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Valuing time: Tourism transitions in Svalbard

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Research Article

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Abstract

As indications of 'overtourism' appear in the Arctic, tourism presents both management challenges and ethical dilemmas, applicable to broader discussions about sustainability within Polar tourism. I argue that mapping value relations can contribute to ongoing discussions for positive ways forwards and that the concept of degrowth holds promise in redirecting tourism to better serve the local community. Tourism has become the largest employer and most rapidly growing sector in Svalbard, taking over from coal mining. Longyearbyen is a small urban centre but nevertheless is the central hub where almost all tourism passes through. Indeed, tourism is how the majority of human relations with its lands, seas, human and non-human inhabitants will be enabled. This paper is centred on charting the transition of Longyearbyen to a 'tourist town'. Drawing on local voices from 2013 to 2016 and 2019, I use a value-based analysis to assess the changes experienced in the context of wider systems of value at work in Svalbard.

Introduction

> "*Coal mining problem, in a tourist town*
> *Well it used to be, the other way around*
> *Well we still got our memories,*
> *But there's no future to be found*
> *Coal mining problem, in a tourist town*"
>
> *JG Hansen: Coal mining problem, in a tourist town (2019 Polar Jazz Festival, Longyearbyen)*

The lyrics appear to hit the mark. The Svalbard Hotel erupts into applause as the coal-mining musician ends his anthemic tune. The song also encapsulates some of the questions I returned to Svalbard with: namely how are people adapting (or not) to the rapid changes that have occurred in the past five years? Back in 2015, when the hotel had barely opened, a cloud of doubt hung over Longyearbyen's future, with many fearing the demise of the coal industry would also spell the demise of the settlement. As Hansen croons, "The government wants to shut us down. They don't see the reality: this place wouldn't be without industry". It appears that the Norwegian capital *has* nevertheless morphed into a fully-fledged "tourist town", once again at risk of decline if emergency state support is not adequate to mitigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

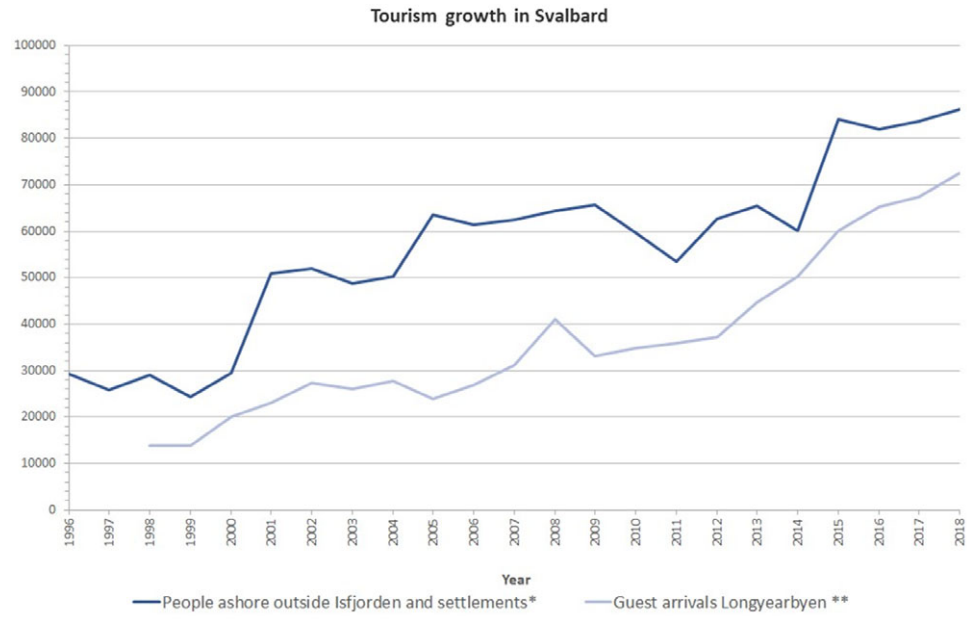
Tourism is a substantial global force, economically representing over 10% of GDP in 2016 (World Bank, 2018) and, until Covid-19, has had a continuous growth trajectory. Arctic tourism has followed a broader European expansion in 'nature-based' tourism (Bogerson et al., 2020), spurred on by increasing global interest in 'the north' and all things Arctic. Svalbard taps into this popularity as the northern-most accessible destination. Urban cultural experiences are also driving tourism growth in Nordic rural areas (Bogerson et al., 2020), Longyearbyen captures some of this market. Over the past 20 years, tourism in Svalbard has benefitted from state support in its development and visitor numbers have grown by over 70% (see Fig. 1).

In this paper, I chart the historical rise of tourism before placing it within the context of wider polar, Arctic and tourism literatures. I then give voice to lived experiences of recent change and continuity. My aim is to demonstrate the tensions, challenges and perceived opportunities connected to tourism in order to provide a base for ongoing discussions over its role. Four key themes – summarised as diversification, time and transience, positives and problems – illustrate how the growth of tourism intersects with, and is part of, multiple frameworks of value in Svalbard and beyond.

Nearly 30 years ago, Kaltenborn and Emmelin asked if "the present tourism phase in Svalbard's history will be the last chapter in a story of limitless exploitation of resources" (1993, p.49)? This question is still relevant. The hiatus of travel and tourism during the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst presenting stress and hardship; also offered time and impetus to consider alternative futures. As discussions turn towards what role tourism could or should play in Svalbard's ongoing story, I argue that mapping the value landscape past and present should be part of informing and shaping this future. I suggest that whilst 'sustainability' encompasses useful precepts, a 'degrowth' approach to tourism holds promise in brokering better relationships between visitors and their human and non-human hosts.

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*Source: The Governor of Svalbard (2020). These numbers largely account for expedition cruise passengers but likely exclude many of the larger cruise vessel passengers.

** Tourists staying at guest houses and hotels (excludes camping, Air BnB and other accommodations). Source: 1998–2007 - Sysselmannen på Svalbard (2006) cited in Hall and Saarinen (2010); 2008–2018 – Visit Svalbard (2018)

Fig. 1. Tourism growth in Svalbard.

The rise of the resort

Small-scale tourism in Svalbard pre-dates the establishment of Longyearbyen as a coal town. In the late 1800s, cruise ships landed at the promontory of 'Hotellnesset' for hikes at the site of the first tourist accommodation that opened in 1896 and operated for two summer seasons. From 1934, what became the Hurtigruten company ran steam-powered cruises along the coast of northern Norway to Svalbard. Pausing for WW2 and operating again from 1950 to 1965, the ship called at Longyearbyen and Ny-Ålesund, which both remain popular cruise stops (Reymert, 2013). Annual guest arrivals numbered around 5000–6000 in the early 1970s, growing to 15000 by the end of the decade (Viken & Jørgensen, 1998). Svalbard's airport opened in 1975, but tourist numbers remained low, with visitors needing a commitment to adventure as there were no hotels, public shops nor government support until the late 1980s.

A gradual process of 'normalising' the coal company town of Longyearbyen to a more family-oriented society with a diverse economy gathered pace in the 1990s (Grydehøj et al., 2012; Reymert, 2013). A key step in 1989 was breaking up the state coal company, Store Norske Spitsbergen Kullkompani (SNSK), that had previously run all services in town, so that it would concentrate on coal. Spitsbergen Tourism was founded to manage the growing number of visitors. In 1990, the Norwegian government's White Paper encouraged tourism development (Viken & Jørgensen, 1998) alongside research and education as ways to diversify economic activity in Svalbard. Through the 1990s, tourism grew as part of this approach. Much of this new tourism was 'adventure' or 'wildlife' based with many organising their own tours, attracted to the "mysterious", "somewhat risky", "end of the world" explorations (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004).

There was early recognition of the need to manage and plan for recreational activities. Strong environmental protection measures were developing alongside tourist provisions and other commercial interests (Kaltenborn & Emmelin, 1993). The challenges this posed then, such as the complex legal regime surrounding the Svalbard Treaty and local administration, limited resources, policing remote areas, cultural values such as the right to roam and the differences in access for visitors and residents (see Saville, 2019) are still at work, though in a different context and manner. Indeed, there are echoes of similar concerns now as to whether there is sufficient control over the present-day tourism volumes and how management of leisure activities and increasingly stringent environmental protection goals can be reconciled (Kaltenborn & Emmelin, 1993; Viken & Jørgensen, 1998).

In the next two decades, tourism flourished and became enshrined in the approach to asserting Norwegian presence through economic activity in Svalbard as set out in its White Papers and accompanying governance practices. Tourist operations became more formalised, professional and numerous (see Viken & Jørgensen, 1998 and Fig. 1). The Svalbard Reiseliv, now Visit Svalbard, became the 'destination management organisation'. Acting as the coordinating industry body, and voluntary membership organisation for tourism services, Visit Svalbard also operates the tourist information office in Longyearbyen and main web portal. Mid 2010s, tourism in the Russian settlements of Barentsburg and Pyramiden, previously limited to external operators bringing tourists on day trips via boat or snowmobile, started to develop with the Russian mining company, Trust Arktikugol founding their own tourism spin-off, Arctic Travel Company Grumant (ATCG). Hotels at both towns were renovated, tour guides employed and a new tourism drive initiated with tour packages

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aimed at Russian and Eastern European markets, longer stays and expanding their services. In 2019, ATCG reported 36000 visitors (Visit Svalbard, 2020).

Common winter/spring tourism attractions and activities include snow mobile excursions, Northern Lights watching, dog-sled trips, glacier hiking and ice-cave visits as well as skiing and snow-boarding. The summer season includes large cruise boat visits and smaller expedition cruises. Day boat trips to see glaciers and the Russian settlements of Barentsburg and Pyramiden are popular, and kayaking trips are becoming more common. Onshore, the 24 h daylight offers lots of possibilities for hiking and wildlife photography. Across the year, 'city break' style trips to Longyearbyen and the close surroundings have been developed as a specific sub-market. Events such as the Polar Blues, Polar Jazz and a growing number of other festivals entice a smaller number of visitors within the dark season when the above activities are more limited. More structured use of mining infrastructure as a tourist attraction is also expanding: tours to the site at Svea were popular, and there is now a guided tour experience near Longyearbyen at Mine 3.

By 2016, employment in tourism was at nearly 40% in the Norwegian towns, being the largest employment sector, and for the first time accounted for more economic activity than mining (Statistics Norway, 2016). Between 2015 and 2018, two new hotels, one guesthouse in Longyearbyen and one hostel in Barentsburg, were opened, and tourism intensified both at sea and on land. As Figure 1 illustrates, between 2014 and 2015, cruise tourist visits ashore rose by 40% and remain at a high level. Guest arrivals in Longyearbyen have increased by 45% between 2014 and 2018. Growth in non-cruise tourism is limited by the number of guest beds and flights available. Further expansion will depend on either granting permission through building regulations and local area plans or an increase in private rentals.

Summer cruise tourism is a significant sector, making up over 40% of visitor numbers to Svalbard in 2018. Cruise seasons are lengthening as Svalbard waters stay ice free for longer. Conventional cruise liners carrying up to 6000 passengers per voyage accounted for approximately 45000 visitors in 2018 (Epinion, 2019). Whereas the smaller expedition cruise vessels generally have between 12 and 300 passengers and attracted over 17000 passengers in the same year (ibid). Despite their lower numbers, expedition cruisers bring far more income to the Longyearbyen economy: studies commissioned for the Association of Arctic Cruise Operators (AECO) estimate the per passenger contribution to be more than five times as much as conventional cruise passengers and overall, expedition cruises make up two thirds of the cruise tourism income (Epinion, 2019). Conventional cruise tourism generates significantly more greenhouse gas emissions than flights, and high passenger numbers present infrastructural challenges. Recent regulations and management decisions can offer potential for restricting such cruises. For example, the Norwegian government ban on Heavy Fuel Oil use in protected areas, which is set to be extended to the whole of Svalbard; the 2017 Polar Code requires specialist polar training for navigational staff, enhanced safety equipment and limits waste discharges. Further, in 2019, Longyearbyen Port doubled its port fees for larger ships. However, it is likely a more proactive approach will be needed if significant decreases in ship visits is desired.

The decline of Norwegian mining, arrived far more quickly and suddenly than most foresaw. In 2017, the final decision was taken to permanently close the largest Norwegian coal mines, leaving only Mine 7 active, its coal still used to fuel Longyearbyen, with planned closure within the decade. The mass exodus from Longyearbyen that some envisioned as a result of downsized mining and worries that tourism was not sufficient to sustain the community, have subsided to more long-term concerns around the role and impact of tourism in Svalbard. The rapid increased development of tourism in Longyearbyen and continuation of Svalbard as the most frequent destination for cruise tourism in the Arctic (Bystrowska & Dawson, 2017) led to concern and calls for improved research, strategy, management and sustainability. The travel restrictions and cruise cancellations brought by the Covid-19 global pandemic served as an extreme reminder of how reliant on tourism the Archipelago had become and exposed the economic and social vulnerabilities that such a reliance entails. It has also further ignited local debates on how tourism in Svalbard can move forwards positively. This article seeks to likewise reflect on this question.

Methods

Research undertaken between 2012 and 2016, utilised mixed methods, with the greater emphasis being on qualitative research. The goal was to examine systems of value in Svalbard with particular attention to nature–culture relationships. During fieldtrips in 2013, 2014 and 2015, semi-structured, wide-ranging interviews were conducted with over 70 Svalbard residents and stakeholders. Witnessing the importance of tourism, a small-scale survey ($n = 55$) was designed to capture motivations and impressions of visitors, in addition to the tourist industry personnel included in the interview co-hort. Ethnographic tourism experiences also informed the research, both from the perspective of being a temporary tour guide, and as a 'tourist', as did focus groups with those who have previously visited Svalbard.

The resulting gathered materials consisted of photographs, field notes, policy documents, survey results, promotional materials from tourist companies and other institutions, audio files from interviews and focus groups. These were transcribed and thematically coded. In 2019, I returned to Longyearbyen for a multi-purpose fieldtrip to engage with feedback from previous research findings and to research community adaptation to and experiences of the rapid changes vis a vis mine closures, avalanches and increased tourism. This resulted in 20 additional semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations, in which tourism featured heavily as a theme. Recent news, policy and related literature as well as observations of local community online discussion events, also inform the latest round of research. Tourism has been key to discussions within several of the Longyearbyen Community Dialogue forum meetings held by LPO Architects and the Svalbard Social Science Initiative during 2020.

In the following analysis, I am guided by the questions: how has the changing role of tourism been experienced and how do these experiences connect with value frameworks? Gathered materials have been re-visited and re-coded in finer granulation to focus on overarching trends, changes, relationships and tensions surrounding tourism in Longyearbyen. As a researcher, I seek to respond to recent requests (Ikonen & Sokolíčková, 2020) to develop the knowledge base of Svalbard's tourism in order to inform policy, regulations and guidelines that can better enable the 'optimal balance' of tourism with the environmental and socio-economic impacts it has and the search and rescue requirements needed. I also strive to positively affect a place I have come to know through an embodied, human engagement.

Although I argue the case for including 'value-mapping' exercises within discussions over tourism development, this is by no

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means an exercise of objective measurement with a readily definable methodology or fixed outcome. Rather, the research approach is infused with a sensibility and sensitivity towards value from the outset, where value and values are conceptualised as fluid, relational and not always easy to trace. Value leads us to questions of what is perceived as important? What matters, who does it matter to in what ways? What action – collective or individual – does that lead to? As such, value is at work in society through politics, culture, practice, decision making processes and more (see Saville & Hoskins, 2020).

Sustaining tourism?

This literature review brings relevant Arctic, Nordic, Polar and Svalbard tourism scholarship into conversation. Following Saarinen and Varnajot (2019) in their goal of improving sustainability in Arctic tourism, I aim to provide a 'holistic' standpoint that does not privilege the perspectives of either production (the tourism industry) nor consumption (tourist experiences). Tourism practices in Svalbard are embedded within and inseparable from the dynamic context of global socio-environmental change.

Urry and Larsen note that tourism is, at its core "about consuming goods and services which are in some sense unnecessary" (2011, p.1). The Covid-19 pandemic has shown, however, that although tourism is rarely essential, a sudden stop to an industry that is so integrated into worldwide systems has dire knock on effects to employment and economies reliant on it (Fletcher et al., 2020), Svalbard now being one of them. Sustainable tourism is oft touted as a viable, 'soft' development option, yet 'sustainability' in this sector is highly questionable. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO 2005). Whilst the sustainable tourism research paradigm is now vast, putting such concepts into practice is proving difficult, resulting in "little if any evidence of progress" (Sharpley, 2020, p.1933). Hall (2019) argues the sector as a whole has been reticent to consider approaches beyond the hegemonic neoliberal discourse and management strategies that privilege growth. Here, Svalbard is an interesting case in that tourism has grown alongside strong environmental protection governance and desire for sustainability yet has assumed some of this growth narrative in the drive to diversify the economy from its previous reliance on coal.

Research outputs from the maturing sub-discipline of polar tourism have tended to focus on cruise tourism, management and climate change (Stewart et al., 2017), all of which are relevant to Svalbard. The majority of research about Svalbard's tourism has covered its management and development (Hovelsrud et al., 2020; Kaltenborn & Emmelin, 1993; Viken, 2006), its relationship with research, and the ongoing development of environmental regulation (Hagen et al., 2012; Hovelsrud et al., 2021; Nyseth & Viken, 2016; Viken, 2011; Saville, 2020). The impact of tourism, especially on cultural heritage has also been studied (Holmgaard et al., 2019; Roura, 2009, 2011). More recently, the importance of expedition cruises has been recognised with increasing numbers of studies examining this sector (Bets et al., 2017; Bystrowska & Dawson, 2017; Bystrowska et al., 2017).

Having no indigenous population, high levels of environmental protection, yet established, if somewhat transient, cosmopolitan communities and research stations, Svalbard shares commonalities with both Antarctica and other Arctic tourism destinations. It is at once an exceptional, yet accessible place to experience the general "attributes that define the polar regions – geographic isolation, unique wildlife, snow and ice landscapes, a legacy of human exploration and habitation" and where "pleasure, adventure [and] education" can be enjoyed (Stewart et al., 2017, p.60). Gyimóthy and Mykletun (2004) provide insights into adventure tourists' experiences of risk, play and challenge in Svalbard and how these connect with discourses of masculine explorer-heroes. Whereas Lindberg and Eide (2016) provide an important counter-narrative that demonstrates not all Arctic tourists enjoy the extreme. The combination of regional development policies encouraging tourist season extension, interest in climate change, media and political attention in 'the Arctic' produce simplified imaginaries of the region as an "adventure playground" or cold winter wonderland (Lundmark et al., 2020; Müller & Viken, 2017). This process of 'Arctification' attracts growing numbers of tourists who are not always looking for a physically challenging expedition, but an 'exotic', pleasurable, holiday. Over time, tourism activities in Svalbard have adjusted accordingly to cater for 'softer' or faster options accessible to a wider range of visitors.

> "*People get hooked on this extreme part. You put Arctic in front of something, everyone goes crazy for it . . . but I get the impression that people come away with a wrong idea about what Svalbard is . . . They sell their trips on the extreme, and it's literally just drive out of town on a snow mobile on a pre-prepared track and then drive back again, so there's nothing extreme about it, it's almost a lie, but then isn't that what all tourism is?*"
>
> (Interview, 2014)

The frequently visiting researcher quoted above laments the adrenaline-soaked impressions that students and tourists visiting Svalbard can be left with as inauthentic and misleading. Yet, seeking extraordinary experiences that contrast to everyday life can also lead to opportunities to learn and reflect within and about inspirational environments. Indeed, Antarctic and increasingly, Arctic, tourist operators and management bodies lean on the potential for increasing attitudes of environmental stewardship or creating Arctic/climate ambassadors to justify the high environmental cost of bringing tourists to remote polar locations. Evidence to support such effects is scant and inconclusive (Eijgelaar et al., 2010; Font & Hindley, 2017; Groulx et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2020; Powell et al., 2008). However, as discussed later, the wider sentiment of experiencing Arctic nature is seen as an important educational and transformational opportunity for visitors to Svalbard (see also Saville, 2019). Whilst Svalbard is not promoted explicitly as a 'Last Chance' tourism destination (Johnston et al., 2012), it is associated with polar bears (Dybsand, 2020), climate change and 'pristine wilderness' (Kelman et al., 2012). There is emerging evidence that some tourists *are* motivated by 'last chances' to witness Svalbard before climate change reduces its Arctic features (Aldao & Mihalic, 2020).

Overtourism and degrowth

The negative impacts of tourism have a long research history. The combination of tourism growth strategies as well as the heightening mobility of both capital and people, are increasingly associated with rising inequality and at times, resistance. 'Overtourism' is a relatively recent concept commonly associated with cities such as Barcelona, Rio de Janeiro or Dubrovnik. The insights overtourism brings to power relations, management and governance issues stretch across many more tourism contexts, including within the

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Arctic (Lundmark et al., 2020). Though not a precise term, all definitions of overtourism incorporate negative experiences, which lead to host communities becoming less amenable to, or able to cope with, tourism. Destinations suffering overtourism are associated with problems such as over-crowding and strained infrastructures; housing pressures and increased costs of living; disruption to resident's lifestyle, well-being and sense of place; increased crime and disturbances from noise and substance abuse; environmental deterioration and poor waste management (Martín Martín et al., 2018; Milano et al., 2019; Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019). Causal factors are often "explosive growth of cruise tourism, the rapid growth in numbers of seasonal and day visitors … and the mainstreaming of special and niche tourism practices in vulnerable places (national parks, small islands and critical cultural heritage places)" (Milano et al., 2019, p.355). We can observe almost all of these drivers and indicators in Longyearbyen.

Some scholars, and certainly the UNWTO, present overtourism as a management challenge, rather than an outcome of increased tourism: "the problem is about governance and not tourism itself, and about planning and management and the extent to which communities remain amenable to tourism" (Cheer et al., 2019, p.556). In the words of one Longyearbyen resident, "Tourism is positive if you can handle it. If you cannot handle it, it's a bad thing" (Interview, 2014). Here, the response logically moves to analysing various destination carrying capacities: ecological, socio-cultural, psychological, to find strategies that can bring tourism back within acceptable thresholds. However, others argue it is the pursuit of growth that fundamentally needs addressing (Hall, 2019; Oklevik et al., 2019).

In the context of climate and biodiversity emergencies, rising overtourism and the Covid-19 pandemic, an increasing number of tourism scholars are turning towards degrowth (Fletcher et al., 2020). Degrowth is a diverse movement and wide-ranging concept that challenges the primacy of economic growth as a way of structuring society. It acts as a conceptual space hosting multiple alternative imaginaries and shifts in values and valuation systems towards, for example, decreased consumption, conviviality and 'frugal abundance' (Demaria et al., 2019; González & Espelt, 2020). Engaging with degrowth ideas could be a way to transform tourism relations. So far, degrowth has been applied as a means to address overtourism (Lundmark et al., 2021) by *optimising* rather than maximising tourist volumes and re-centring the needs of local host communities (Carson & Carson, 2021; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). However, as González and Espelt (2020) show, even in small communities, there are divergent experiences, expectations and values associated with tourism. Degrowth values such as increased autonomy, care and conviviality can be aligned with some aspects of tourism, meaning there is little will to decrease the volume of tourism, but tourism can also increase consumption, resource use and reduce local empowerment (ibid.).

Degrowth could be especially compatible with Svalbard's local tourism operators. As Margaryan et al. (2021) show, small business owners of Swedish and Norwegian nature-based tourism firms are often not primarily motivated to maximise profits. Instead, they aim to provide tourists with good quality, educational experiences of nature. Margaryan *et al.* identify these tourist firms as engaged in 'lifestyle entrepreneurialism' in which values and personal goals prioritise "the ability to live in a specific area (often remote and peripheral), to work outdoors, to be physically active in nature, to meet like-minded people, to be independent and to be able to contribute to local sustainability" (2021, p.44). Although research into lifestyle entrepreneurialism has not yet been undertaken in Svalbard, observations and perspectives from the sector (Andersen & Rolland, 2018) indicate that at least some firms and guides operating there share these values.

Tourism and value

A value lens can shed light on the frameworks of importance that pervade everyday life, decision making processes and evaluative systems. Locating value and its effects – where value is treated as a relational, contingent, political, but often invisible, practice – can help to make sense of and potentially address sources of conflict and tension. Analysing tourism using a value(s) perspective is gaining traction. Using a 'moral terrains' approach, Grimwood (2015) challenges totalising narratives of Arctic 'nature' and 'wilderness' as pristine or primitive by working with more relational and embodied tourism practices and values. Flemsæter et al. (2015) expose the normative power of *Friluftsliv* (outdoor citizenship) and its unequal consequences for what is morally acceptable or contested behaviour within Norwegian outdoor spaces. In their study of conflicting perspectives on the future of tourism in Norway's Lofoten Islands, Lindberg et al (2019) show how different value references (orders of worth) are utilised by different groups in a dynamic ongoing negotiation whereby different actors employ the appropriate discourse to make their case. A values perspective is used also to differentiate between emotional, economic, functional and social factors that feed in to expedition cruise operators' decisions over where to land around Svalbard (Bystrowska & Dawson, 2017).

These works, despite using value in different ways, all share the perspective that tourism 'destinations' are not a fixed product that can be defined by the tourism industry but are in process. Moreover, that current narratives of sustainable tourism limited to simplified 'triple bottom lines' of economic, social and environmental costs and benefits, miss the more complex negotiations, which encompass wider political, emotional, moral and cultural registers of value. In the analysis that follows I pay attention to overt systems of value practiced in connection with tourism in Longyearbyen as well as underlying value frameworks and hierarchies. In mapping this complex terrain of value I make the case for including a transparent discussion on underlying values in ongoing planning and consultations for future tourism management.

Tracing change and continuity

2015 was the year when smaller tourist businesses "started to flourish" (Tourism sector interview, 2019). In March, an unusually high number of visitors came to Svalbard hoping to see a total eclipse of the sun. 2015 also saw the launch of Visit Svalbard's tourism 'masterplan' for 2025. This strategy focusses on increasing employment in the sector, sustainable tourism growth in and around Longyearbyen and aimed to produce a more year-round industry through diversification of 'products' and targeted marketing (Brunvoll, Pedersen, & Jervarn, 2015). Recent years in Longyearbyen have seen profound change, with tourism rising alongside avalanche events, continued climate change adaptations and decreased mining. As Kaltenborn et al (2020) posit, constant change – of public values, climate, economy and geopolitical relations – may be on Svalbard's horizon. However, many value frameworks are persistent through time, shifting, morphing or coagulating slowly. Some of the changes observed in tourism can be seen as a continuation and deepening of trends and discourses which were already present. Longyearbyen's high population turnover brings an added dimension of varied baselines to

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perceptions of change. Who and what counts as tourist identities or activities is not easily segregated (Viken, 2011; Saville, 2019), which underlies and complicates the following discussion. Nevertheless, four themes presented below illustrate how Longyearbyen's relationship with tourism is developing, and how tourism is entangled within key systems of value at work in Svalbard.

Diversification

Between 2013 and 2016, many participants spoke of the need to further diversify Svalbard's economy in preparation for a decline in mining. "There is a common understanding that you can't build a society on only 2 pillars . . . " (Interview, 2014), and the dominant discourse was Longyearbyen has three pillars: mining, tourism and science/education. This is certainly an over-simplification as it discounts satellite communications activities as well as public and cultural sectors. However, it was assumed that if the mining pillar were to collapse or be removed, something should replace it for the community to remain viable. Moreover, that it would be preferable, according to some views, geopolitically, if that replacement were something with more material presence than tourism, as long-term resident connected to the coal industry explained.

> "*In real politics, it's not a question of just being here and doing something. It's also what you have invested. What's* ***at stake****. And then having an industrial presence here in Svalbard is very important, not just lightweight science and tourism. . . . when push comes to shove and people, nations, start to fight over the resources, then credibility and investments, both morally and you know, materially, are very decisive factors.*" (Interview, 2014).

The re-development of Longyearbyen's port and harbour area conceived as an Arctic logistics hub is one such idea that continues to be explored with support from the Norwegian parliament (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, 2016; Nyman et al., 2020).

Up until the arrival of Covid-19, the continued growth in Longyearbyen's population despite the minimal mining activity or an industrial replacement has challenged this narrative to some extent, there is "no concern now about the community fading away without coal" according to a long-term tourism-connected resident (Interview, 2019). However, pre-Covid-19, there was already recognition that "tourism is a very fragile industry" (Tourism-sector interview, 2019), profitable only thanks to state support and funding (Long-term resident scientist interview, 2019) and that further diversification should be encouraged (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, 2016). Due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, although flights, hotels and some tours were able to operate in the 2020 summer season, activity was extremely limited. Tourism and service companies in Longyearbyen suffered large losses despite Norwegian government support packages (Bårdseth, 2020b). Many people left the settlement. It is, therefore, no surprise Community Dialogue meetings raised the need for not only greater sustainability within tourism but also "more legs to stand on" besides tourism.

The heavy leanings towards an economic framing within this discursive theme reverberate within local and national media, governmental statements, policies and everyday parlance. Economic revenues from tourism are crucial to the small- and medium-sized businesses in Longyearbyen, and therefore, numerous Svalbardian families and individuals, however, more is at stake. Just as coal mining was rarely only about resource extraction (Avango et al., 2011), tourism is not merely a revenue stream. Geopolitics are important here, tourism and its value locally is bound up within the nation-states desire for a resilient Norwegian community in Svalbard. Yet, as Brode-Roger (this issue) details, insecurities surrounding the status of Norwegian sovereignty in Svalbard go beyond the scale of the nation-state, permeating everyday life. Norwegian and Russian tourism managers are keen to point out that their destinations should not be competing but can support each other's growth. However, these relations are couched within wider geopolitical undercurrents. As Timothy (2010) shows, government support for both Norwegian and Russian tourism activity is significant. Tourism is clearly an important development for each to assert their sovereignty as mining becomes less dominant.

Value associated with coal mining diversifies as barracks become guest houses and mine shafts turn into museums. Mining's value is no longer combustible but drawn from the stories that cling to its extractive infrastructure. The materiality of mining is still important, its remains now acting to intrigue tourists and differentiate Longyearbyen from other Arctic destinations. Coal mining is woven into the town and its inhabitants' identities, memories, inter-relationships, and built environment, but those values are not static, they morph, support and seep into other fields, including tourism. In this way, value latches onto time through both material cultural heritage preservation and presence, and memorial practices of museums and storytelling.

Time and transience

> "*People working in tourism are coming and going and tourists are coming and going.*
>
> *[SS] So coal mining is more stable?*
>
> *Yes . . . if you look at the society of Longyearbyen you have people [who have] been here for a generation, they are all connected with coal mining.*" (Long term resident interview, 2014).

Longyearbyen is recognised as a transient town, with around 20% of the population turning over each year (Statistics Norway, 2016). Many public service positions are fixed-term contracts, with employees often taking sabbaticals from their regular Norwegian mainland jobs to work in Svalbard. Although there are now long-term residents without connection to the mining industry, the previous mainstay of the economy could offer *some* long-term stability, which contrasts with the flux of seasonal, short-term, insecure contracts of the tourist industry. If tourist guides, hotel and restaurant staff *are* inclined and able to settle in Svalbard, they tend to have less leisure time, less disposable income and are more likely to be 'non-Norwegian'. This means cultural and leisure activities supported by previously more stable employment, are beginning to suffer. The Longyearbyen population share a strong affinity with Svalbard (Kaltenborn, 1998; Olsen et al., 2020). Yet, whilst some are very engaged in local politics and civic activities (Olsen et al., 2020), this is not universal. Residents are increasingly siloed: separated over language, access to housing, social security rights and income (Sokolíčková this issue). The economic relief measures to support workers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic has furthered these inequalities as many non-EU/EEA citizens did not qualify. The newly realised avalanche and permafrost safety risks have significantly reduced the supply of housing. Tourism workers struggle to find accommodation in this reduced market where much housing stock is held by other employers, competing too with tourists who can provide landlords with higher rents.

In this context and dependant on unpredictable tourist flows, tourism work is often unstable and far more likely to be of a shorter term or seasonal nature. Again, value and time are related here. Length of residency is a key element of social capital in Longyearbyen, where the intent to stick around can be rewarded

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with the emotional investment of friendship and community. Tourism workers can thus be at several disadvantages. Additionally, from a Norwegian state perspective, tourism is less than ideal as an employment sector: workers will likely have less time to participate in community activities; and tourism attracts larger proportions of international workers.

"The Government's aim is for Longyearbyen to remain a viable local community that is attractive to families and helps to achieve and sustain the overriding objectives of the Svalbard policy" by "maintaining Norwegian communities in the archipelago" (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, 2016, p.39).

As Pedersen argues, increasing internationalisation "represent[s] a formidable foreign and security policy challenge" (2017, p.101) to the state's goal of maintaining a *Norwegian* community. The non-discriminatory principles of the Svalbard Treaty support perceptions of Svalbard as being an international place. The growing non-Norwegian population reinforces this understanding: 31% of Longyearbyen and Ny Ålesund's inhabitants hail from over 50 different countries (Statistics Norway, 2020). Whereas recently announced plans (Ministry of Justice and Emergency Preparedness, 2021) to limit local voting rights in Longyearbyen to those with three years residency in mainland Norway, evidence the state's intent to curtail such internationalisation.

Increasing internationalisation can also be challenging to some of the longer term residents of Longyearbyen, as a long-term, non-Norwegian resident describes:

> "*The old Svalbard, it's a Norwegian … rendering of this adventure/company town. Having more and more foreigners, and being more and more based on the outside world through research and tourism, it means a lot of researchers with foreign names and funny accents and different skin colour, come here … More tourists come … The Chinese market is booming still. It's not the self-reliant place anymore that just dug some coal out of the mountain and shipped it off …. It's more interconnected, more international, more of a multi-national place. And people resent it.*"
>
> (Interview, 2019)

Sokolíčková's (2021) work evidences this view – tourists can encounter xenophobic discrimination. The rising number of Chinese tourists visiting is a 'market segment' that exposes gaps in cultural and linguistic understanding leaving Chinese tourists to be considered some of the most "painful" to encounter as a resident (ibid.) There is in fact an unwritten hierarchy of value associated with different kinds of tourists. The least "painful" or optimal tourist is assumed to be Scandinavian or perhaps Northern European rather than Chinese or American. They should be "knowledgeable, genuinely interested in Svalbard, willing to spend money and stay longer … than the current [average of] 2.4 days" (Ikonen & Sokolíčková, 2020, p.26). This is another example of how value can 'stick' to time. Not only are short trips, such as conventional cruises less likely to generate high revenues, these visits are not sufficient to share the full 'Svalbard experience' or go beyond sightseeing and bucket-listing – taking photographs and ticking Svalbard off their list but having a very minimal engagement with the place. Guides cherish longer camping trips and tours where visitors can fully disconnect from their normal life and be immersed and enchanted by the landscape.

Embracing different kinds of tourists and tourism has contributed to increased visitor numbers in the dark season on the pathway to what is seen as a more 'sustainable' year-round business in the previous tourism masterplan (Brunvoll et al., 2015). Working on different communication, information and host–tourist relationships will be needed to overcome current conflicts in this endeavour. Expecting tourist behaviours and impacts to be solely positive or morally 'good' is perhaps unrealistic (Butcher, 2003), especially for short trips. However, many *do* see value – economic, cultural and ethical – at least in some forms of tourism.

Perks and principles

Across the study period, many residents retain a tolerance of, if not enthusiasm for, tourism due to the services and opportunities that tourists support.

> "*How many planes would come up here, what would the prices be, if it wasn't for the tourists? How many restaurants and pubs would there be in Longyearbyen? So the people coming up here, [are] keeping the shops alive, the restaurants alive. It's a vital place. … If it had only been the people staying up here, maybe you would have one pub, one sports shop, maybe.*"
>
> (Tourism sector interview, 2014).
>
> "*Usually I don't talk to tourists, I try to get away from them ….there's a lot of entertainment, 600 people in the town, the challenge to get back and from work, but I have to try to look on the bright side and smile, and think, 'hope you leave a lot of money' things like that.*"
>
> (Non-tourism sector resident interview, 2014).

That the small town supports a large number of services and community activities relative to 'ordinary' Norwegian towns and villages is considered an important attraction for the families that the Norwegian state wishes to move there. Tourists can also be seen as a source of entertainment, as a fascinating phenomenon to observe, tell amusing stories about and occasionally interact with. Indeed, some residents actively enjoy this and have participated in a scheme where those willing to be approached by tourists wore an 'ask me' badge. As a long-term Norwegian resident reflects, "it's nice to tell your story and tell them about Svalbard. I mean the tourists will get a really good experience if they get to meet local people" (Interview, 2015).

The value of transformative and educational tourism experiences provides another vector of support for tourism. Although some lament the environmental impact of tourists travelling to Svalbard, many are passionate about providing access to 'wilderness' and the possibilities of creating, if not Arctic or Svalbard ambassadors, then at least people who care.

> "*It's very important that people experience this area and learn about it and learn about the danger of destroying it … to spread this out to the whole world.*" (Environmental sector interview, 2014).
>
> "*The type of tourism we have, eco-tourism you could call it, I place quite a lot of value in it and this is a key corner stone of conservation management. We can only make sure that measures will be put in place and will be sustained if there is consistent public opinion behind it, and if there are enough people that care deeply about this.*"
>
> (Resident environmental researcher interview, 2014).
>
> "*My biggest goal is to create new friends of the Arctic nature … I just want them to take the time to really feel the place, this is a totally different place. I want them to have enough time to sit down and breath and just take it all in with more than their camera … I want it to mean something.*"
>
> (Tourist guide interview, 2014)

The ability to viscerally experience such environments, may inspire a desire for more sustainable human–nature relations, action on climate change and care for the environment. On the one hand, evidence to support tangible pro-environmental behavioural change connected to such tourism is patchy (see above). The re-connection to nature approach runs the risk of reifying the nature–culture binary: the exotic, harsh and exceptional wilderness as a potent contrast to more everyday nature–culture relations (Fletcher, 2017; Picard, 2015). Additionally, there is potential to

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equate the provision of 'wilderness experiences' with sustainability and, therefore, abdicate further environmental and ethical responsibilities (Bårdseth, 2020a; Sivertsen, 2020). On the other hand; the environmental education sphere largely subscribes to the positive benefits of nature-based experiences (cf. Fletcher, 2017). Spending time in 'nature' corresponds to several axiological notions: the 'transformative' values of 'nature' (Takacs, 1996), 'inspirational orders of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) or emotional attachments to and humanistic valuation of aspects of 'nature' (Kellert, 1996). A common phrase when discussing environmental protection in Svalbard is "you protect what you love/know". Many Arctic (Manley et al., 2017) and Svalbard tourists, are motivated by and seek out educational experiences, particularly related to climate change (Tourism sector interview 2019, survey data 2014).

Some residents and scientific visitors, recognise their relative privilege at being able to spend time in Svalbard's wilderness. They are keen to see that – so long as sensible management of numbers, safety and environmental impact is upheld – fair access for others is also possible. Indeed, unbeknownst to most tourists, their rights to visit are being defended in ongoing consultations on the management of protected areas (Nyseth & Viken, 2016; Saville, 2020). Defining both ecological carrying capacities and levels of culturally acceptable change from 'pristine' is important to establish what 'sensible' means here. Without this, further tensions over the evidence base for access restrictions are likely. Indeed, the current proposals for new tourism regulations under consultation (Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2021) are being disputed by several local tourism bodies.

The development of urban-centred cultural tourist experiences could limit environmental impact on protected areas and further increase the number of visitors in the off-peak dark season. This could address the social instabilities for tourism workers. Yet, if such experiences continue to be marketed towards short city breaks, this misaligns with the longer tourist experience guides and other stakeholders value and want to encourage (Ikonen & Sokolíčková, 2020). The brief, more superficial engagement with Svalbard reinforces a sentiment that these are less justifiable travel emissions, bringing into question whether this kind of tourism is welcome.

Not just a nuisance

Tourists are the subject of many "tourists behaving badly" Svalbard tales, featuring their various inappropriate and unpopular tendencies. As tourism has grown in scale, these have multiplied, with flashpoints particularly around photographing children or seeking out polar bears. To address these issues, Visit Svalbard, AECO and local residents co-produced Longyearbyen Community Guidelines that advise against the most troublesome tourist traits. The cumulative effects of these nuisances make overtourism now relevant to Longyearbyen. One factor is increased incidents of theft. Already in 2014, residents felt that their safe, close-knit community, was slipping away. In 2019, this remained a key concern and the Governor's office began routine police patrols whenever more than 2000 cruise passengers were due ashore.

> "*Actually I hate tourists. . . . they buy nothing, nothing. They would even steal what they can, postcards, whatever they can fit into their pockets . . .*" (Long-term resident and business owner interview, 2014).
>
> "*When I came here, maybe it was because it was a bit before Facebook, but the feeling was that there was less stuff that gets stolen. Now you hear of people getting their sledges stolen, and their stuff stolen, cameras, from cars. . . . Then people have to start locking their cars and doors. When I came up here I never locked any doors.*" (Tourism-sector interview, 2015).

Crime was also connected with the increasingly 'part-time' society of seasonal workers with insecure or no contracts. There are also safety concerns. Since the Norwegian airline service was reintroduced in 2014, cheaper flights have meant more tourists can afford to come to Svalbard. A lower cost holiday can be arranged by centring on independent activities, for example hiring snowmobiles rather than joining organised tours. This is more risky, assuming most tourists do not have prior local experience. Moreover, in the event of an emergency, large numbers of tourists represent a challenge for the very limited local response services. A further worry is an increase in non-local tourist operators that are not registered with the voluntary standards of AECO or Visit Svalbard and do not have experience operating in Svalbard. These 'rogue' or 'cowboy' companies are less likely to have well-trained guides and appropriate safety procedures or equipment. Although the 2018 Tourism regulations require companies to have "sufficient and relevant knowledge, expertise and experience" the practicalities of assessing guide and operator competence has been challenging (Tourism-sector interview, 2019). Hence, new companies can be a risk to tourists' safety and to the Svalbard destination 'brand'. AECO and Visit Svalbard run guide training, and since 2010 the University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS) have offered a year-long Arctic Nature Guide course, but to date, training has not been compulsory.

Longer term operators are generally aware of the need to limit their environmental impact as "it's very important that they don't destroy their product – because the product here is untouched wilderness" (Interview, 2015). Whereas non-local operators are reportedly less environmentally responsible and more interested in generating short-term profit. The environmental impact of tourism has been a long-term consideration, enshrined within policy and wilderness area management plans as well as everyday narratives. In 2014, some tourism sector workers worried tourism was approaching the "the border of what is acceptable" culturally and that increasing numbers were "impacting nature more and more". In 2019, these sentiments were still present and becoming more vocal. Protest signs greeted some cruise passengers with the message, in German, "Your holiday melts 12 square metres of my home" accompanied by a soft toy polar bear. Most stakeholders concede that tourism on Svalbard cannot be considered 'sustainable' due to the climate footprint of travel to and from Svalbard (Dvorak, 2019). Efforts have been made to improve environmental performance within Longyearbyen through gaining Norwegian Sustainable Destination certification between 2016 and 2019. The protected 'wilderness' areas are regulated via area plans and the Svalbard Environment Act. The Governor's Office employ inspection patrols to protect cultural heritage, minimise wildlife disturbance and environmental impact. Due to the vast area, these are not always effective and require tourist and operator co-operation to achieve their goals.

Added to these issues are seemingly mundane problems for which there are solutions but will require significant investment: lack of public toilets, walkways, signage, and appropriate waste disposal. Although some new facilities have been built recently at the port, these are still insufficient for the needs of the thousands of passengers that are distributed through the town in the summer season. Sewage and organic waste in Longyearbyen is discharged untreated into the fjord with refuse and recycling shipped back to the mainland, an in-ideal system to which large increases in

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volumes makes significant impacts. The numbers of visitors ashore at once, especially if two conventional cruise ships are docked on the same day, not only puts pressure on the local infrastructure but also downgrades visitors' experiences, as one guest explains:

"I was happy to be in Longyearbyen while it was relatively uncrowded. On our last day multiple cruise ships were in town. It was not pleasant . . . . the facilities are not really able to handle that many people" (Svalbard Visitor Survey, 2018).

Due to their large capacities, conventional cruise visits are the main 'culprit' here. Local newspaper Svalbardposten ran a survey in 2018 indicating that 60% of readers would like conventional cruise tourism to cease (Sievers, 2018). Smaller expedition cruise operators are also starting to find Svalbard waters crowded (Bystrowska & Dawson, 2017). Although Svalbard remains a popular expedition destination as the area offers all the attractions tourists are interested in, "the most difficult thing is nowadays to avoid other ships" (tour operator quoted in Bystrowska & Dawson, 2017, p.218). There are some additional concerns that tourism is inflating prices and products are becoming increasingly geared to the tourism market rather than for local consumers (Research sector interview, 2019).

As Lindberg et al. (2019) recognise, multiple motivations and entangled frames of value operate at the individual and communal scales. The above themes illustrate there are recognised benefits and positive discourses surrounding tourism, but indicators for 'overtourism' are also present. Visit Svalbard acknowledge that they have "something to work on with the locals" perceptions of tourism (Interview, 2019). The themes have also revealed that in many ways value is sticky to time. The problems and benefits discussed above are generally part of longer term value frameworks. Tourism offers a way to derive different kinds of value from coal mining and the cultural services tourism enables contribute to some important community values. Moreover, several tensions within tourism can be seen to revolve around time and the value placed on duration of stay in Svalbard. Stable employment, housing and working conditions can support longer residency, stronger cultural engagement and community cohesion – but these are often lacking within the tourism sector. Similarly, the immersive, transformative educational experiences of nature-based tourism are better cultivated over longer trips, yet short stays are currently the norm.

Turning tides

There is clearly appetite for increased management of tourism consolidated by the stark impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The overriding narrative in Longyearbyen and messages from Oslo is that an updated strategy and management tools need to be devised and implemented.

> "*It's obvious to anyone looking that tourism is growing in Svalbard, and it needs to be managed. I think we'll see more management tools applied. I also think there's a great work going on that will help to . . . close the gap between what's available and what's needed to ensure that we are doing the right thing.*" (Tourism sector interview, 2019).

Changing and ambiguous support and management mechanisms, policies and narratives at multiple levels undermine the 'pillar' of tourism. Hence, the management structure of tourism in Svalbard is a vital consideration. There appears to be a governance gap between national directorates, the Governor's office, local council, Visit Svalbard and other actors. The Governor's office have limited person-hours dedicated to the regulatory side of tourism. Visit Svalbard is clearly important and is trying to build community links, but as an industry representative and membership organisation with a clear mandate to promote and market Svalbard as a destination, its role is not neutral. It is also limited in power to influence and implement measures, politically and financially. Similarly, AECO play a strong role that has enabled "collective self-governance driven by environmental stewardship" (Bets et al., 2017, p.1584) that requires stricter measures and reporting for member cruise operators than state policy and is pushing progressive research agendas. They too, however, have limitations as a private tourism operator membership body with funding not guaranteed and reporting measures that are perhaps beginning to suffer from over-complexity and privatisation of information (Bets et al., 2017). Management bodies could benefit from updated regulations (Kaltenborn et al., 2020), improved coordination and clearer lines of responsibility and power. Yet local actors appear to be frustrated by the approach and evidence base of the latest government ministries' consultation.

The direction of travel both in the tourism masterplan for 2030 in formulation locally (Krystad, 2022) and from the Norwegian government (Nærings og fiskeridepartementet, 2019) is shifting away from a growth-centred strategy for tourism and towards an increase in quality alongside a prioritisation of sustainability and environmental protection, building full time employment, improved working conditions, year round Longyearbyen based activities. Moreover, campaigns from the Svalbard Guiding Association for a compulsory guide certification scheme have seemingly had an impact. The current draft regulations include the requirements of tourist guides to undergo training and acquire Svalbard specific knowledge and skills (Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2021).

These changes could align well with a wider move to degrowth and shifting the value associated with tourism away from the dominant economic discourse. However, this needs to be matched with a 'will to transform', how tourism is conceptualised at all levels. Whilst there are encouraging synergies between degrowth ideas and some existing tourism narratives and local business approaches (as discussed earlier), this is not without potential conflict or tension. Table 1 summarises some of the ideas stemming from Longyearbyen discussions of tourism and roughly maps the tones of conversation surrounding them with value frameworks and relations to degrowth thinking as applied to tourism according to González and Espelt (2020; see also Fletcher et al., 2020; Heikkurinen, 2019). This is indicative only and points to directions for further research and community consultation that takes a wide evidence base, including a mapping of values, to develop long-term future scenarios (Sharpe & van der Heijden, 2007) for tourism's relationship with Svalbard.

Conclusion

Tourism is an integral part of Svalbard now. It is how the majority of human relations with its lands, seas, human and non-human inhabitants will be enabled. As such, it is important to take discussions of its future development beyond extractivist discourse: of tourists 'consuming' Svalbard and hosts 'extracting value' from them as they do so. As shown, tourism has offered economic diversification, but also spurs enthusiasm for further diversification. Tourism has contributed to a vibrant, cosmopolitan society, but challenges sovereignty agendas and community relations. It offers opportunities to work 'close to nature' and provide transformational experiences, but employment and living conditions are often

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Table 1. Indicative mapping of tourism management proposals.

Suggested Changes	Current value narrative	Relation to degrowth values
Tourist tax, in addition to the current environmental tax added to airfares.	Increased economic value from tourism: can help fund improvements to tourism infrastructure and rebalance the gains and losses from tourism impacts. "What's in it for us?" (Community dialogue, September 2020). Fears over reduction in tourist numbers and competition from other Arctic destinations.	Could help to encourage longer stays and decrease tourist volumes. This would increase possibilities for deeper engagements and learning from Svalbard's environment. May increase tourism infrastructure and, therefore, environmental transformation.
Limits on tourist numbers, particularly relevant to conventional cruises.	Decrease in factors leading to overtourism. Potential decrease in tourism revenues, challenges to local businesses.	Less conflict with environmental protection regulations and 'wilderness' experiences. Reduced consumption and travel, shift away from economic narrative to further community and environmental considerations.
Mandatory guide certification	Increased safety and quality of tourist experience. Better valuation of skills and knowledge.	Potential for supporting longer term employee experience, social justice and care.
Development of low season, urban tourism.	Can support more year-round, stable employment and local businesses.	If shorter stay: increased consumption and travel impacts. Supports conviviality and autonomy of community.

lacking. The historical trajectory traced here has illustrated that tourism can take varied forms, which will hold different kinds of value for visitors and hosts. The time has arrived to consider how to direct tourism in relation to balancing the value frameworks of wilderness protection, community and sovereignty in ways that also take into account the wider climate emergency and socio-political context.

Research efforts to ascertain key ecological and cultural carrying capacities or 'levels of acceptable change' for different tourist destinations in Svalbard should feed into decisions over management changes. Listening to a broad spectrum of local voices and experiences throughout further transitions will be crucial. Yet, as I have argued local perspectives cannot be divorced from wider value frameworks and forces: the pandemic being an extreme example. As the above findings demonstrate, value(s) is slippery, multi-scalar, and varied, there is no one correct answer.

Options such as tourist taxes, visitor number limitations, guide certifications, minimum stays or other access restrictions could take tourism in the direction of optimisation and possibly degrowth. This places importance on finding levels of locally acceptable change. It also, I suggest, can integrate findings that time spent in Svalbard – extending trip durations and length of residency – can facilitate better quality tourist experiences and relationships. When tourism has ground to a near halt and employees and tourism businesses are struggling to pick up the pieces in Longyearbyen, it may seem inappropriate to suggest that a concept not wedded to growth could be relevant. However, this is also a period where international academics (Fletcher et al., 2020; Lew et al., 2020), local residents and tourism actors have been reflecting on the future of tourism. Key questions about volume, quality and sustainability of tourism in Svalbard are being voiced from within and without the sector (Ikonen & Sokolíčková, 2020). Degrowth offers advantages for nature-based and 'lifestyle entrepreneur' tourism operators and possible pathways to more secure, long-term employment. It could also contribute to a growing vision for Svalbard as a progressive testbed not only for technical Arctic solutions and tourism management beyond 'sustainability' but also for alternative ways of thinking.

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