

# People about Longyearbyen as a physical framework

Focus group 07  
Open for all

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.**

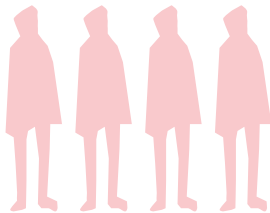
The project is part of a needs assessment of the self-initiated LPO project Right Place Right Form, funded through the Design-driven innovation program (DIP) by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway).

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

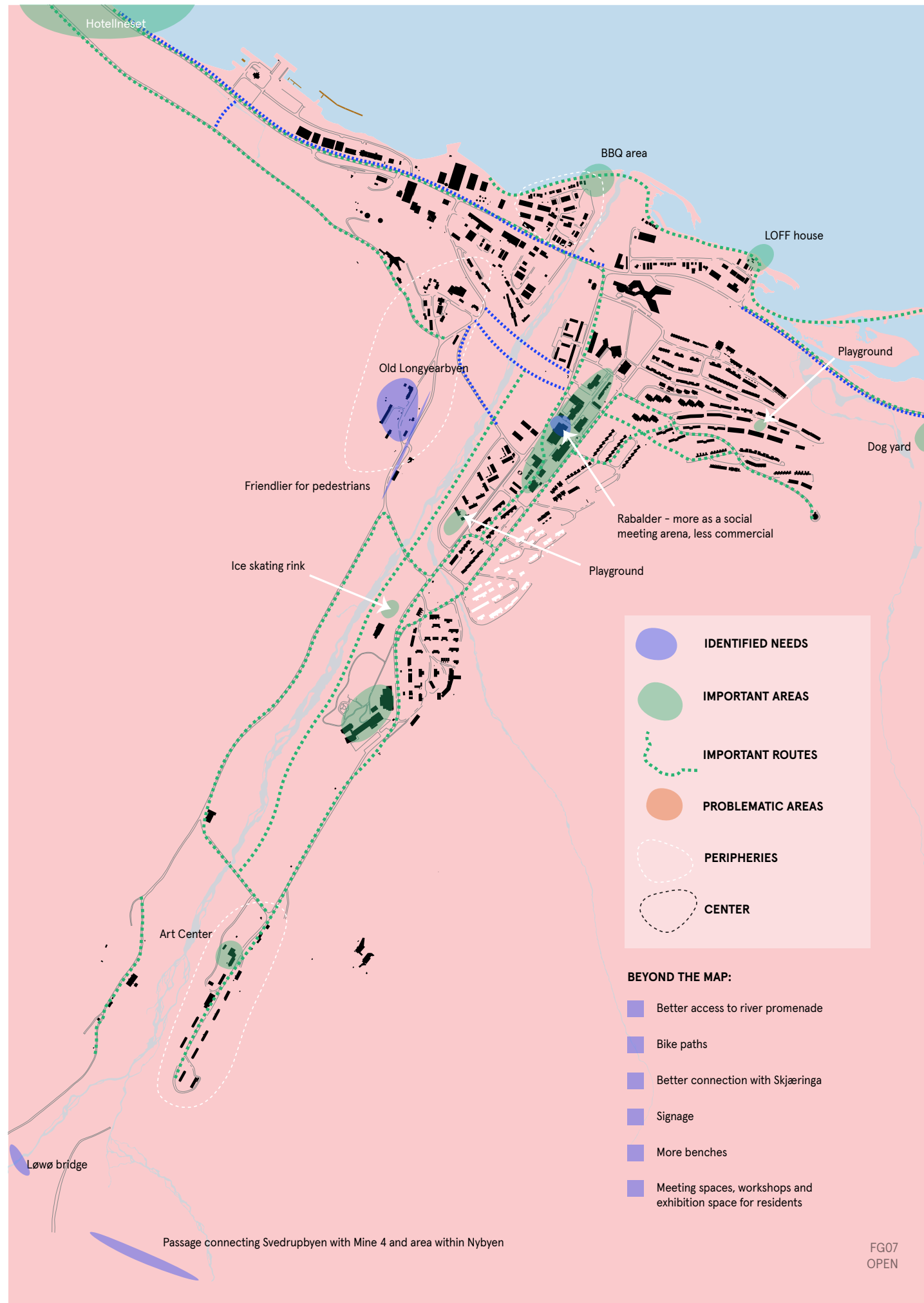


**4 people:** 3 Norwegian, 1 from another country

**Years spent in Svalbard:** < 1 year, 32 years, 1 year, 1 year

**Jobb:** employed (1), entrepreneur (3)

*People have different needs and see things differently depending on their experiences. Our seventh group was a conversation among people with widely varying backgrounds. The meeting was open to everybody.*

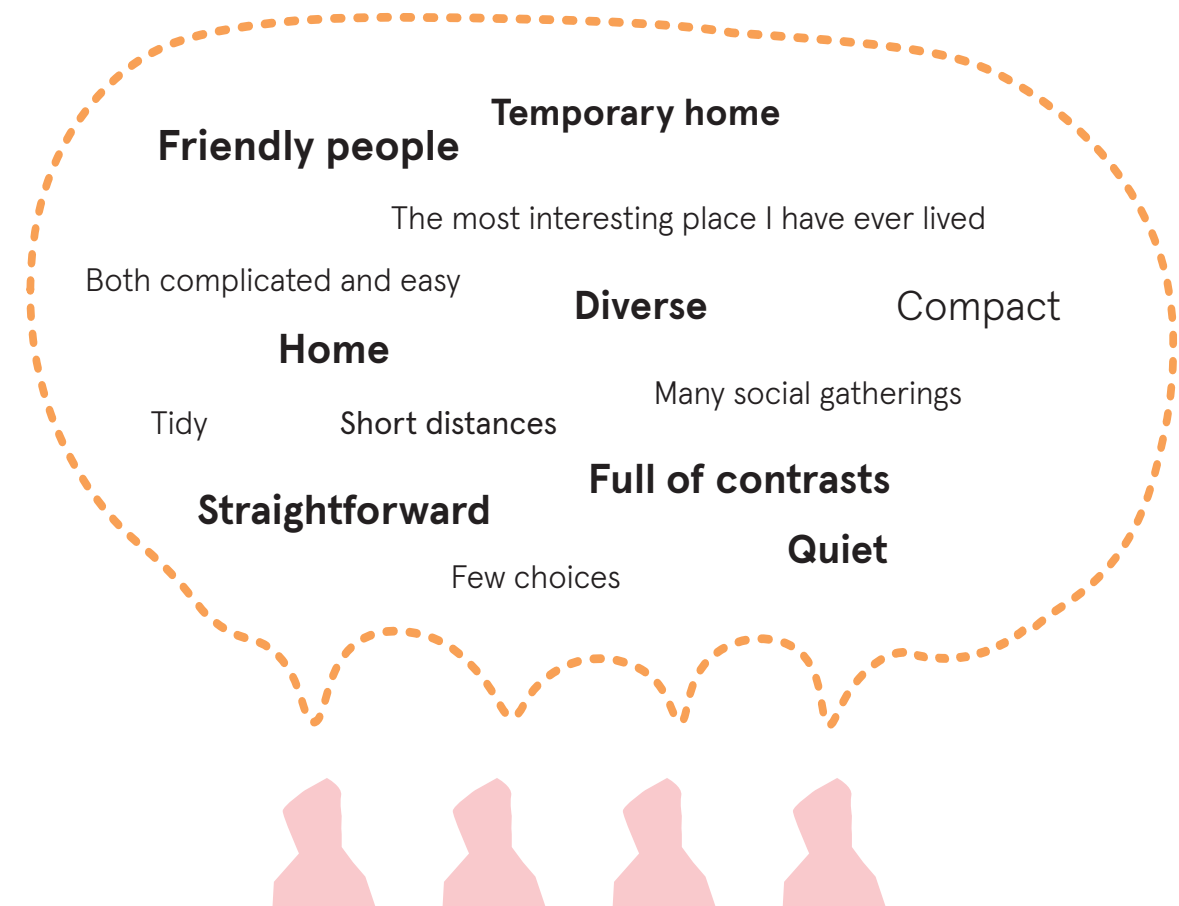


## Map

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 people in the open group are engaged in town activities and make constantly new discoveries. They would like more activities near town and an art space for residents. They focus on history and accessibility of various areas.

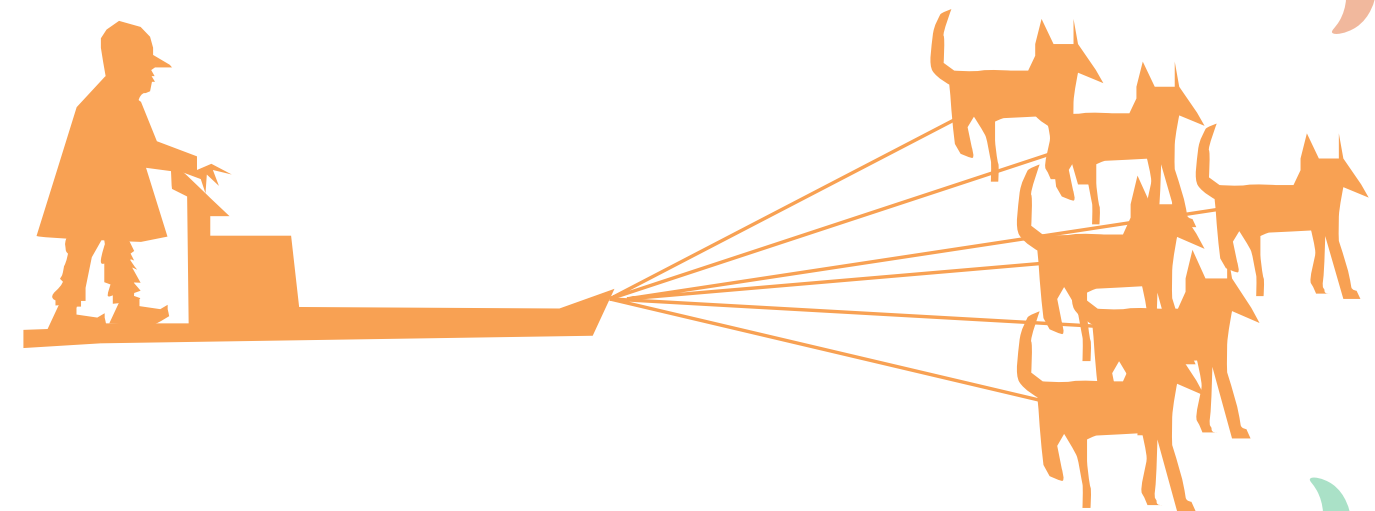
## Description of the town



Town`s identity

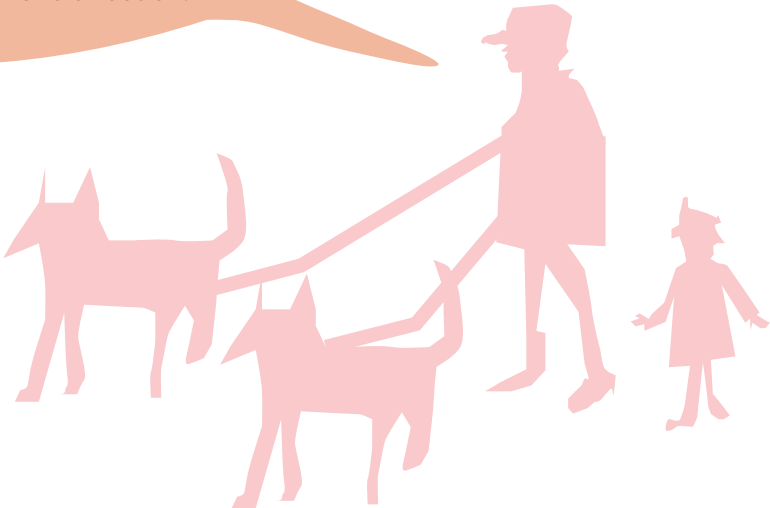
It's like a diamond as it has many facets. The greatness of the diamond is in the complexity. If I am on one side of the diamond I don't see the other, and if the sunshine is here it doesn't necessarily shine there. Different situations, different economies, different attachments, different social benefits, different jobs – all the differences that are sometimes opposites and sometimes side-by-side. A very special and very unique identity.

It didn't take me long to see all the contrasts. Those issues are becoming more visible because of the situation of the past months. The town needs to rely on several different pillars economically because this could happen again.



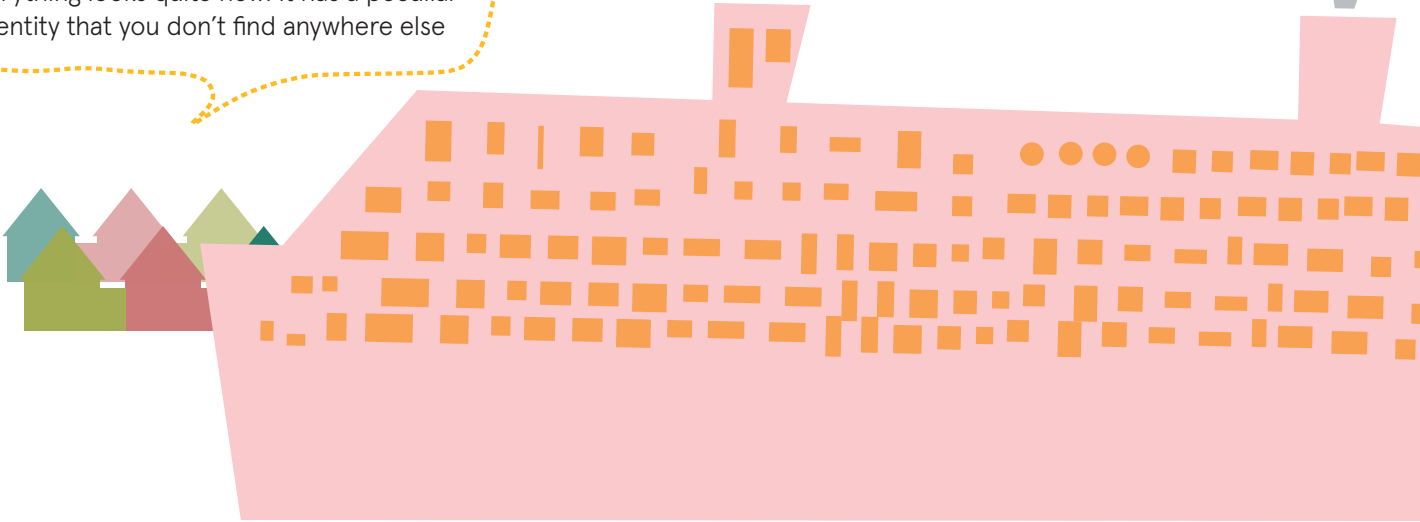
It's a very vulnerable place and I think that should bring people closer together. It's been difficult to build a common story but this is an opportunity to create a more resilient community.

I worry about the identity of Longyearbyen. Not because it is going to change because I think part of the identity is that it is ever-changing. But I am afraid that it's going to change only in one direction.



There are many who live here for a period and then they leave, and there are few who have a long history. There is very little trace of the old, everything looks quite new. It has a peculiar identity that you don't find anywhere else

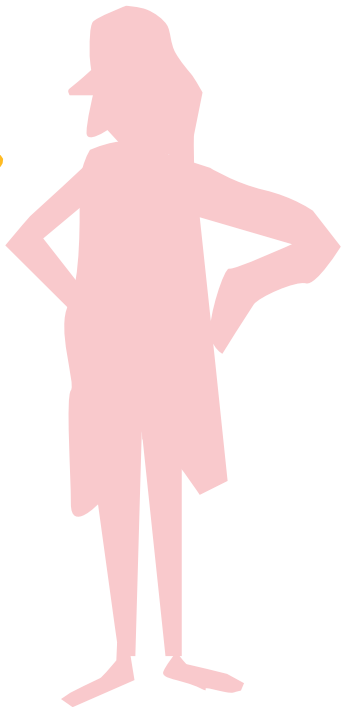
Longyearbyen has a very strong identity in terms of the colors used and the architecture. It's an important part of an identity project.



To me it seems that Longyearbyen has a brand, like a picture postcard, it's being sold as "this is what we are" – but what we are is something quite different.



But sometimes there is no WE. To me part of the identity is the contrasting flux or movement all the time, but it's also very risky because if someone brands the town they take one truth and present it as THE truth. And I don't think there is one truth.



# Use of town, centre vs. periphery

## Centre:

- Area around the grocery store and Næringsbygget
- Area around school
- River path

## Public places:

- Fruene
- Rabalder
- Library
- Parking lot
- COOP
- Main street
- Lompensenteret
- Art Center in Nybyen
- Playgrounds
- Dogyard
- School
- Svalbardhallen
- Iceskating rink
- Kulturhuset
- Barbecue spot at the sea
- Bird watching house
- Miner statue = focal point



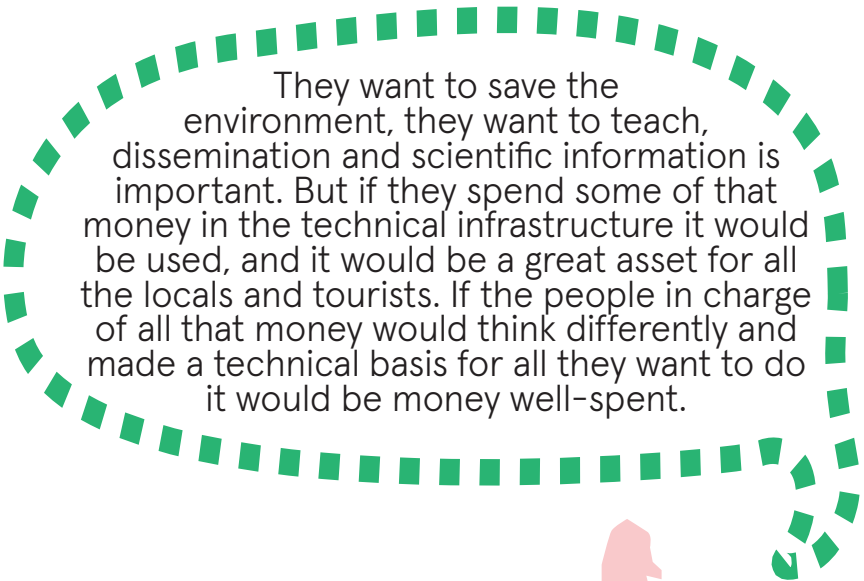
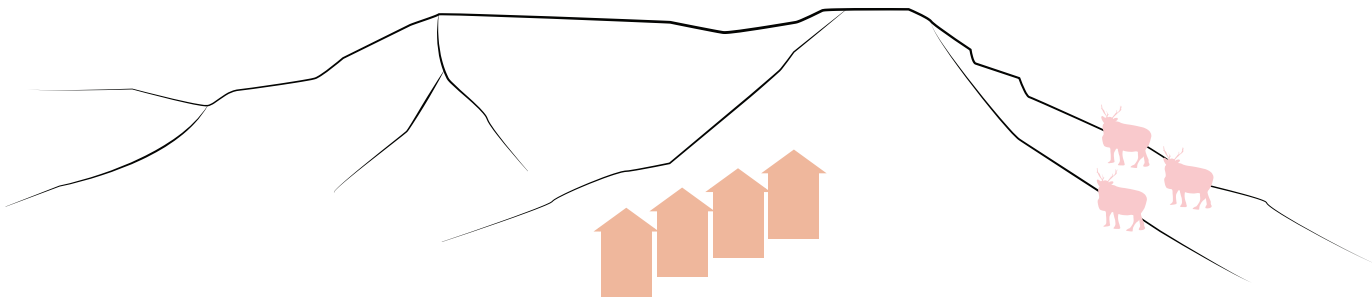
# Transportation means

Feet, car, bicycle, dogs



# What should be prioritised

- Many roads made for driving, not for walking and cycling
- Better connection to Skjæringa
- More access points to the river path
- The area around the old centre of Longyearbyen more friendly to pedestrians
- Money from Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund should be used for locally beneficial measures
- Infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, marking of streets)
- Cafés opening earlier
- More benches
- Exhibition space available to the residents
- Stage/exhibition area built of pallets (a community stage in the centre)
- Rabalder should be complementary to the library and should work when events are happening (less commercial, more public friendly)



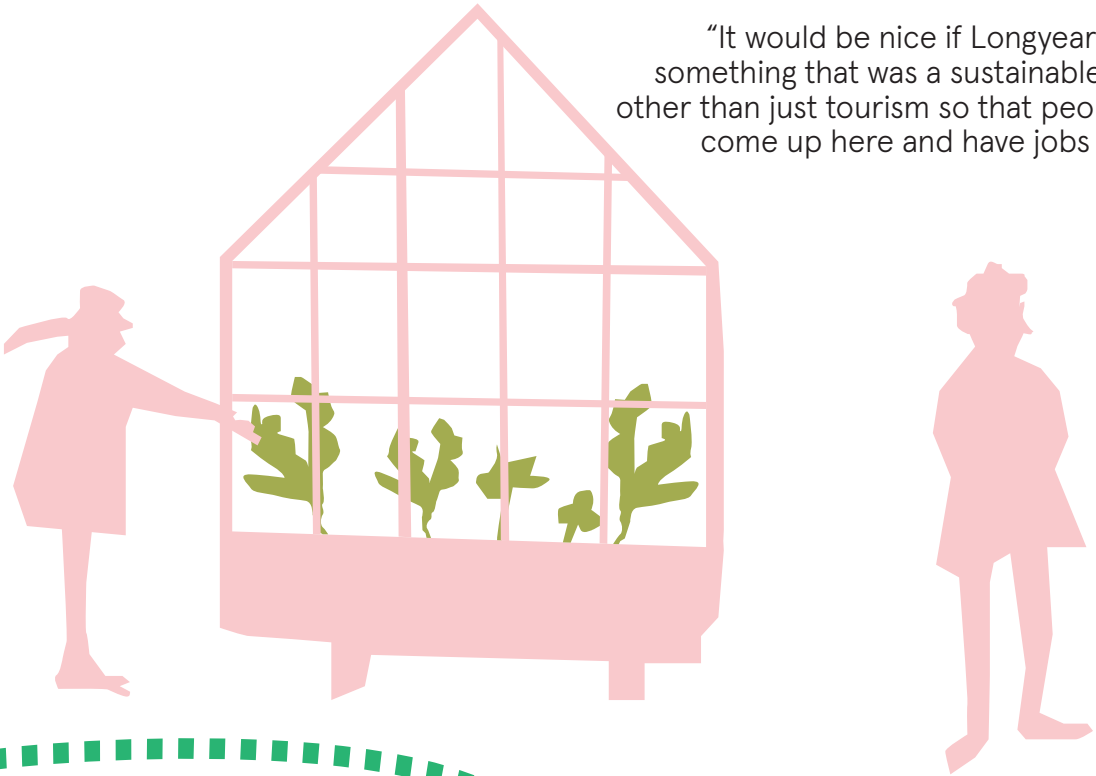
Town's future

"I hope first and foremost that there will be more environmentally friendly solutions here. It's good with a bit of tourism, but I think it has grown too much and it will be a bit wrong if it is built on premises to make money. There is a lot left to be more environmentally friendly up here and it's a bit weird because it's a small place, you should get things done. So I hope it will be built more on environmental terms than the market logic."

**"There is an opportunity here with a small population, a harsh climate, a remote location without efficient logistics, but this would require massive levels of funding. You could pour money into projects producing food sustainably on location. You could do so much about waste. There are some genuinely active and passionate people in this town with high levels of knowledge and skills. Applied research, applied technology – that's what I think this place could be about in the future."**



"It would be nice if Longyearbyen had something that was a sustainable industry other than just tourism so that people could come up here and have jobs and raise families."



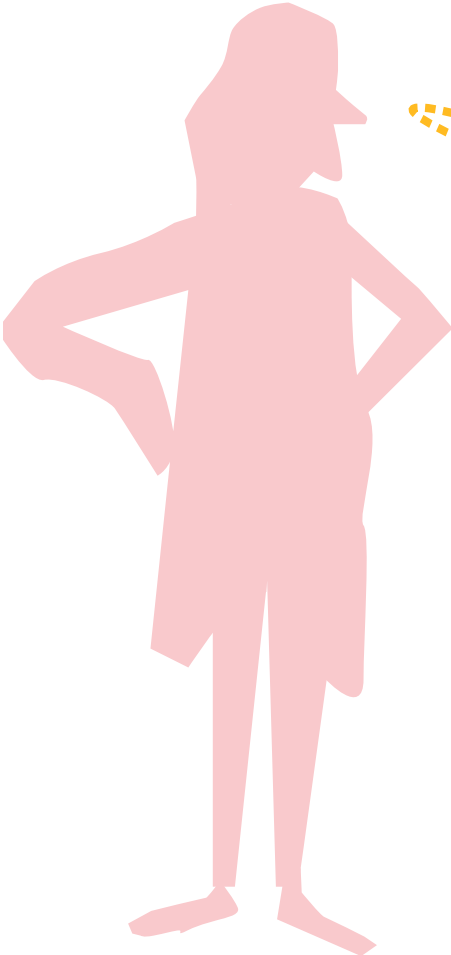
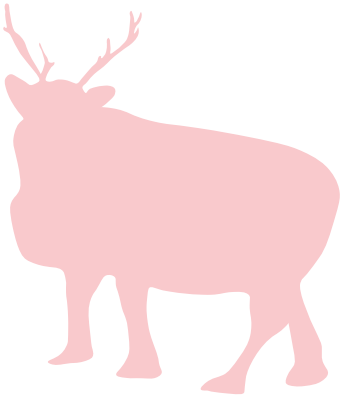
I don't think Longyearbyen is unique in being in deep shit at the moment. It's not resilient and I think the industry itself is aware of this. It makes sense to talk about where we as a society want to go and how we want to organize a meaningful life. That's the important question, I think, and that's a political one.

There needs to be clarity about the framework in Longyearbyen. It would be easier to know what it was than not knowing where we stand. If this community is going to survive it needs to balance being a local community with being a destination. I think it should pay off to be a local. And I don't think the solution is coming from the mainland.



I think the international population is part of what makes this a very unique place.

I also think there are some people who should not be here. It sounds very harsh, but the framework is not clear enough, people just drop in and stay. I don't think it's good for all those people and those who follow, spouses, children. It's not for everyone. It can never be.



We have to remember that the big question is: Why are we here? Are we a tool for the Norwegian government and the Treaty, or is it something else? Maybe in order to look into the future, we have to put the question differently: Why should we be here?

It makes sense for Norway taking care of Svalbard to make sure that there is some international presence. It's like an international space station – no country would come and take the space station, right? So it would be stupid not to facilitate for an international population.

But it would be better if there weren't so much difference in what privileges and opportunities one has.



## Consistent themes in the discussion

### *Social inequality, change, participation and environment*

The group perceived the nature of the town as contrasting and paradoxal; positive sides were underlined more than negative ones. The people were aware of social inequalities and the bubble-like structure of the population. There was a focus on (the lack of) continuity, and identity (community) versus brand (destination). They agreed the potential for time spent outside is not fully used because of accessibility issues and missing infrastructure that makes the urban space even more disparate. There was agreement on a missing exhibition/creative space for residents.

We discussed ideas and strategies (what sustainability means, how to be more resilient, what the legal framework does and does not define) more than technical issues (compared to other groups). The group agreed solutions need to be developed in collaboration with people who are impacted, and local capital (ideas, skills, engagement) needs to meet national investments (funding).



Thanks to all participants

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P L A S S  
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F O R M  
**Lpo**

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