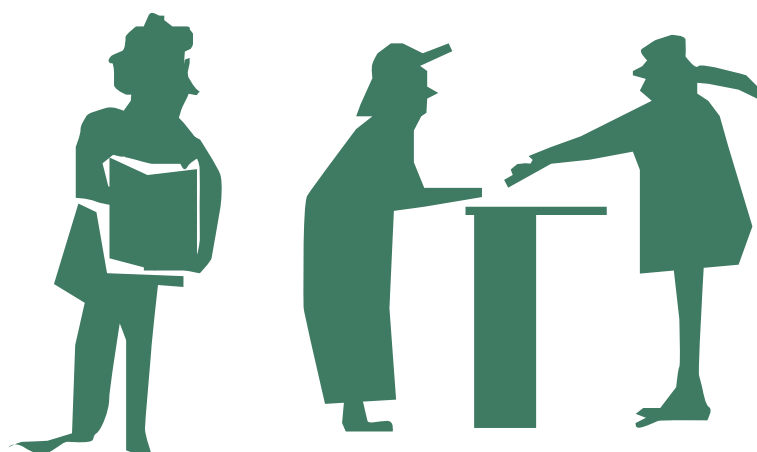


People about Longyearbyen as a physical framework

Focus group 09

Technical 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.

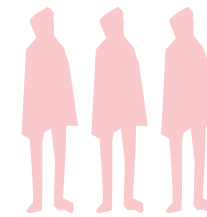
The project is part of a needs assessment of the self-initiated LPO project Right Place Right Form, funded through the Design-driven innovation program (DIP) by DOGA (Design and Architecture Norway).

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

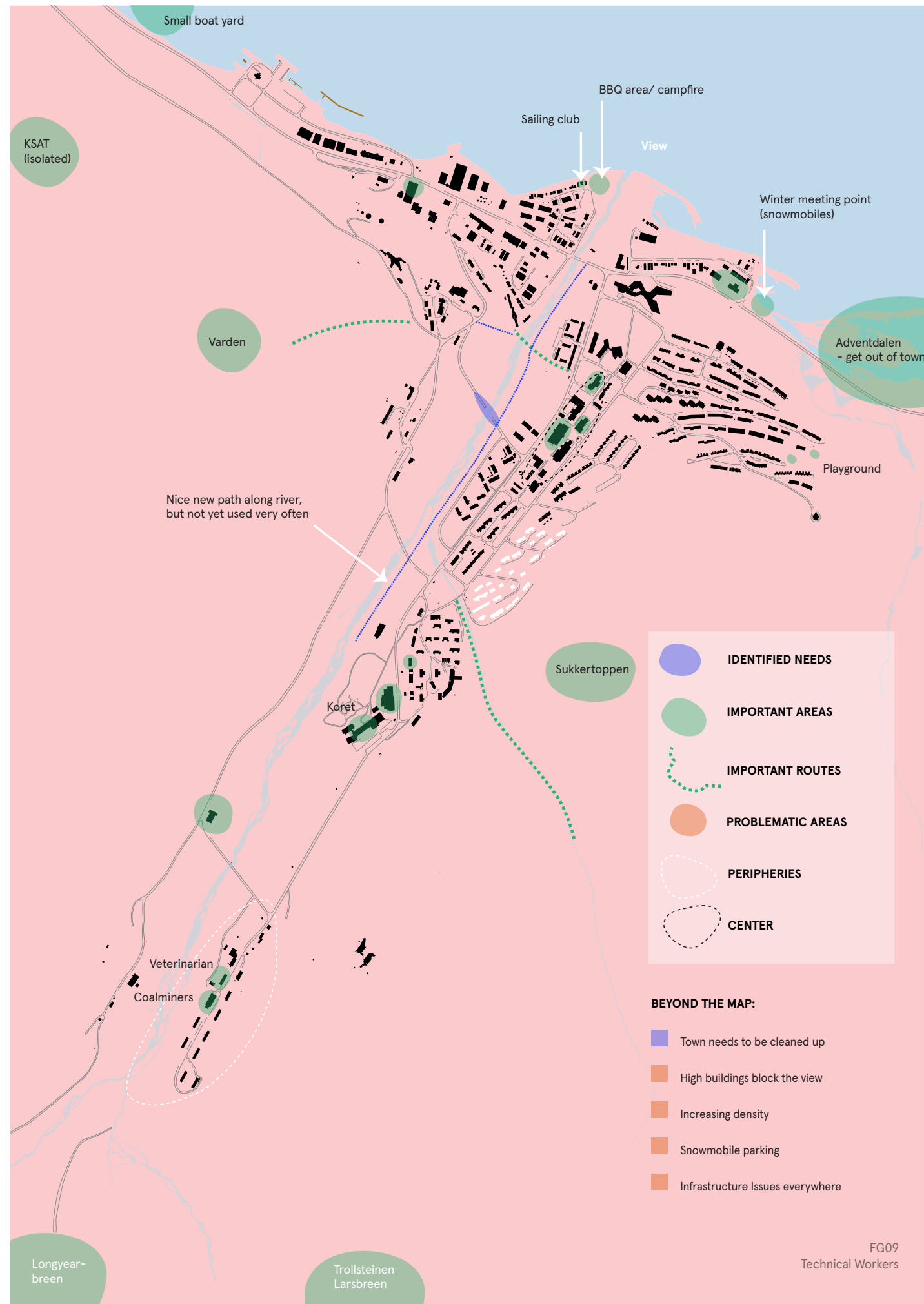


3 people: all 3 from Norway

Years spent in Longyearbyen: 0,5 years, 2 years, 10 years

Average lengt of stay: 4 years

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

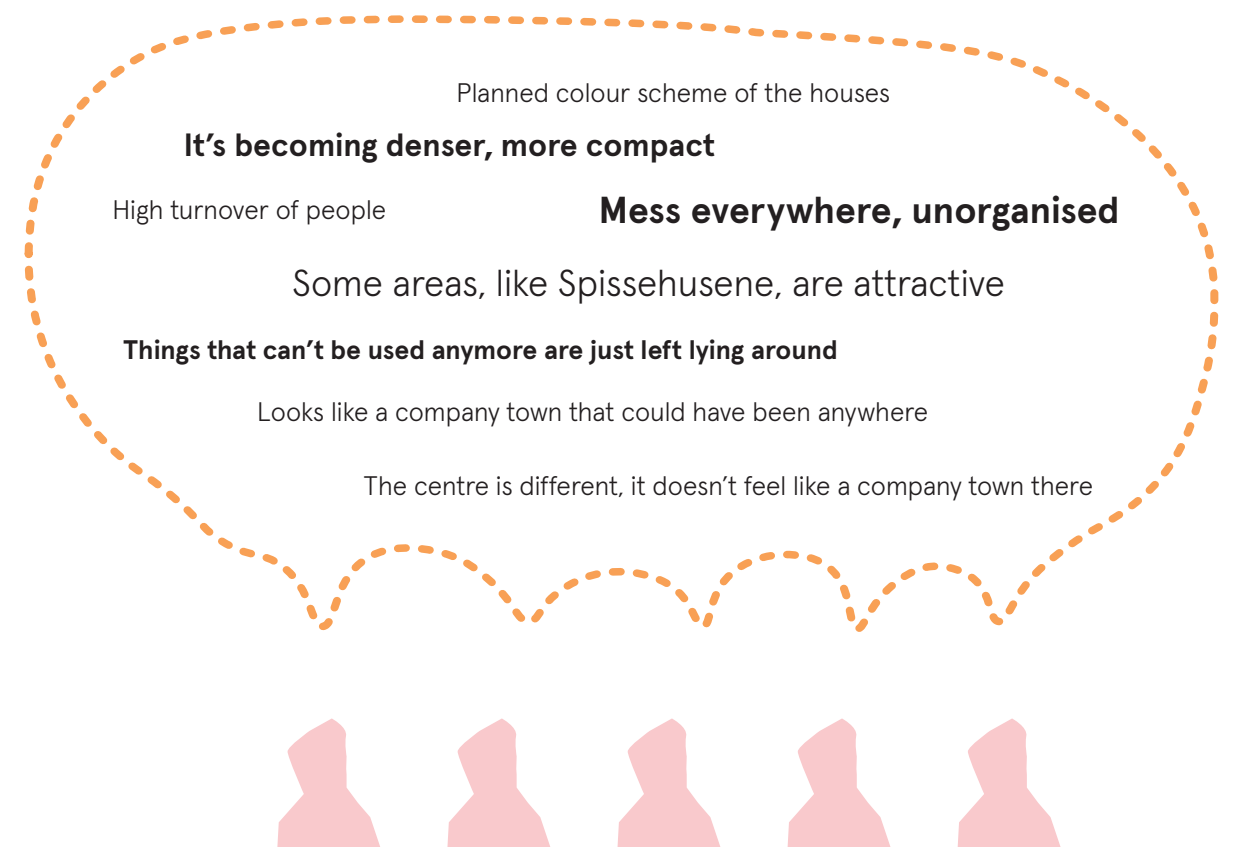


Map

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.

Participants in the technical workers group are active in the community. They see the increasing density in town as negative, both because of the stress it will put on the ageing infrastructure and because the view from town centre will be lost. They would like the town to be tidied and to be more equal for all.

Description of the town

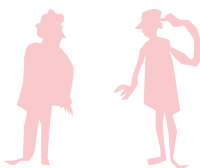


Town’s identity

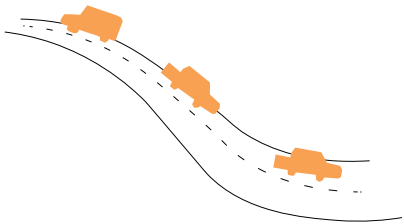
“On the mainland, you know you can live there for the rest of your life. But here, you know you can’t.”



“If you run into problems here, there are no other companies in your sector, so you are alone. It will take a long time to get the help you need.”

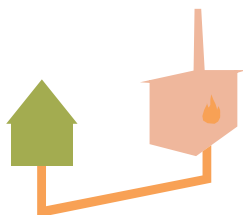


“Starting to change, new sidewalks for example.”

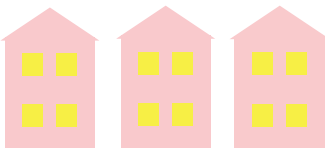
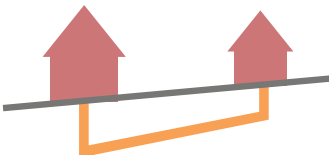


“The roads are between industries here, that is what has decided where they will be. They aren’t meant for people.”

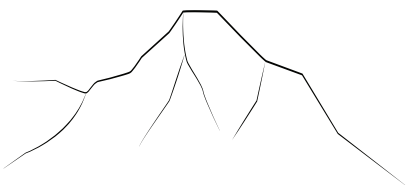
“First time I came here, it seemed like an ugly place, the industrial part and all that. And that hasn’t really changed.”



“The plumbing system used to be above ground, but now they have started burying it. Which isn’t necessarily good because it’s a lot more work and harder to intervene on.”



“What was before was worse – it was a dump, a landfill, so now with things built on it it looks better, it hides that.”




“Once you’ve done all the mountain tops, the things that keep you are the hobbies, the cultural events, the people you meet.”

Use of town, centre vs. periphery


What people use/do

- People go out more often here than on mainland (cheaper)
- Small apartments makes it difficult to invite people over
- People want to meet other people
- Many people go out of town for the weekend
- Warehouses are placed to be practical
- Industries have to take costs into account and that may not be the most attractive solution
- Pipes are being covered
- The river is being slowed down with new dams

 "There are very few places where social dumping is quite so clear as here. It's almost even accepted as being normal."


"Many are just here to have as many experiences as possible and then they



 **"So many people move around. Some even move like 6 times every year."**

"I think we also need to think about who Longyearbyen is for. Is it meant to be pretty for tourists? Practical for industry? For the people who live here?"



 "You need to have things for the families who live here, the people who live here, because that is an important mission for the State. But if you also are to have tourism, then you need to have a different infrastructure."

"I think it should be for everyone. We need to keep both in mind. It needs to work together."



Public places

- The Sailing Club/BBQ area
- The port area
- The centre
- Adventdalen/nearby nature
- Fruene, KB

"I think KB plays a role that no other place has. If you go to Kroa, you sit with your friends. It would be weird if someone else were to come and sit with you. But at KB you can easily sit with people you don't know. Which is particular to KB. Like at Stationen, you wouldn't sit with others you don't know there either. Or at Barentz Pub, or at Svalbar"



Central places

"The centre of the town is the walking street, from the hospital or maybe Kulturhuset, to Kroa."

"I see a second centre. Like here with the Elvesletta Sør, where the Thai community gathers and grills and their kids play."

Peripheries:

- Nybyen
- Skjæringa



When I first came as a tourist, one of the most important things for me was standing in town and seeing the intense nature all around. The reindeer in town you remember. Those are things that can be a value for tourists as well because they are the things you remember.

The snow scooter parking is also something you remember, even if it isn't attractive.

Some people think it is cool though, because it is special, different.

When I was a tourist, I thought it was idiotic (laughter) but now I might see it differently!

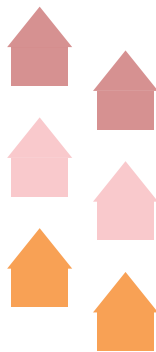
Problematic places and roads

- Height of buildings, blocking the view of nature
- The town becoming more compact
- Snowmobile parking (although better this year)

“There are problem areas everywhere.”

“Ever since I’ve come, there has been like a fight about about what will happen with the boat houses. Who can get the right to do something, who can’t, what they can do. The shifting of people in Lokalstyre changes things too.”

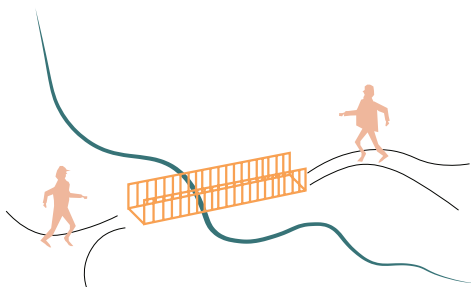
“Some, if they come here to have an experience for a couple of years, may never really feel at home. They just do their thing and go down again. They don’t connect to the place.”



Things that should be developed

- The bridge should be rebuilt
- The new path along the river is nice, but people aren’t using it much yet
- (overall feeling that the town has enough things on offer)

“Sysselmann has a lot of people coming in but you can’t go over here unless you scramble up this side here. It’s not a good way to go. It’s missing a part in a way.”



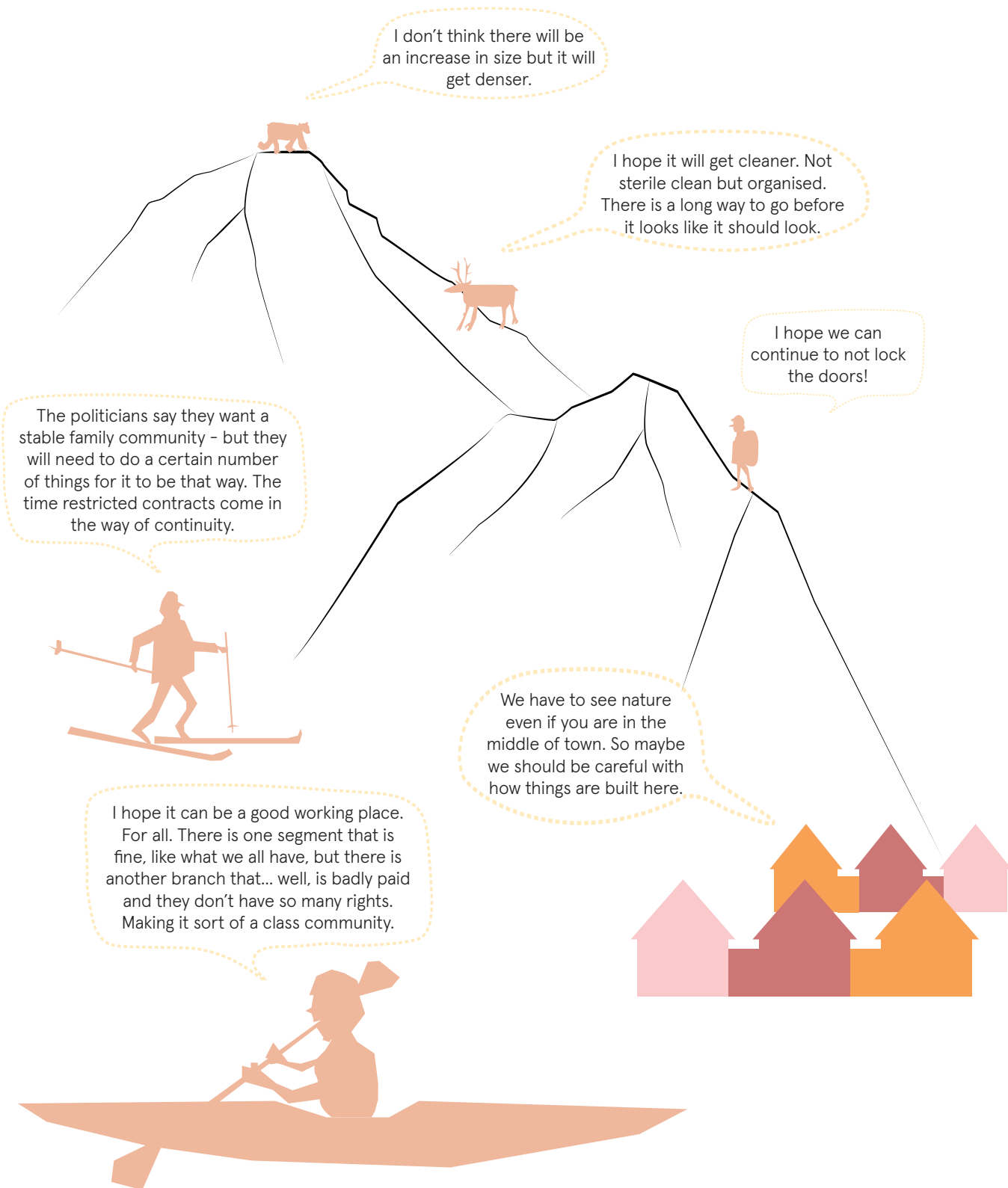
Transportation means

- Professionally: car
- Spare time: bike, walk, snowmobile



Futuring Longyearbyen

- Denser buildings and living conditions
- Would like to see it get cleaned up
- Hope for more equal conditions for all



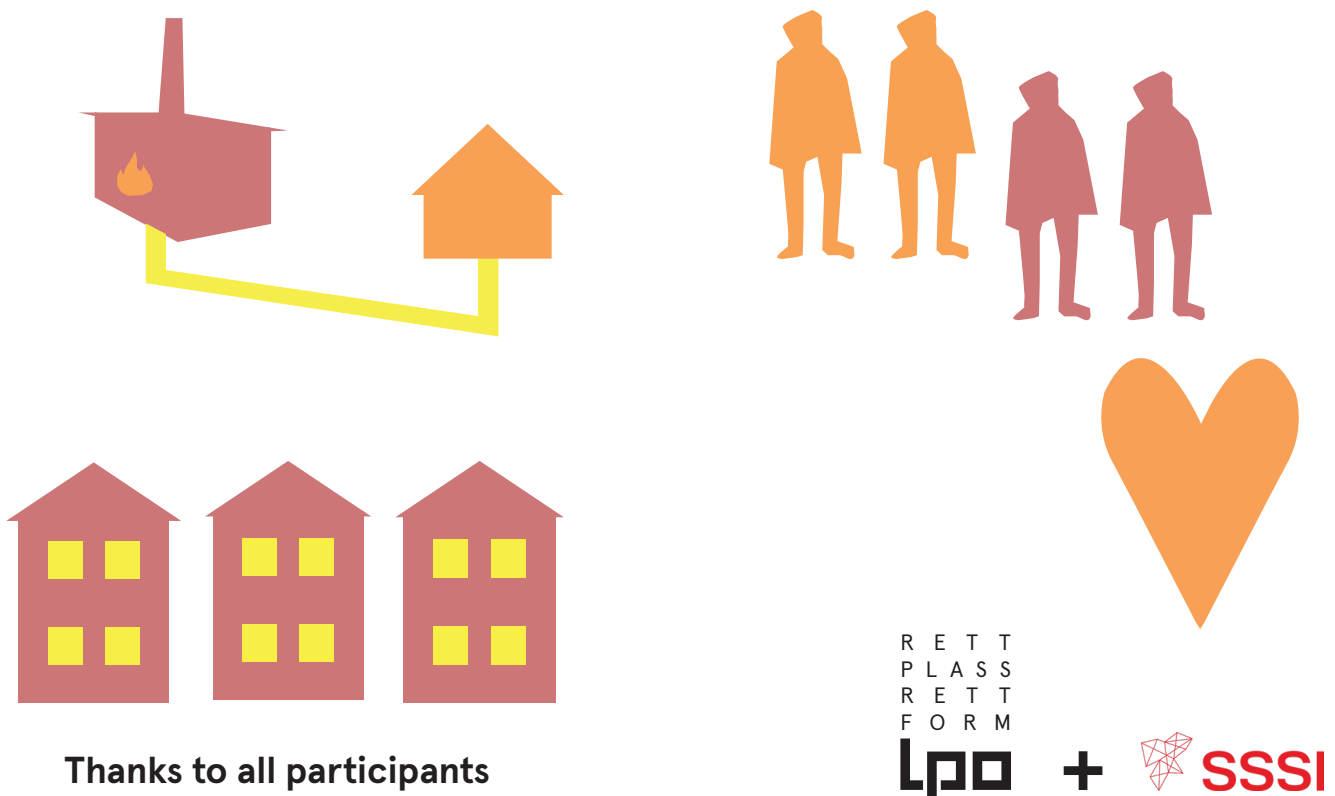
Consistent themes in the discussion

Company town legacy, concerns about densification, migration and social differences, hope to see the town evolve into a better place for all.

This group was very pragmatic and gave a sense of being satisfied with what the town has to offer. They were aware of how the industrial history of the town has structured how the town and its infrastructure is today. They were also aware of differences between various segments of the community and desirous to see things become more equal for all. Their concerns were often concrete, for example in their concern about how new buildings will impact town, making it denser and blocking views.

They were concerned about transience and inequality and hoped to see the town evolve into a better place for all (physically and socially). They felt part of the town still shows the company town legacy (things left lying around, type of buildings, road works etc.) while others (town center, spissehusene, overall color scheme) show the shift towards a local community. They were aware of technical problems that make this community unlike others on the mainland (distance, lack of other companies in same sector who could help out incase of an emergency, lack of potential building sites etc.). They were also aware of the State's interest in maintaining the town but still see the community as being able to be viable and would like to see it become more socially balanced.

Tourism was seen as needing a different infrastructure than that which is currently in place. They saw a dilemma between best (sometimes cheapest) technical solutions and the visual impact for the town. Their personal experiences showed how the temporariness of people in regulating positions makes dealing with infrastructural issues harder and that time-restricted contracts came in the way of continuity. They made a distinction between those who came for the 'experience' and those who invest in the place and want to be a part of the community for however long they stay.



Thanks to all participants

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