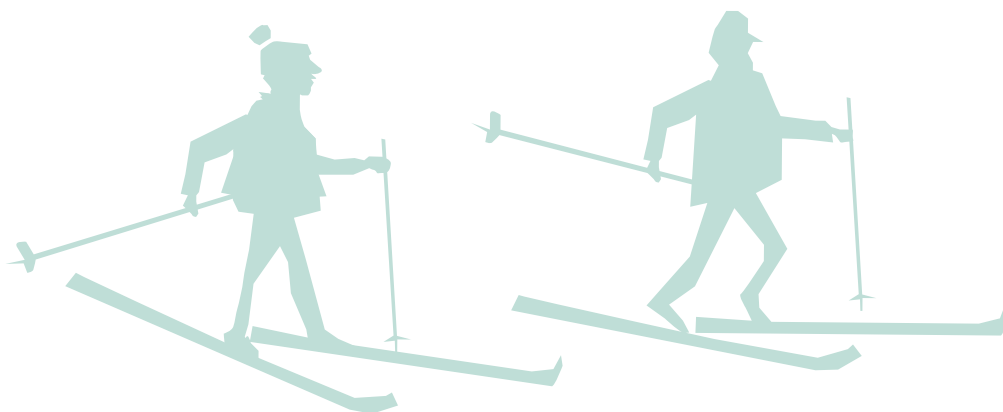


People about Longyearbyen as a physical framework

Focus group 06

Guides

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.

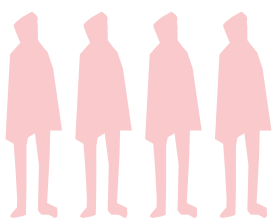
The project is part of a needs assessment of the self-initiated LPO project Right Place Right Form, funded through the Design-driven innovation program (DIP) by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway).

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



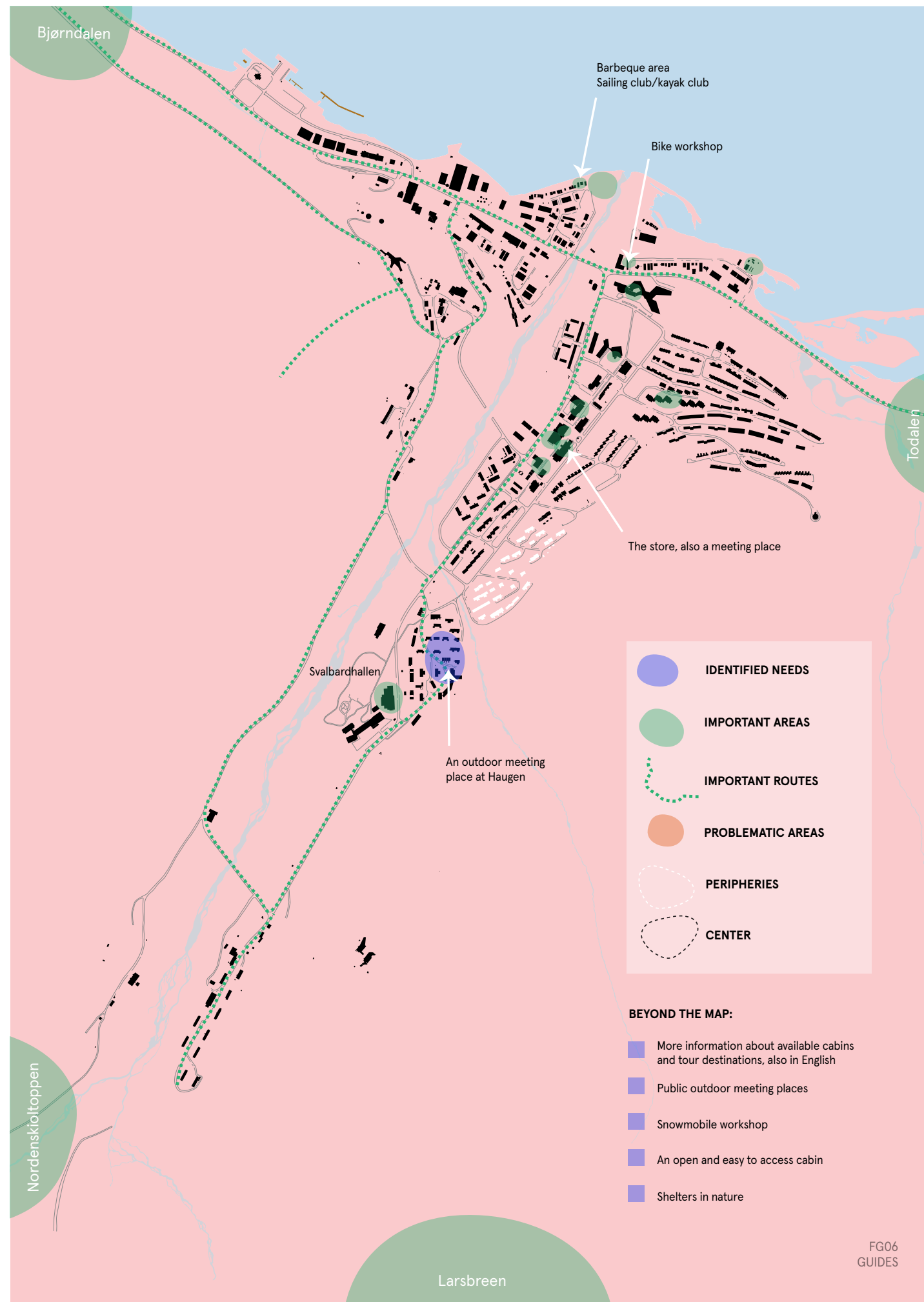
4 people: 1 Norwegian, 3 with background from other countries

Years spent in Svalbard: 5 years, 5 years, 4 years og 3,5 years

Average length of stay: 4,4 years

Job: Guides

*People have different needs in different phases of their lives.
Our sixth group shows what needs Svalbard guides identify.*

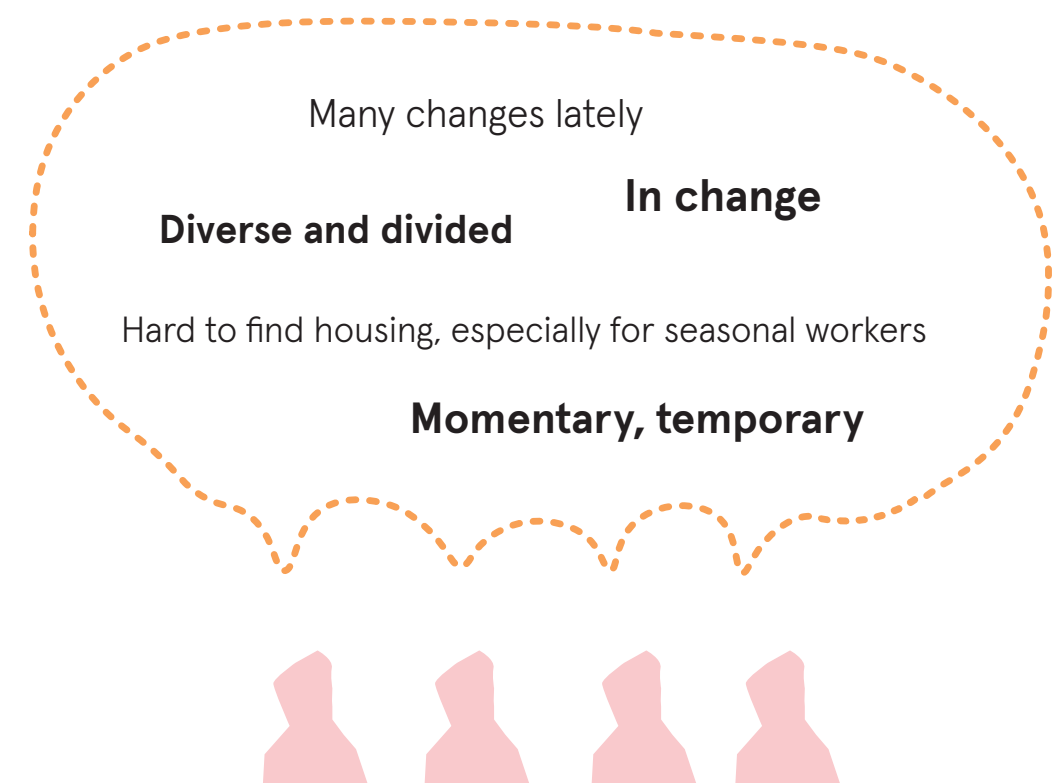


Map

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 participants in the guide group use the nature a lot, and the nearby hiking areas are considered an important part of the town. The beach in Sjøområdet is an important meeting place, and they would like more outdoor meeting places.

Description of the town



Town's identity

- Industrial town
- Small, Norwegian town
- Multicultural society

"But the industrial heritage also has its charming aspects. The whole history is there, and that I think is very nice."



"Some parts of it are like a small Norwegian town, there are a lot of small, colorful houses, and you know that they have used a lot of effort to have some architectural designing of the whole thing. But your first experience when you drive from the airport into town is like the whole industrial storage areas, and that is definitely not pretty."



Diversity and division

- People are classified based on their jobs
- Solidarity
- Social divisions are visible in the physical environment

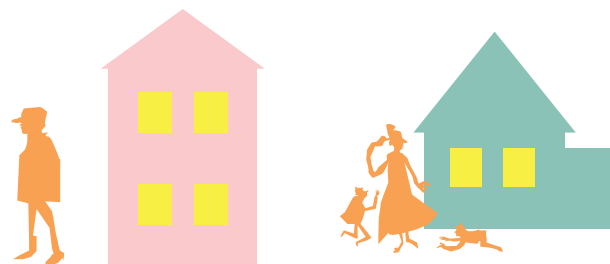
"It's a small town, with a lot of different people living here, a lot of different cultures, but there are also a lot of problems going on, and a lot of disagreements over what you should use the town for, and how you should prioritize the space because it is very limited."



"Longyearbyen culture is not a culture that hangs together. It is like a cacophonie. It's a mix of individuals with strong opinions. They have maybe forgotten to make a consensus."



People with this kind of jobs live here, people with this kind of jobs live there...

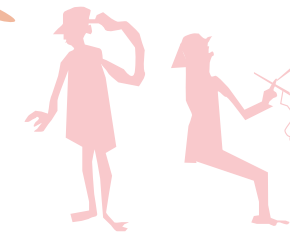


Integration

If you are not Norwegian it is very hard to excel in this town.

I don't feel very welcome, being non-Norwegian and also being a guide.

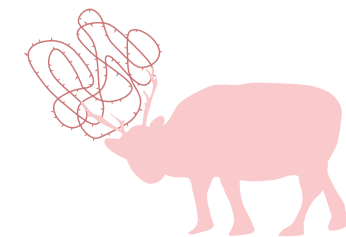
It all depends on your passport: are you Norwegian, or are you not.



Environment and environmental awareness

- Industrial "garbage" in a vulnerable environment
- Space is prioritized for tourism and hotels

"I find it frustrating that you find cables and all that garbage left around but it's actually protected by law because it's cultural heritage and you know that probably nothing will be done with it. I've seen reindeers with their antlers stuck in wires and it's just disheartening."



"We try to press out the whole local environment to try to gain as much money on it as possible by bringing up more and more tourists, and making more space for that."

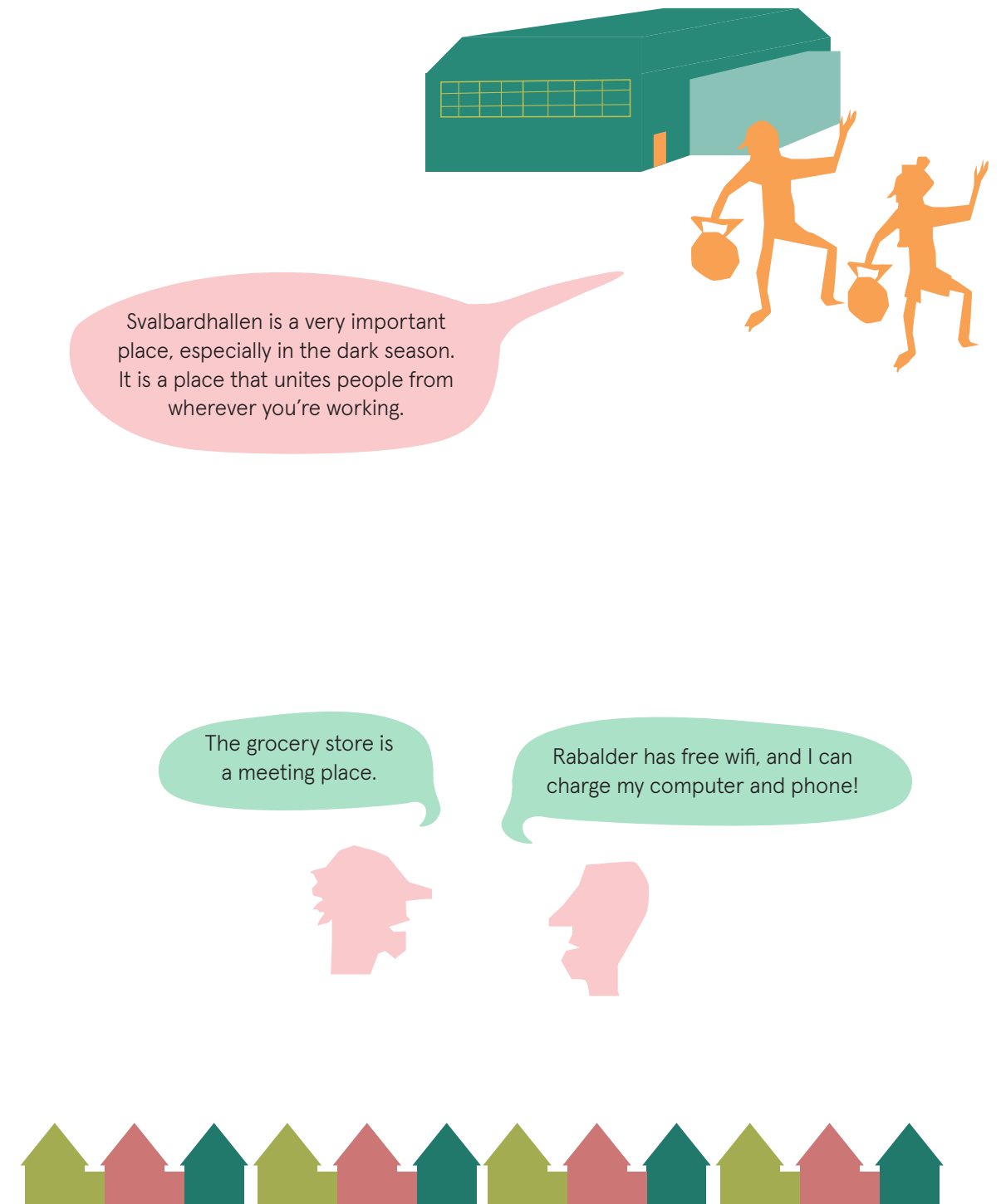
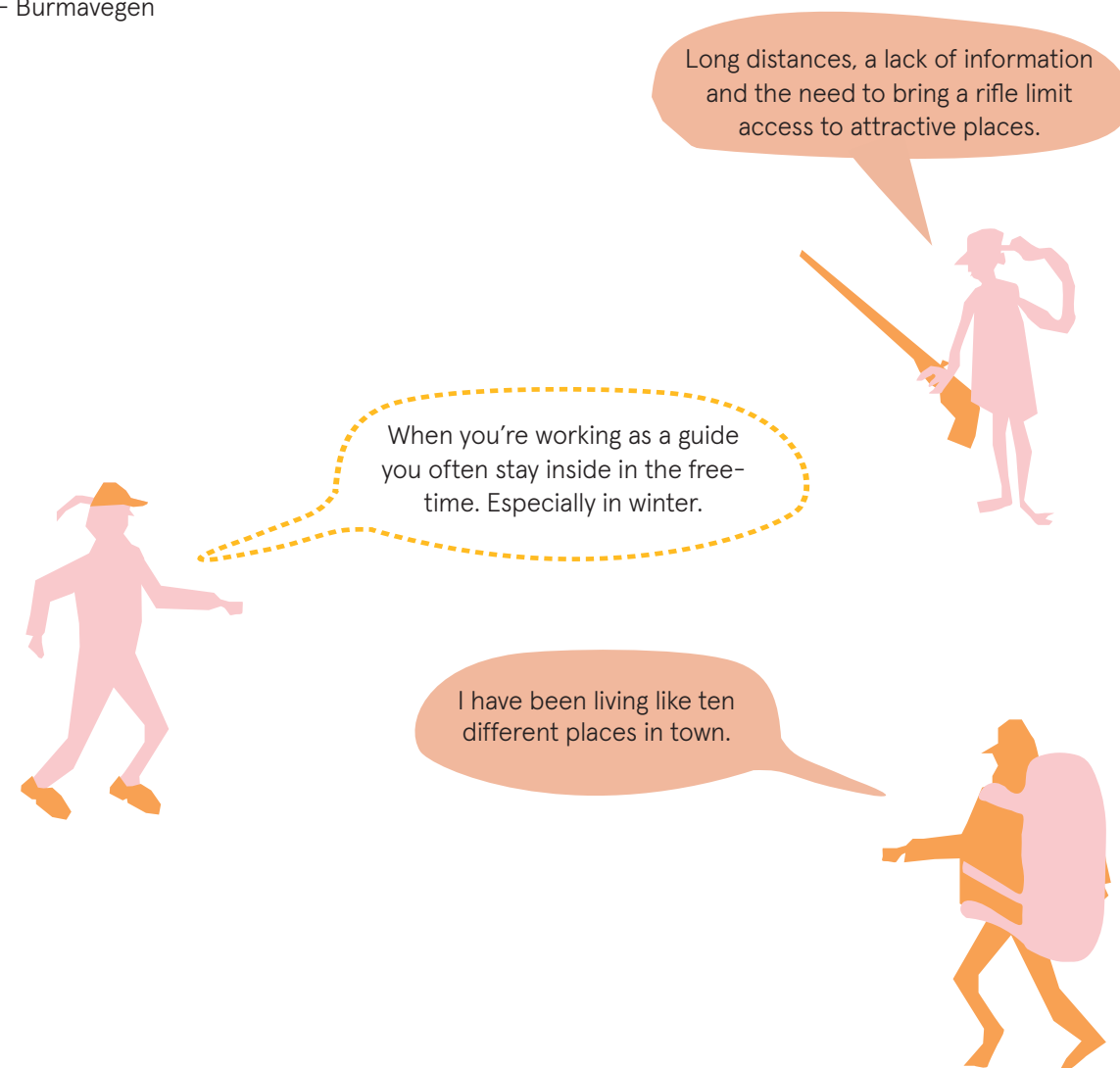


"That's at least my experience that people who have been here for a long time they all have this more same feeling about keeping it clean, being more protective, than people coming, doing a job and then leave again."

Use of town, centre vs. periphery

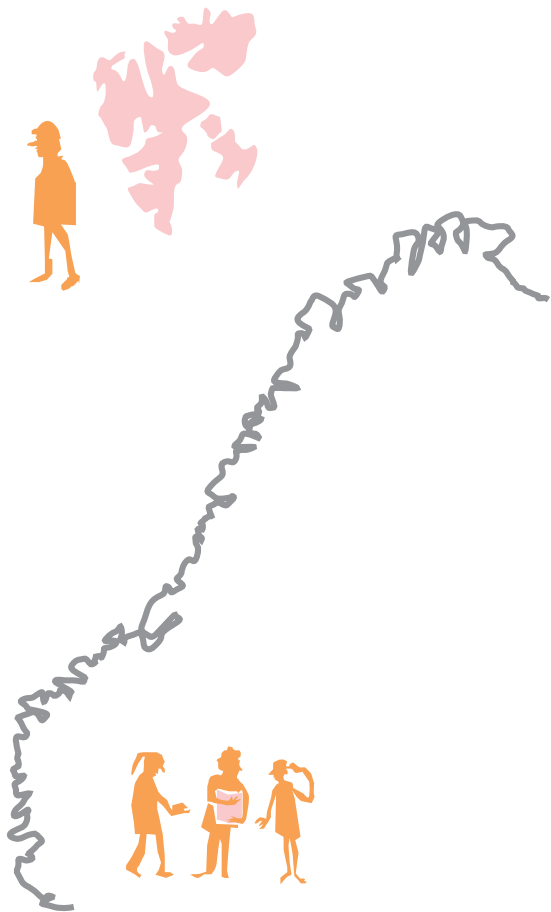
Central and public spaces, meeting places people use

- Sjøområdet, especially in spring: the fireplace, the barbeques, Seilforeningen, the Kayak Club
- Svalbardhallen
- Library
- Rabalder
- Barentz
- Fruene
- Coop
- Bike workshop
- Nordenskiöldtoppen, Larsbreen area
- Burmavegen



Governance and participation

“If I would describe it to my guests, I would say it’s a small, peaceful town, where the city and the countryside are very close to each other. And it is one of the most peaceful places on Earth. But if I would describe it to someone else, I would say that it is more like a Norwegian colony. It’s controlled by people who have maybe never even been on Svalbard, they don’t know anything about the Arctic environment and how things work up here.”



I’m very fine with the fact that this place is under Norwegian sovereignty. But they don’t really listen to the people, and it’s very dictated.



Seasonal workers cannot vote, they cannot say anything, they cannot do any difference, even though they have been working here for maybe the last ten years. The whole idea of who is a resident is maybe defined in a wrong way. People that have been here for a year can have more influence than people who have been here for years.

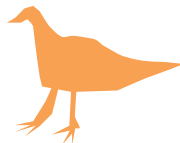


Places that should be developed

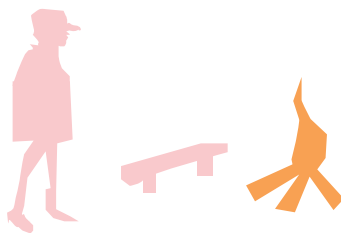
Something I experience in the summer sometimes is feeling trapped when you’re in the community. Whereas in the snowmobile season you can really explore.



The birdhouse is super nice, but it is mostly used for guiding. But I don’t think a lot of people know about it!



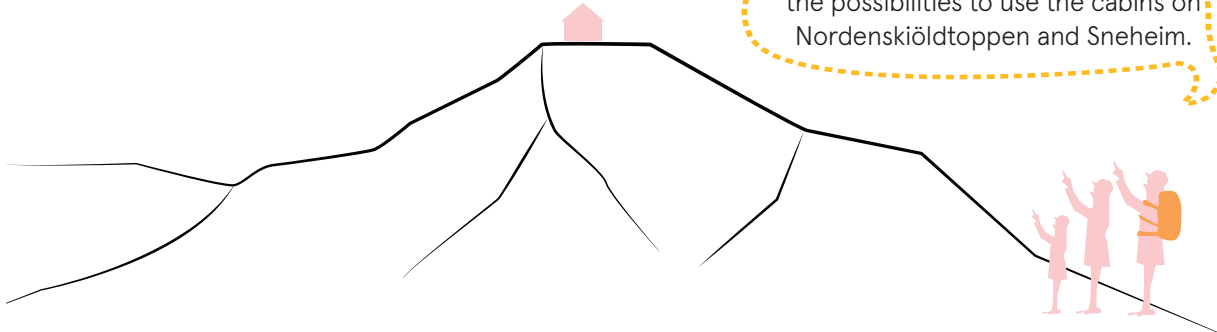
There is very little open space, like we have one grill place at the beach and one in Bjørndalen, but for a town like this we could use much more. We could have much more space where we could actually meet with different kind of people in town, where guides can get to know people that work for example in Lokaltstyre.



I would wish I could spend more time in Haugen. An open, public space at Haugen would be amazing. Like a bonfire space. A space that has sun.



I would love to know more about the possibilities to use the cabins on Nordenskiöldtoppen and Sneheim.



What do you wish for?



My idea would be to open these cabins, but I know, that because Sysselmannen is involved in that, things will go so slow, the process might be very very difficult.

I wish that we will be even more environmental aware.




A little bit more focus on the local environment and not just tourism. So it's not going to end up like Gran Canaria.



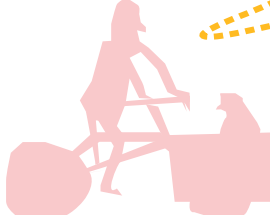
I wish for more information and transparency. For example if you're new, it's very cool to know about where can you go, where can I rent a cabin, when can I shoot a reindeer and stuff like that. Not everyone is talking that much with the people that know stuff.




It could be nice with more courses in general. Because it is an outdoor area, it is an outdoor lifestyle up here. So more available courses where you can learn more about being outdoor, learn more about avalanche risk, about glacier hiking, rescue whatsoever... and especially also Norwegian courses.




In general more focus on integration.



I would really like to see Longyearbyen with less moving cars. More willingness to use bikes and to walk. This could have easily been a bicycling town.



I wish that Longyearbyen, and especially Sysselmannen, would realize and accept that there is not only Norwegians up here, and they will start inform important stuff in English, and not only in Norwegian.



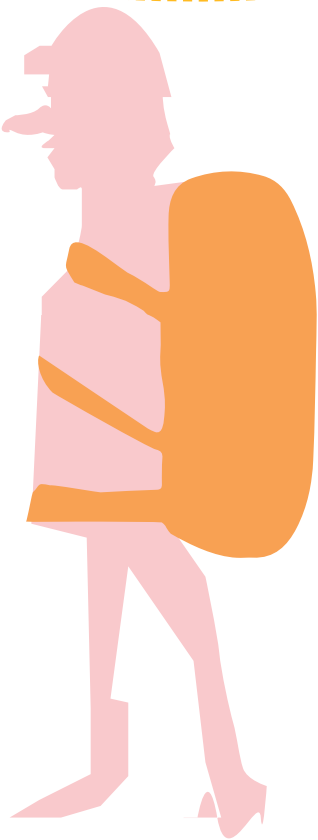
They are making the tourists come back, and not the guides, or the companies and people working with them. It would be nice to have a balance between that. Some energy and money for the people dealing with the tourism, and also some money and energy for the tourism, of course, we need both.

What should be prioritised

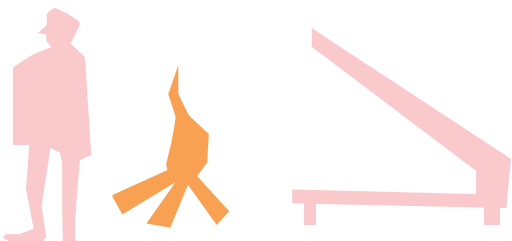
- Public meeting spaces
- More transparency and information about different places and areas how to get there, also in English
- Shelters one can use when being in nature
- A cabin that is public, open, and easily accessible



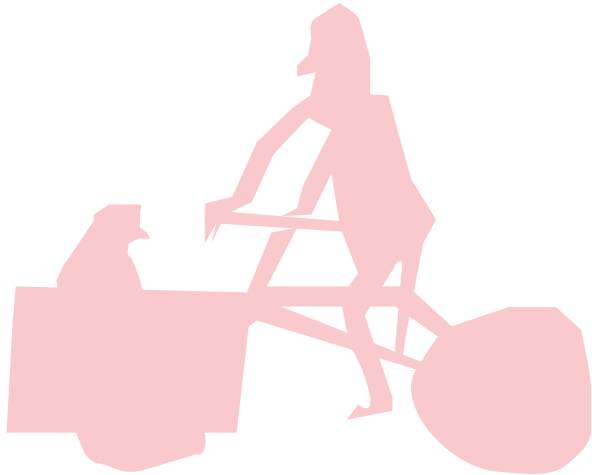
I think people would use the local mountains more if it would be easier to find trips and figure out how to get there.



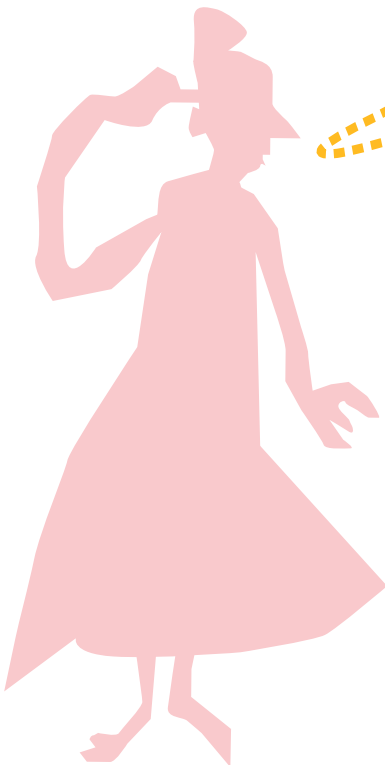
I think a lot of people live here because they don't want to live in a big city. They want to be outdoor. We should acknowledge that and make more meeting spaces outside.



You can really clearly see that they are investing in it and put these things away, make a switch, and turn the town into a more modern, maybe more sustainable town



We have the recycling bike shop, but it could also be with scooters. There are so many scooters each year that are thrown out or abandoned. It should be possible for people to fix their scooters instead of buying new ones. And also that people could learn how to take care of a scooter.



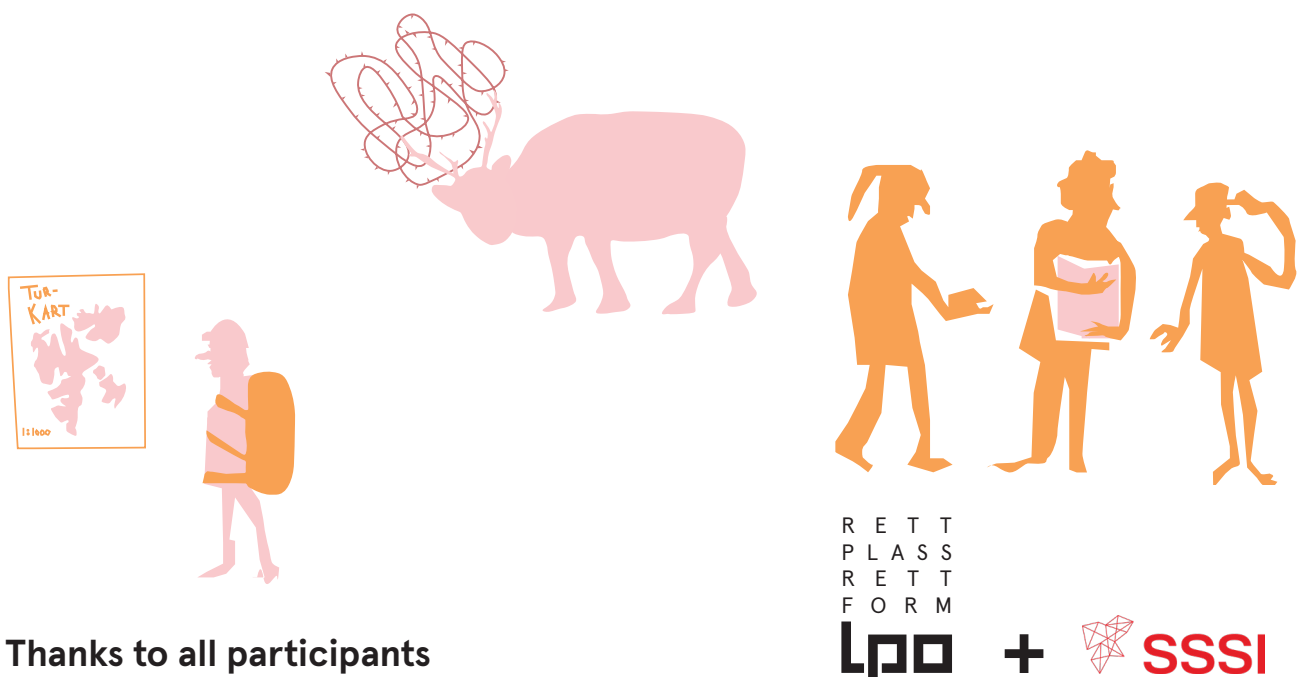
Consistent themes in the discussion

diversity and division, participation, tourism and environment

This group uses the natural environment, including the close environment, a lot, and spends a lot of time outdoors, both for work and privately. They use much of the town actively (the cafés, the sports' hall, the library) actively, but are not as much involved in the town's cultural life. Also the bicycle workshop and Sjøområdet are important places, the latter especially in the spring (the fire place, the barbeques, the sailing club). They have good insight into and are concerned about social inequalities and problems in town, related to housing, language barriers, income, influence on decision making, and power.

They experience the town as diverse, constituted by different groups with different status, opinions, and perceptions. They further experience that (seasonal) contracts, nationality, and language define one's position in town, and influence integration, social mobility, status, and power in decision making. Non-Norwegian workers with seasonal contracts are at the bottom of the hierarchy. Some of the non-Norwegian guides feel not wanted in town, a feeling that has increased during the pandemic. Even if several of the guides have been living in Longyearbyen for a relatively long time and have strong bonds to the town, they feel that they are not perceived as "locals", and feel that they do not have power to partake in decisions taken in town.

They view the town both from the inside (as inhabitants) and the outside (from the tourist's point of view). They view tourism critically and point at the problematic aspects of this industry (social inequality, environmental pressure), even if they live from it, and in general show a strong care for the environment. This group wishes for more common outdoor meeting places, like shelters and cabins, and emphasize that this would contribute to social integration. They furthermore wish for more information about the town and how different places can be used, for example existing cabins, also in English. A public snowmobile workshop is also on the wish list, as well as more courses (including language courses).



Thanks to all participants