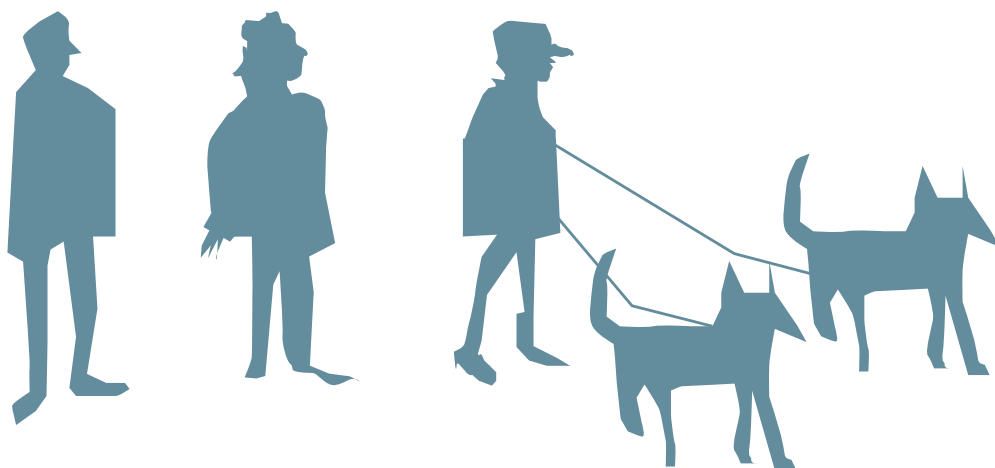


People about Longyearbyen as a physical framework

Focus group 03
Svalbard veterans

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.

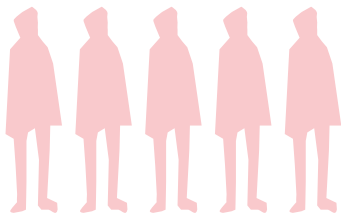
The project is part of a needs assessment of the self-initiated LPO project Right Place Right Form, funded through the Design-driven innovation program (DIP) by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway).

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



5 people: 3 Norwegian, 2 with background from other countries

Years spent in Svalbard: 25 years, 50 years, 50 years, 50 years, 13 years

Average length of stay: 38 years

Job: employed by private company (1), entrepreneur (2), retired (2)

*People have different needs in different phases of their lives.
Our third group shows what needs Svalbard veterans 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 Svalbard veterans feel their town centre is where they live and work, and see the town from their established perspective. They are skeptical to how the town has developed, e.g. building more densely or the avalanche protection measures. They see Sjøskrenten/the waste facility and the seafront as potential development areas.

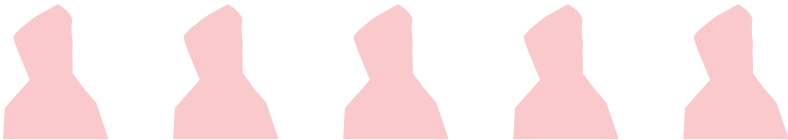
Description of the town

Many people and little continuity

In change An unequal community

Nobody cares and nobody wants to take responsibility

An unbelievably messy town



Town's identity

There are multiple worlds:

- 1) Candy Town, Dreamland, everything organised and paid by Mother State
 - 2) People who try to keep on, who decided to invest their lives in doing something against mainstream
 - 3) Outsiders who don't really fit in anywhere else
- Multicultural community
 - Social dumping
 - Culture
 - Unorganized mess
 - Large class divisions
 - Colours

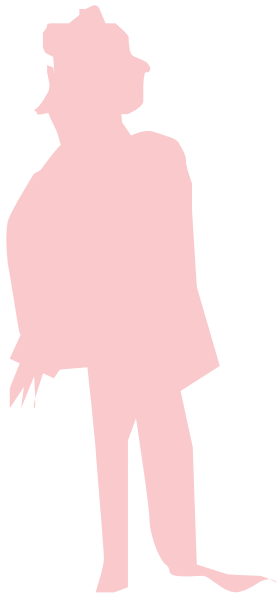
This is home. All homesteads develop, of course. But the kind of development that we have seen up here is quite still rare for such a small place. I liked it here very much but now I don't have that feeling anymore.

The colour code and composition we had here was very particular and very nice but it seems that it is not being followed any more and you can see that clearly. It was holistic, it was beautiful, you could recognise all the colours from nature and the different seasons.



Birger Amundsen told me once:
"Listen. If you had been a bird, and you flew over Svalbard, you would see that everything is just the same everywhere except for a few more houses in one valley." And that's true. I am happy here because I am able to get out into nature. When I come back to Longyearbyen, I am happy in my house.

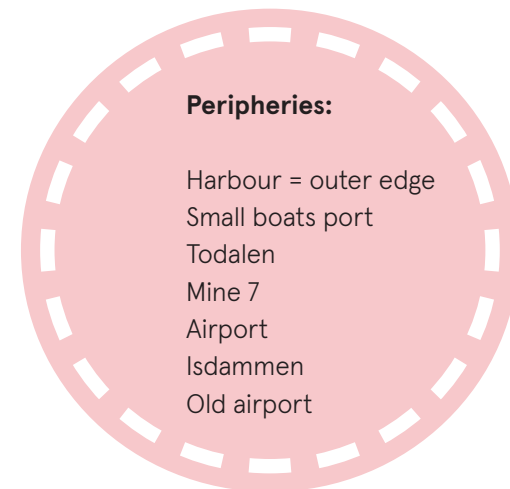
It is difficult to put into words what the town's identity is. I don't know what to say. From company town it has become a sort of a gold diggers community.
To demolish is part of our identity.



Use of town, centre vs. periphery

Public spaces, meeting places people use

- Lompensenteret
- COOP
- Main square
- Rabalder
- Fruene
- UNIS
- Huset
- Art centre in Nybyen
- Church
- Barbecue area in Sjømrådet
- New benches



About Sjømrådet og Sjøskrenten

We talked about

- Mess
- Housing
- Electricity
- District heating

In the dark season you see where people remember to switch off the lights. It's down here in Sjømrådet and Sjøskrenten. Otherwise people go on holidays with the lights on, day and night.

They shouldn't have built on the landfill and no one was supposed to live in Sjøskrenten.

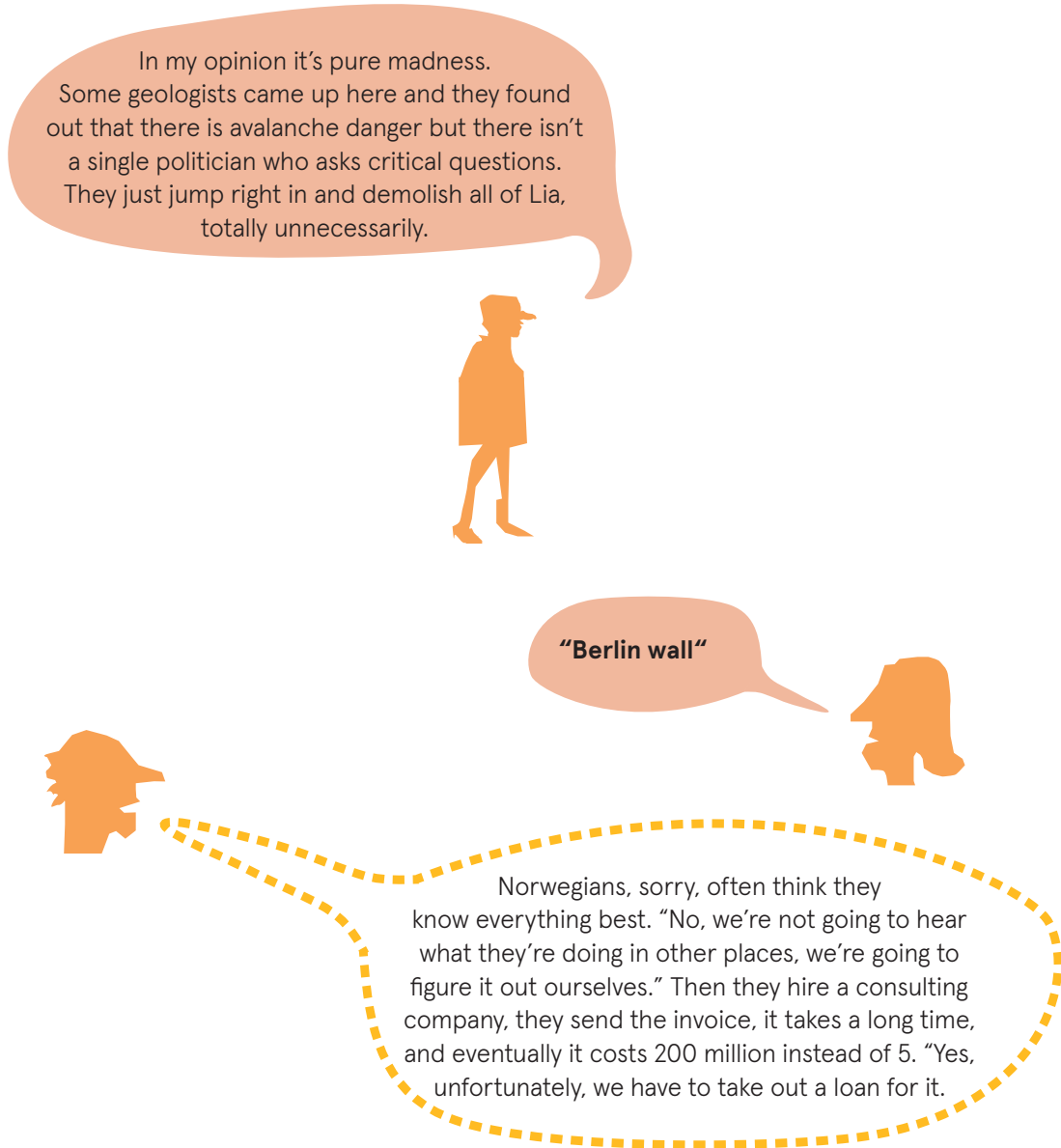
One thing that I don't like is what Longyearbyen has become. And so I just try to find my little niche that some call the garbage heap, or Sjøskrenten, and Sjømrådet where I know people I meet in the street. Because when I cross the road, I don't know a damn soul.

People come up here, they do what they want, they make a mess, and nobody says anything. "Is it your land? No. Then you have to clean it up." Nobody has the courage to say that. It's the politicians who should take action.



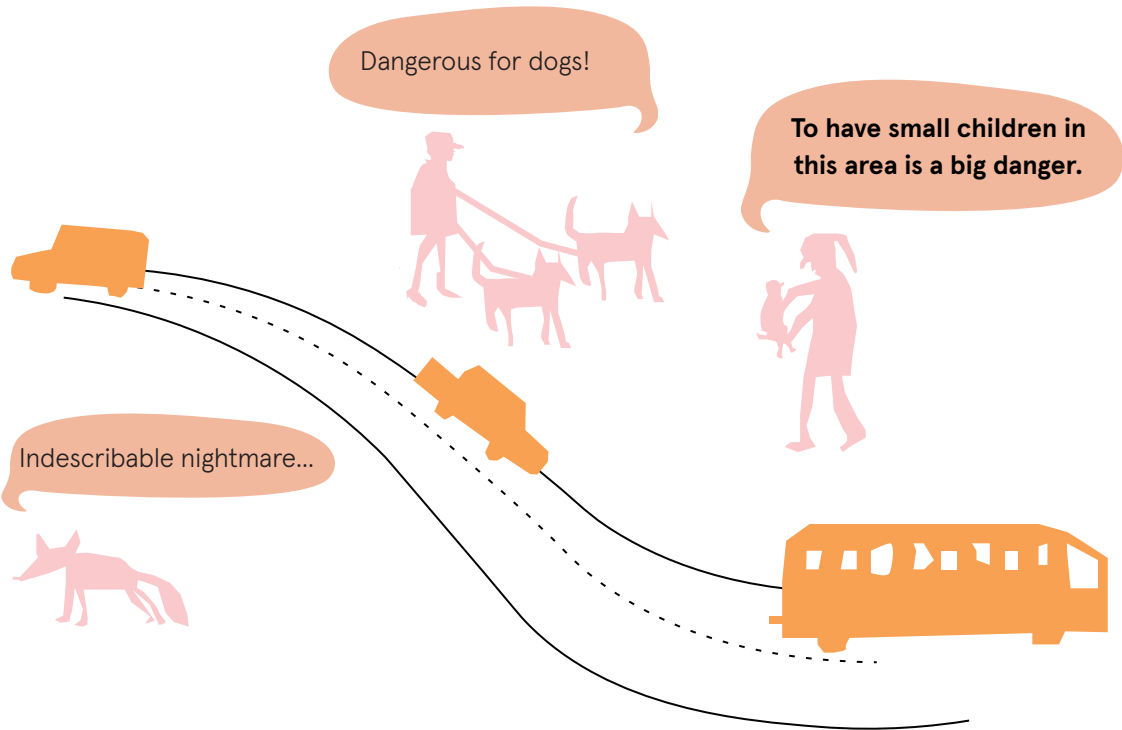
Avalanche prevention

- Easier and less expensive solutions for avalanche protection that have been used in other countries (e.g. Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France) that have experience with avalanche danger – poles made of wood on the mountain side, infrastructure that protects, slows down or splits avalanches, possibly dynamite
- Important to build something that is not visible when it is not needed
- Fear that the wall under Lia will attract many tourists who will disturb those living in the area

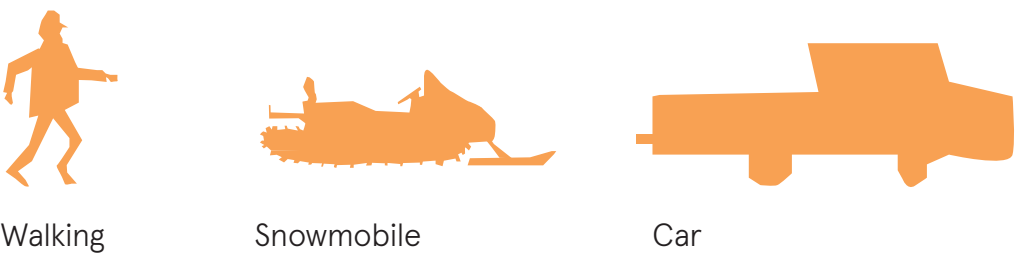


Problematic places and roads

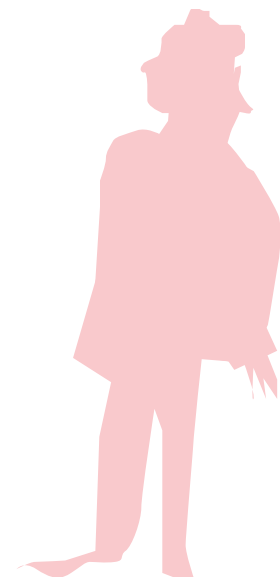
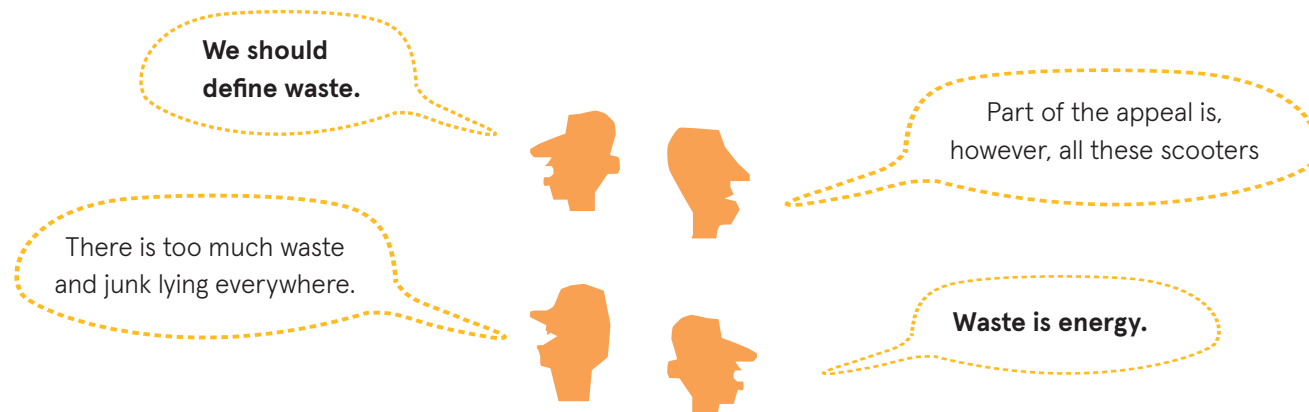
- Road up to Gruvedalen (children, traffic, school bus)
- Scooter-trail up to Haugen



Transportation means



Waste



„My niece was up here and we went out to Bjørndalen. We saw some glass lying around. It was quite close to one cabin and I thought, “Well, no, it’s not my rubbish.” But my niece came along and she had a plastic bag with her, so she picked it up, she didn’t care whose rubbish it was. It’s quite exciting to see that the new generation thinks “Well, no, we clean up””

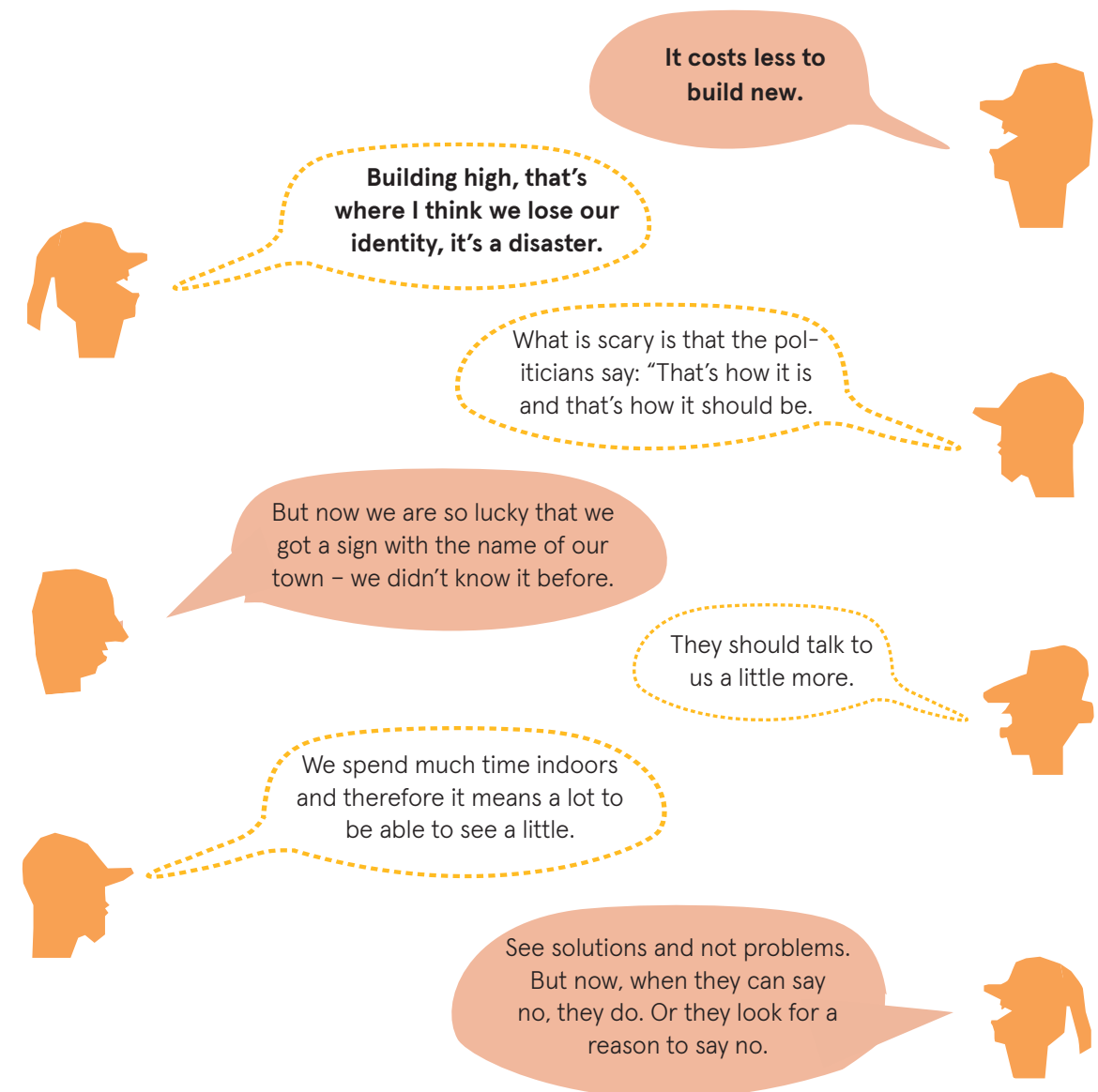
What should be prioritised

- Signs and directions
- Public toilets
- More rubbish bins
- More benches
- Lighting, especially in the center of town when it rains during the dark season
- Scooter parking zones
- More barbecue areas with toilets and rubbish bins for sorted waste:
 - In Sjømrådet, Hotellneset, Vestpynten, up to Huset, up in Svedrupbyen
 - Recycling of materials – environmentally friendly, good for identity
 - For locals, not tourists

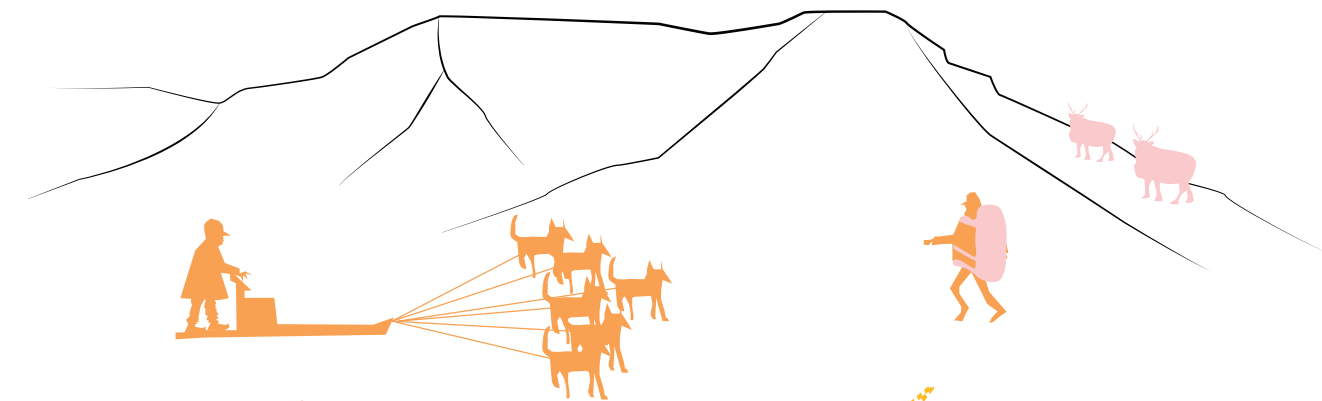


What creates frustration

- Legal framework and costs that make recycling difficult
- Unequal treatment (some pay little or nothing, others pay full price and it’s expensive)
- Lack of local knowledge, expertise and common sense among LL and the Governor’s staff, related to turnover
- High prices for food, rent and electricity
- Too tall houses in the Elvesletta area
- Lack of continuity regarding numbers and names of houses
- Lack of signs and sign rules
- One has to go through meaningless procedures just to meet bureaucratic demands



Town's future



I think it will go in the same direction as it's going now, unfortunately. It will grow bigger and more chaotic, there will be a high turnover, wrong architecture, wrong decisions, lots of money spent for nothing. That is actually what Norway wants. The government doesn't want people to thrive. They just want someone to live here and have control. But the rest of the landscape will be the same.

Yes, the mountains will be the same, but when you look at the history-less leaders in the community, things are going in the wrong direction. They have no control today and they won't get it either. Money and tourism rule here.

„The Norwegian state and the government want to maintain Norwegian sovereignty because we are part of the Kingdom of Norway. But tourism does not attract Norwegians. Something has to be done about the price level: the cost of living, building and housing.

We have the same interests: we want to go on trips, use boats, cabins, and exercise. It needs to become more equal socially. They need to think about how things will be in the future. A fair part of the costs must be passed on to the Norwegian state and not the local community. We can't pay for what it costs.”



What do you wish?



We should have different economic drivers than just tourism and research.

We should be a showcase for the world when it comes to environment and energy. From a mining community that used only coal and produced CO2 to a tiny little village that doesn't pollute at all.

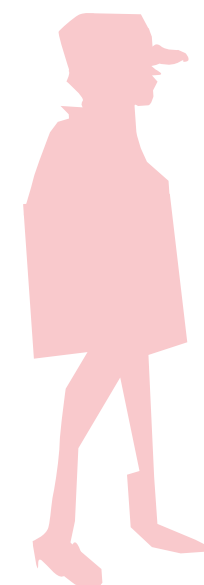
I want to keep the buildings lower, but I know it's not possible because it has already been decided. I don't want the Berlin Wall. I wish there were a minimum wage for all and perhaps also a maximum salary, thus greater social cohesion. What I fear is that there will be even more tourism. But it really shouldn't increase.”

And also we should have our own Svalbard minister and not a damn idiot who is being replaced several times a year. We need our own Svalbard minister that we can talk to!



A better hospital!

I wish a for family community, a lifelong community as it's actually called, but they don't want that. But I feel that we have a lifelong community for ourselves anyway.

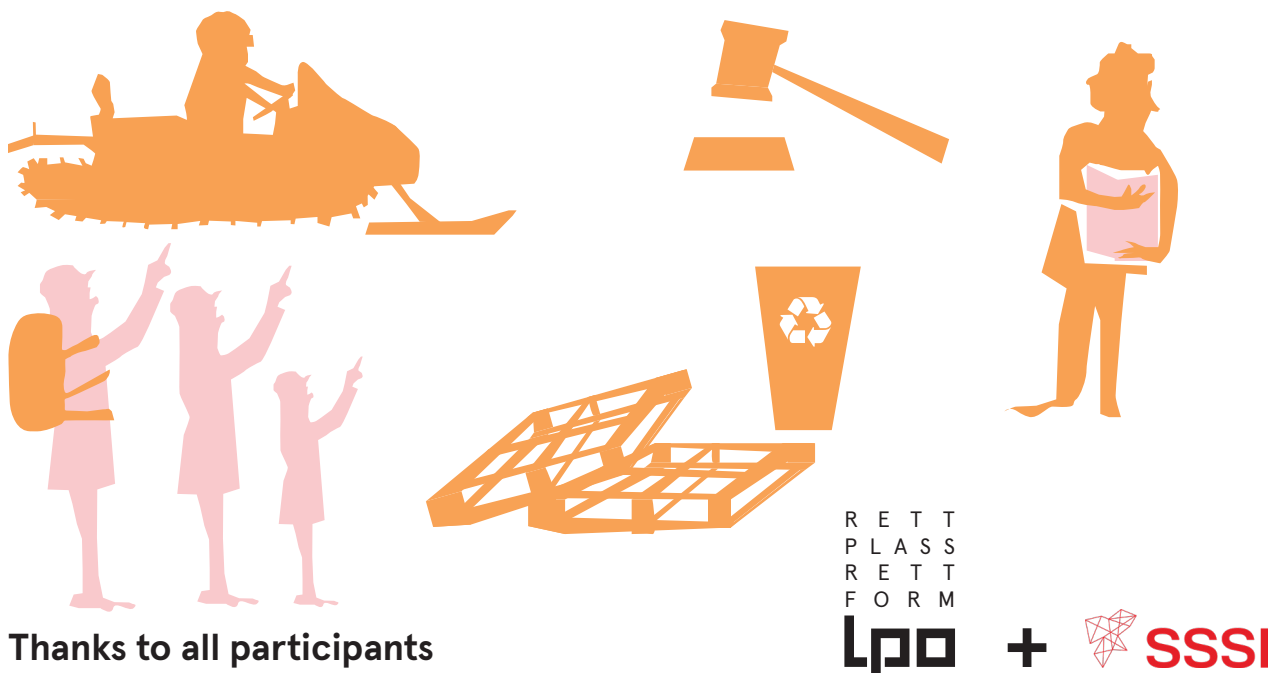


Consistent themes in the discussion

Bureaucracy, waste, scooters, turnover, tourism, government and governance.

The group declared a strong bond to Svalbard, but was unhappy about how Longyearbyen has developed during the last 50 years. Among the negative impacts they saw: growth (more and higher buildings), turnover, entropy (lack of order, in the form of omnipresent trash or insufficient signage), social inequalities and cost of living. The group was well aware of the wide range of motivations that bring people to Svalbard and the growing social gaps between various groups. There was little focus on how to develop new public meeting places. The people were rather unsatisfied with existing cafés and they prefer to spend time at home. Among important parts of the town's identity, they mentioned the color scheme, rich cultural life, constant change, and multiculturalism which is seen as a double-edged sword.

The group focused much on outdoor recreational areas for residents (highlighting there is a clear line between "us" who live here and "them" who visit) and how to decrease the amount of trash lying around. There was a shared feeling good ideas are often not developed further while bad ideas translated into reality are difficult to get rid of. People in the group had an ambiguous perception of control: on one side bureaucracy and regulation is seen as heavy and ignorant to local people's needs, on the other side there is a shared feeling of control being lost. The group showed a very low level of trust when it comes to area planning and climate change adaptation. There was a shared feeling big stakeholders in tourism should contribute more to local development. The people showed a high level of pessimism when it comes to the town's future, and they found the steps of the government confusing and local governance inefficient. On the wish list of the group, there was life-long society, better tourism, more equal opportunities and sustainable business.



Thanks to all participants