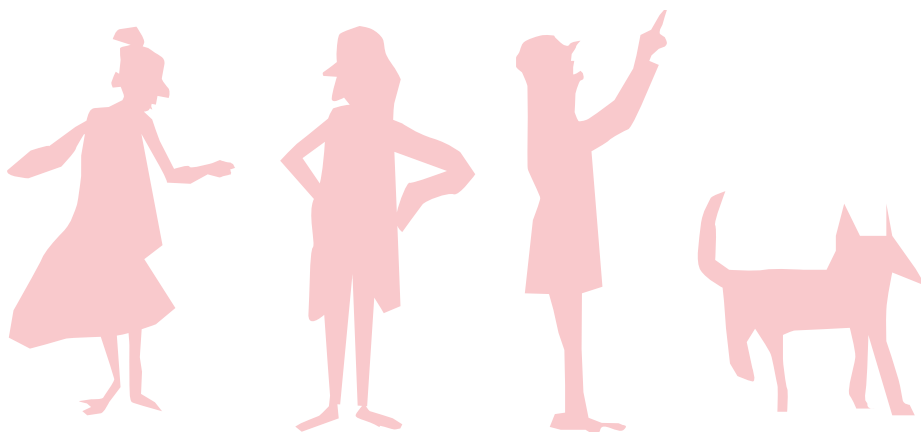


People about Longyearbyen as a physical framework

Focus group 05

The service industry

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.

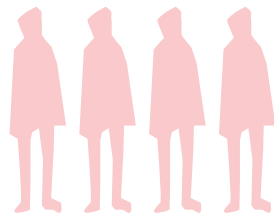
The project is part of a needs assessment of the self-initiated LPO project Right Place Right Form, funded through the Design-driven innovation program (DIP) by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway).

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

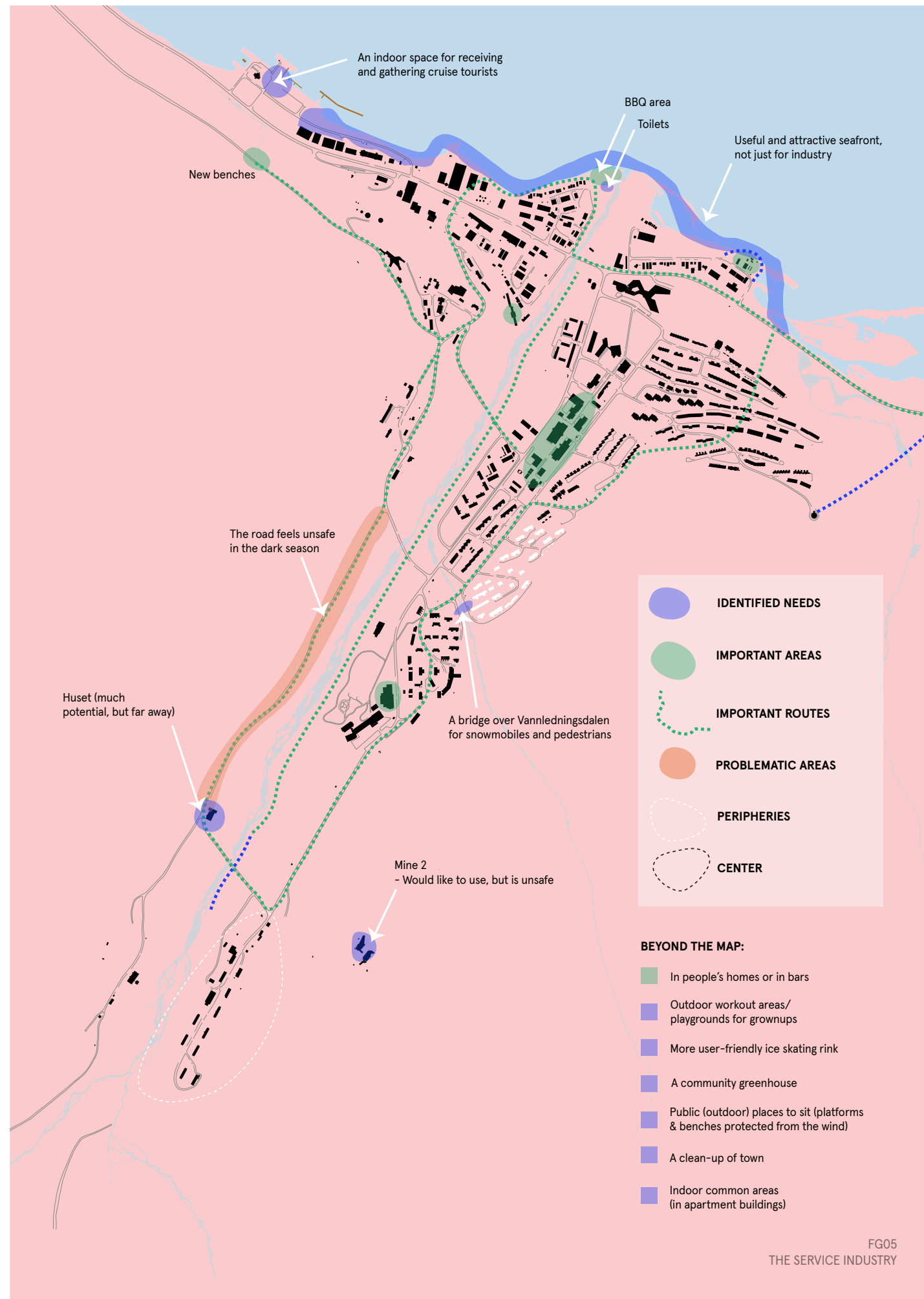


4 people: 2 from Norway, 2 from other countries (all female)

Age 29–33

Years spent in Longyearbyen: 1 year, 1,5 year, 2,5 years, 5 year

*People have different needs in different phases of their lives.
Our fifth group shows what needs the service industry identifies.*



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 participants in the service industry group live in the concentrated downtown area. They meet at each other's homes and at bars, and also the beach area is an important meeting place. They wish for more indoors and outdoors meeting places, and a development of the town's seafront for common use.

Description of the town



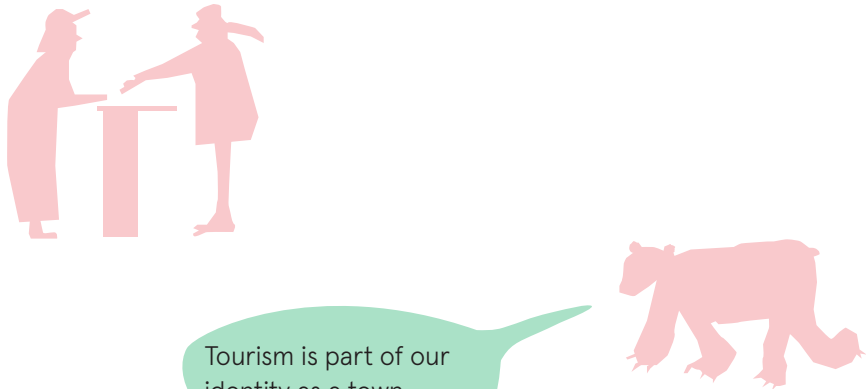
Town's identity

A tourist town...

I think it is important for us to say, listen, maybe last years have been a bit miscarried because it has been too much, so we need to find some sort of balance.

Tourism brings so much life and it keeps the place running. For me, these past two months [corona] have been the saddest, a lot of people were describing it as a ghost town...

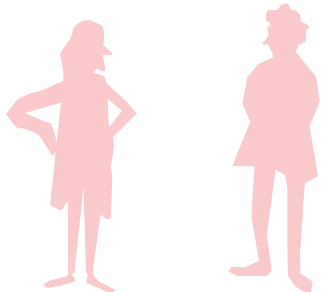
Tourism is part of our identity as a town.



A mining town...

When it comes to the identity I would also say mining. I don't identify with being a miner, but still you feel like you live in a mining town.

But I think that we are losing that quite a lot. With all the changes of the place, it's less and less of how things used to be, there are only a few places now left with a kind of mining style, that are still reminding people of why we are here.



An international town...

The guests notice that there is a very diverse and international community. And I think they appreciate it as well.

I understand that from the mainland they want to make it more Norwegian, but I would like it more if it goes more in the international way.

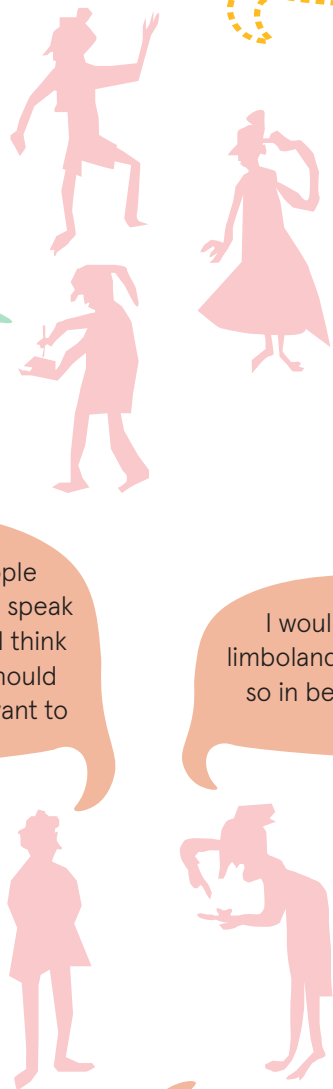
Even though it's supposed to be Norwegian, I feel that it's more international.

You take a lot of crap from people coming here and expecting you to speak Norwegian, but at the same time I think Lokaltstyre or the government should do something for people if they want to learn Norwegian.

I would say this is definitely limboland in so many ways. You're so in between, you don't know where you are.

I also feel like you have separated the society with the people working in hospitality versus the people who work for the government.

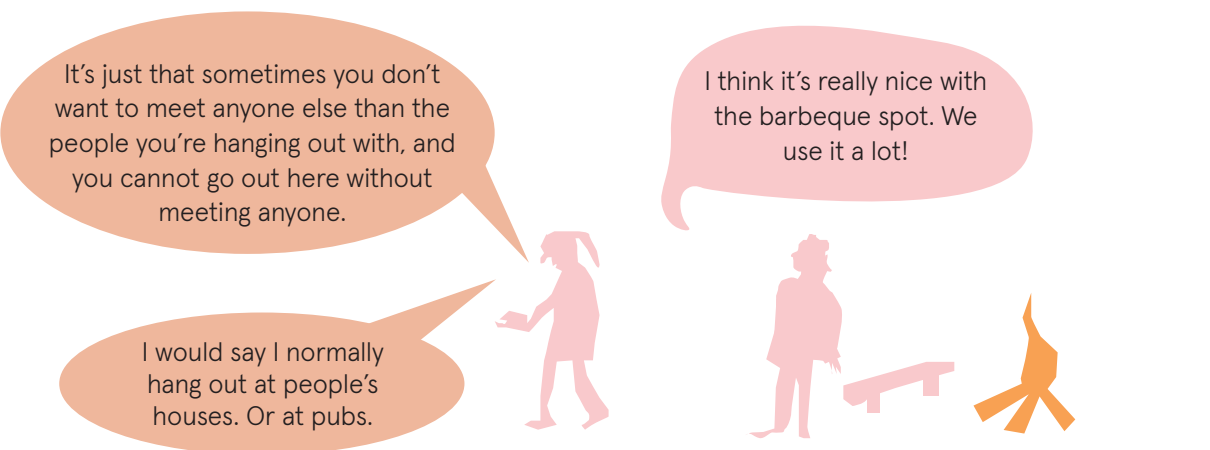
For me, being from outside the EEA, I felt kind of discriminated, because I've been living here for a year and a half, previously lived one year in Norway, I've been paying the same taxes and working as hard as any European citizen, I'm entitled to nothing.



Use of town, centre vs. periphery

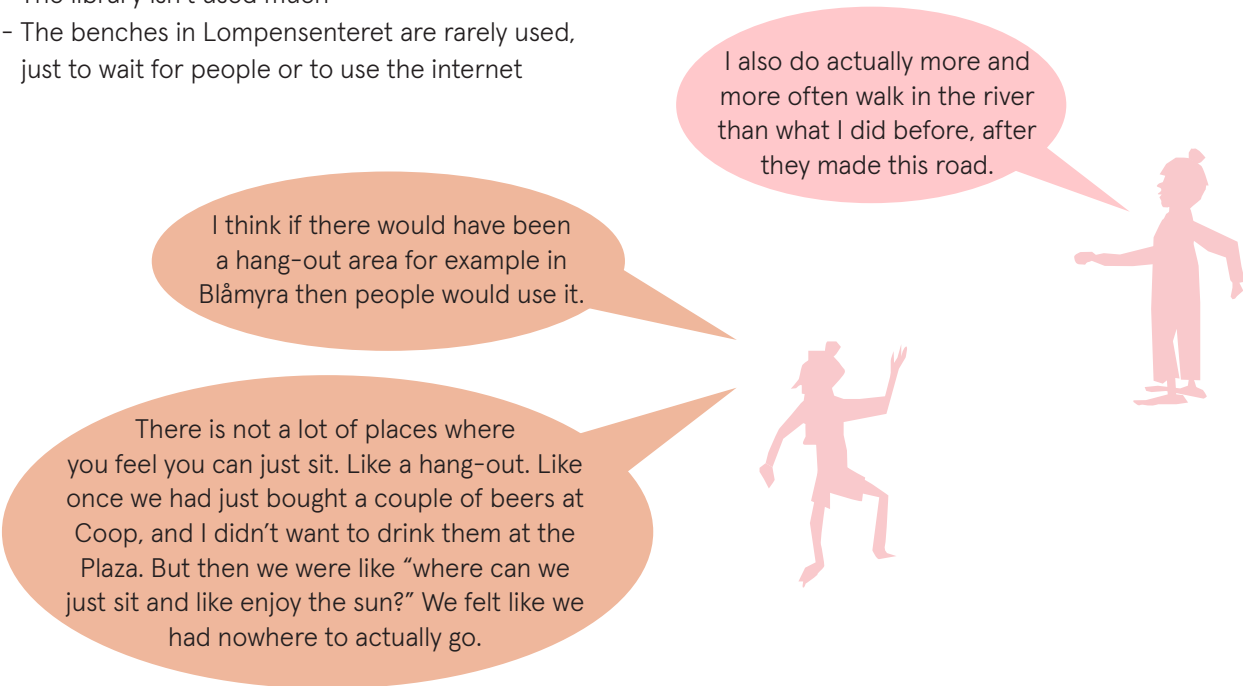
Central places, meeting places

- The names of the different neighbourhoods (Skjæringa, Haugen, Lia) were not known to everybody
- The city center spans from the hospital to Kroa
- Coop
- Hallen
- Burmavegen
- Nybyen is considered a periphery and rarely used
- The barbeque area at the beach (Sjøområdet)
- Whatever is outside is hardly accessible in winter



Public places

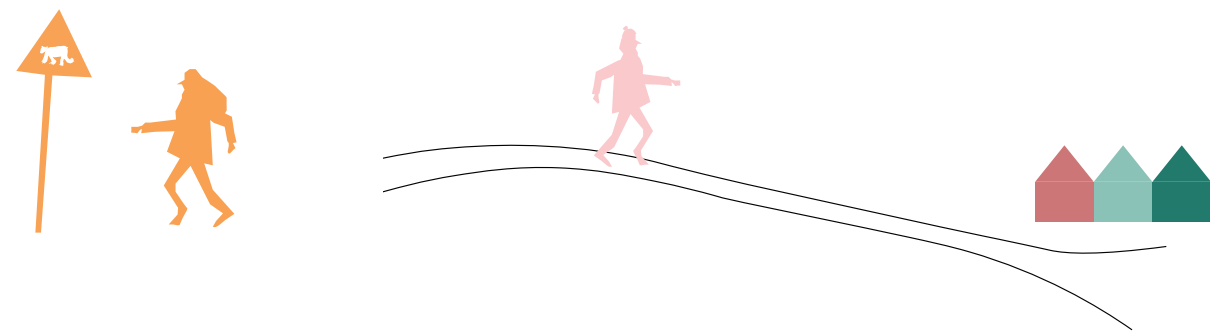
- The stairs outside Fruene – “the Plaza”
- Kids’ playgrounds
- The birdhouse
- The library isn’t used much
- The benches in Lompensenteret are rarely used, just to wait for people or to use the internet



Walks around town

“I quite often go to the dog yard as well. Or polar bear sign and back. Crossing, obviously, all the tundra over there.”

“I do the city walk at least two or three times a week.”



Places they would like to use more often



“Before, when mine 2 was open, we used to go there a lot, just to drink a cup of coffee and like wander around.”

“I learned that at Huset there are quite many things happening, like the cinema club, and there is anyways a lot of space to do things, theater potentially. But it's way too far away, taxis are way too expensive to get there regularly, but the space is there and has potential.”



Places that should be developed



"When it's summer time, I just want to go hiking all the time, and in the winter I just want to go on snowmobile trips. I just want to get out of town."

"I would love an ice skating ring. There is one, but it's not really well kept or really official."



"The birdhouse. I think that's a very nice place that could be equipped with a little bit more things, like coffee or better chairs or whatever. And it is very pretty, it is closed and it is out of the wind. It's one of these places where you could hang out more often."

"I would love a bridge over Vannledningsdalen, both for snowmobile and people."



"Some toilets in Sjømrådet would be nice. Outdoor playgrounds for people to do outdoor exercise."

"I would love a place where you could actually just sit in the sun where the wind doesn't come and eat you up."



"I think it would be nice at the harbor to have a closed structure where you could gather all these tourists, there could be a souvenir shop, cafés... A place for welcoming the tourists, hosting them, and not having all of them walking in our pedestrian street."

"A bit of a clean-up would be nice. It feels like it's containers' place everywhere. And the same with the snowmobiles. Everything is piling up everywhere and it doesn't look nice."



I realized that inside Mary-Ann's there is a full-on green house. And to get into this space you have these five minutes of like peace and breathing air that is moisturized and its fantastic. It's really good after months and months here and all of a sudden you're surrounded by green stuff.

The new houses in Gruvedalen:
I think it's really nice with them that they created this common area where you can sit, benches, platting, that's really nice. I wish I had something like that at my house. Like a nice area to sit outside. Now it is muddy, even though when the sun comes out...



Seafront: There is something that really kind of disturbs me, and it is that at the seafront line there are all these industrial buildings and containers and all this waste. While in any other place in the world the real estate market is happening in front of the seaside, or something for the community. So everyone can use the seafront for activities or community gathering or something.



Transportation means

How do you move around town?



Walk

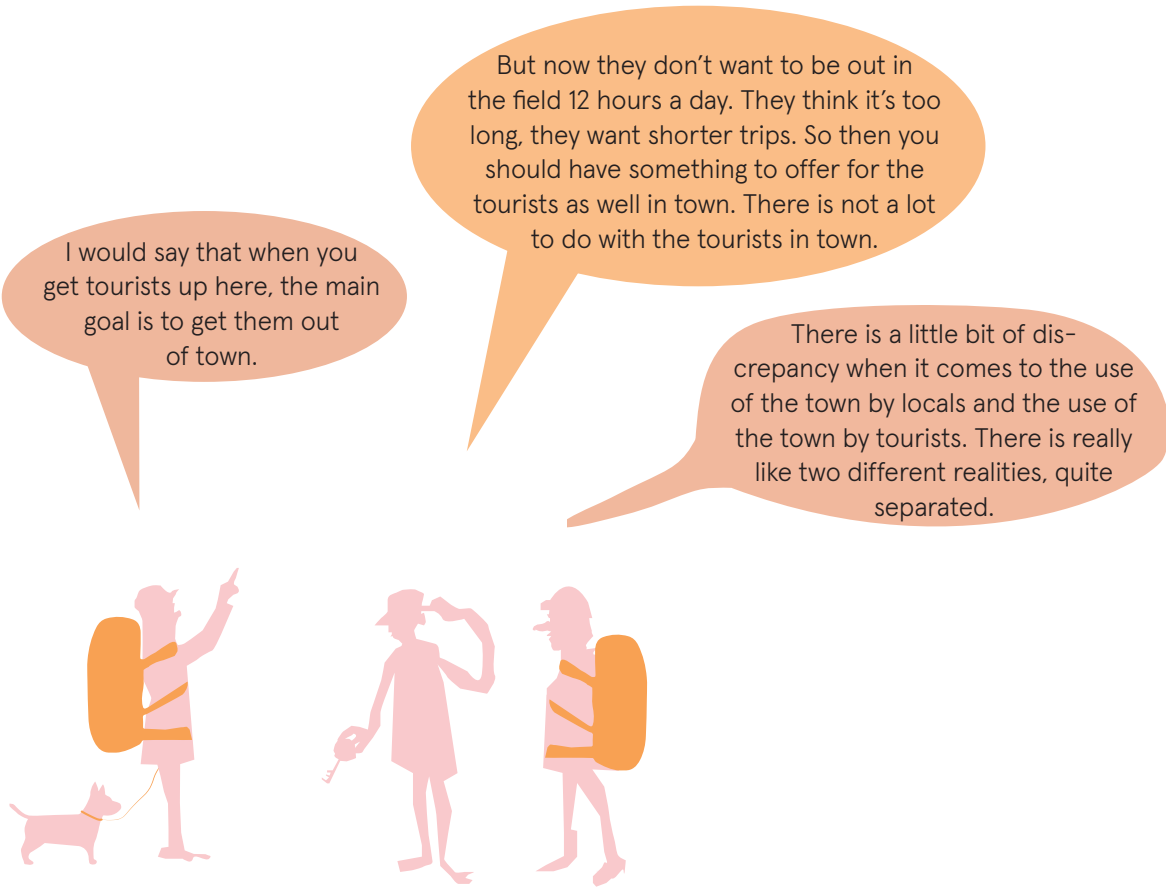
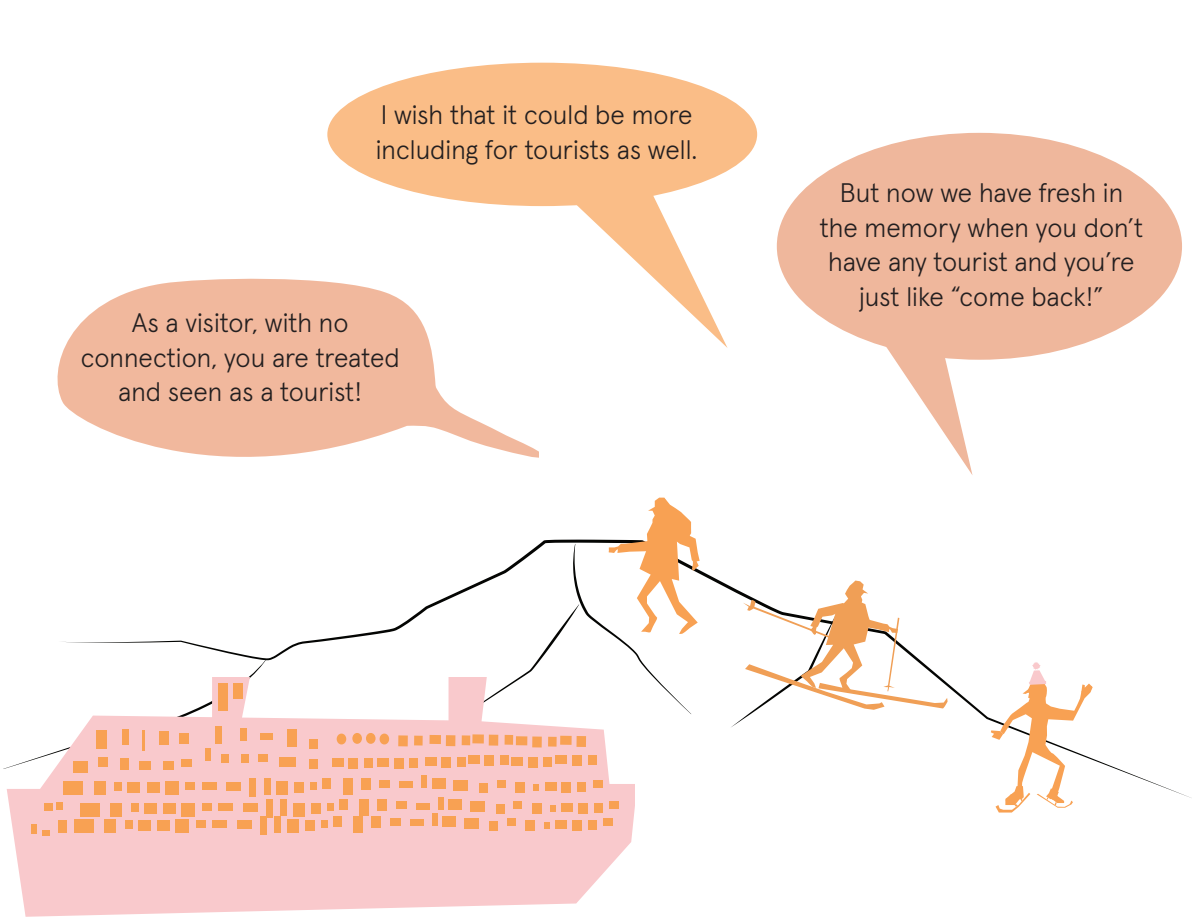
A town (also) for tourists?

"I believe tourism here is growing a lot but at the same time we don't have the right infrastructure to keep it growing and growing. We have seen it last year when we had these big ships with 4-5000 people, walking everywhere, invading everywhere, and we don't even have a proper harbor to host them and great them. I don't think the infrastructure is developed enough if we want to go in that direction of having more tourism."

"We should try to quantify the amount of tourists that is sustainable. No tourism is sustainable to be honest, but to establish some sort of roof and then try to keep that instead of just putting more and more flights and squeezing more and more people into hotel rooms. It's kind of counter-productive for my business, but you can't just keep going."

"And then they don't leave any money. I would say that the important thing is that they actually stay at a hotel, use the tour operators here, I don't want other tour operators from the mainland coming up here and that don't know about safety or how things are."

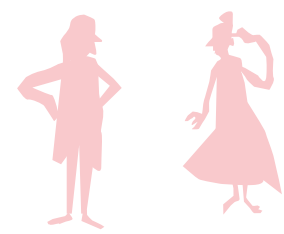
"To be honest, working in hospitality, it's very nice to have a break from the tourists. When you are surrounded eight hours a day by tourists, all you want is to avoid them in your free-time. So it's nice that there is this separation."



Futuring Longyearbyen

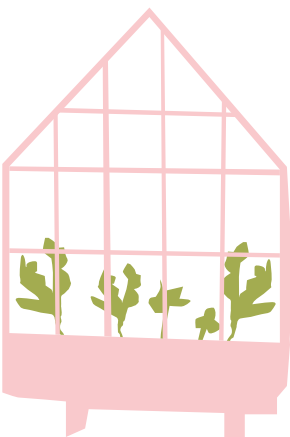
- Either ghost town or luxurious destination
- Sustainable development
- The mining will disappear completely
- Urban growth?

"I wish that Longyearbyen will be leading when it comes to new, different energy, but it's also very interesting to see how it actually is in town, "no we need coal", it's very polarized when it comes to these questions."



"I like to believe that we are going to develop greener technologies and that the town will have to adapt to that, so I would like to believe that it's going to look a lot different."

"I would like it to be a little bit more self-sustainable. And not depend so much on shipping stuff up here. All the waste and all the plastic and all these things I think we can avoid. We could have a big community green house and people could volunteer to take care of it."



"It would be nice to put a limit to the amount of tourists or snowmobiles that can be out daily or hourly or whatever. So environmentally, just as a local I would love there to be more control in that. And not just exponential growth just because we can."

Without tourism, I think we will then be the next Pyramiden. In Corona times I've been joking that the Russians are driving past Longyearbyen and are like "this used to be a Norwegian town, this used to be the school", like the way we do in Pyramiden.



Winter Wonderland. I think it's destined to become Disneyland, a winter Disneyland!



"It's nice to have around 2000 inhabitants. And if you want to live somewhere bigger then go to a city or move somewhere else. This is not the place for that."



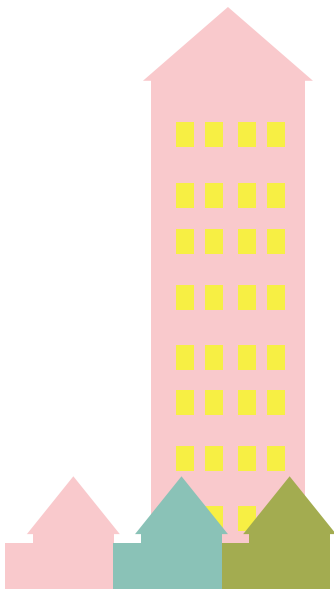
"Can the town really grow more? Than the limits that we have right now? In terms of geography and landscape, can the town grow somewhere? Because I feel it's kind of limited."



"I would definitely not like to have a skyscraper in town. It is completely unnatural and does not fit with the identity of the town."



"I think the government for a long time already wanted to pause the growing."

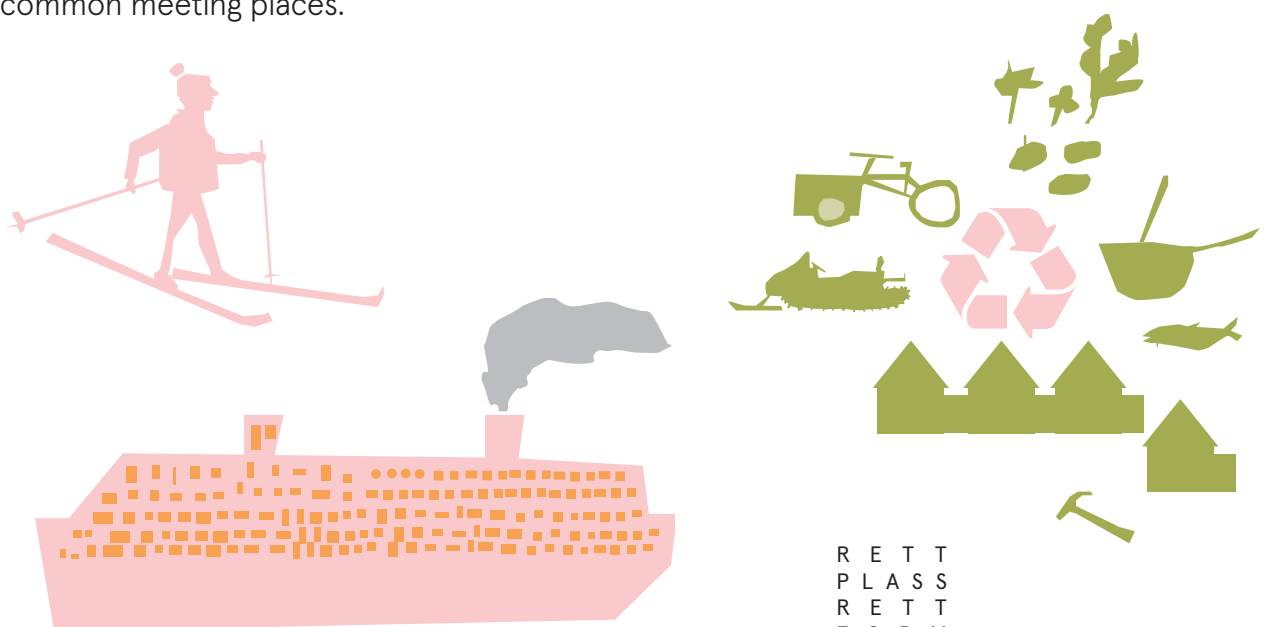


Consistent themes in the discussion

integration, internationality, sustainability and tourism

The participants in this group use most of the town, except for Nybyen, which is considered a periphery. They use the town's cafés and bars, the barbeque area in Sjømrådet, and hang out at friends' houses. They also go for walks around town. Several of the participants do not know the history of the town very well, and do not know the names of the different neighbourhoods. They perceive the town as very dynamic, international, and cosmopolitan. They are part of a dynamic, cosmopolitan, and partly transient environment, and to some degree view the town from the outside. They appreciate the social aspect of living in Longyearbyen, and experience that it is easy to integrate, make friends, and appreciate the diversity in town. They feel that tourism makes the town attractive (the town during the pandemic was perceived as sad), but are also concerned about the negative aspects of tourism (unlimited growth, environmental pressure) and wish for a more sustainable development.

The pandemic has changed their view on the town. The non-Norwegian participants do not feel very wanted anymore, while they were welcomed in town as long as the tourism industry flourished. They experience an increased focus on Norwegianness and a clear division between people based on nationality. They view the town also from the perspective of tourists, and care about how tourists experience the town. They point out for example a lack of activities for tourist within town. They have many ideas about a sustainable development of Longyearbyen, and it is evident that they care about the town and its future, even if they are a quite transient group. They have a range of ideas about what should/could be developed, for example a structure for welcoming cruise tourist at the harbor, a bridge over Vannledningsdalen also for snowmobiles, a community greenhouse, outdoor "playgrounds" where people can work out, toilets in Sjømrådet. The sea front has a klot of unused potential, and also this group pointed out the need for more outdoor common meeting places.



Thanks to all participants

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