The Paradox of Svalbard

'More than a tourist destination, Svalbard is a hotspot of geopolitics, climate change, transient migration and social inequalities. Engaging, rich and nuanced, this book gives voice to people whose stories are rarely told, and exposes the deep dilemmas facing this Arctic archipelago. This book is a must for anyone with an interest in Svalbard, and the challenges of a melting world. Ethnography at its best.'

—Marianne E. Lien, Professor, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo

'In a rich and deeply-textured account of the human communities that call Svalbard "home", Zdenka Sokolíčková demonstrates how the logic of extraction intersects awkwardly with community, environment, geopolitics and sustainability. If Svalbard is a paradox then it will demand explicit recognition of the competing interests, pressures and wishes that make the archipelago and its communities such intriguing places to live, work and study.'

—Klaus Dodds, Professor of Geopolitics, Royal Holloway University of London

'Lucidly captures the dilemmas of maintaining community in the world's northernmost settlement, where climate change is particularly evident. Through fine-grained ethnography, this weaves together questions of belonging, labour and inequality with the paradoxes of "green growth" initiatives and geopolitics. Highly recommended!'

—Cecilie Vindal Ødegaard, Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen

'Sokolíčková profoundly and poetically reveals Svalbard as a site of concentrated uncertainty: simultaneously microcosm and periphery, container for a range of peculiarly twenty-first-century meanings, and home to a community unique in the world.'

—Adam Grydehøj, editor-in-chief of *Island Studies* journal

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The Paradox of Svalbard

Climate Change and Globalisation in the Arctic

Zdenka Sokolíčková

Foreword by Thomas Hylland Eriksen

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*Introducing the Field*walk: *Field, Companions and Path*

Svalbard as a Miniature of the World?

'Svalbard is a miniature of Norway. And Norway is a miniature of the world.' In November 2021, Jenny Skagestad, a Norwegian politician specialising in environment and transportation, and adviser in the environmental foundation ZERO, published a TEDx Talks video entitled 'Svalbard – Canary in the coal mine goes green'. In the annotation, we read:

> Svalbard is a climate paradox: A community next to the North Pole already threatened by the dramatic climate crisis and totally dependent on coal and diesel. But what happens when people start to ask new questions and challenge old systems? How can Svalbard become the showcase for both the climate crisis and the inspiring climate solutions?

Anthropology bewares of generalisations. Can we claim Svalbard teaches us anything about the world we inhabit? The meme of 'what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic' has been around for about a decade now, and it is usually associated with either climate change, or geopolitics and security. But can the statement also kick off a discussion about other issues relevant in the Arctic, such as globalisation, migration or social justice? How serious are we about asking fundamental questions? What does it entail to challenge old systems? And can a place be both a showcase of a crisis and its solutions? What does the paradoxical nature of multi-layered processes under way in Svalbard look like from within?

Longyearbyen, the biggest settlement on Svalbard, is a contradiction indeed. A living dilemma of the twenty-first century. An anthropological Petri dish where both climate change and globalisation 'are happening', they are fast and can be experienced by all five senses. You can see the glaciers diminishing and the faces of strangers – soon to become 'locals' – appearing. You can hear heavy machines working, numerous languages being spoken, gigantic cruise ships sounding their horns in the harbour,

geese arriving and planes landing and taking off. You can feel raindrops on your face in December and polar bear fur with your fingers in front of a popular tourist store, inviting you to engage with a 'Touch me' sign. You can taste Thai spring rolls produced by a 'local', beef imported from New Zealand, crystal clean iceberg water 750 ml for €80 and coal particles carried by the blizzard squeaking between your teeth. And the smell; the smell is a tricky one. Svalbard first seems to have no smell. But there are scents. A Svalbardianer with a trained nose might be able to smell snow and ice. The kennels smell, especially when mild weather comes and thaws what is to be thawed. The brewery, the world's northernmost, announces its existence with an unmistakable odour of hops. Not to forget the diesel burnt in snowmobiles – it is hard to miss that one unless electric scooters erase it from the scentscape. All that at 78° North, at a place that is said to be warming up faster than anywhere else on the planet, that is undergoing a substantial economic shift from a coal company town to an attractive but disappearing destination, a climate research hub and a green 'testination'. It is neither remote nor untouched, and human presence manifests itself in traces of the past and actions of today so self-evidently that film crews must shoot their landscapes of 'pristine wilderness' carefully, ensuring that no mining or research infrastructure, scooter trails or cruise ships spoil the images.

On a chilly and dark day in November 2018, I was invited to hop on a car in front of UNIS, the University Centre in Svalbard. My youngest son who was 8 months old expressed his mixed feelings about the venture by a choked cry, his baby carrier under my heavy Canada Goose jacket. The guy spoke good English but warned me right away that his working language was Norwegian. 'We won't have a car when we move up here,' I said while trying to climb up to the front seat. 'You won't need it,' said the driver and off we went.

After a few minutes, the car stopped in front of an orange row house with two floors. The 87 square metre apartment we were offered to move into three months later, for NOK 16,661 (approximately €1,600) a month, was situated on the upper floor. The scenery I glimpsed from the entrance was breathtaking. The first week of November still offers a decent portion of twilight around noon at this latitude, even though the sun is no longer to be seen from the end of October and won't appear at the Old Hospital's staircase, *gamle sykehustrappa*, before 8 March. I embraced the mountain at the opposite side of the valley with my eyes and noticed that we would have a lovely view of the church (the world's northernmost, of course) and

a strange industrial monument I later learned to call *Taubanesentralen*. It used to be the hub for cable cars bringing coal from several mines around Longyearbyen to town. No longer required for its original use, it is a venue for cultural events with a true genius loci. In spring 2019, we lost the view to the *Taubanesentralen* because of a modular house, one of that year's modest replies to the urgent housing crisis triggered by a complexity of factors, including avalanche and landslide danger, population growth and the state's effort to regain control and re-Norwegianise the town.

The tour round the flat was quick, the previous user was still packing, and we were soon sitting back in the van, which looked shabby compared to the pretentious SUVs I had noticed on the way. Per asked me what I was up to in Longyearbyen, maybe more of courtesy than of serious interest. I replied I was planning to study how people here live with climate change and globalisation. When he said that he moved to the town in the 1980s, I asked a rhetorical question: 'Has Longyearbyen changed since then?' A bitter and sharp reply followed: 'A lot.'

Indeed. The speed of change that only one generation has witnessed in Longyearbyen is overwhelming.

Brief History of Svalbard and Longyearbyen

Svalbard has not always pretended to be a 'miniature of Norway' or 'the world'. In fact, until very late (the end of the sixteenth century) the area was not well documented at all. Russian Pomor hunters might have made use of these lands before that, but it is the Dutch explorer Willem Barentsz who is typically credited as the first historically confirmed observer of the group of islands, with their spectacular pointy mountains, naming the archipelago Spitsbergen. Lacking an Indigenous population, the archipelago triggered awe and fascination and its the raw landscape was an obvious target for colonial imaginaries, as *terra nullius*, a no man's land (and water) full of 'resources'.

Exploration and exploitation went hand in hand in the centuries to come. Whale populations, abundant in the fjords of Spitsbergen, were rapidly devastated by the whaling industry pursued by the Dutch, Danish-Norwegian and British imperial powers. Russian and Norwegian hunting and trapping of seals, walruses, polar foxes and polar bears was also among the economic activities of outsiders coming to the archipelago in the High Arctic, but whaling was the most monstrous, truly industrial venture of Svalbard's early history. 'Whales were butchered and cooked

near where they were killed, which is why the remains of whaling stations are found at so many places along the shoreline,' write Hacquebord et al. (2003) in their account of Dutch and English competition in the seventeenth century. In the early nineteenth century, whaling was no longer profitable as the 'stock' decreased dramatically.

More countries engaged in expeditions, driven both by scientific curiosity and hunger for profit. Arctic explorers such Nordenskiöld, Amundsen or Shackleton passed through on their voyages. In the cultural representations, very much dominated by masculine stereotypes of strength and endurance, there are also other, less mainstream accounts of people meeting the archipelago. One example would be the Austrian painter Christiane Ritter's memories in the book *A Woman in the Polar Night* (2010 [1938]), or the stories of women generally less visible in the Norwegian polar history (Ryan 2022).

The late nineteenth century saw the beginning of tourism in the area, and deposits of black coal were discovered. Mines were opened, not only by Norwegians but also by Swedes, Russians, Americans, English and Scottish (Kruse 2013). Ny-Ålesund started to resemble a settlement after 1916, thrived as a company town until the tragic accident in the mine in 1962, and has since been transformed into a 'centre for global climate research and node of contemporary Arctic geopolitics' (Paglia 2020). The hard extractive industry of coal mining is a powerful component of the identity of places such as Ny-Ålesund or Longyearbyen, founded in 1906. It is in Longyearbyen that the stories I document in this book unfold.

Now represented as a showcase both for the climate crisis and its technological solutions, Longyear City was founded by an American businessman and – as people in town say – a 'cruise tourist' John Munro Longyear. For the first ten years of its existence, it was a multi-ethnic company town created in order to mine coal and ship it south. In 1916, the Norwegian-owned Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani bought the settlement, along with the extensive mining infrastructure, and has been the core stakeholder and guardian of the Norwegian presence since then. Similarly Barentsburg, today seen as a Russian (or more precisely a Russian-speaking) community of about 350 people, was founded in 1920 by the Dutch NESPICO and bought twelve years later by the Soviet Union. Store Norske's equivalent here is the Russian mining company Trust Arktikugol. Together with other Svalbard settlements such as Grumant and Pyramiden, today abandoned or only seasonally revived as tourist sites rather than places where families live, Barentsburg was used as a showcase

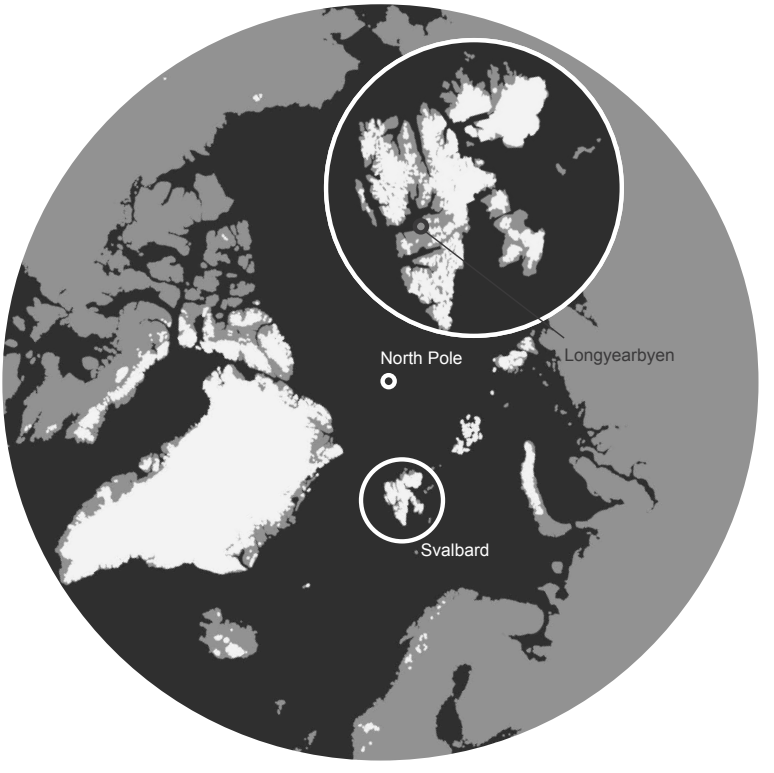

Figure 1 Locating Svalbard

Source: Map courtesy of Jakub Žárský.

for Soviet prosperity. There are also numerous differences between the two largest settlements, but one striking parallel is the initial 'foreign' investment made within a few years by Norway and Russia (Sokolíčková et al. 2022), the only two countries that have kept a continuous presence on the island through financing settlements populated all year round up to today.

Yet the two Arctic states are not equal in Svalbard. In the work of the Norwegian historian Thor Bjørn Arlov (2003), the path towards exercising Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago is outlined, from the purchase of Longyear City in 1916 up until 1920, when the document by then known as the Spitsbergen Treaty was drafted, entering into force in 1925. In the same year, the Norwegian authorities also changed the name of the archipelago from Spitsbergen to Svalbard, keeping the previous name only for the biggest island, where all the current settlements are

located. While the term 'Svalbard', meaning 'cold edge', is first mentioned in late twelfth-century Icelandic annals (Chekin 2020), with historians disagreeing about which locale the Icelanders actually meant, its embrace in 1925 by Norway was a sign of Norwegianisation – an active construction of the archipelago's political but also cultural identity (Arlov 2020a). Up to now, over 40 countries have signed the Svalbard Treaty, acknowledging Norway's absolute sovereignty over the territory in exchange for equal rights for the signatory parties' nationals in terms of access to the archipelago and the possibility of engaging in economic activities such as hunting or gaining mineral resources. Norway is bound to govern over the territory as 'the best protected wilderness in the world' and ensure peace. Most parties acceded to the treaty in the 1920s and 1930s (among them China, the Soviet Union, the US and the UK), and only a few are recent signatories (such as South Korea in 2012, North Korea and Latvia in 2016, or Turkey's intention to sign, announced as late as 2022). The archipelago is officially part of the Kingdom of Norway but because of the treaty, it is not governed like any other part of the kingdom. Svalbard is not part of the Schengen Area, and many Norwegian laws do not apply here, such as the Immigration Act, the National Insurance Act and other legislation related to social rights and welfare. This is also one of the reasons for the exceptionally low income tax (about 8 per cent, in sharp contrast to the high taxes paid in mainland Norway), which is at the same time the main economic incentive for Norwegians to settle down in Svalbard.

During the Second World War, the settlement of Longyearbyen was destroyed by German forces, but after the war Norway returned and restored it. The Soviet Union also returned. Both countries invested heavily in the mining industry, which provided them with coal and strengthened their foothold on the territory. The second half of the twentieth century was impacted by the Cold War, and the archipelago was a scene of tension and conspiracies, popularly depicted in the movie *Orion's Belt* (1985). Seen from within, to the contrary, people who resided in Svalbard from the 1960s on remember those decades with nostalgia for a time when they were less mobile and less connected to the outer world, but more connected to each other; when the material reality of life in Svalbard was more fitting for the archipelago's location; and when there were no reasons to doubt Longyearbyen's Norwegianness.

In the 1990s, the trend changed, taking a direction inspired by the new order in a suddenly unipolar world, where Russia – unlike the Soviet Union – was no longer perceived as a major threat and globalisation accelerated.

Operating mines were fewer, leading to a decreasing Russian population, in contrast to Longyearbyen, which started to grow and become more diverse and international. Here, the standard of living quickly rose and so did energy and goods consumption, resulting in increasing amounts of waste and pressure on infrastructure. Instant travel has become a simple, cheap and, to many, mundane activity, contributing to speeding up the volume of traffic by both plane and cruise ship. After the turn of the millennium, information technologies and social media made the virtual image of Svalbard widely accessible and tempting. Tourism was booming. Following a thread already to be found in the governmental White Paper from the 1970s (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security 1974–1975), it was chosen by the Norwegian government as the new economic backbone of Longyearbyen, which was then developing fast both as a science and technology hub, and as a tourist destination. Transnational migrants settling in Svalbard without a visa could live there while staying connected to family, friends or employers scattered worldwide, and Longyearbyen grew bigger, more dense and more complex. Even in the mining

Figure 2 Longyearbyen's coat of arms: Black sky, with snowy mountain penetrated by a mining tunnel

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_arms_of_NO_2100_Longyearbyen.svg

industry spirits were high in the early 2000s, and more Norwegian mines were opened thanks to massive investments. Falling coal prices and rising environmental consciousness contributed to a change in the late 2010s. The newly opened Norwegian mines were closed and are now being left to go 'back to nature' (Avango et al. 2023; Ødegaard 2021, 2022). The last operating mine is Mine 7 (*Gruve 7*), but its life cycle is also coming to an end, with mining activity likely to terminate in 2025, with a few more years to clean up.

For about 115 years, Longyearbyen had a black heart beating in the wild white north to the rhythm of industrialism. Longyearbyen's post-industrial heart is now expected to turn green.

My Travelling Companions: Engaging with Anthropological Theory

In this book, I wish to unpack the paradoxical nature of such a turn in the context of other changes on the move. I peel back the layers of Svalbard's paradox with the help of ethnography, entangled in the questions the place poses through the stories of my interlocutors, myself and my family.

To do so, I engage with anthropological theory that – throughout the process, from writing the first funding application in 2017 until revision of the draft manuscript in 2022 – spoke to the themes emerging from my research and helped me to develop and anchor my argument. Such an engagement also means selecting authors whose work resonates with, or in a constructive way challenges my own thinking, and thus cannot be exhaustive. This book is an outcome of a thinking path, where distinguished companions walked the second mile with me. Those are authors interested in climate change and globalisation, overheating, scale, temporality, extractivism, justice, violence, nationalism, and also the Anthropocene.

My work is inspired by the approach the team of Thomas Hylland Eriksen, my research project's mentor, developed within the Overheating project (Eriksen 2016; Eriksen and Schober 2016; Pijpers and Eriksen 2018; Stensrud and Eriksen 2019). In their introductory essay, Eriksen and Schober (2016: viii) explore the 'intricate meshwork of partial connections […] cultural hybridity, social differentiation and their counter-reactions in the shape of identity politics attempting to reinstate boundaries and purity'. The idea of destabilised identities resonates with what I found in Longyearbyen, very much part of 'a fast changing world with rapidly increasing connectivity and mobility, with mounting environmental chal-

lenges, rapid economic transformations and the rise of often virulent nationalisms', where 'forms of belonging to places, groups or communities are being challenged in new ways' (Eriksen and Schober 2016: 1).

Eriksen's work helped me see the concrete connection between two abstract phenomena, climate change and globalisation, which both have to do with overheating intrinsically linked to capitalism. Here also the issue of difference comes into play; difference underpinning a variety of choices and life-ways that can lead to alternative futures, instead of a monolithic linear story in which the future has already been decided. In his editorial commenting on the 2022 IPCC report, Eriksen (2022) sharply criticises the absence of a nuanced anthropological perspective enabling 'a sustained critique of corporate capitalism conspiring with governments' (2022: 1). Dominant narratives (co-created by initiatives such as the IPCC) of how 'the Anthropos' should 'fix' what Anna Tsing (2015b) calls the 'capitalist ruins' disregard what anthropologists have long been insisting upon, namely that 'every event takes place at a particular place and a specific time' (Eriksen 2022: 2). One-size-fit-all solutions are thus risky to pursue, binding us further to the vicious circle causing the problems we are facing. The idea of Svalbard being the world in miniature seems misplaced in this light. Yet it is *part of* the world, and my aim is to document it while paying meticulous attention to the specificities of the place in the time … of the Anthropocene?

It turned out to be impossible not to refer to Haraway's (2016) 'staying with the trouble'; the Anthropocene lingers in our thinking like climate change and globalisation, becoming just as heavily discussed as identity or culture. There is beauty in the possibility of having a conversation with minds such as those of Latour (2004, 2014), Head (2015), Moore (2015) or Haraway et al. (2016), who put a finger on the ambivalence of the concept. The reasons why I choose not to operate with the term in the book are manifold.

The first pulls back from the nonsensical claim that Svalbard is a miniature of Norway or – worse – the world, which is not a unified place. Longyearbyen is a particular place, enmeshed with numerous processes of many layers, and it blurs the understanding of what is going on if we draw a line from 'unsustainable' to 'sustainable' reducing the path towards sustainability to a technological fix. The narrative of the Anthropocene is linear, modernist, cherishing 'a perfection-yet-to-come' (Haraway et al. 2016: 547): a fairy tale, making the messy world safer and legible, yet tricky if accepted as a political manual. There are more arguments against the

Anthropocene becoming a fairy tale of humankind that realises its mistakes just in time and comes up with a technological solution to the many human-induced crises. One of them is the concept's anthropocentrism, while studying multispecies communication and collaboration might take us further than remaining stuck with the human-species-centred discourse of competition, culture versus nature conflict, and the obsession with resilience, vulnerability, ecosystem services and the like. Multispecies ethnography is not what *The Paradox of Svalbard* offers, but it could have. I chose a different path, but I do not see it as the only possible one.

Some authors, such as Moore (2017, 2018), argue for the Capitalocene instead, rejecting the shallow historicisation of the Anthropocene, in which all people bear equal responsibility for global environmental damage and social injustice. Moore urges paying attention to the issues of profit, power, exploitation of the marginalised, including nature, and the machineries of state, capital and science in their efforts to make everything legible. Such a perspective proves fruitful when unpacking what the abstract beasts of climate change and globalisation mean in the Arctic settlement of Longyearbyen, a place colonised by the Western discourse of modernity, scientism and progress pursued through the reductionist logic of the state.

Yet other influential thinkers, such as Chakrabarty (2017), argue against the Capitalocene:

> Globalization and global warming are no doubt connected phenomena, capitalism itself being central to both. But they are not identical problems. The questions they raise are often related, but the methods by which we define them as problems are, equally often, substantially different. Social scientists, especially friends on the left, sometimes write as though these methodological differences did not matter. (2017: 25)

It would indeed make little sense to claim that climate change and globalisation are the same. Yet they have some things in common, capitalism being one of them. In Svalbard, climate change is an expression you cannot miss when talking to people: scientists, journalists, politicians, young people, retired miners, nature guides – all have climate change in their active vocabulary. The way they understand it, feel about it and see it impacting their lives differs largely, which is also what drove my ethnographic interest in the issue. Globalisation, on the contrary, neither makes it into the headlines of the local newspaper nor does it

feature in the rationale of numerous research projects, stories told to the tourists or conversations among the old-timers. If anything, then *geopolitics* would be the word people use to touch upon the complexities of the hyper-mobile, heterogeneous and transient population dependent on employment in spheres where flows of goods, people and capital are key, but where all these processes unfold with Norway's geopolitically driven policy for Svalbard in the background. Unlike other Arctic locales, inhabited by Indigenous peoples who developed place-specific understandings of processes they were part of and cultivated a humble sense of belonging throughout centuries, Svalbard keeps being appropriated on the basis of economic and political interests of 'outsiders'. Appropriation of Svalbard by countries, businesses, discourses and ideologies, its legal backdrop and political enforcement, is a recurring theme also in the context of simmering conflicts in the early 2020s. There are disputes with the European Union (EU) over fishing quotas available in waters around the archipelago, caused by different interpretations of maritime legislation that came into force after the treaty (Hønneland 1998). China challenges Norway's firm standpoint on the country's right to regulate scientific endeavour; Russia has bold plans for the Arctic, regularly raises questions regarding Norway's interpretation of the treaty and insists on maintaining its presence in Svalbard. In the atmosphere of the 'scramble for the poles' (Dodds and Nuttall 2016), there is also the open question of drilling rights and shipping routes when (not if) the ice retreats further.

Svalbard cannot opt out of climate change; it is there and rolling, manifesting both in environmental changes and in the minds and mouths of people. The same goes for globalisation; Svalbard cannot isolate itself, it will stay entangled with living entities (in my work I focus on people) and things (including money resulting in unequal profits) on the move. Both the Anthropocene and Capitalocene (and Chthulucene, Plantationocene and other suggestions I am not even aware of) have their merits and pitfalls, but I present my work without the feeling I must choose another 'theory of everything very fast' (Haraway et al. 2016: 561). Overheating is general enough. The good thing about overheating is that it is an open-ended story; my contribution lies in showing in what sense Longyearbyen in Svalbard is overheated, and also how some of the efforts to cool it down leave out important aspects of sustainability.

Before I describe the backdrop and the logic of my argument in more detail, let me acknowledge how Latour's (2004) understanding of engaged anthropology influenced why and how I frame my work, and what I see

as its meaning. In his self-critical appeal to return to empiricism, description and getting closer to facts, he warns against critique running out of steam. Critique is disempowered when we 'believe that there [i]s no efficient way to criticise matters of fact except by moving away from them and directing one's attention towards the conditions that made them possible' (Latour 2004: 231). Instead, he suggests moving back to matters of fact and, further, to matters of concern; that we stop debunking and start caring. Not an easy task; destruction takes less time and effort than construction (not constructivism). I did my best, though, to focus on matters of concern hiding in a single question: *How to live in a warming world where many desire what a few keep for themselves?* Latour, by the way, is one of those who accepts the 'poisonous gift' I am (unsuccessfully?) trying to stay away from, stating that 'the Anthropocene pushes anthropology to the centre stage and requests from it to be worthy of its original mission' (Latour 2014: 139-AAA 8). Such a call is intimidating, but it is also reassuring to read that 'all field studies are studying devastated sites in crisis' (meaning the many crises are real and deserve attention) while 'there is no common world, and yet it has to be composed' (Latour 2014: 139-AAA 12). Globalisation on a planet that is being ecologically ruined does not imply there is a unified world or that things are the same everywhere. It means that things are connected, and through understanding how things are connected *somewhere* we gain reliable material for a comparison with *somewhere else*. At the same time, a case study like this one of Longyearbyen can be used to identify the unspoken and unheard stories that cast a shadow on what, from the outside, might look like a striving for sustainability. The stories I document are unique to Longyearbyen, but they might also be symptomatic of the warming and unjust world. It is the reader's task to judge this.

Obviously Overheated? Scratching the Surface and Building a Scaffolding

At first sight, overheating effects are pronounced at all levels in Longyearbyen. Climate change is fast – it is seen and sensed: higher temperatures, more rain, permafrost thaw, landslides, avalanches, less sea ice, glacier retreat. At the same time, the narrative of climate change is being produced on the island through climate science, and the discourse is setting the agenda for life in Longyearbyen. The economic shift from coal mining to other, softer extractive industries triggers change that has foreseen and

unforeseen consequences, and it's the unforeseen ones (or anticipated but not really cared about) that I am interested in. From a 'company town' that was predominantly Norwegian, with a class divide respected by all, but also competitive salaries and loose regulations enjoyed by all, centrally governed by state authorities looking after the strategic settlement in the High Arctic in the Cold War era, Longyearbyen became an internationalised place with a diversified job market, figuring out what it is and what it should be.

Since 2009, the proportion of non-Norwegians living in town rose from 14 per cent to 38 per cent in 2022, accommodating people from over 50 countries, with the three biggest minorities coming from Thailand, Sweden and the Philippines. Tourist and service industries, together with research activities, attract a somewhat different mixture of the new 'locals' compared to the times before everything started to gallop. While some processes, such as the increase of tourism, international migration and climate change urgency with all its complexities have an overheating effect, other trends that manifested with a growing intensity during my fieldwork seemingly cool Longyearbyen down. The Covid-19 pandemic belongs to those unexpected ones, putting a halt to tourism, temporarily silencing the booming vibe of the town. Yet after the paralysing exceptional state of affairs right after the pandemic broke out in spring 2020, the impacts seemed to have had a further overheating effect. Inequalities rooted in the pre-pandemic status quo solidified and became more apparent (Brode-Roger et al. 2022), as did the fragility of the tourism industry, dependent on instant and cheap mobility of people. Also the central government tightened its grip, suggesting adjustments to existing regulation with a potentially cooling effect. The spectrum of laws and rules newly approved or under consideration (as of 2022) range from tourism regulations regarding the fuels used in the cruise industry, movement on and around the archipelago, environmental protection, landing sites and guide certification, to closing doors to families whose children have special needs and to political participation for non-Norwegian residents. Another tool used to cool down and re-Norwegianise Longyearbyen is the housing policy, exercised more through indirect measures, such as increasing state ownership of housing units or renting flats only to those who are likely to fulfil the (geo)political aims for Svalbard. The scene is complex and one stumbles across many layers, contradictions and paradoxes.

The ways in which both Norway's policy makers and people living in Longyearbyen negotiate and navigate through the changes embody the

emblematic questions of our time: How to live in a world where one urgency trumps another? Which values are to be cherished, and at what cost? What happens when the paternalist (Pálsson 1996) argument of a 'fragile environment' triumphs in the discourse, to the detriment of human lives that, in the geopolitical perspective, are seen as meaningless? This book can be used as binoculars to look at Svalbard in the High Arctic, which is attracting ever more global attention nowadays given its strategic importance in the immediate future, through the overheating lens. It narrates a story about the conflict between different scales of the striving for sustainability and the driving forces of politics and the economy in the 'global North'. The northernmost settlement, as close to an ordinary town as it can be in the 'uninhabitable' but peopled Svalbard archipelago, has something to say about climate change, globalisation, inequalities and social injustice, agency and dignity, need for continuity and feeling of loss.

The book is divided into three parts: Fluid Environments, Extractive Economies and Disempowered Communities. These mirror the three layers I was originally interested in, namely: how people live with a changing environment; how they experience the shift in the economic strategy for Svalbard; and how both these changes transform the social landscape in town (and vice versa). None of the parts is a summary of 'results'; instead, I trace my thinking with the people I met in Longyearbyen and whose reflections guided me.

In Part I, I first explore what I learned about experiencing change through talking to natural scientists, and especially geologists. I unpack different meanings changing environments have for Longyearbyen residents, and link these to 'the other changes' that many of my interlocutors felt as equally (if not more) pressing than what we have learned to call 'climate change'. Part I ends with an a chapter about the climate change discourse, which is viscous and ready to use in order to push political agendas that my participants struggle to believe are motivated by truly environmental concerns.

Part II explores how the supposedly new and more sustainable industries of science and tourism hold on to their extractivist features. I challenge the black-and-white representation of coal mining in Svalbard, showing how the green future of Svalbard fails to break up with its bed-fellow of coal mining, still following the same 'take out and sell further' logic. I connect the lived experience of the coal miners, feeling redundant in the process of designing a brighter tomorrow, to the struggles of other 'little people' such as tour guides, left out of the discussion of what it means to make