

Research Article

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The Svalbard treaty and identity of place: Impacts and implications for Longyearbyen, Svalbard

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Abstract

The Svalbard Treaty established Norway's full and absolute sovereignty over the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard. At the same time, it also established special territorial status for the archipelago, providing nationals of all signatory nations equal access to its resources. During fieldwork in Longyearbyen, conducted as part of a bottom-up exploration of place in 2018, several recurring issues came up in the analysis of interviews with residents using grounded theory methodology. Two of these issues, sometimes linked and sometimes seen as separate, were a questioning of the legitimacy of the community and a sense of geopolitical vulnerability. These emerging categories led to a series of focus groups, conducted between December 2018 and November 2019, that was designed to explore the impacts and implications of the Svalbard Treaty through the articulation of residents' lived experiences in Longyearbyen. This paper examines the findings that emerged within an Identity of Place framing that point to an inherent conflict between the Svalbard Treaty's special territorial status and the possibility of establishing a fully functioning local democracy in Longyearbyen.

This article inquires whether and how the special territorial status afforded by the Spitsbergen Treaty (hereafter called the Svalbard Treaty, the name by which it is known in Norway) inhibits a true shift to a “normal” Norwegian community with a local democracy in Longyearbyen, Svalbard. By applying an Identity of Place conceptual framing, the aim is to show how the lived experiences of local residents point to key elements of Longyearbyen's identity and can provide a broader understanding of underlying tensions in the town today.

Human presence on the archipelago has been significantly shaped over the years by geopolitical interests and the approach to place as a resource. The Svalbard Treaty, enacted on 9 February 1920 and in force from 14 August 1925 (The Svalbard Treaty, 1920b), continues to shape the various kinds of presence on the archipelago, be it public or private business, state, or individual. The Svalbard Treaty was written to secure access for extractive industries, not for the construction of family-oriented communities. And yet, communities do exist on Svalbard. Initial communities were seasonal. Later, company towns developed. Only one of these, Longyearbyen, has evolved into a form of local democracy.

The conceptual background for the analysis is provided by contributions on the concepts of place, space, and materiality from a range of disciplines including sociology, philosophy, geography, and contemporary archaeology. Drawing on these sources, a distinction is made between place-centred “Identity of Place” and human-centred “place-identity.” The argument made here is that this distinction is useful for separating what a place is (Identity of Place) on the one hand from how an individual's identity is shaped by place (place-identity) on the other. The empirical part of the article draws on a series of recorded and transcribed focus groups conducted in Longyearbyen between December 2018 and November 2019 that were then analysed using grounded theory methodology.

The article's first section will elaborate on the distinction between Identity of Place and place-identity, establishing links between place, space, and materiality. The next section will present the results of the focus groups, framed by an Identity of Place approach in order to elucidate core elements of Longyearbyen's structure, revealing the ways in which it can (or cannot) evolve within its current framework. The final section will discuss how the Svalbard Treaty continues to shape Longyearbyen and show how applying an Identity of Place framing helps explain the apparent confusion in views and understandings of Longyearbyen today, as articulated by those living there.

The research presented here contributes to a better understanding of Longyearbyen and helps explain the range of reactions and confusions people have about the town. It also points to what the town can and cannot be within its current framework. Specifically, the shift from a

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company town structure to a local democracy is not complete, nor can it be, given the Norwegian state's current understanding of sovereignty and the special territorial status created by the Svalbard Treaty.

Theoretical framework: identity of place

Working in cultural studies, the concept of place that is proposed here draws from work done in sociology, philosophy, geography and contemporary archaeology. Because the concept of place is understood and applied in so many different ways, there is no single, clear definition. And although place is an element across many disciplinary considerations of space and its social constructs, it is rarely the central part of discussions (Gieryn, 2000; Malpas, 2010). By framing the analysis in a place-centred approach, new ways of understanding are opened up: instead of just exposing the frustrations and difficulties people experience in Longyearbyen, the article aims to show the structural reasons that underlie residents' reactions, as well as the ways in which the situation can (or cannot) be changed.

Given the breadth of work done on place, the framework of Identity of Place is necessarily interdisciplinary. Thomas F. Gieryn has made a strong case for the role of place in sociology, explicitly acknowledging the materiality of place. His interest, however, remains in a human-centred framing, "Place saturates social life: it is one medium (along with historical time) through which social life happens" (Gieryn, 2000, p.467). In much the same way, the philosopher Jeff Malpas' focus on place centres it as the terrain in which humans exist and interact. It is in and through place that humans live experience(s) and form their identity. Therefore, ultimately, the human is still centred even if place plays a central role: it is the human's experience in or of a place, the human's investing of a place with meaning, the impact of a place on the human, the entangled nature of the human's identity linked to a place, that is important. Indeed, Malpas (2016) argues even further that place is fundamental for any kind of understanding, "Understanding belongs essentially to place. Only in place does there arise anything that requires understanding, and only in place are there the means by which understanding can be arrived at" (p.387).

While the human-centred side is one important aspect of the discussion, I would argue that it is equally important (although in many ways elusive) to take into consideration the material, structural, and systemic foundations of a place—an approach which is complimentary and not contradictory to that of Malpas and Gieryn.

In order to understand place without the human-centred focus, our underlying assumptions and understanding of space need to be re-examined. The geographer Doreen Massey has argued that how people think about space (place, people, etc.) impacts how they see it and use it (Massey, 2005). As one of the pioneers in the relational approach to space, Massey has argued for a de-centring of the human as a means of decolonising our understanding of space (place, landscape, nature, the physical world, etc.). Her approach opens a different understanding and framing of these elements. In Massey's argument, which focuses on a re-thinking of what space is and how people conceive of it, she equates this seeing of space with the way the Western world has othered (and colonised) spaces, people, places. Her argument is that seeing space as immobile reduces it to an impassive element, an object awaiting the active involvement of the discoverer. In the case of Svalbard

—an uninhabited archipelago referred to as *terra nullius* when it was "discovered"—it was seen as a place to be used at will, one where resources were free to be extracted. Although Massey's work is about space as a central issue, it is in many ways also about how humans perceive space and how that impacts our understanding of it.

Bjornar Olsen (2010) has argued that even in archaeology, where the focus is nominally on things, "the material components of what we have come to think of as 'social life' have been marginalised—even stigmatised—in the social sciences and philosophy during the twentieth century" (p.2). Olsen's work in contemporary archaeology, specifically his work on the archaeology and ontology of objects in which "things" are centred and their lifelines decoupled from the human, allows for a different understanding of the world and the life of material elements. Acknowledging that things can exist in their own right, that they have life stories in material terms, enables a de-centring of the human from the framing. In Identity of Place, this de-centring allows a place to have its own identity—even if the built environment and most systemic issues are man-made. In this proposed understanding of place, a place can and does exist even when the humans who made it or lived in it or transformed it or experienced it are gone. A place in this framing acknowledges its connection to humans in the flow of its making and being, but also acknowledges how the flow of materiality of place can continue irrespective of continued human involvement, as in the abandoned sites of Grumant or Coles Bay on Svalbard.

In spite of the increasing emphasis on object-oriented approaches in human and social sciences (Olsen, Shanks, Webmoor, & Witmore, 2012), the vast majority of literature on place still focuses on a human-centred version, as the large body of literature on place-identity shows.

Although Identity of Place also looks at how place impacts people, the assemblage that makes up any given place is seen as a separate entity that may or may not have an impact on the humans within it and interacting with it. Definition of symmetrical archaeology, in which "the observer is in the world in the same way as that which is observed," Olsen et al.'s (2012, p. 12) allows for a non-human-centred understanding:

(A)nother important aspect of a symmetrical archaeology is to take leave of the dominant paternalist idea that things depend on people and are of interest to us (and even exist) only insofar they involve humans. (...) While there is no possibility of thinking humans outside the realms of things and natures, the other option is of course viable. (Olsen et al., p. 13)

This framing of understanding, in which the human is de-centred, opens up a new perspective, and the very act of being "sensitive to things' otherness and their utterances qua things may yield richer and far more compelling interpretations than those hitherto provided." (Olsen et al., p.14)

In an inhabited situation, like Longyearbyen, Identity of Place is a dynamic assemblage of material and human expressions. It is a combination of how people think and feel about the place; the intangible, systemic structures in place organising it; and the tangible, material, situation of the place itself (including everything from the natural setting to the built environment). In a place with special territorial status like Longyearbyen, Identity of Place is complicated by external viewpoints that situate it within a more abstract, geopolitical sphere. A place with special territorial status will have significance as a concept, or a tool, with layers of meaning other than those encountered in the embodied experience of living there. The built environment of Longyearbyen reflects this

multiplicity of narratives, belongings, and meaning-making that intertwine politics of presence, politics of space, and individual identities.

Although Identity of Place and place-identity do in many ways overlap, Identity of Place de-centres the human in its framing: the tangible and intangible elements that constitute the place itself (in this case, Longyearbyen) are the focus of the study. In contrast, place-identity focuses on the human and their relation to a specific place, such as Longyearbyen, through self-identity, attachment, or a sense of belonging. In this study—where the focus groups were specifically designed to explore the impacts and implications of the Svalbard Treaty through the articulation of local residents' lived experiences in Longyearbyen—an Identity of Place framing enabled the underlying structures and systemic issues that shaped residents' sense of place to be exposed.

Using an Identity of Place perspective in the analysis of the focus groups, the town's current situation can be understood in ways that would not have been apparent otherwise. Specifically, this approach helps clarify some of the town's systemic and structural issues, such as access to housing or social security, and explains why Longyearbyen can never be a "normal" Norwegian town with a true local democracy.

Contextual framework

To put the focus group work and analysis in context, it is important to highlight two historical approaches to Svalbard: place as a resource and place as a tool in geopolitical manoeuvring. From the beginning, Svalbard has been seen as a place to extract value. Whether in the form of whaling, trapping, extraction industries (mainly, but not only, coal), or more recently, tourism and research: Svalbard has value. People come for jobs or experiences, businesses to make money or as part of a programme to maintain a national presence, research stations are set up to establish or reinforce an Arctic identity and so on. Most residents remain here only for the time of their work contract. Few are able to retire here and even those who do, know that one day they will have to leave as there is no palliative care. Nor are there adequate health facilities for giving birth. Expecting mothers must travel elsewhere when their term approaches. Long-term residents in Longyearbyen often ask those arriving—implicitly or outright—if they are here to take something, or if they are here to give to the community. Others will dismiss someone as being "just here for an adventure" with the implication that after their adventure, they will go home (personal field notes, 2018–2021).

People coming to Longyearbyen "to take something" have been part of the town's—and indeed the archipelago's—structure from the beginning. Between 1898 and 1920, over one hundred land claims were made, covering an area larger than the land area of the archipelago (Drivenes & Jølle, 2006, p.147). Longyearbyen, founded in 1906 as Longyear City, was established for the extraction of coal. As was the case all over the Arctic, mining settlements, also known as mono-towns or company towns, were developed to house and feed workers while making a profit for the company backing them. By 1920, when the Svalbard Treaty was enacted, Longyear City had 289 people over-wintering, including 37 women and children (Arlov, 2008, p.268).

The Svalbard Treaty was written and signed in Paris, during the Paris Peace Conference following WWI. With only 10 articles (The Svalbard Treaty, 1920a), it is a concise document that gives full and absolute sovereignty to Norway while granting equal access to resources for nationals of all High Contracting Parties. In addition,

the Treaty stipulates that Norway has the responsibility of maintaining, preserving, and, if necessary, reconstituting, the fauna, flora, and territorial waters of the region. Provisions were made for heretofore acquired rights. An Annex was included that described how all claims were to be reviewed. The Treaty also stipulated that Norway provide mining regulations (Mining Code), to be approved by the High Contracting Parties; taxes and charges were to be used exclusively on the territory; Svalbard was to be a neutral zone that could not be used for warlike purposes.

The Treaty and the Mining Code structured the settlements already present on Svalbard and those that were to develop. Even in Longyearbyen today, the company town legacy persists in many ways. The evidence is especially strong in the housing market. Because much of the housing was constructed for workers, there is a concentration of smaller-sized dwellings. The residential housing market is still largely owned by the state and state-owned companies (61.1% share), and business interests (15.3% share). Individual homeowners make up only 13.1% of the residential housing market (Longyearbyen Lokaltstyre Boligbehovsutredning, 2019, p.12). In this context, it is interesting to note that the state-owned SNSK (Store Norske Spitsbergen Kullkompani) has just agreed to buy Hurtigruten's real estate, increasing its stake as a property manager (Bårdseth, *Svalbard Posten*, 2021). The transaction will be made financially possible by the state via the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries (Wiersen, *Svalbard Posten*, 2021).

Norway remained relatively poor until later in the century when oil was found in the late 1960s and developed over the 1970s. In practical terms, this meant that for the first 50 or so years that Svalbard was part of the Kingdom of Norway, the Norwegian state was not in a position to exert much control over the state of affairs in Svalbard beyond what was absolutely necessary. Even today, long-term locals tell stories of how the Russians used to lend their support (helicopters, etc.) to the Norwegians during those initial decades (personal field notes, 2018–2021).

Today, mining has been radically reduced and is earmarked to be completely shutdown in the near future. However, it still informs local identity in the form of public sculptures, visits to the functioning mine by school children, a defunct mine (Gruve 3) turned into a tourist attraction, photos of miners in the local pub, and in the man-altered landscape. In terms of the built environment, there are traces of mining all over town, and indeed all over Svalbard. Since 1992, all structures built before 1946 are automatically protected, creating a large park of industrial and cultural heritage (Forskrift om kulturminner på Svalbard, 1992). Dotting both sides of Longyear valley are the pillars that once supported the cables transporting coal wagons; entrances and/or exits to mines, now boarded up; mounds of debris making hills and knolls; bits of scattered coal and scarred earth (personal field notes, 2018–2021).

Since the Treaty came into force, there have been many important milestones in Norway's management of the territory. These and other events have impacted how people residing in Longyearbyen and the other settlements on the archipelago can live. The office of Sysselmannen (the Governor of Svalbard, now known as Sysselimesteren) was created in 1925, but it wasn't until 1935 that a Sysselmann was permanently stationed in their own offices on Svalbard (Arlov, 2011). Before German occupation in WWII, mines and housing were purposefully damaged. After peace was re-established, there was an attempt at a bilateral renegotiation of the Treaty instigated by the Soviet Union (Mathisen, 1954). Norway joined NATO in 1949, but Svalbard was not included until 1951. Norway signed and ratified the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)

agreement—bringing with it the as yet unresolved discussions of whether the waters between 12 and 200 nautical miles around Svalbard should be considered Norwegian or as part of the territorial waters under the Treaty (Jensen, 2020). Norway opened an airport in 1974 which the Russians protested against (Drivenes & Jølle, 2006), changing the connection of the archipelago to the mainland. After a rush in the search for oil around Svalbard in the 1970s, Norway introduced environmental regulations in 1973 and established several national parks and nature reserves. The Environmental Protection Act was passed in 2002, protecting roughly 65% of the land and 86% of territorial waters (Miljødirektoratet, 2009).

As for Longyearbyen itself, the transition from a company town to a local democracy began with the democratically elected Svalbard Council in 1971 (Arlov & Holm, 2001). It wasn't until 2002, with the establishment of the Longyearbyen Lokalstyre, that the town gained a form of local democracy. Since then, mining has declined, tourism has grown, and education and research have become more firmly established. There have also been rapid changes in climate bringing challenges to local infrastructure and increased mediatisation. Climate change has brought the circumpolar region increasingly into the spotlight, both because changes are happening at an accelerated rate at the poles and because resources may become available for exploitation as sea ice recedes.

The Treaty's stipulations, combined with Norway's decision to make the archipelago an integral part of the Kingdom of Norway (Ulfstein, 1995), create a unique situation. The archipelago is a part of Norway, yet open to all without the need for a visa. It is governed by Norway, but not all rules can apply. Established with economic interests in mind (specifically mining at the time) it is now a place where people can come to live for personal reasons. Longyearbyen, as formulated by the Norwegian state, is to be a "family community, but not a lifelong community" (Stortingmelding 32, 2015–2016) (Det Kongelige Justis og Politidepartement, 2016).

In 2019, there were 2,152 people living in Longyearbyen (Boligbehovsutredning 2019). The non-Norwegian population was just over 35%, with citizens from 52 different nations (Longyearbyen Lokalstyre Årsberetning, 2019). It is interesting to note that some of the more populous non-Norwegian groups in Longyearbyen are citizens of states that have not signed the Treaty. Longyearbyen has a high degree of transiency with nearly 20% turnover and a 3–4 year average length of stay. But people who live in Longyearbyen still call it home for the time they are here.

The only other state with ongoing mining interests on Svalbard is Russia, with the towns of Barentsburg and Pyramiden. Barentsburg is a company town with a population of about 450 people, while Pyramiden was closed in 1998 and continues as an abandoned, but managed, site that can be visited by tourists. According to the Central Statistics Office of Norway (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2021), the combined population of Barentsburg and Pyramiden was 455 in 2020. As a result of Russia's economic interests, Norwegian-Russian relations in the archipelago differ from Norway's position vis-à-vis other states whose presence is limited to a research station.

Methods

Research design

Analysis of 38 interviews with local residents conducted between March and July 2018, revealed several categories, two of which—Sense of Geopolitical Vulnerability and Questioning the

Legitimacy of the Community—pointed to the need to look more closely at the Svalbard Treaty. In order to do this, a series of focus groups was constructed to serve as a theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). The intent of the focus groups was to uncover how residents' perceptions of Svalbard's special territorial status impacted their sense of community and to explore issues around the potential construction of a long-term family community within the context of a newly developing local democracy.

In order to cover a broad spectrum of lived experiences, focus groups were constructed around specific segments of Longyearbyen's population. Given the 3 pillars of Longyearbyen (Mining; Education & Research; Tourism) four groups were based on these: SNSK Workers; Students at UNIS (the University Centre in Svalbard); Tourism Management; Nature Guides. Two groups were from the administration: Community Workers; Public Workers (cancelled). Two groups were based on nationality: Thai because of the high population of Thai residents; Russian because of the importance of Russia on the archipelago. The final group was made of Long-term Residents.

In each of the Focus Groups, questions covered four main topics. The first part focused on perceptions of the different settlements of Longyearbyen, Barentsburg, and Ny-Ålesund. The second part focused on territorial questions; perception of ownership/sovereignty; management of the natural environment. The third part was about the community of Longyearbyen: perceptions of legitimacy; background as a company town; the situation today with local, democratic representation and the notion of a "family town." The fourth part asked about how people envisaged Longyearbyen in the future.

The analysis of the focus groups used grounded theory methodology, following Kathy Charmaz's approach (Charmaz, 2006). This allowed for a systematic approach to data analysis that consisted of actively coding transcribed interviews line by line. It is an iterative process that favours theory construction based on the content of the data, rather than fitting the data to a hypothesis constructed before the collection of the material.

Quotes from participants are attributed to the focus group they come from according to the date recorded in order to maintain the anonymity of all participants. All quotes have been shared with participants for their approval prior to publication. The combined statements that are part of the codes and sub-categories that emerged during analysis are shown with quotation marks.

Results

Given the importance of the different perceptions of the various settlements to the conclusions, they will be presented first, followed by an outline of the themes and categories that emerged in the analysis of the transcribed focus group discussions.

Participants' perceptions of settlements

Longyearbyen

Longyearbyen was seen as complicated, its identity confused and unclear. While seen as systemically Norwegian, with Norwegian management, in everyday life it was often perceived as international. This confused situation—of being Norwegian in some ways and international in others—is directly related to Svalbard's special territorial status. Norway has full and complete sovereignty and yet can have no control over who can come since no work visa is required. This makes Longyearbyen an attractive destination for foreigners. As one participant said,

It's Norwegians who run the place and even if there are a lot of foreigners it's still a Norwegian place. Obviously, we have Norwegian values and so on. (participant in FG 2018.12.14)

This statement is interesting for the way it insists that Longyearbyen is Norwegian—even with all the foreigners. The fact that Norwegians run the place, and therefore give the place Norwegian values, anchors a certain division that is often felt in town, at least by non-Norwegians. As another participant said,

Sometimes you actually don't feel like a foreigner here until you actually meet people who make you feel like that. And then that hurts. (participant in FG 2019.01.12)

In this case, the participant was made to feel like an outsider—when they weren't expecting to feel that way. The implication is that this is unfair, since they also live here and are attached to the place. However, certain Norwegians living here denied them the right to that attachment. This takes on a different meaning when one knows that even the Norwegians are transient as “everyone leaves in the end” because housing is almost always connected to a job. So what is it about this place that makes certain Norwegians respond in this fashion?

From a place-identity point of view, this participant was expressing hurt and the feeling of exclusion: their place attachment was being rejected by certain Norwegians. From an Identity of Place perspective, the question becomes “what about the place evokes non-acceptance by a Norwegian?” as well as, “what about the place makes the non-Norwegians feel they should be accepted?” From a non-Norwegian's perspective, Longyearbyen should be open to everyone. For some Norwegians (and some non-Norwegians), the expectation is that Longyearbyen should be like any other Norwegian town. For other Norwegians, the expectation is that Longyearbyen should be mainly for Norwegians.

Overall, Longyearbyen was often described as feeling “more like a city than a town” because it is more international and has a wide offering of bars, restaurants, and cultural events. Both Norwegians and non-Norwegians who had been living in Svalbard for a longer period, or had lived here before and had come back, felt Longyearbyen was less Norwegian now than before. Many commented that the Norwegian state supported it for “political reasons.”

Barentsburg

Barentsburg was seen as Russian. Beyond that, perceptions depended on how much the participant knew about Barentsburg and/or Svalbard history. In four of the groups, they were clear about Barentsburg's status as a company town and knew there were mostly Ukrainians working there with Russians in positions of power. In two groups, this was implied in their statements; and in the other two, they were satisfied with knowing that it was “Russian” and “Russian is spoken there.”

It's separate, definitely separate. Even from Day 1 the first time I went (to Barentsburg), it's by the look, by the everything. (participant in FG 2019.01.06)

Some participants felt being in Barentsburg was like being in Russia. One person described it as a Soviet time capsule. For the Russian participants, there was a certain nostalgia around Barentsburg, especially with regard to food—whether or not they had lived there before. Several groups had participants who had lived there and they described it as a complex, highly nuanced society. Even there though, Barentsburg was still seen as a company

town, run by the Russians who “have to comply to Norwegian laws.” No participant described Barentsburg as being a Norwegian town. Even when pressed with the question of if Barentsburg could also move to be a local democracy, participants felt Norway would have no right to control how the settlement manages itself: if a local democracy were to happen, it would be on Russian terms.

Ny-Ålesund

Ny-Ålesund was mostly seen as Norwegian. Participants described it as a research settlement and not a community. There was no question of a local democracy being established. In spite of the many nations working there, it was perceived as run by Norwegians and therefore Norwegian. Several participants had worked there or were often back and forth. A few participants mentioned it as a tourist destination. Others had never been and did not feel they could comment.

Because you do feel a big difference between Ny-Ålesund and (Longyearbyen) because Ny-Ålesund is way more—I don't know (...) —way more serious and efficient in a way because (people) just go there to do their research and here there's way more community. (participant in FG 2018.12.05)

Main themes and categories

Throughout the focus groups, discussions would go back and forth between local issues and perceptions of Svalbard's importance on a broader, sometimes global, scale. The three main themes, grouping the categories that emerged from the coding, are as follows: Life in Longyearbyen—lived experiences of place (micro-scale); As Part of a Greater Context—perceptions of Svalbard's geopolitical significance (macro-scale); Micro-Macro Intersections—instances where the first two themes entangle.

Theme 1 life in Longyearbyen

This overall theme groups the categories relating to perceptions of everyday life within the local context of Longyearbyen. The three main categories are as follows: Layers of Community; Control of Access; and Systemic Issues.

Layers of community. Longyearbyen was often described as having “bubbles,” “layers,” or “groups.” At times, participants saw these as a positive factor. In others, they were perceived as excluding. In all focus groups, these layers were acknowledged. One Norwegian participant explained,

Ja, I think it's very Norwegian (...) I meet a lot of Norwegian people and I have friends working in UNIS and I have friends like guides and so from their perspective, I can see that I guess it is not Norwegian (...) so maybe it depends on what part of where you work and whether you work it feels more or less Norwegian. (participant in FG 2019.01.17)

What is interesting in this quote is that the participant can see how Longyearbyen can be understood as either Norwegian or not-Norwegian, depending on an individual's situation. This highlights a fundamental element of Longyearbyen's identity: where one works shapes one's experience of the place. Although this is true everywhere, in Longyearbyen it is intensified by the fact that company housing for those in “official” jobs—here meaning jobs in established, often state-backed, Norwegian companies—gathers workers in the same neighbourhoods, potentially even in the same buildings (as mentioned previously, housing was built for workers so there is a predominance of apartments, not single-family houses, in Longyearbyen). In addition, since people cannot settle here

permanently, most come without pre-existing networks (family, friends etc.) further encouraging those who work together and live near each other to socialise. This creates tighter groups than one would encounter on the mainland. In many ways, the “layers” or “bubbles” participants described are a natural outcome of this.

For those who do not have access to company-owned, subsidised, housing (such as service workers, guides), the situation is a bit different and some participants described Longyearbyen as having “circles of segregation”: Norwegian, Scandinavian/Nordic, European, Asian and other. The closer you were to the inner Norwegian circle, the easier life was. In general, people felt that most groups didn’t mix and that the lower, unseen, jobs were held by non-Norwegian groups (such as the Filipinos in menial jobs in the hotel and service sector and the Thais in domestic or company cleaning services).

Language was an issue that came up in all focus groups and most discussions included the lack of Norwegian classes. This was seen as a problem, both socially and practically, since many things are only spoken about on the Norwegian sites.

I think a lot of other Norwegian communes spend a lot more resources to give language courses and to like integrate people which is not like the goal here. So I think you can feel a lot like Longyearbyen is really layered society. (participant in FG 2018.12.11)

For this participant, access to language courses was seen as a tool of control: if there are no Norwegian classes, non-Norwegians can’t learn Norwegian and be integrated into the (dominant, Norwegian) community. Although this is in no way in conflict with—nor even an impact of—the Treaty, it is at odds with participants’ understanding of what a normal Norwegian community should be doing. Once again, there is a disconnect between the expectation of what Longyearbyen should offer as a family-oriented community versus what is actually offered.

Some participants felt there was an inconsistency in how situations were dealt with. As one participant said,

I think Longyearbyen is often as Norwegian as it is practical for Norwegians and as it works. But when it is not practical, then it is like ‘oh ja ja the Treaty’ and more international in some ways and it goes over like social rights and so. Some are included here for everyone but there is more that is excluded for non-Norwegians than if I would live in Norway. (participant in FG 2019.01.12)

Here it is quite clear that one element of Longyearbyen’s identity, the special territorial status created by the Treaty, has a certain number of implications for both local residents and the Norwegian state. Even from a quick reading of the Treaty, it is clear that non-Norwegian nationals are allowed to come to Svalbard. The gist of the comment though is that while non-Norwegians are allowed entry, they are being denied access to “social rights”—rights they would have had access to had they been living in Norway. This is a more complicated situation and one that often causes deep confusion in Longyearbyen. If Longyearbyen were still a company town, this question would not arise (there would also only be people in “official” jobs). It is the gradual shift to a more normal town, begun in the 1970s, that has enabled this expectation of access to social benefits to develop. Presenting Longyearbyen as a family community with a local democracy creates expectations for services to be available.

Control of access. As evidenced above, some of the perceptions of layers of community had to do with the barriers people encountered. In addition to the control of access to housing, healthcare,

and news sites, participants also mentioned a problem with access to events (since they are only in Norwegian) and access to nature. Longyearbyen was described as having “the nice part that works well (Norwegians with housing and benefits) and then there’s the rest.” Several non-Norwegian participants explained “if your partner is Norwegian then they can open certain doors (access) for you” and so on. The ability to establish a private business in Longyearbyen was also seen as something made harder for non-Norwegians, as can be seen in the following quote:

I know a person who is doing a business here and the person is not Norwegian, she is struggling, really struggling, for example. And not just one or two years but much much longer. Again, the Norwegian culture is very warm and welcoming but it’s about control more. About how many more groups, European groups, they want to have here. (participant in FG 2019.01.06)

The perception of the Norwegian state’s desire to control (or limit) access for non-Norwegian businesses is clearly stated. In the discussion, the participants spoke about their frustrations and how Longyearbyen was not equally open to all. At the same time, several non-Norwegian participants acknowledged that Longyearbyen was the only place they could come without needing a visa to work. They felt that even if it was difficult to get housing, they were also thankful that they could be here. In another group, a participant said,

(W)e even see space being used as a tool to at least limit access for non-Norwegians in this town. It’s kind of obvious that right now already for years going on, there is a living space crisis, there is only space created for government employees which obviously happen to be Norwegian. (...) basically you see right now, even within the city limits, space is used as a tool for foreign access. Because if there is no flat available for a non-Norwegian then there’s not going to come one. (participant in FG 2019.01.12)

The statement makes clear that some participants don’t feel the town is open. Not only is Longyearbyen perceived as a place for Norwegians, structural limits are put in place to keep out non-Norwegians. Since a fundamental element of Longyearbyen is its anchoring in Svalbard’s special territorial status, it can’t prevent people from coming. But if the state leverages the company town legacy by continuing to own the majority of the real estate, they can de facto control who lives here, thus controlling how “Norwegian” it is or isn’t. This conflicts with the vision of a local democracy and equal access to becoming a resident and causes both frustration and misunderstandings amongst those trying to move here. Several non-Norwegian participants summed it up this way: “it is easy to come, hard to stay.” Although it did not come up in the focus groups, it should also be noted that it is just as hard for a Norwegian to stay once they have retired or if they do not have an official job as it is for the non-Norwegians, in keeping with the stated goal of being a family town albeit not a lifelong town.

Systemic issues. Norwegians who come here are often on leave from a job. They are also required to have a primary address on the mainland. Individuals who move here from the EU, Asia or elsewhere usually do not have a job or primary address to go back to. As a result, many feel there is no “cost” for Norwegians to be in Longyearbyen. Norwegians in official jobs also get a supplement on their salaries for being here. In contrast, many foreigners are not in official jobs and do not get the move paid for, nor the subsidised housing (nor indeed any housing), nor any of the other extra incentives offered to Norwegians in official jobs to come to

Svalbard (access to a car, snowmobile, travel back and forth to the mainland paid for, etc.) For many non-Norwegians, these differences are only discovered after living here for a certain time.

Even so, Longyearbyen has a high number of non-Norwegians. As one participant said,

(O)ne of the things that really attracted me to being here is the fact that it feels so international school but on a societal scale. (participant in FG 2019.01.12)

Even as the participant describes why they enjoy living in Longyearbyen, the description points back to systemic issues that are part of Longyearbyen's identity: namely that Longyearbyen is open to all, but you can't settle down (little private housing) and, just as in an international school, there is high turnover of a mixed group of people all focused on the intensity of the moment.

When Longyearbyen transitioned from a company town, with a majority of Norwegians, to a more "normal" town with local governance, it opened itself up to a broader population. One comment about this shift was particularly interesting:

When I came here it was much more Norwegian than now. In the last 5 years it has changed, become less Norwegian. For example we no longer have Norwegian classes. (participant in FG 2019.06.23)

From this non-Norwegian's perspective, the lack of Norwegian classes is perceived as making the place less Norwegian (later in the conversation it was also stated that English was becoming the common language). This perspective contrasts with the quote from the Norwegian resident in which the lack of Norwegian classes was seen as a desire to not integrate non-Norwegians.

Several participants said that Norway is paying to keep Longyearbyen alive and wants it to be Norwegian, therefore "only things of interest for the Norwegian community get debated." This was supported by other participants who pointed out a lack of coverage in the local news of what was going on in Barentsburg.

In addition, systemic issues (such as lack of housing) make it difficult for new businesses to establish themselves in Longyearbyen.

There are a lot of mechanisms in the society which make sure that there are not 200 Koreans coming up here to establish their territory. (...) You have to sustain yourself. You have to provide yourself with housing and you do need money. And basically that has been the traditional law for working here. (participants in FG 2018.12.14)

As with the non-Norwegian struggling to establish a business described in the previous section, this participant states that there are "mechanisms" to keep certain people out. This reinforces the dissonance between the notion of Longyearbyen as a "normal" town with a local democracy (bringing with it an expectation of equal rights for all residents) and the lived experience of Longyearbyen as a Norwegian settlement that is being maintained "for political reasons."

Theme 2 as part of a greater context

This theme groups the categories that have to do with a larger picture of Svalbard or of Svalbard within an Arctic/global context. The main categories are as follows: Political Manoeuvring/Control of Access; Geopolitical Vulnerability; Norway-Russia Power Balance. Although these categories are not directly related to Longyearbyen, they are important as the context in which the town is situated.

Political manoeuvring/control of access. By far, the biggest part of this category is related to Environmental issues. Participants

described environmental laws and regulations as "a mechanism of control" or as "both political and a desire to protect the environment." Some felt it was easy for the Norwegian state to implement whatever rules they wanted because residents are often transient: "when you only stay a few years, how attached do you really become?"

The law is much stronger in protection of environment here (than on the mainland). And from the start of the Act, what is the purpose of this law? Environmental protection is the most important—whatever is the other things you will do up here. It's much more important than anything else. For example, like putting up a new house. (participant in FG 2018.12.14)

The contrast noted between environmental protection and limitations on constructing a new house is interesting here. Regulations concerning environmental protection come from the state and are managed by the Governor's office—the local administration is not involved. Yet the participant says the state prioritises protecting the environment over building new houses (or cabins), a domain where the local administration is involved. The quote is not a criticism of the protections in place: whether participants felt this higher level of protection was a good thing or not was not discussed. However, the state's focus on the environment is seen to override the needs of local residents for more houses (or cabins).

Some participants felt that closing the mine at Svea was a gesture meant to make Norway look green to the outside world, and/or provided personal political gain to the politicians involved. Some felt coal was being sacrificed because it wasn't as important to Norway as oil, so closing the mines was "green-washing." Others felt it was better to stop coal and to move to other forms of energy because environmental issues were important worldwide. Generally, environmental regulation was seen as a "convenient tool," a way of "controlling access" and "limiting presence."

There's also such an important part about Barentsburg in that it is the last sort of remaining Treaty's real consequences because otherwise Norway has done a pretty good job of nullifying any access to the island in the big scale. I mean everything is turned into national parks. (participant in FG 2019.01.12)

This comment shows how the control of access to nature is perceived as a tool to limit access by other states to potential resources (specifically, mining and extractive industries). Barentsburg is the only other settlement on the archipelago other than Longyearbyen with an active mine. This is perceived by the participant as being the last real manifestation of the spirit of the Treaty which was meant to ensure (not nullify) access to resources.

Geopolitical vulnerability. On an international level, Norway was sometimes viewed as insecure and needing to assert itself in Svalbard. Generally, individuals across groups felt that Norway needed to work to maintain its sovereignty. Some felt this was due to Norway's weaker position during the early years of the Treaty and that it was harder for Norway to assert itself over the Russians since they were used to being able to do what they wanted. Alternately, some participants wondered if it had to do with Svalbard's special territorial status:

I'm wondering if that insistence on it being super Norwegian has to do with the weird status of the island because if this were just Norway everybody could just relax because everybody would be like "ah, you're in Norway" but since it's this unincorporated-territory, part of the Kingdom but (with) separate rules—then it seems like everybody has to try extra hard sometimes (agreeing sounds) to kind of remind everyone that yes, technically we're all foreigners here including the Norwegians, but also not, and then you get this weird kind of contradiction sometimes. (participant in FG 2019.01.12)

The participant perceives the status of Svalbard as unclear, creating a need for Norway to impose their right to manage the territory. They point to how confusing living in Longyearbyen is because the rules are not the same as on the mainland. They also bring up the notion that even Norwegians are foreigners here and that no one, in the end, is allowed to live here permanently.

Another example of the “insistence of being Norwegian” was brought up in a different focus group where one participant mentioned that although English is used at UNIS on a daily basis—and is the common language in research worldwide—only those who speak Norwegian can be on the Board, thus excluding many of the non-Norwegian faculty.

Although participants felt Norway wouldn’t relinquish Svalbard—in spite of the cost of maintaining Longyearbyen—they also felt that Norway could one day be challenged for it. This was particularly true when futuring Svalbard and discussing impacts of climate change that would make more resources available and therefore of interest to other states.

Svalbard was seen as geographically strategic in the case of war/rising tensions and was seen as being of potential interest to several larger states, such as China, Russia and the US.

It all depends on the direction the world takes. Russia has been making moves like flying around and they don’t do anything by accident. (...) there has been a lot of rumors about the Treaty and what could happen. They get in your mind and stay. Like one of the rumors was that the Treaty was going to be re-negotiated in 2025. Which is not true. Another rumor was that there was land for sale—and I don’t even know if there was—but they said that the Chinese wanted to buy that mountain range and it was a problem but for some reason these rumors go around. (participant in FG 201.12.11)

This participant brings up different examples of how people perceive the status of Svalbard and other states’ interest in it. If Svalbard’s status as Norwegian is unclear—and potentially even vulnerable—this compounds the inherent confusion people have about Longyearbyen’s identity as Norwegian. Several participants noted that there is confusion from the moment you come up to Svalbard: is Svalbard really Norwegian if you need to go through passport control when flying from Norway?

Interestingly, half of the groups brought up a variation of the story about the Chinese wanting to buy the mountain range and the Norwegian state intervening (the Norwegian state did, indeed, intervene and buy the land).

Norway-Russia power balance. Individuals in all groups viewed both Norway and Russia as having geopolitical interests in Svalbard. Generally, the participants saw Norway as a rich country but not very strong compared to Russia. Norway was seen as trying to appease the Russians, enforcing rules in a supportive way in Barentsburg, for example, rather than the directive way they handle the rest of Svalbard. Others felt Norway was too harsh on Russia and was trying to show dominance. Some felt that if Russia wants something (like an airport or a brewery) then, “Norway does it first. After, maybe, they say yes to Russia” since they want to show who is in control.

A: But still (the Russians) do have to follow the Norwegian laws.

B: But do they? (general laughing)

A: Ah, the Sysselmann takes care of that ... (laughing continues)
(participants in FG 2018.12.14)

This interaction was interesting because the participants joked openly about Russians not following the rules. Their laughter

acknowledged that although there are rules, and the Russians should follow them, they may not be doing so, and the Governor’s office may instead be turning a blind eye. A perception that Russians can “get away” with things undermines the idea that Norway has full and absolute control over what is happening on the archipelago.

Several participants also mentioned that Norway has to keep issues on the mainland in mind when dealing with Russia on Svalbard. Others felt that Russia had to be careful since “if you insult Svalbard, you insult the whole of Western Europe” and that Russia is dependent on Norway for certain things, like access to the airport. It was noted that this position of strength allowed Norway to be firmer in how it was imposing restrictions on the newly developing Russian tourism.

I think it’s a thin line where you accept some things. You close your eyes for things and just let it be instead of saying “you are now breaking this rule, you are now breaking that rule” and why? maybe because they don’t want any problematic, diplomatic problems arising because Norway and Russia already have a somewhat strained relationship on the mainland and I don’t think they want this to affect life here as well. Or more than necessary. (participant in FG 2019.01.17)

The participant implies a balance of power issue, showing an underlying geopolitical insecurity. If it were clear that Norway was in charge—or perhaps had the means to stand up to a larger country like Russia—this insecurity wouldn’t be here. As mentioned by the participant, there are tensions on the mainland between Norway and Russia, and therefore avoiding tensions on the archipelago might also be in Norway’s interest.

Theme 3 micro-macro intersections

This theme groups issues that arise because of how local (micro) and broader (macro—be they national, geopolitical, global etc.) issues become entangled, often in the form of some kind of clash or disjuncture.

I think the Norwegian government is seeing that there is a bigger issue than they thought in the first when they thought making this a normal society and they are now starting to see issues in different ways. I don’t think it’s been too ... big enough ... for them to be really scared but if it would be so, and then it will be interesting to see how they cope with that. (participant in FG 2019.08.08)

Here, the participant gets right to the heart of the problem: what happened when the decision was made to normalise Longyearbyen? How did that work with the Treaty? What will happen now/in the future? The comment points to key elements of the town’s identity: Longyearbyen was a company town that transitioned to a local democracy because the Norwegian state wanted to anchor Longyearbyen as a “normal” Norwegian town in order to strengthen Norwegian presence on the archipelago. But because of another core element of Longyearbyen’s identity, namely the archipelago’s special territorial status, the shift to a “normal” town also opened up other possibilities such as the increase in foreigners coming to stay, the establishment of private companies, etc.

Legitimacy/sustainability of community. This category relates to the perception of the town as both a tool of the State, maintained for legitimising Norway’s sovereignty, and as a place where individuals want to settle down. Often these two visions are experienced as conflicting. Geopolitical motivations structure the town one way while residents want to shift it in other directions.

In a way this community or the political system in Longyearbyen is just a playground. You can do whatever you want within some frames. And the frames are much tighter in Longyearbyen than on the mainland. (participant in FG 2018.12.14)

The issue raised here is: to what extent are the people administering the town able to make the decisions they feel best for the community? The conversation continued and another participant explained,

(T)he government is much closer to the position. So when Sysselmann made the position on anything then they have the government just right there (agreeing sounds, 'ja right'). So the democratic process is not so good on Svalbard you might say because it's so tight. The government is so close to the positions. (participant in FG 2018.12.14)

This highlights potential conflicts between what a local administration might want and what the government in Oslo decides. If Oslo has more control, the legitimacy of the community as a "normal" town with a local, democratic, decision-making process is open to question.

Svalbard was generally acknowledged as strategic, and participants felt Norway needed to maintain a community to maintain legitimacy. The possibility of bringing their families was seen as a necessary condition for getting people to come. However, without good healthcare facilities or support for the elderly, some questioned the state's commitment to having a "family community" and saw it instead as an "artificial community."

And if you look at everything, even this building, everything is built to get taken down at one time. Because one time this town was built to actually leave. It's more or less like Svea or everything else, it was not supposed to be a permanent town. And if you see all the buildings around, it's not a permanent town. (participant in FG 2019.08.08)

Even if the buildings weren't in fact made to be dismantled, the perception is that they were. In another set of focus groups in which public space was discussed (LPO & SSSI, 2020) it became clear that a lack of sidewalks contributed to this feeling of impermanence. Whether from the structure of the built environment, the difficulties encountered in establishing oneself/one's family, or the inherent transiency of company-owned housing, Longyearbyen's perceived impermanence undermines the projection of a long-term community commitment.

The archipelago was seen as highly accessible for tourism and research with commercial flights making it cheaper and easier to get to than any other place in the Arctic. Research was viewed as important but not as an economic activity even if declared as such by the Norwegian state. Tourism was seen as an economic activity but not viable as a sole source of income since "it would be just a resort."

Interestingly, those who worked in tourism insisted the most on the need for Longyearbyen to be a real community. For some, it was because they felt tourists wanted "an authentic experience" and to be legitimate, Longyearbyen needed to be a real community. For others, it was connected to the need to take housing of employees into account in their business models. Stability and sustainability were seen as more difficult for a business with these constraints.

In speaking of coal mining, the original reason for the town, some participants brought up local sustainability, alternate energy use, and the need to protect the environment, even in Longyearbyen itself. Others, however, felt that there wouldn't be any way of making Longyearbyen sustainable, that the town was here "for political reasons" and people needed to accept that if they wanted to be here.

But at the same time, sometimes I wonder why I'm here myself. Because I'm flying down to the mainland a lot. So all the airplanes, everything I use is shipped up here or comes by an airplane. Like I said, everything about being here is contradictory compared to being environmentally friendly. I'm not a hysterical person when it comes to that, but still, I think about that. (participant in FG 2019.01.17)

This participant gives logical reasons for their assertion that nothing about being in Longyearbyen is environmentally sustainable. The lack of sustainability derives directly from Longyearbyen's geographic location. Yet, as a different participant stated in the previous section, "environmental protection is what is most important for the state." There is an inherent conflict between these two realities.

Alterities/disconnections. This category emerged from a wide range of comments and observations that showed how Longyearbyen was several different things at the same time, both on a local (micro) level and on a broader (macro) level.

On a local level, for example, Longyearbyen was often described as feeling like a city in spite of its small size, as being Norwegian but international, as a family community without grandparents, as easy to come but hard to stay (even for Norwegians if outside the official companies or once retired). Social services, healthcare, job security, access to housing, etc. were all seen as primarily of benefit to Norwegians.

On a broader level, people saw a disconnect between Longyearbyen and the rest of the archipelago in terms of environmental issues (such as waste flushed into the fjord and the lack of recycling in town versus the environmental protection of most of Svalbard). Participants also noted another disconnect between official statements and local realities, for example tourism is desired officially but there is little or no structural support, "hotels get permission to be built but there is no support for housing for the employees."

If you look to Svea, the reason we have to clean up Svea. It's quite strange that there is so much money into cleaning up Svea when we are walking around in the nature there is so much garbage in my eyes. I know this is (Cultural Heritage), some of it, and should be protected of course but I also think some of it should be cleaned up but it's not allowed and should stay in nature. But for Svea, (...) if all the infrastructure is cleared, so I think that if the Russians or the Koreans would like to come to Svea, and start mining (it would be harder). (participant in FG 2018.12.11)

Svalbard is seen as open to all and at the same time participants understand that Norway needs to control access. This participant questions the priority of specific environmental protection policies in light of this reality, suggesting political motives may be involved. They felt that had Norway truly wanted to protect the nature up here, controls would be stricter all over.

Other disconnects—or even conflicts of interest—exist in the decision-making powers of local administration versus Oslo. As one participant said,

The Norwegian state is very much into having more Norwegian employees. But they don't really have the means or any ideas of how to do it. And many of the local companies say that they put ads in the paper for vacant positions and they hardly get any Norwegian applicants. So what do you do? Do you force the Norwegian to apply? Or do you choose your best applicant or what do you do? The state doesn't really have any good suggestions on how to do what they want. (participant in FG 2019.01.17)

This quote shows the tension between what the local, private, companies want (the "best applicants") versus what the state is perceived to want ("more Norwegian employees"). The disconnect is

symptomatic of a deeper issue: who actually controls what happens in town?

When you are so dependent on the government to give you money for what you are planning to do, you are always trying to adjust to what the government expects you to do. (participant in FG 2018.12.14)

As mentioned in the previous section, the Norwegian state is perceived to control—or at least heavily influence—what is done locally. These alterities—the disconnects and discrepancies between expectations about Longyearbyen and the town's lived reality—expose a fundamental conflict in the town's identity.

Discussion

The focus groups documented above were constructed to look into two categories previously encountered during research conducted in Longyearbyen: Sense of Geopolitical Vulnerability and Questioning the Legitimacy of the Community. The questions focused on the Treaty and Longyearbyen's company town legacy. The expectation was that the confusion residents were expressing about Longyearbyen in one-on-one interviews had to do with systemic issues coming from these two structuring elements of Longyearbyen's identity. What emerged from the focus groups, however, points to a different issue: although both the Treaty and the company town legacy clearly inform Longyearbyen's structure (shaping its identity as a place) the confusion participants expressed comes from Longyearbyen's shift to a more "normal" town structure with a local democracy.

As discussed in the results, the perception of Longyearbyen is convoluted. It is at times perceived as trying to be a normal community, at others as site for geopolitical positioning by the Norwegian state. The local community can decide what to do—up to a point. Those in positions of power in Longyearbyen are limited: "money comes from Oslo in a package and is not linked directly to local taxes."

In contrast, Barentsburg is seen more simply as a company town and Ny-Ålesund as a Norwegian-run research settlement. Some of the difference in complexity may derive from the fact that I was interviewing people living in Longyearbyen, making their lived experiences of place more complex than their impressions of the other settlements. But it also has to do with the Longyearbyen's Identity of Place.

Longyearbyen was founded as a mining settlement, a company town owned and run by a company exploiting land claims. With the shift to a local democracy, a division was made between the local administration of Longyearbyen in the form of the Lokalstyre and Svalbard's place in Norway's international space as administered by Sysselmasteren. No longer a company town with control over who can come, nor able to be a "normal" Norwegian town with immigration laws because of the archipelago's special territorial status, the Norwegian percentage of the population of Longyearbyen has dropped to around 65%.

Impacts of this are evident in participant comments. Questions of language, housing, or access to social/health services would not come up in a company town nor in a scientific research settlement. But in Longyearbyen, the shift to a "normal" town structure with a local democracy has created an expectation that it should function like a town on the mainland.

Because Longyearbyen serves as a lever for geopolitical positioning, the Norwegian state has invested huge sums to support it over the years. The state has said several times that it wishes to make Longyearbyen more Norwegian. One recent example

can be seen in Svalbard Posten's article on the newly appointed Business Manager (Wiersen, 2020). Workers employed by the state have it in their mission statement that they are "here to keep it Norwegian."

Therefore, Longyearbyen as an increasingly international space poses a problem for the Norwegian state's positioning. Barentsburg, by contrast, limited to being a state-controlled company town even as it branches out into tourism and research, is still perceived as Russian. Ny-Ålesund, even though it is even more international than Longyearbyen given the mix of people working there, is still seen as Norwegian because it is run by Kings Bay, a state-owned company. Ironically, Ny-Ålesund is also a site where other, non-Arctic, states can create a national narrative of belonging in the Arctic.

One participant said, "the town is still trying to figure itself out" (FG 2018.12.05), a comment they saw as meaning Longyearbyen didn't know what it wanted. The analysis of the focus groups, however, shows that the confusion and frustration people often feel is symptomatic of the alterity between trying to have a local democracy in a place where a key element of the Identity of Place inhibits it: the only way for Longyearbyen to be a true democracy, given the Norwegian state's current understanding of sovereignty and the archipelago's special territorial status, would be to renegotiate, or even eliminate, the Svalbard Treaty. Since this is not, and has never been, Norway's intent, the state is leveraging another key aspect of Longyearbyen's identity, its company town structure, to try to regain control.

Conclusion

The results of the focus groups documented here led to an unexpected result. A pervasive mismatch between expectations and lived experiences was exposed, as well as significant confusion over what, exactly, Longyearbyen is. It was expected that residents' frustration would revolve primarily around a lack of legitimate economic activity/transiency (Legitimacy of the Community) or that Longyearbyen/Svalbard was seen as vulnerable to a shift in control (Geopolitical Insecurity). But that wasn't what emerged.

Looking at the results through an Identity of Place framing brought out the fundamental alterity of Longyearbyen today. The feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, as well as the perception of layers in town and the conflicting aspects of control of access within what should be an open, democratic, community all, show how the special territorial status of Svalbard (a space created for economic purposes and open to all), and the Norwegian state's desire to create a more normal Norwegian town to anchor Norwegian presence on the archipelago, conflict with each other. Having a normal Norwegian community is not possible within the structure imposed on this space by the Svalbard Treaty, as currently interpreted by the Norwegian state. The Norwegian state, by moving Longyearbyen from a company town to a local democracy, has opened the space to an increased internationalisation—thereby going in the opposite direction than it intended.

Interestingly, some of the laws recently passed (removal of the right to vote for non-Norwegians, for example) seem to confirm a desire to return to the more centralised control possible in a company town (in this case a "state town"). Housing is being reorganised under one, state-owned, umbrella. The nature around town is under consideration for protection by the state, potentially limiting access for residents and local businesses. In one-on-one interviews, non-Norwegians have said they sometimes don't feel welcome or that if they were applying for the job they currently hold, they

doubt they would get it in today's context. Private business owners, Norwegian and non-Norwegian, have said they no longer feel supported. Although there is no discussion at this point in time of Longyearbyen losing its local democracy, several focus group participants mentioned feeling that Longyearbyen was being "slowly choked" and that it was "on a tight leash" to Oslo.

By taking an Identity of Place approach, some of the structures that shape the way Longyearbyen is and/or can be become more apparent. This does not imply that a place's identity is a single set of elements or a fixed structure. All places are fluid in nature, evolving with the multiple and entangled threads that constitute their "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005). At the same time, given the entangled nature of this throwntogetherness, there are certain ways in which a situation cannot evolve without a rupture in the form of a problem space (Grossberg, 2010).

In the analysis of these focus groups, Identity of Place was a useful tool to think with since it revealed different understandings from those which would have come out with a human-centred place-identity approach. By putting an understanding of place forward, certain elements of the conjuncture that is Longyearbyen today were revealed. Although each situation will be unique, a place-centred approach such as that used here may also be useful in the study of other situations where a place's specificities are deeply entangled with the conjuncture under study.

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