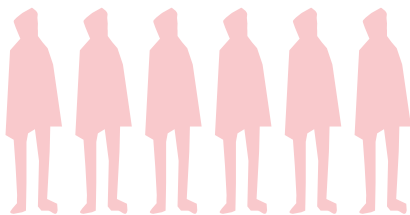
The project is part of a needs assessment of the self-initiated LPO project Right Place Right Form, funded through the Design-driven innovation program (DIP) by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway).

We conducted **nine focus groups, which are structured group interviews**, with different groups in town, and talked with in total 39 persons. We also worked interactively with maps as part of the conversations.

The original focus in the conversations was on the urban physical environment but our conversations took us beyond that to include also social realities in town, **making apparent the interconnection between the physical and the social.**

In these folders we present the outcomes of these focus groups and hope by this to stir engagement for our town!

Participants



6 parents: 4 Norwegian, 2 from other countries

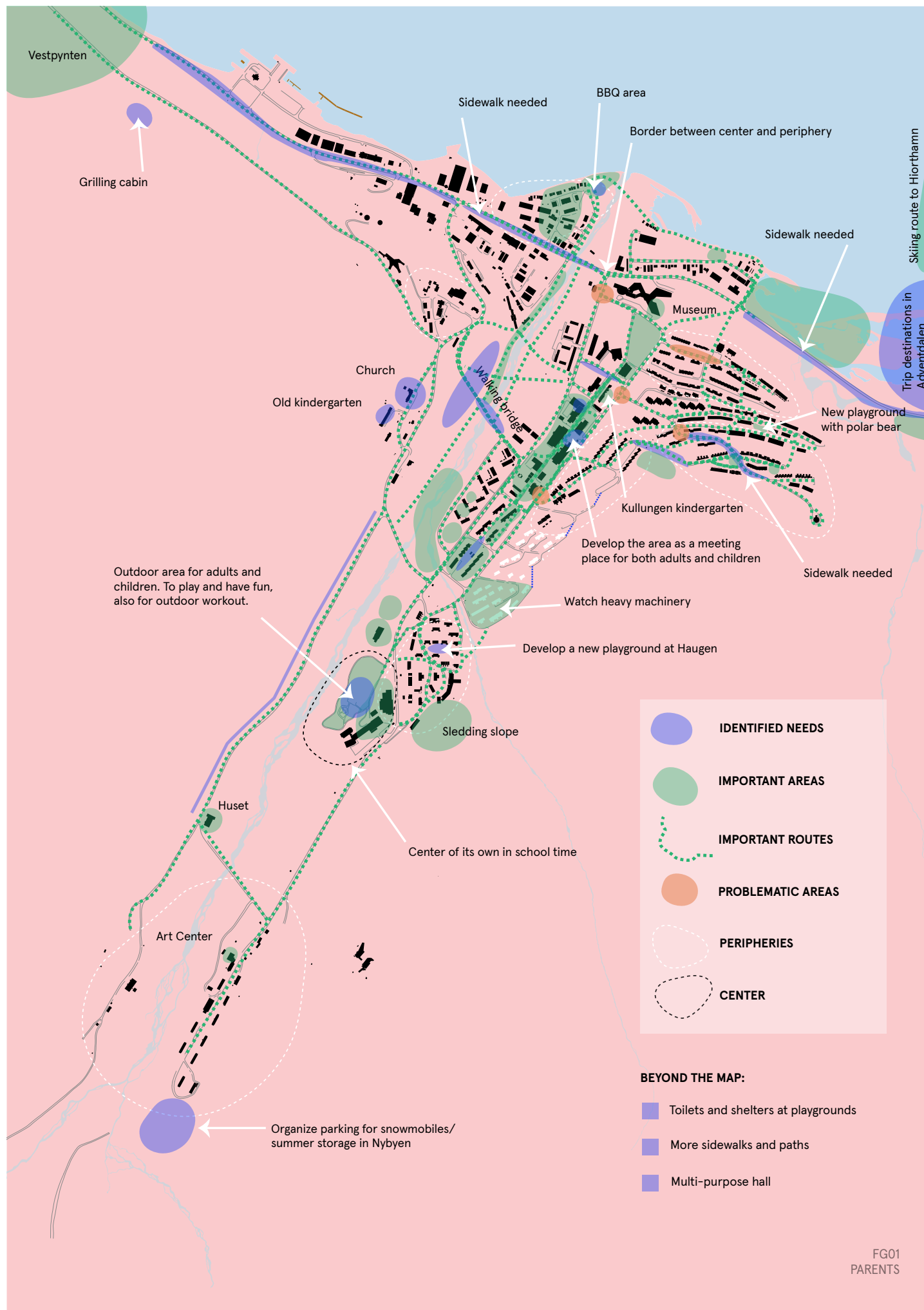
Years spent in Svalbard: 20 years, 15 year, 8 years, 7 years, 4 years, <1 year

Average length of stay: 9 years

Number of children represented: 14, age 1-18 years

Job: research (1), home office (2), tourism (1), work for state (2)

*People have different needs in different phases of their lives.
Our first focus group shows what kinds of needs parents identify.*



Map

During the focus groups, maps of Longyearbyen were distributed and participants were asked to mark important areas, problematic areas and identified needs. The map on the left is the collective map for this group.

The parents use the whole town and road system. They are concerned about accessibility, meeting places, traffic safety and near trip areas. They would like more walkways, cycling paths and sidewalks.

Description of the town

A living town continuously in change

People live close to each other

A small town in a small area with a lot of urban features

Not enough meeting places

There is no common project

Messy

Short way everywhere – great for families

Never quiet, both with regard to buildings and people

Fascinating, fantastic and accessible nature surrounding the town

Tiny, charming and quiet village with little traffic, but segmented



Use of town, centre vs. periphery

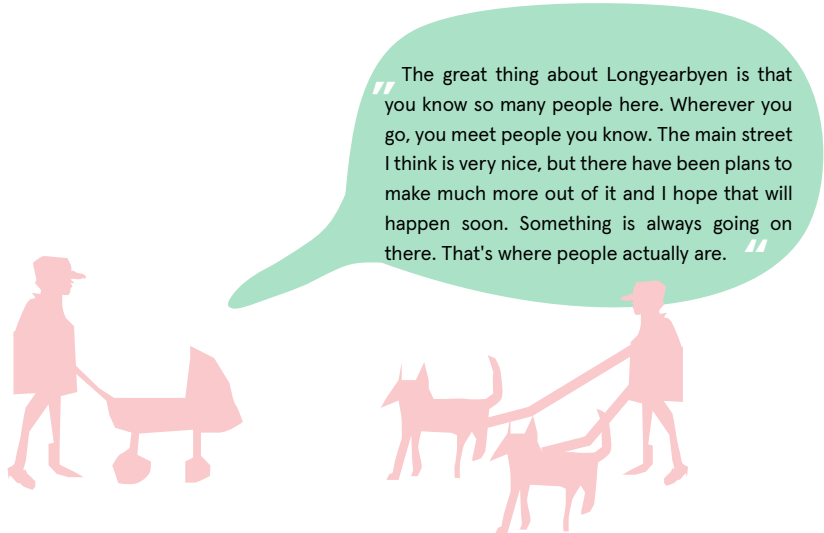
Central and public spaces, meeting places people use

- Area around school and sports hall - skiing path
- Area around Lompensenteret, the grocery store and Kulturhuset, including ramp
- Library
- Rabalder
- Pedestrian street in the middle of the town
- Playground at Elvesletta Syd
- New playground in road 232
- Sjøområdet next to the "garbage cabin"
- Huset
- Church
- Svalbard Museum
- Art Centre in Nybyen
- Ice-skating rink



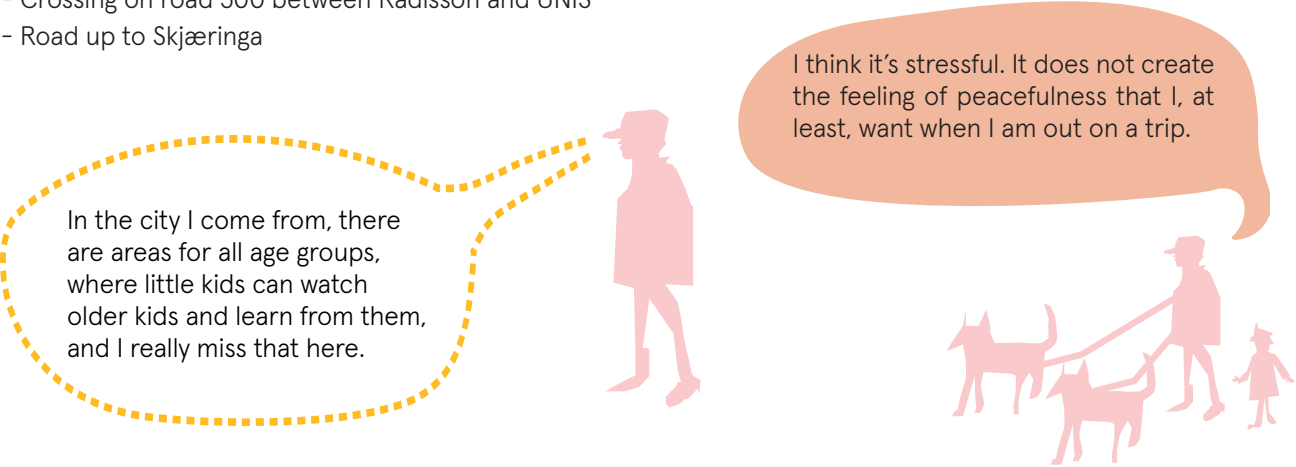
Areas that should be developed

- Area around school and sports hall
- Area between centre and Skjæringa
- Sjøområdet
- Pedestrian street in south direction
- Shortcut next to the ski hill from 230 up to Gruvedalen
- Skjæringa, Burma Road and the area around the old kindergarten
- River promenade



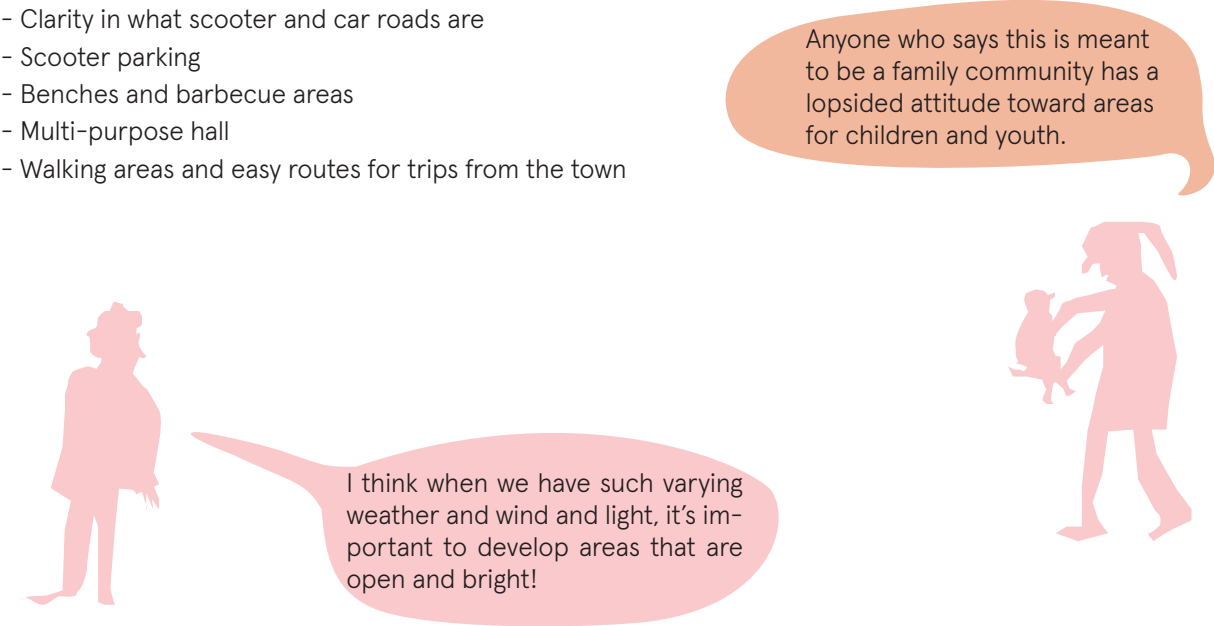
Problematic places and roads

- Gruvedalen, especially roads 238 and 232
- Road 606 (Adventveien) both towards the dogyard and towards the airport
- Hilmar Rekstens road
- Crossing at Blåmyra next to Kullungen
- Crossing on road 500 between Radisson and UNIS
- Road up to Skjæringa



What should be prioritised

- Child safety (roads, intersections, playgrounds with toilets)
- Bicycle traffic
- Walkways / pedestrian walks
- Clarity in what scooter and car roads are
- Scooter parking
- Benches and barbecue areas
- Multi-purpose hall
- Walking areas and easy routes for trips from the town



Transportation means

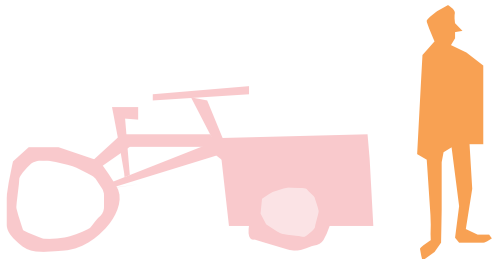
Why do we use the car a lot? I think there are a lot of clothes some-times, and the cold and darkness have made me a little sceptical of sending the kids out alone.



I use the bike a lot, I probably walk more than I bike, but I probably drive the most – unfortunately. I totally agree that there are short distances and that you should basi-cally walk or bike more than drive, and then I try to think why I do it – because it really does not go very much faster either – and I think that there is the feeling that it’s stressful to walk along these roads and intersections. So really in a way you drive because it’s more comfortable, without it being a particularly good thing to do.



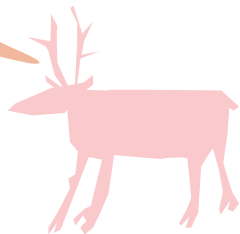
I drive a lot. I am lazy. But – if it had been more biking friendly here, I would have done that.



The town’s future

We are starting to reach the tipping point.

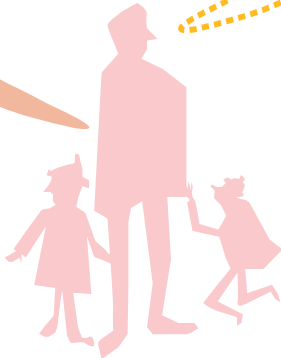
That, with cars in and out, that’s worrying.



A lot of the good things we get from our employers might actually not contribute to a common good. You could think of something more future-oriented in such a small town that we live in. If I could wish for one thing, it’s that the use of cars gets significantly reduced.

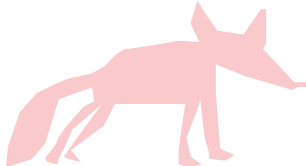
It doesn’t feel like living in a valley anymore. You live in a faceless suburbia with lots of houses around you.

Longyearbyen could be a place where you use cars less. As it is today, I find it difficult.

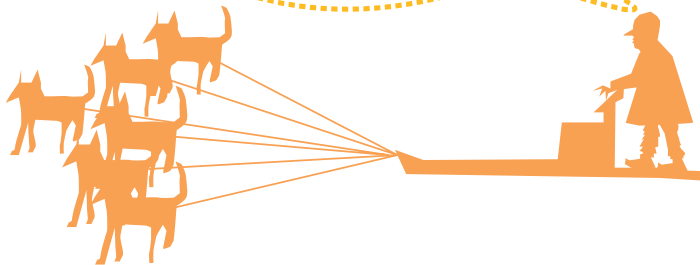


I want them to move the big and heavy industry out to the airport at Hotellneset so that the feeling of arriving in an industry that we all get when we come from the airport, that this feeling disappears.

How many can you put in this town?

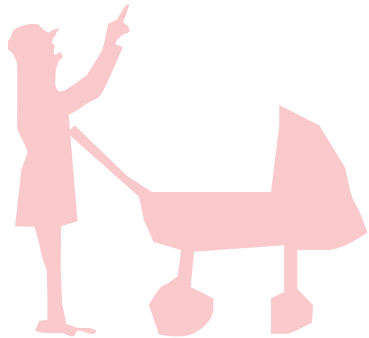


They have to make it easier for us to make the right choices.



How do you think Longyearbyen will look when our children are adults?

"Unfortunately, I'm rather pessimistic. I think we will get too many people up here, I think the politicians think very short-term, that means we get more densification, we get taller buildings, I don't think that things will change when it comes to driving. Unfortunately, I am not that optimistic to believe that we will have Longyearbyen as a pleasant family community with low buildings and many walking paths, and that we will take care of the surrounding nature."

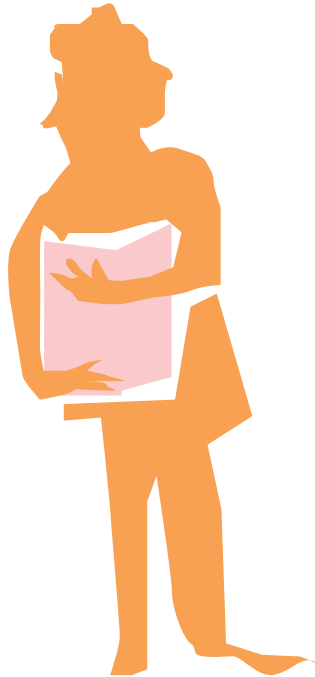


"The problem is that people come and stay for such a short time here. And many will only use this for themselves during their two years long stay. It does not create a good living environment in the long run, so I believe that if there is to be a change, the state must lead us and decide that we should be a green society. I think many people longing for power have a short-sighted perspective."

"I wish we had managed to live here well with tourism – how to solve it I have no idea. Finding a balance there is a dream, after all."



"I don't know if I believe in it, but I hope that someone who is tough enough will raise the alarm and help this place become green. We have a unique opportunity, we are a bit in our own bubble, we should be the pioneers. We should have a really good project and see what happens then. You could really jump into it and dare, because it's all about courage."



"I hope we can look after some of the traces of the mining community."



"I have little faith but an equal desire for a positive change, but I don't believe in it, to be honest, after living here for a while. I've lost trust."



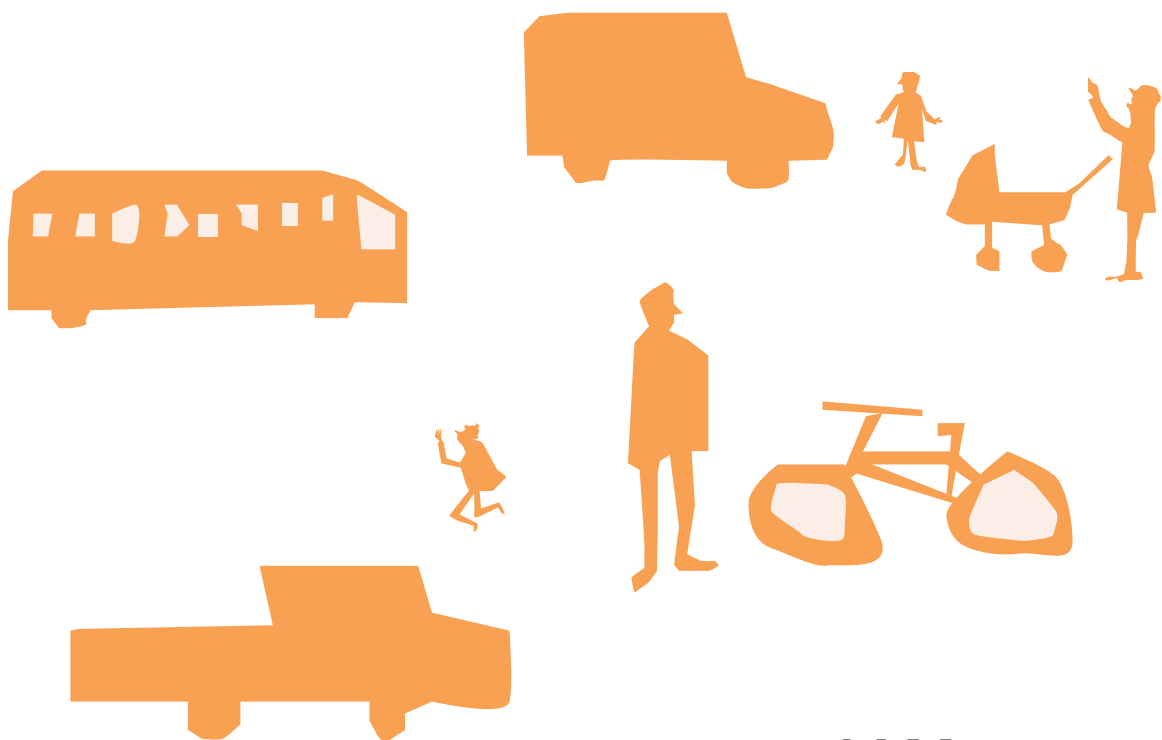
Consistent themes in the discussion

Traffic, playgrounds and safety

The group saw the nature of the town as ambiguous, with positive and negative aspects. The overall feeling was that the recent development is resulting in a more crowded and messier town. People agreed common meeting places (where children can meet regardless of age) are missing and nearby areas for short trips with BBQ possibilities should be developed. The group perceived car and snowmobile traffic as way too heavy and dangerous for families with children, and agreed cycling should be supported more in terms of infrastructure.

The group was aware of unequal housing conditions and access to benefits impacting the town (i.e. free cars for employees), but focused more on the need to develop areas and facilities (such as a multi-use sports hall) useful for everybody. Indoor and outdoor public meeting places, better playgrounds and more curated trip routes would make the place more attractive for families, which is a desired goal. There was a shared impression there is little common strategy for how to develop the town and individuals just do what best fits their needs.

Parents staying longer were aware of the problem with discontinuity and agreed taking care of the town's environment needs long-term engagement. Those staying longer were more critical and pessimistic than those who came a few years ago.



Thanks to all participants

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