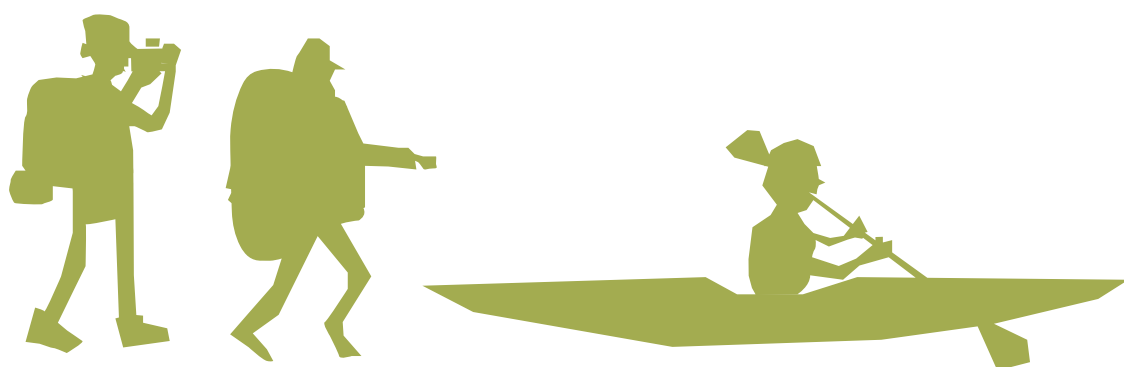


# People about Longyearbyen as a physical framework

Focus group 02  
**Folkehøgskole**

JUNE 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.**

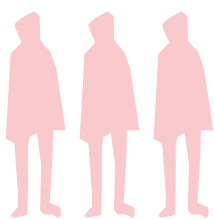
The project is part of a needs assessment of the self-initiated LPO project Right Place Right Form, funded through the Design-driven innovation program (DIP) by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway).

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



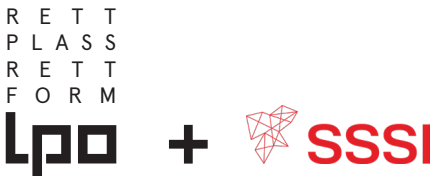
**3 pupils of Svalbard folkehøgskole:** All Norwegian, 2 female, 1 male

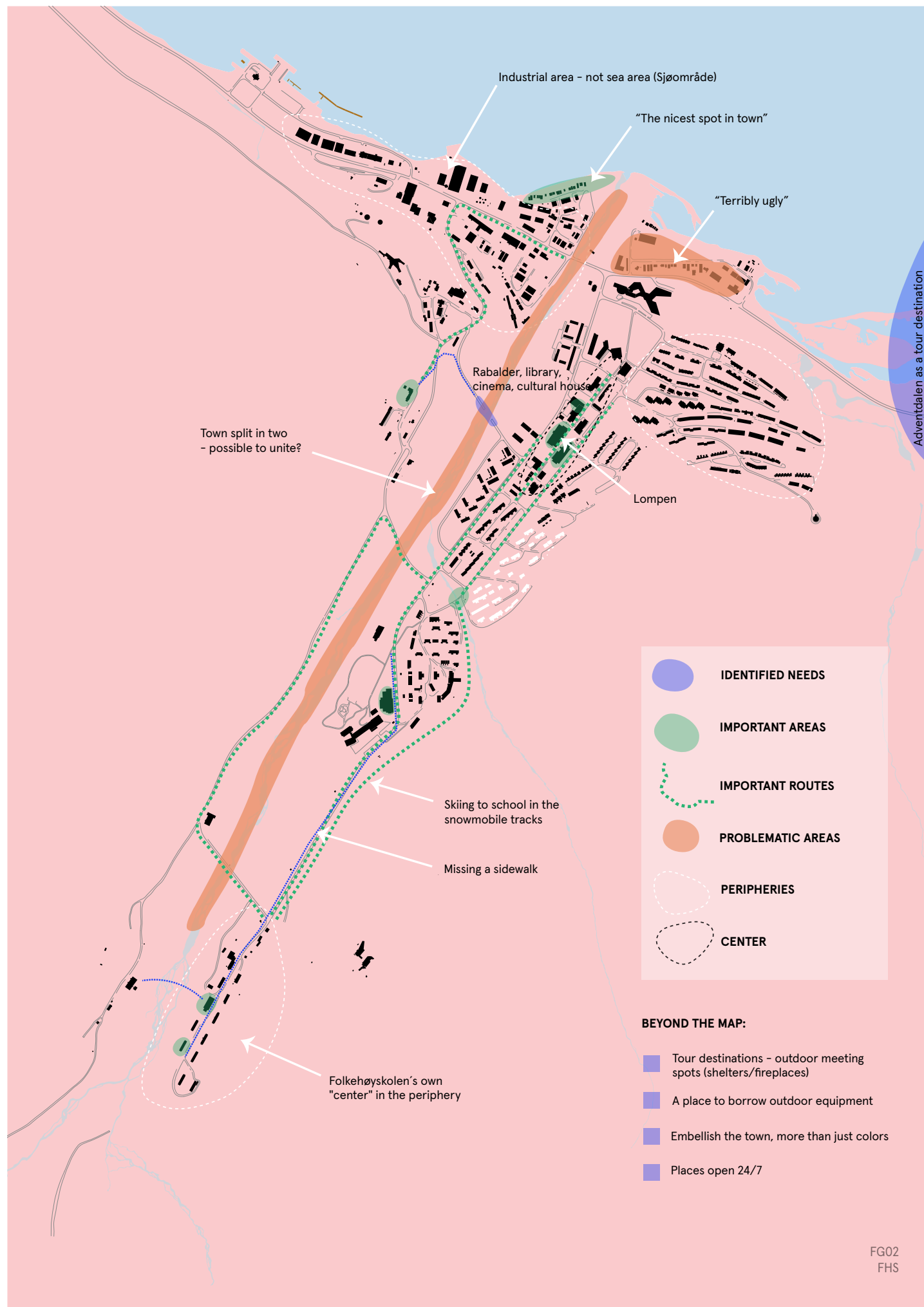
**Alder:** 19-22 years

**Years spent in Svalbard:** < 1 år

**Average length of stay:** < 1 år

*People have different needs in different phases of their lives.  
Our second group shows what needs pupils of Svalbard folkehøgskole 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 Folkehøgskole students have their activities spread around in various hubs in the city and generally walk back and forth between these areas. Nybyen is to them their own center. They would like more hiking destinations in the nearby area, and feel the town could be decorated a bit.

## Description of the town

"It's kind of a bigger town than small towns on the mainland, with all these things to do, different activities, cinema, sports..."

"A strong community."

"A colorful town, especially Spisshusene."

"It is a bit hard to say, since I haven't had the same relationship to the town as many others, since we've been living up in Nybyen. That part is a bit deserted. And since we have a curfew and some restrictions."

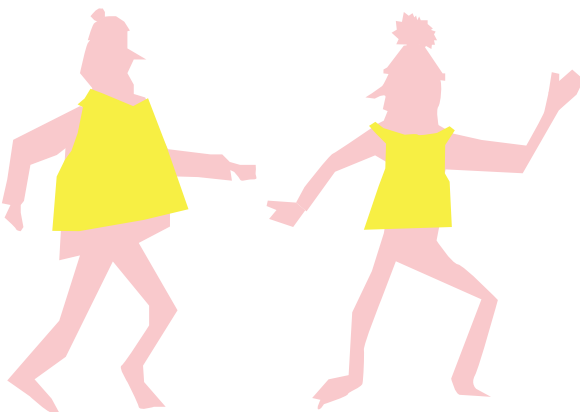
"What's unique about Longyearbyen is that we are so close to nature. What makes Longyearbyen so pretty are its surroundings. Then you can build as ugly buildings as you want to, it will still be pretty."

"It is deliberate that there are things going on all the time, festivals, concerts, arrangements, that bring people together. And that creates a community."

"Norwegian, pretty and bright."



Descriptions of the town



Everything is very central here, there are few people, people get to know each other.

It was very cool to live in a barrack that was built for miners on Svalbard, which is part of the local history.



Longyearbyen is a bit ugly-pretty. And that is because it is so challenging to build on a place that is this cold. There's the plumbing above the streets, when you walk towards Nybyen for example it smells like sewage, and that's not exactly very nice. But it is messy and it is very characterized by the fact that it is not easy to build here.

Identity – from mining town to tourist town



I would say that in Longyearbyen the strongest identity is tourism. Because the mining is dying out. The mining is an important part of it, but it is more history. This is no longer a mining town. The town is run by tourism, that's what they make money off. So the history is of course an important part of it, but I wouldn't say that it is a mining town anymore. It is a former mining town with a lot of history. But now it's only tourism.

It is tourism, mining and research, and now it feels very separated between the old and the new.



Longyearbyen is very proud of its history within mining. And even if it will be phased out now, the town is holding tight onto its history and shows that this, this is a mining town.



I would still say that Longyearbyen is a mining town, but I think that it is more because of its history than the present.

# Use of town, centre vs. periphery

## Central places in town

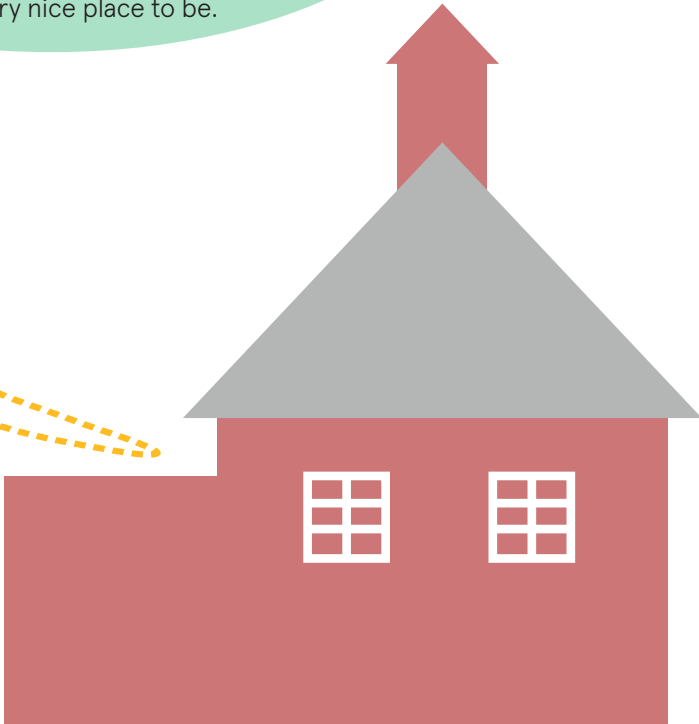
- The town center spans from Svalbard Hotell to Radisson
- The sports hall – the entry is a nice waiting room
- Nybyen is definetly outside of the center
- Lompen
- Kulturhuset, Rabalder and the library
- The cinema
- Coop
- The barrack in Nybyen
- Fruene
- KB

I think Sjømrådet is the nicest place in the whole town. If you need to get a bit out, close by, and without a weapon, then you could just go down there. Then you have the whole town behind you and you just see the nature and it is very quiet.

Folkehøgskolen is kind of forced to have its own center. The locals are more in the center of town, while we are more up in the barracks.

I definitely also think that the library is very important, especially in the dark season. I went there to print stuff, to read books, to find peace or if it was a while to my next appointment I didn't bother to walk to Nybyen and down to the center again, so then I went to the library instead. A very nice place to be.

The church is very important. There's a lot going on there. I'm not even religious, but I like being in the church here, so I was there a lot.



## Public Spaces

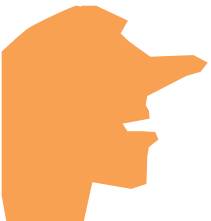
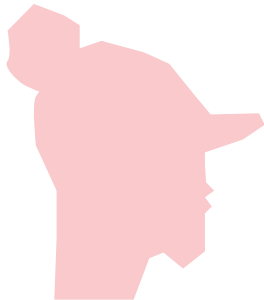
- Kulturhuset
- The ski slope
- Lompensenteret
- The sports hall
- Sjømrådet

Svalbard is kind of like a big park. When we hang out, we do it outside, and if we want to be outside we go on trips. I doubt we would have sat on benches in winter.

The town has a high level of activities and you meet people through activities!

I noticed something strange. I was actually expelled once and there were three days when I wasn't allowed to stay at school. And then I didn't want to spend money, so I wanted to find a place in Longyearbyen where you can sleep without spending money. I found out that it's really hard. The church is open 24/7, but you can't go there to sleep. And the public spaces in the center, like Kulturhuset and the sports hall, close in the evening. And because of polar bears and the cold you can't sleep outside. So the public space aren't available all the time.

The most public space is probably the church, because it is open for everyone, all the time.

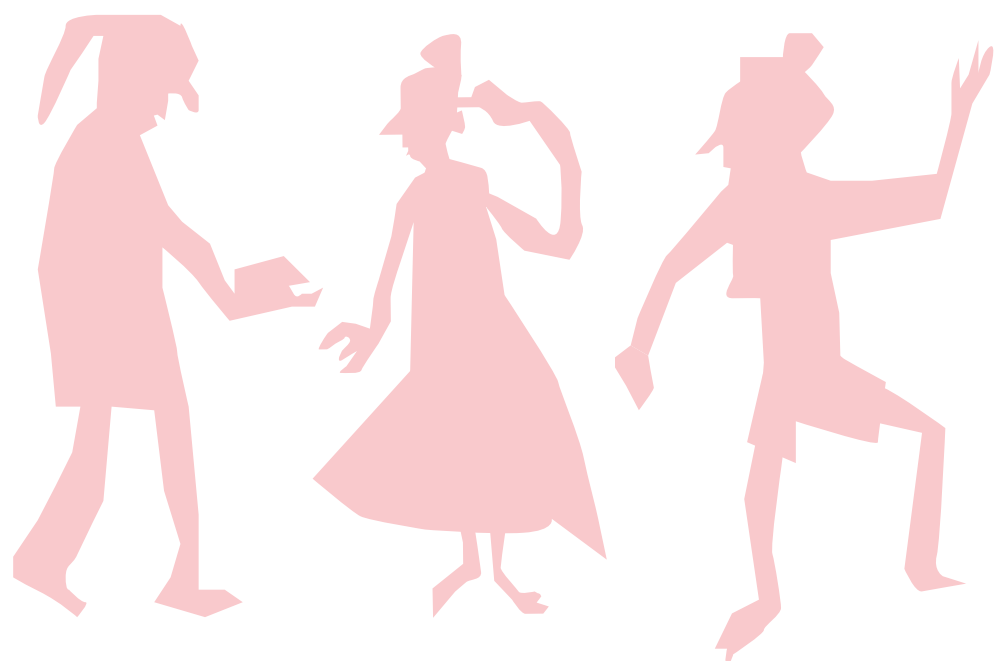


## Important meeting places

The school has its values, like with alcohol, and there is a zero tolerance on that, and then we have activities with the school in the evening as well, so you can't just go and have a beer after school or later in the evening, if there is an arrangement you have to be sober. And we have curfew at midnight. So I'd say that that prevented us from getting to know students and other young adults. But then it was obvious that the school wanted us to get to know the high school students.

This is a place where it is easy to become a hobby-alcoholic!

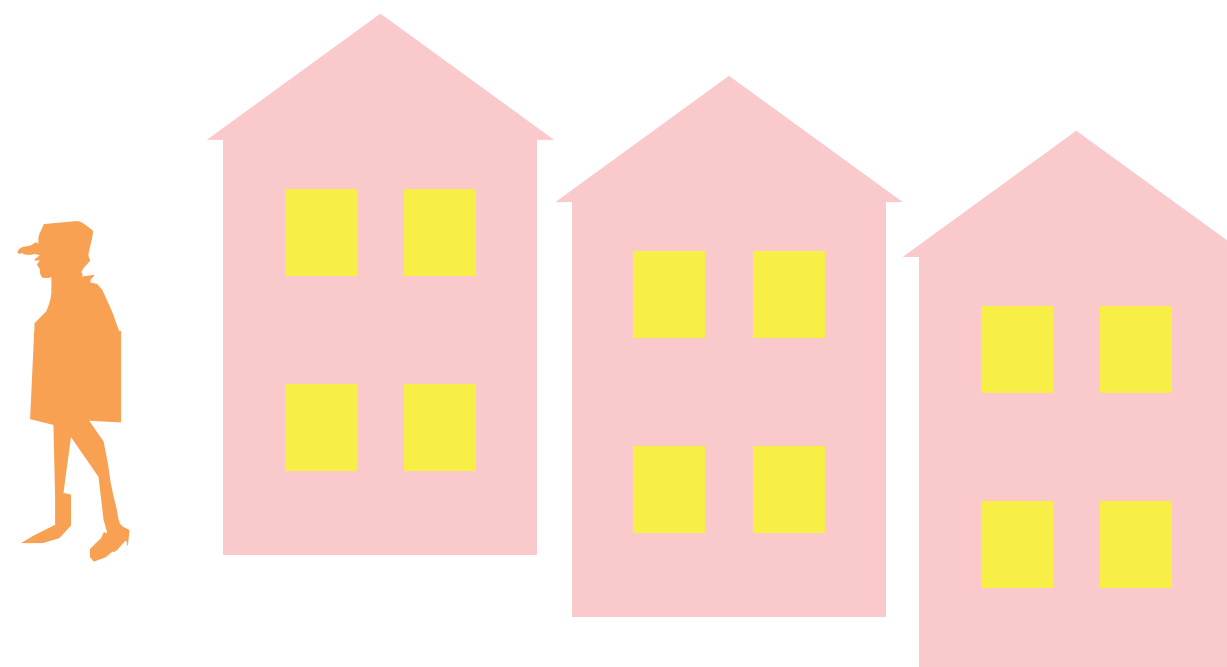
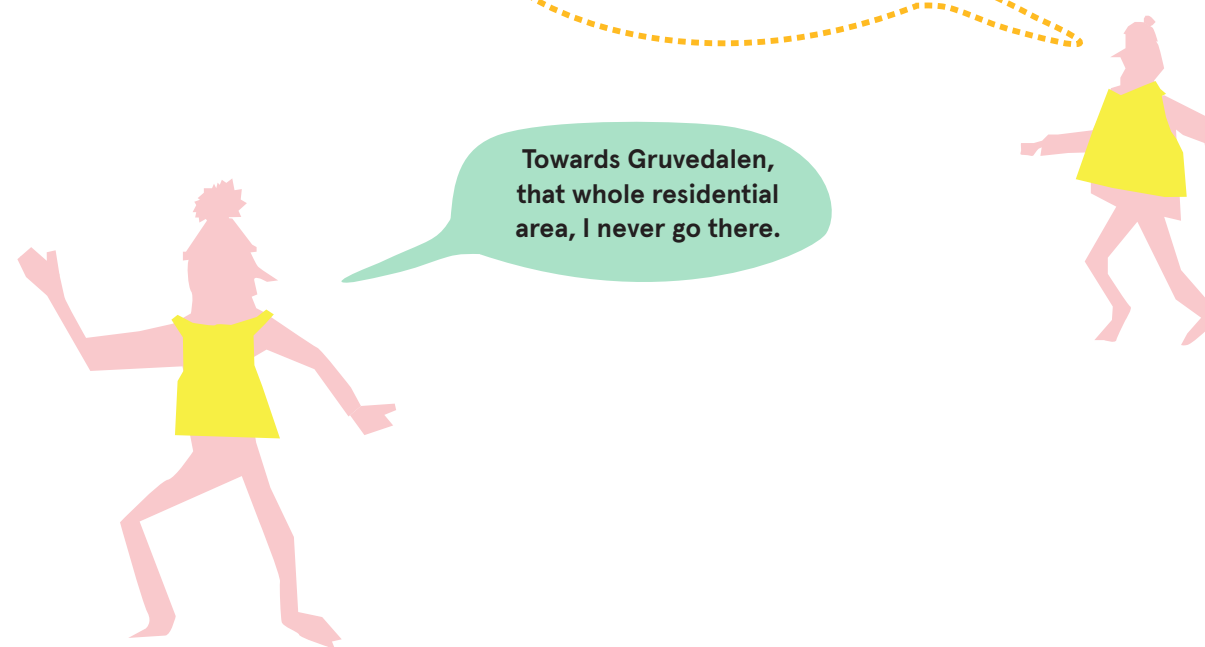
When you are at Folkehøgskolen you get into the folkehøgskole-bubble...



## Use of town, centre vs. periphery

Between UNIS and the airport, all that area on the other side of the river, I never went there. There was nothing there for us.

Towards Gruvedalen, that whole residential area, I never go there.



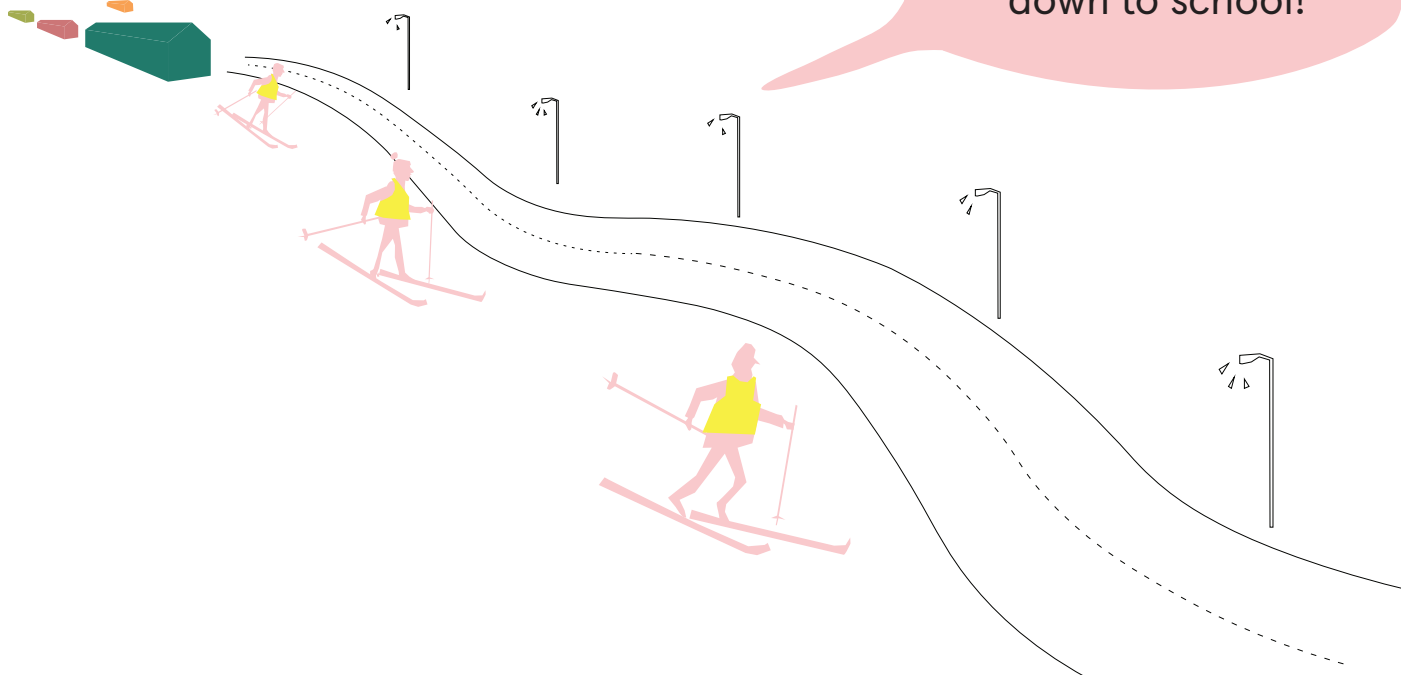
# Means of transport

Our school was very good at walking back and forth between the center and Nybyen.

And I drove quite often with my snowmobile!

That is a very underrated feeling, when you finally have walked the stretch from Nybyen and reach this sidewalk. So I love that sidewalk.

You can just ski down to school!



# Longyearbyen in the future

## Tourism will grow more and more

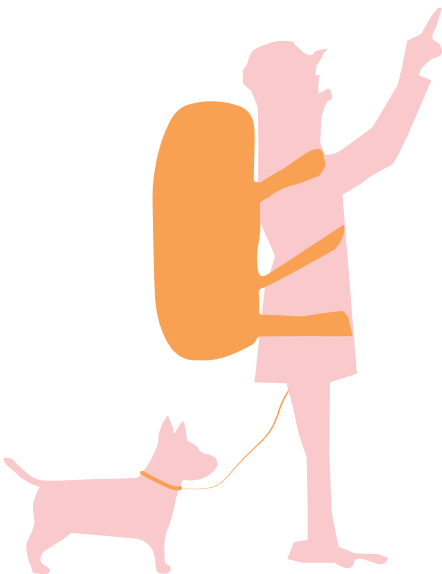
I think that the modernization should continue, but that we also preserve some of the old, that there is a bit of cultural heritage and the likes.

But I think the multicultural will remain. Maybe there will be a bit fewer Norwegians.

It will become more obvious that it is a tourist town. I think there will be more souvenir shops and tourist traps and stuff, I mean more than there already is.

In thirty years mining is definitely history.

In good faith I choose to believe that in thirty years there is more housing on Svalbard. New residential areas, because there is a need for that.





## Local youth vs. folkehøgskolen pupils:

I think that we are quite different groups. They see themselves as very svalbardians and children of Svalbard, so that they don't have anything to do with folkehøgskolen pupils, because they are "fake svalbardians", so I think that we are quite separated. I think that we are more similar to the UNIS students than the svalbardians. Except that we are mostly Norwegians and more involved in the activities in town".

I think there is more than enough space for everyone. But there aren't that many teenagers in Longyearbyen and all of a sudden fifty folkehøgskole pupils arrive and it will be 120 in a few years, so I think it is more like "no this is our town.

## Places that should be developed

- Tour destinations, common meeting places in nature like small huts and fireplaces
- The river splits the town in two
- Places that are open 24/7
- A place where you can borrow equipment for sports and trips

There are things that are nice and other things that aren't that nice, and I hope that they will embellish the town a bit. There are many parts that look a bit industrious, and there is a lot of stuff that isn't pretty, some places are tumbledown. And it's nice if they use colors.

I would like to use Adventdalen more!

There is definitely lacking a road between the church and the town center. I think that very few actually bother to walk around and use a proper road. I think people just walk down that steep hill.

I'd wish that it would be easier to just walk straight across from Nybyen to Sverdrupsbyen.

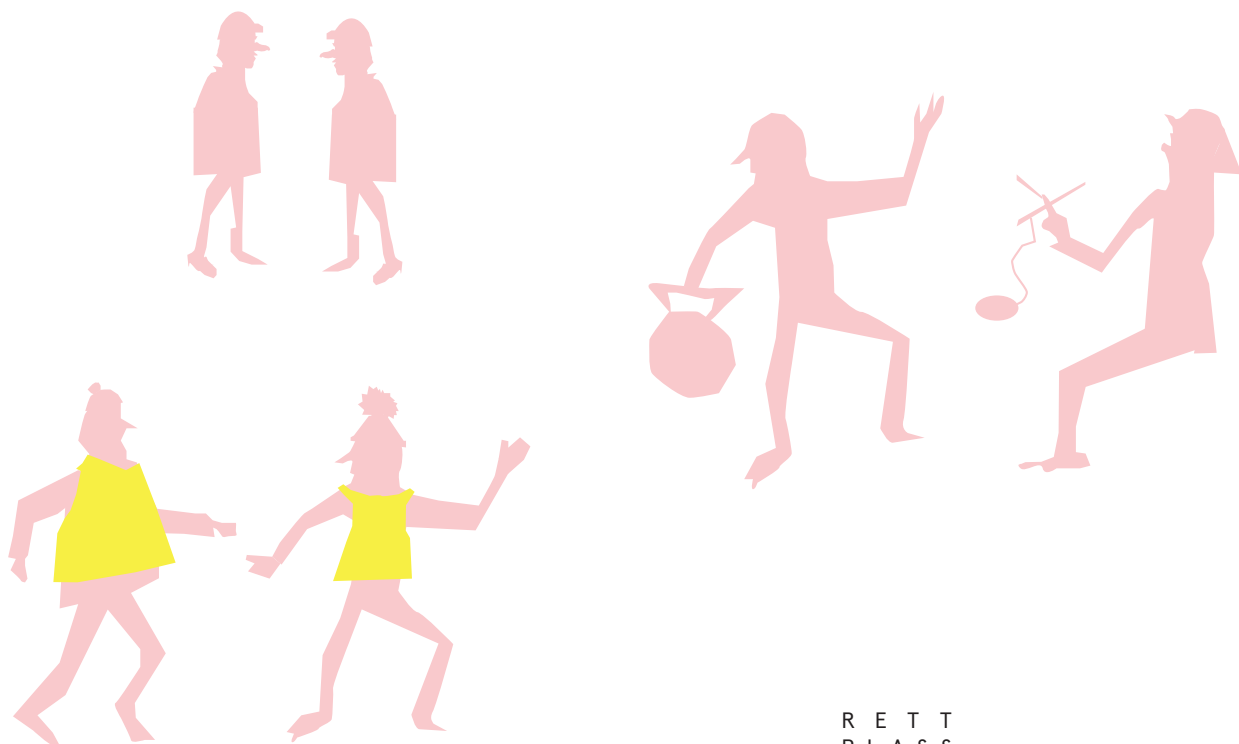


## Consistent themes in the discussion

### *Folkehøgskolen, meeting places, identity and activities*

The participants in the Folkehøgskole group are in what they call the “Folkehøgskole bubble”. Nybyen, where they live, is perceived as being outside of the city center, but at the same time constitutes their own center. They use the whole town actively (the library, Lompensenteret, the sports’ hall, the beach area, the bars). They feel that it isn’t as much specific places that are important for getting to know people in town, but that they rather meet new people through activities. They perceive that the town has much to offer in terms of activities and events, and they are actively engaged in the town’s cultural life.

Because of their short time living on Svalbard, that they live in Nybyen, that they hang out mostly with other fellow Folkehøgskolen students, but also because of the school’s values (curfew, zero tolerance on alcohol), they are to some extent “passing through” town, and did not speak much about deeper underlying subjects regarding the town. At the same time, they are very interested in and engaged in the town and its development. They are integrated into town through participation in activities and events, language, nationality, and are a welcomed group in town. This group perceives the mining history as an important but vanishing part of the town’s identity, while tourism is becoming more important. They do not feel as locals and are not well integrated with youth that grew up here. They wish for close tour destinations to be developed, with common meeting places in nature, such as shelters and fireplaces. The church is for them an important place, and they feel that a road from the city center to the church, including a bridge, is missing.



Thanks to all participants

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