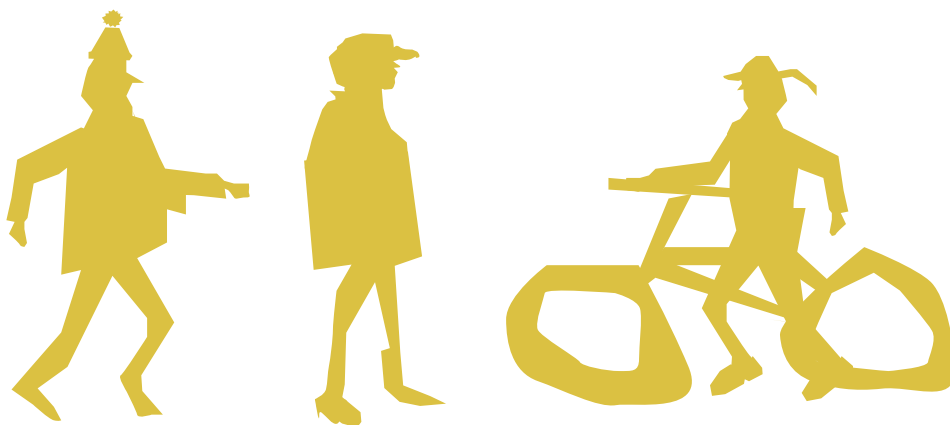


People about Longyearbyen as a physical framework

Focus group 08

Community Workers

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.

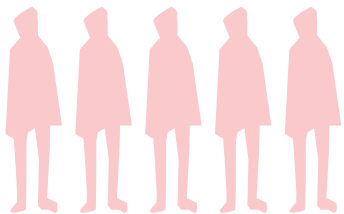
The project is part of a needs assessment of the self-initiated LPO project Right Place Right Form, funded through the Design-driven innovation program (DIP) by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway).

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

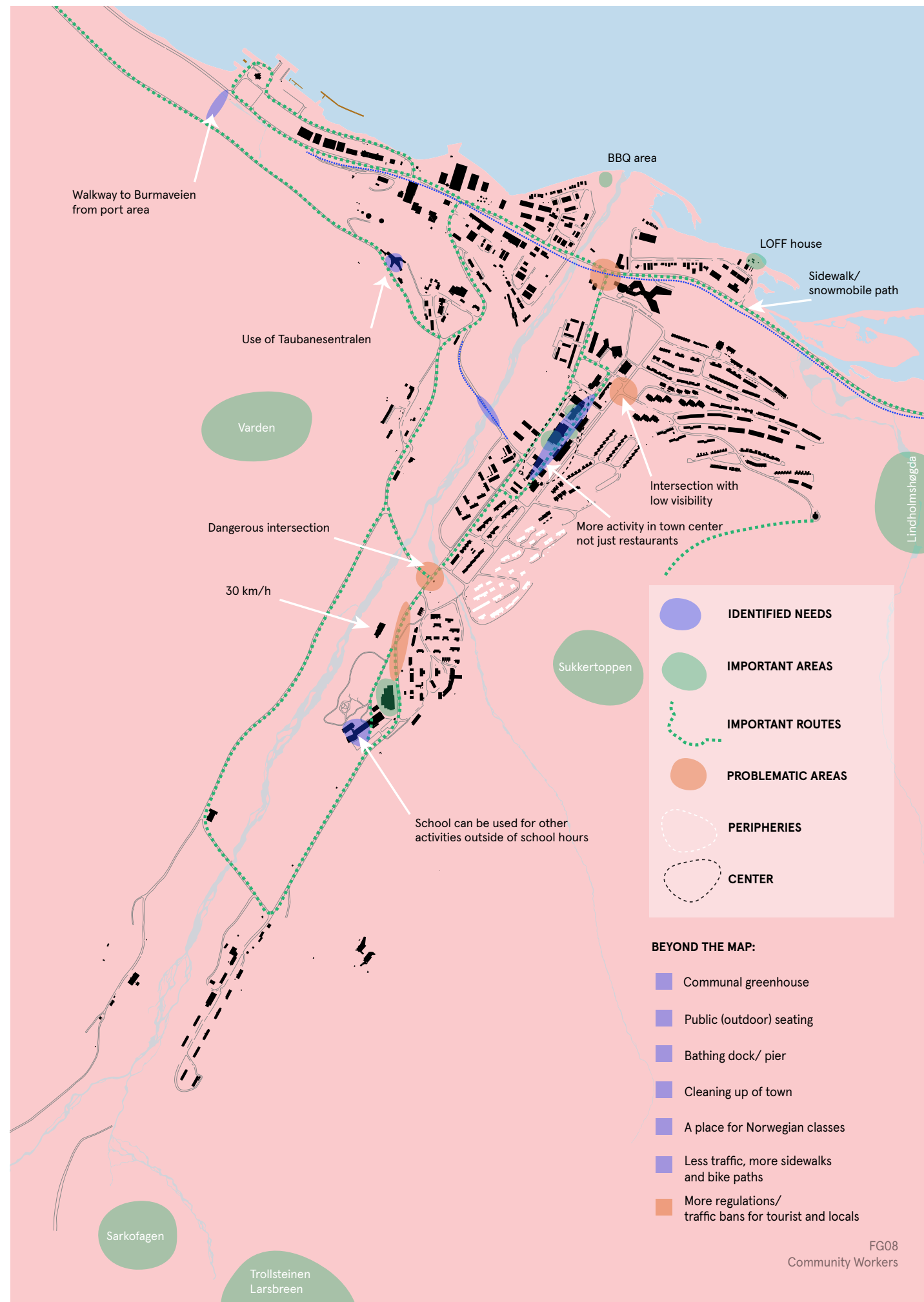


5 people: 4 from Norway, 1 from another country

Years spent in Longyearbyen: 7 years, 2 years, 4 years, 4 years, 1 year

Average lengt of stay: 3,5 years

*People have different needs in different phases of their lives.
Our eighth group shows what needs the Community Workers identify.*

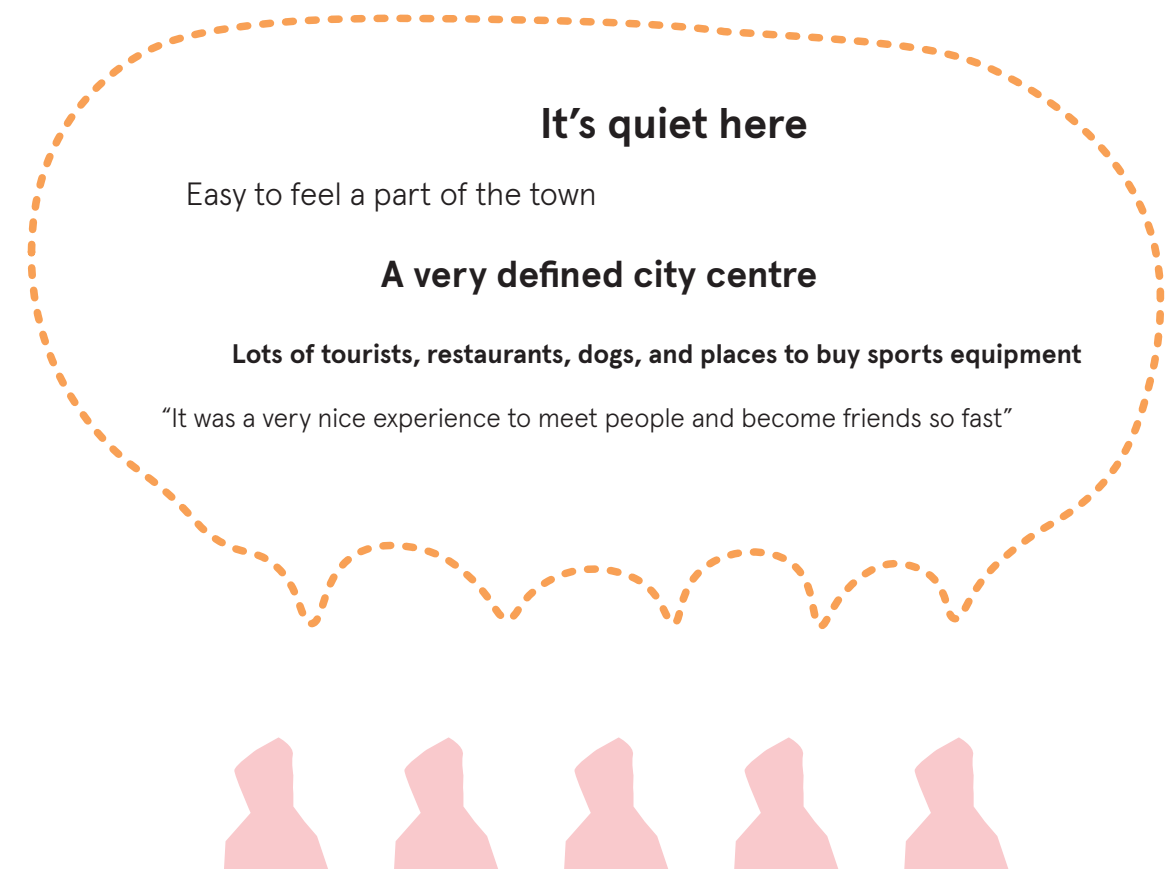


Map

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.

Those in the community workers group take advantage of what the town has to offer, both in terms of sports and culture and are often out on trips. Traffic safety was an issue they were concerned about. They would like a more active town center and to see places that already exist used more often and be better taken care of (for ex. Taubanesentralen).

Description of the town



Town's identity

So many people move up and down so often, so everybody has been new and therefore it's very easy to feel a part of the town. And I think a lot of people are trying to be part of town and contribute!

I'm here for maximum of X years, and people tend to more or less push you away because there is no reason why they should get you as a friend because you will be leaving in this time.

If you want the tourists to keep coming and the local residents to actually tolerate them, then you need to get some sidewalks and make it possible to get to work without spending another 10 minutes to get there because of the cruise ships coming.

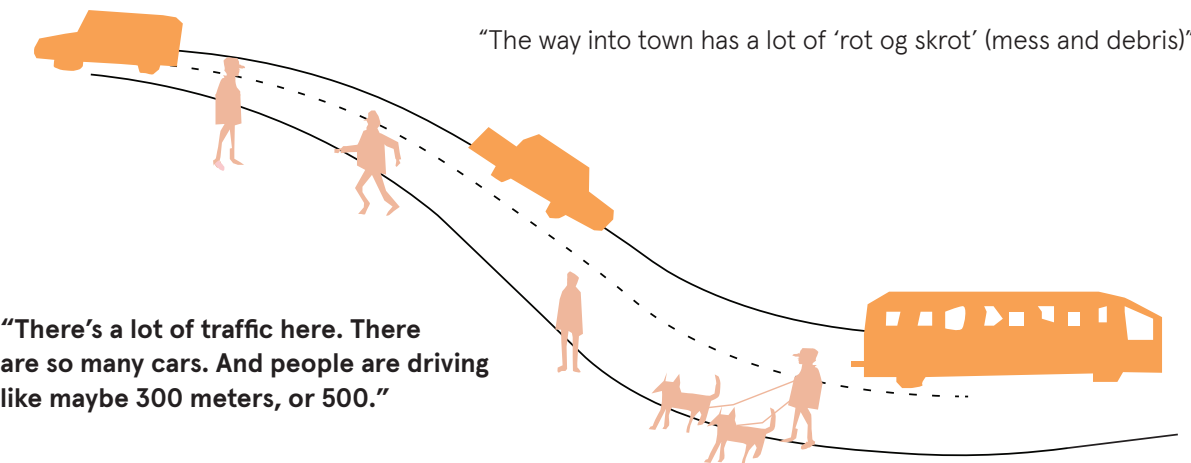
"Regarding infrastructure and all that, we are still a company town. No side walks, trucks going all over."

"In 2015, the avalanche, that changed things. After, they built all these new houses. (The avalanche) had an impact on where things have been built since then and where they will be built in the future."

"I like tourists, I have worked with them in the past. But there aren't so many free spaces. Like LOFF house, when you go there and there is no one else, it is fantastic (agreeing sounds). And the library I feel is just for us, for instance. But then all the restaurants and all this - that is shared."

Problematic places, roads and themes

- Street lights on even when dark time is gone
- Need for sidewalks
- Cross section near school
- Intersection near Kullunge kindergarden has low visibility
- The cost of projects often blocks them
- More regulations
- More areas closed to both locals and tourists

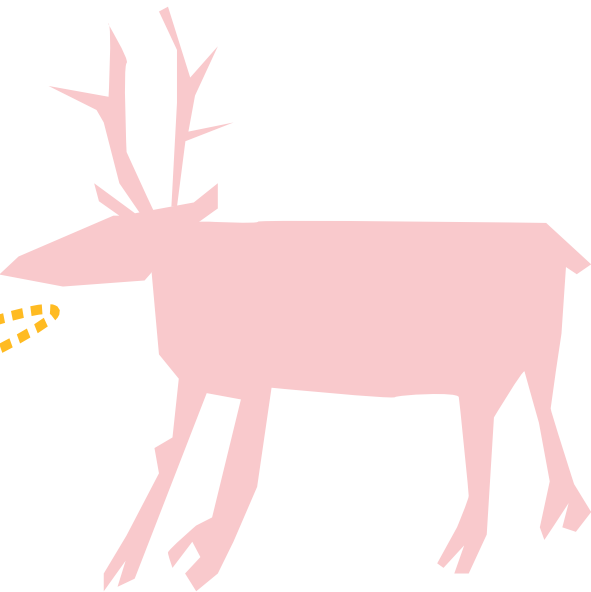


"You have all these playgrounds, but what I see is just people parking their scooters there for the summer."

"Why talk about sustainable when you waste so much energy like that (street lights on in polar day)?"

"I don't think it is the tourism itself that is providing the problems. It's more the boats that come in with 3,000 people. That's where you get the problems."

Sometimes I think we have several groups here, like Thai people and Philippine people or something - and for me, also, sometimes I want to take part in the public discussion but can't because it is in Norwegian. We have opinions and we want to talk but we don't have a place to speak. And then they don't provide Norwegian classes and we have to pay ourselves.



Use of town, centre vs. periphery

Public places

- Half-pipe
- Area in front of Fruene
- LOFF house
- BBQ area on beach

Central places and peripheries

- The centre starts with the Kulturhus and ends with Kroa
- The tourist Information is a place where the guests hang out
- Burmaveien is more for the locals

What people do/use

I used to have dinner parties when I lived on the mainland, I would have people over and have nice cutlery and plates. Here everything is so temporary - I don't have enough plates, I don't have enough space.

For me it is the opposite because it's my employer paying the rent. I have a much bigger and nicer apartment here. So I have a lot of friends over, big dinner parties with 10-12 people that I never had back home. I don't have that much stuff, but I have neighbours and can borrow when I have people visiting. (I can have people over) because of my housing situation and because I am not paying the whole rent myself.

You don't have an upper class and a lower class but you are dividing people into groups with the housing situation.

People in Longyearbyen go out a lot more than in the rest of Norway. It's so expensive to buy food at Coopen, it's so cheap to eat at restaurants.

Things that should be developed

- Sidewalks
- A park type area where people can play/spend time
- Bridge to Skjeringa should be rebuilt
- Places to sit/be outside without having to buy something
- A pier or place one could swim from, with a place to get changed
- A greenhouse
- Use of Taubansentralet
- Norwegian language classes and the space to have them
- The use of the school for other activities

The city centre should be a place where you can actually hang out!

What I am used to in my hometown is that once school is out, the place is used by all kinds of associations and craft groups. They can rent it. I don't know why they don't do that here but I know they are discussing it for different sports events. There are a lot of spaces that aren't being used, actually.

Even going to the store, people are so hungry to talk to people that it ends up being a meeting place. Everyone thinks it's a little strange and you end up making jokes about it like 'ha ha, now I stay here for an hour talking to people again' because we don't have those other places, like a park or just a pavement where you walk (and can stop and talk).

When I didn't have an outdoor place of my own, you'd either have to go in front of Fruene and eat a cake - and maybe you don't want that - or go to Kroa and have a beer. There's no place to just sit down in the sun. Not to have to buy anything.

Futuring Longyearbyen

- Cleaner energy
- Less traffic (better bicycle paths, sidewalks etc.)
- End of mining
- Better standards and contracts for tourism (including certified guides, people with 80-100% contracts, better housing etc.)
- A more active city centre (not just restaurants and bars)
- A tidier city, clearing abandoned vehicles and other large/heavy objects from around town and down by the shore

I don't think we'll go towards a more international community but tourism will be a big part of the identity.

Mining will be a part of the identity. But kind of like a romanticised story of how things were, pretty much like how the trappers are romanticised now.

There has to be something that doesn't collapse in a moment if a crisis happens.

Maybe if they plan right, they could spread things out a bit so that you don't have the Government or Lokaltstyre who live there and the others down there... so people can connect and actually meet in a different arena. Make it an even more family oriented community.

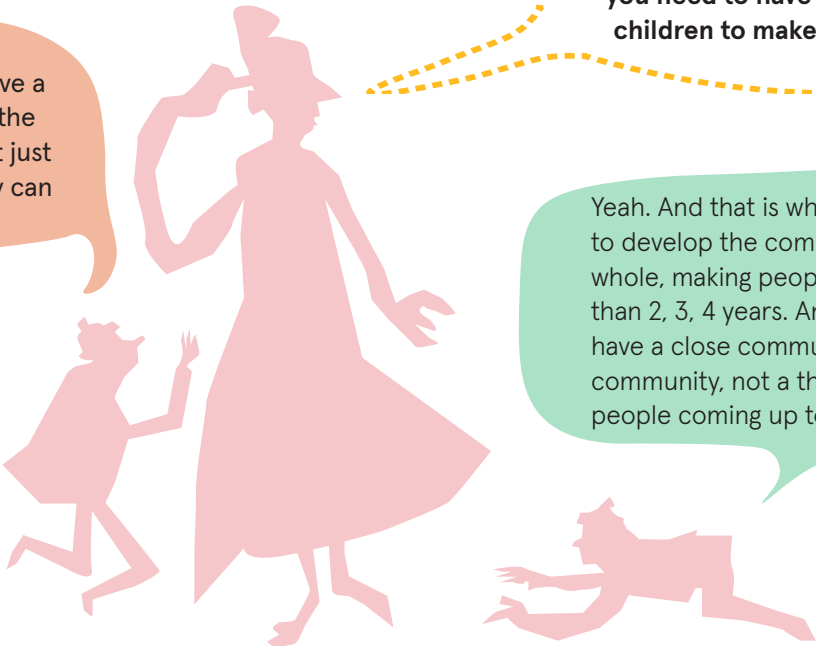
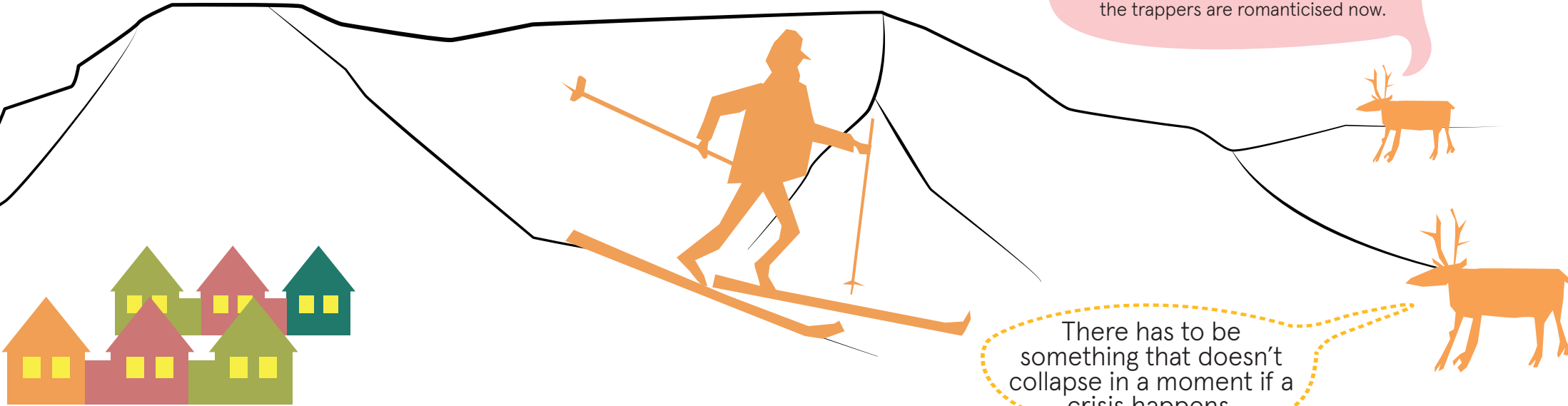
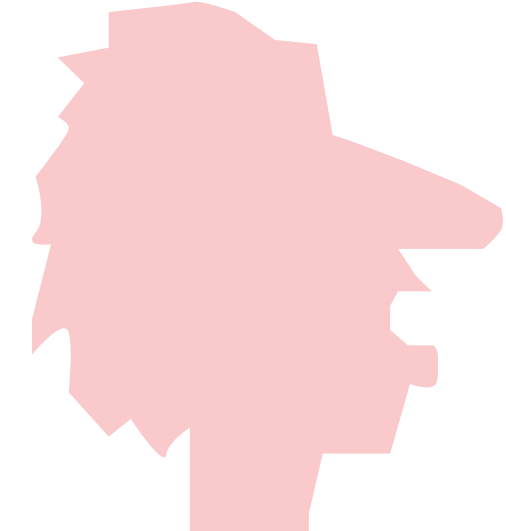
I'd like for people to know their rights and that the employers also make sure to go by the rules. Then it would be more of an equal society and everybody would feel that they are a part of town, not just the official workers in nice housing.

No matter how many tourists, how many other people you bring in here, you need to have stable families with children to make a real community.

But we should also have a Svalbard identity for the people living here. Not just for the tourists so they can come see us.

If you work in tourism today, you can't start a family. You can't take maternity leave. You just lose your job. It's like one hundred years back in Norway. So I think if we had certified guides, people working for maybe 80-100% contracts, and better housing, then we could have a family oriented society for all that want it.

Yeah. And that is why you have to develop the community as a whole, making people stay more than 2, 3, 4 years. And then you have a close community, a real community, not a theme park with people coming up to see us.



Consistent themes in the discussion

Social differences, living situations and public outdoor spaces

This group showed a feeling of being part of the town and connected to how it works. For some in the group, they expressed a feeling of being part of the future development process, for others not – even if they were aware of the main issues the town is facing and future projects under consideration. They were aware of different groups and layers in town and see how that impacts how each group lives and experiences Longyearbyen (for example acknowledging differences in housing and how that impacts not only where you live but also your disposable income and the activities you do). They want a family-friendly community for all (including those in tourism/service industry) that is stable and grounded, not a town that is a showcase for tourists with an identity tailored for consumption. They were involved in many areas and aspects of the town and feel deeply connected to it, giving the impression they will continue to feel connected to the place even after their time here is over.

They see the potential of the town to develop into a more equal place and desire a public place where people can get to know each other. They felt that creating the possibility for all groups to stay longer will help create stability and better community involvement. Individually, they are active in groups and organisations, very much a part of the cultural life that they both patronise and participate in actively. They made a distinction between what was for 'us' vs what was for guests/tourists (private outdoor space vs public outdoor space).

Overall, they want a tidier town with a more active city centre where different groups can meet and get to know each other without having to buy something: they want a town that is less layered and feels more like a unified community.



Thanks to all participants

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