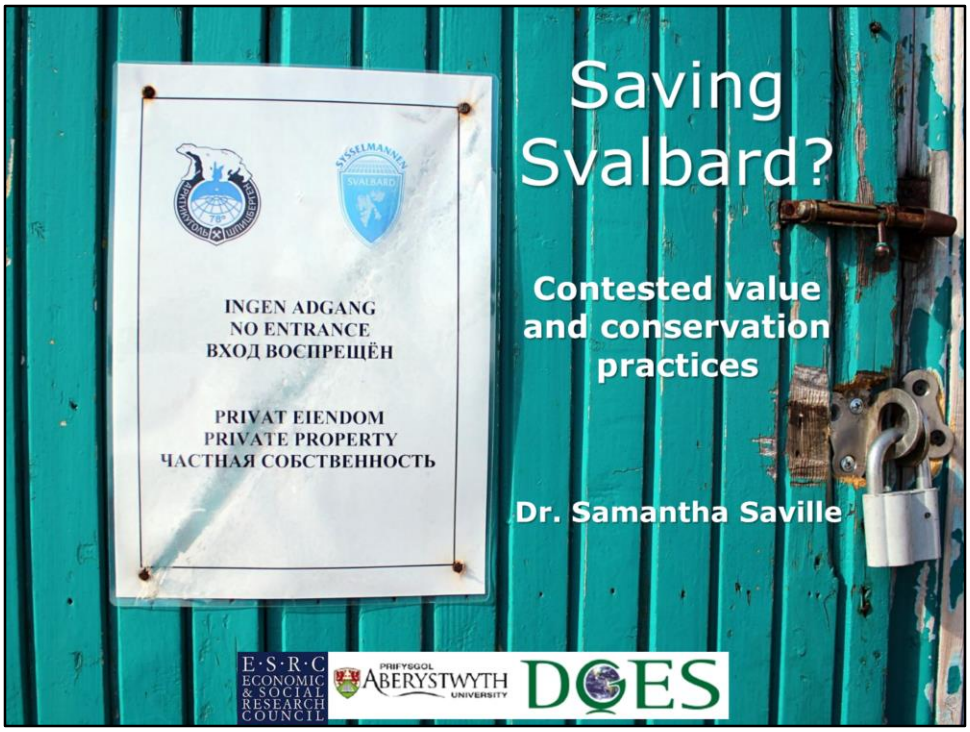


It's quite a rare thing that social scientists get to present their findings back to the communities they did their research with, so I have to thank the funders, the ESRC for giving me the opportunity to come back and speak to you.

What's in store…

- What it's about
- How I did it
- What it says
- What else I found out
- What next?
- What do you think?…

… You can disagree with me!

Some caveats….

The full title of the PhD explains nicely what it is all about - Saving Svalbard: contested value, conservation practices and everyday life in the high arctic.

So, the presentation is going to tour you through the thesis, how I did the research, what I think I found out, what else I found out that is not in the thesis and what I am doing now, then I am open for questions and discussions.

Caveats – as residents of Svalbard, you are the real experts here, but I hope you might learn something from an outside shining a theory tinted mirror back to you.

The research

- Focus groups (3)
- Semi-structured interviews (71)
- Questionnaires to visitors (55)
- Ethnographic observation
- Field and research diaries
- Photographs (~5000)
- Documentary evidence

'Vis meg landet, eg fekk låna' [Show me the country I was allowed to borrow], Lithographic print by Olaf Storø

What really is ethnographic observation?

So this is an outline of the data I used to write the thesis. One thing that might not be so clear is 'ethnographic observation'. Basically I was trying to be as open and flexible to opportunities to get to experience 'everyday life' and activities in Svalbard and being observant whilst doing it.

As you might have noticed there are quite a regular stream of students and scientists from Aberystwyth coming here.

I tracked some of them down, as well as a couple of people who had been there as tourists, and we talked about their memories and experiences of Svalbard, using souvenirs they had collected.

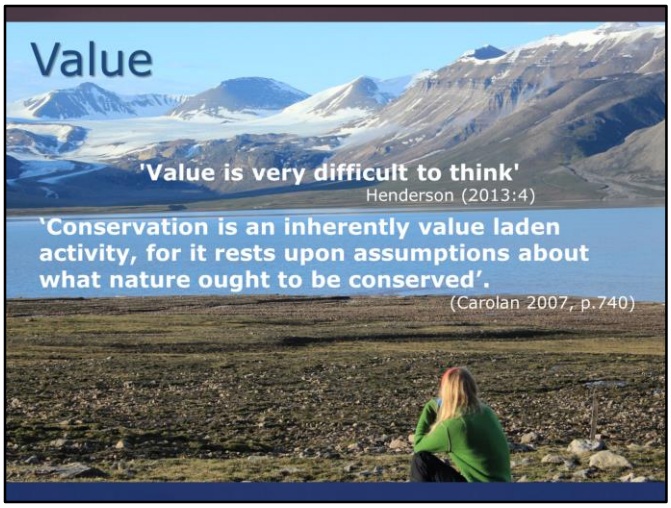
Which, as well as being very interesting, only made me more determined to go myself as it was somewhere they had difficulty in describing – special and magical.

Here I am in summer 2013,
I had only a vague sense of what the project was going to be about, I had been given an outline that it was Svalbard, and value…the rest was to be decided.

I'll talk about the concept of value a little more later but for now…really it centres around what we think of as important – whether that is objective and we try to measure it or put a price on it according to its importance, or whether it is more subjective.

I started asking people questions and getting a sense for what might be important to different people. If you spoke to me at this time, you may have been a bit puzzled by a researcher that didn't seem to know what exactly the questions were.

I also spent some time camping with a group of US and Swedish students and lecturers at Petunia Bay and Pyramiden. This got me thinking about the different roles and rights researchers, students, tourists and residents have in Svalbard, which I eventually published a paper about.



When I returned to Wales, I did some serious thinking about value.

As a social scientist, would argue that objective value is no such thing – there is a politics to what we decide to measure, how we do it and represent it and then what we do with that knowledge.

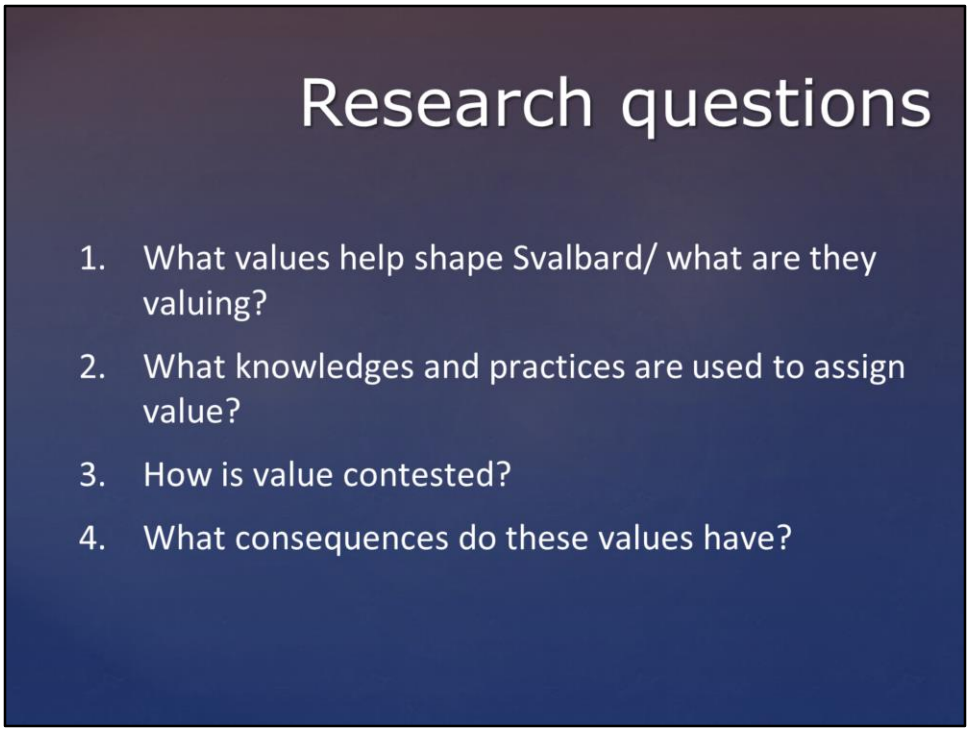
Increasingly it is being recognised in ecosystems services for example – that measure the value of nature to us often economically –e.g the water, air, resources it provides, that this just doesn't capture enough of what we as humans rather than service users do and need – culturally, socially etc.

As this quote suggests value is very much entwined in conservation work

I treated value as something that is not fixed, but changing, is made individually and collectively and enacted in decisions, its context dependent – what is valued and what people do as a result changes according to place and time and people involved.

Our personal values affect the social and political values that we experience through social norms , policies and the ways policies are put into practice, or not.

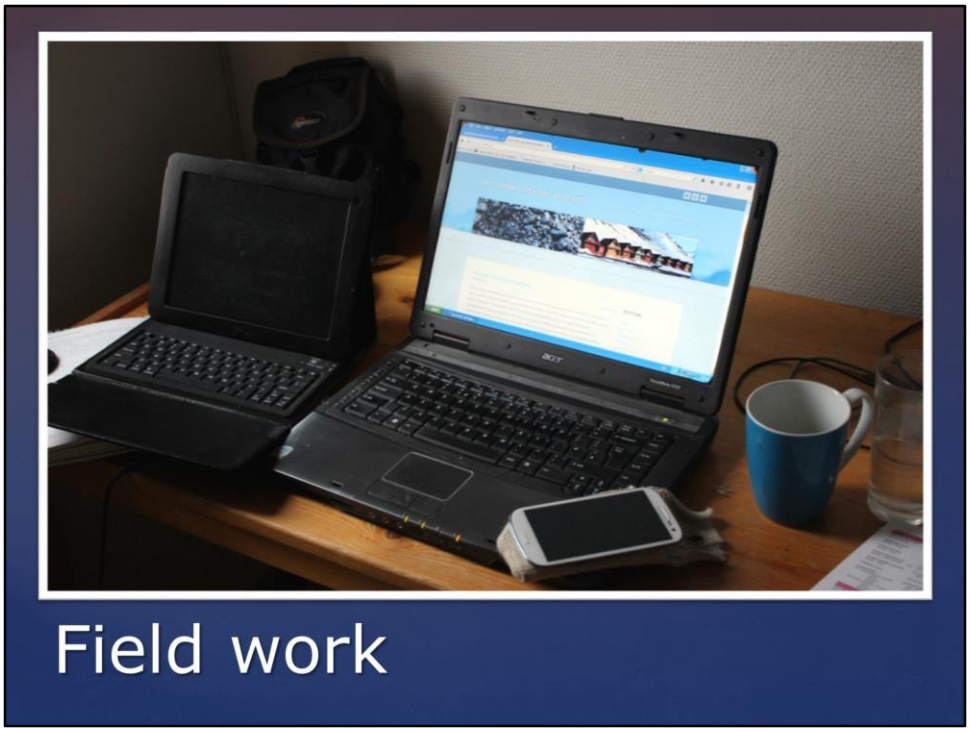
So I spoke with both people influential in policy making, stakeholder processes and people who are more on the experience end of policy and everyday life as to what and how values play out in Svalbard.



These were what I then decided to base my research on.

What feeds into decision making processes, whose voices, how does it happen?

Looking for disagreement , tension, ways and actions that show what is valued

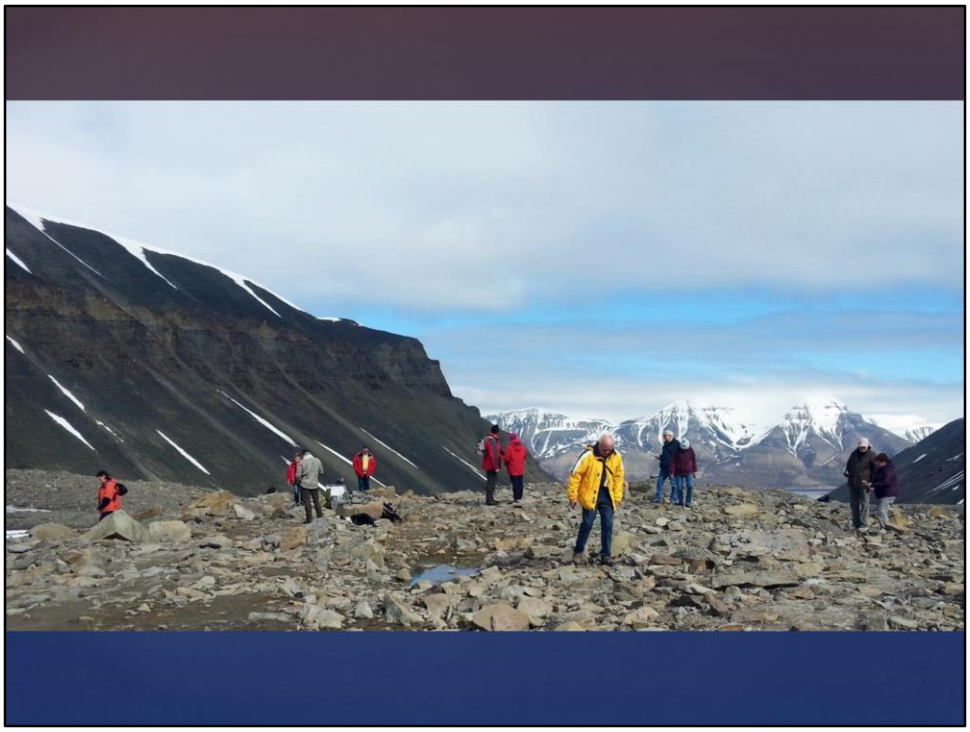


2014 – main field trip May to July – Longyearbyben, Pyramiden and Barentsburg

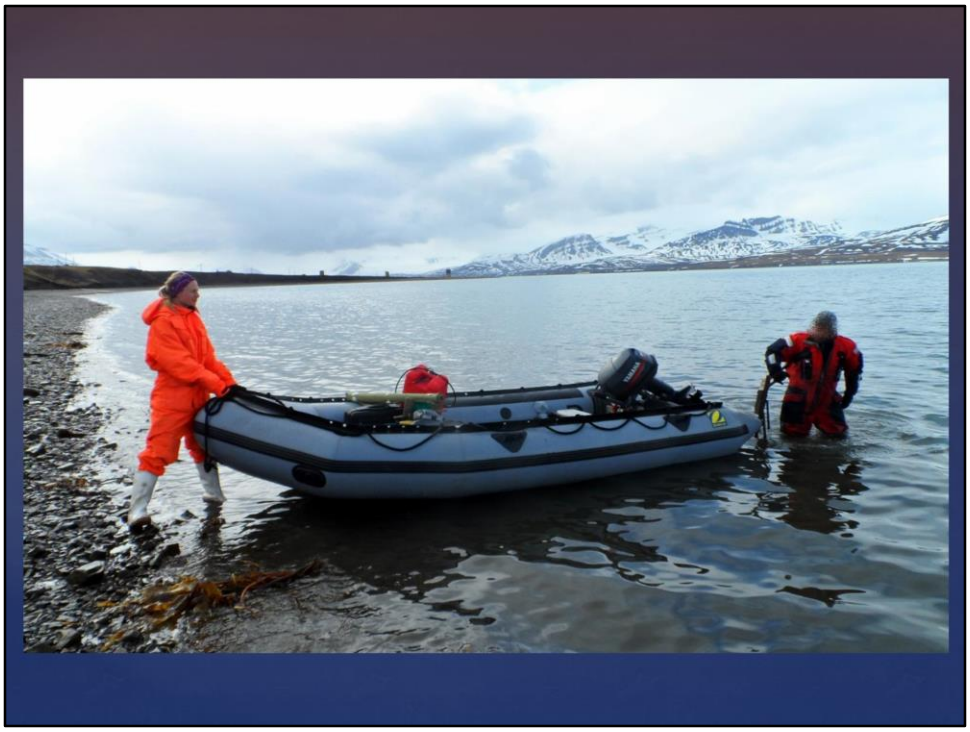
Came back in Feb 2015 follow up research

My fieldwork reality, is very often desk-based, but at this point might get concerned I hadn't seen much of Svalbard. ..

I still have lots to see but I did get out and about as part of my ethnographic work…



Helping out guiding cruise tourists searching for fossils



Helping scientists on Gronfjord, Barentsburg

Snow sampling out of town, a visit to the seed vault

Joining the Fotoklubb in Pyramiden, snow scooter trips.

Back at home, after much transcribing and data analysis…

Inspired by Greenpeace's Save the Arctic slogan- I realised that a lot of what I was finding in the research could be captured by the idea of 'saving Svalbard' – if you want to save something, to protect it, it shows that you care about it, it is important, it is valued.

It also means there are likely to be things people are doing to try and make this happen, practical actions, campaigns, policies, and likely to be disagreements about what is most important.

One way of 'Saving Svalbard' then was saving it as a Norwegian place- the notion of sovereignty, the Svalbard Treaty and contestation between Norway, Russia and other actors is an underlying factor to both political and everyday decisions.

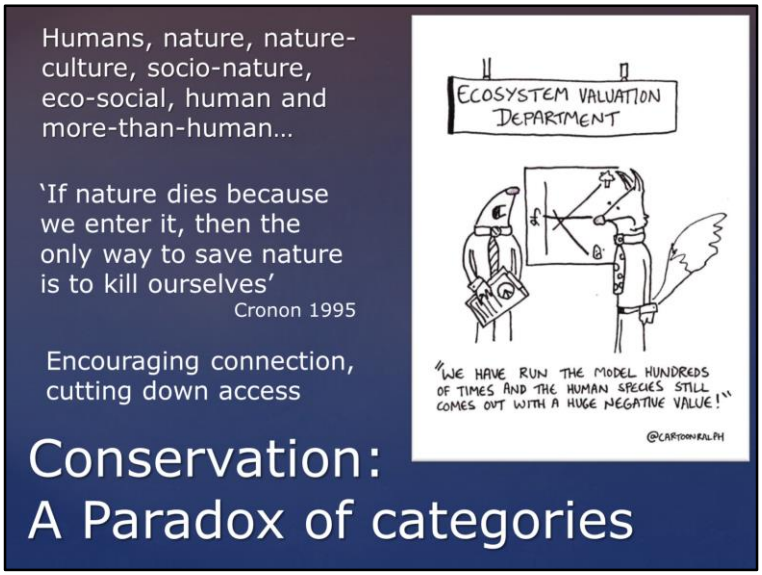
In the thesis, I discuss this as part of the introduction so I can flag up political points later on. It also comes up later when I look at how scientific knowledge is produced and how it feeds into policy decisions. Performing science in Svalbard is one way to assert power and influence here and Norway's role as a gatekeeper in this sense is important.

A second way to think about saving Svalbard, is as a future home and habitat – this aspect I will talk about later as it was an important feature of the research, but one that was not included in the final thesis and is part of the research I am doing now.

The thesis concentrates on this third idea of saving – more traditional conservation perhaps – Saving Svalbard's natural and cultural heritage.

So, this became the main research question the thesis tries to answer.

For context, at the time of the research, the East Svalbard management plan just coming into effect and the Pyramiden area plan was in the making. I looked into these two regulations in quite some detail.



The first empirical chapter uses the notion of categories to unpick and try to understand what value processes are going on in connection to environmental protection in Svalbard.

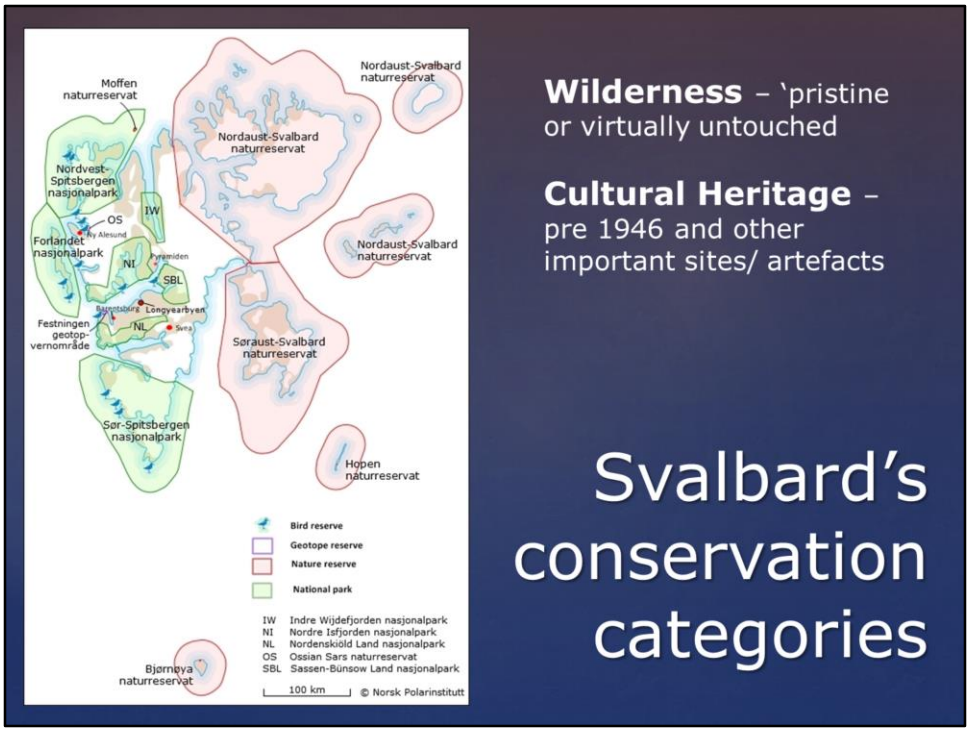
Humans use categories a lot, our language system is based on being able to label things, groups things together to make sense of the world. How we categorise something is very much related to how we value it.

The paradox here is that when we say things like 'save the planet' and 'humans should protect nature', we are separating ourselves a s a species out from the nature we are a part of. And what this cartoon is getting at, when we measure ecosystem services we measure the services in reference to ourselves largely.

We aren't sure which category we belong in, social sciences have tried lots of different labels to try and get round it, but the problem remains in the way we approach conservation, and we mainly still refer to nature and culture as being separate.

We are the threat AND potential 'savers' –William Cronan in his famous essay, 'the trouble with wilderness' says, this the key problem with the idea of a wilderness without humans.

We also end up doing paradoxical things as a result – we restrict access to what we want to preserve, but we also have to ensure people are connected to what we think is valuable otherwise they don't care enough to support such protection.



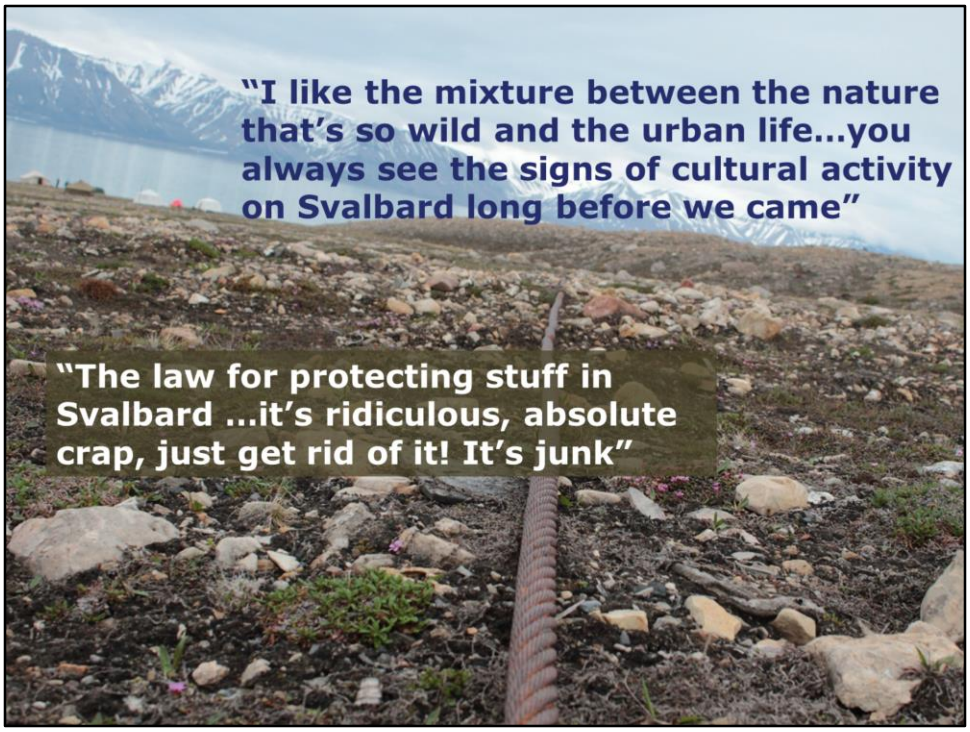
The first chapter looks at how this plays out in Svalbard – looking at the key categories in the environmental protection legislation and Svalbard treaty and how people relate to them.

Relating this to the primary research I did, wilderness of course came up as something that was highly valued by 2012-2015 residents and visitors of Svalbard: for tourists it is the biggest 'pull' factor and for residents it is a key aspect people value about living here – the most often cited answer for what was important to living in Svalbard.

I talk also about the important of friluftsliv and different notions of wilderness and nature at play in Svalbard: for example the differences in Russian and Norwegian cultural understandings of wilderness.

That leads me to discuss what belongs and doesn't in these ideals of wilderness – for example, what kind of transport is overall most appropriate – snow mobiles/ skis/ dog sledding if we prioritise environmental protection?

So the notion of wilderness in in one sense unproblematic in that everyone is agreed it is important to protect it, the tensions come when we get to the detail of how to do it and how we decide to manage it, which comes later…



Cultural heritage is more controversial when talking about what is valued before we get to the how.

Remains of human activity can disrupt an ideal pristine wilderness landscape, so there is a potential conflict between the two categories.

To an extent, I found that people do value the arctic history of Svalbard and its past and want to see some of that preserved and remembered. But there is a point which it becomes like there is 'too much rusty junk' lying around for some people.

There is also a tension, which can be quite political, when it comes to Russian properties and communities as to whose version of cultural heritage and ideas of protection should prevail – Norwegian or Russian, which versions – not everyone agrees between these groups. For example, in Barentsburg there was quite some discussion between different people as to how the built environment should look.

In Pyramiden the area plan offers protection to a lot of the central buildings there. However, not so for the interiors, objects and industrial infrastructure, which are aspects that are at risk from being tidied away. For some this loses a lot of the meaning of the place.

As well as historical value, there is monetary value in some of the ‘rusty junk’, this is scrap metal stacked up ready to ship back to Murmansk and sold.

When thinking about environmental protection in Svalbard categories are important, but in practice they are tricky, politically and practically, I go into a few examples where things don’t fit neatly into boxes next.

Restrictions and areas as to where different groups of people can and can't go are to some degree fixed by the lines on the map and specified zones. However, ice conditions and where protected species hang out move and change, hence there needs to be some flexibility if the balance between access and protection is to be managed in a consistent way.

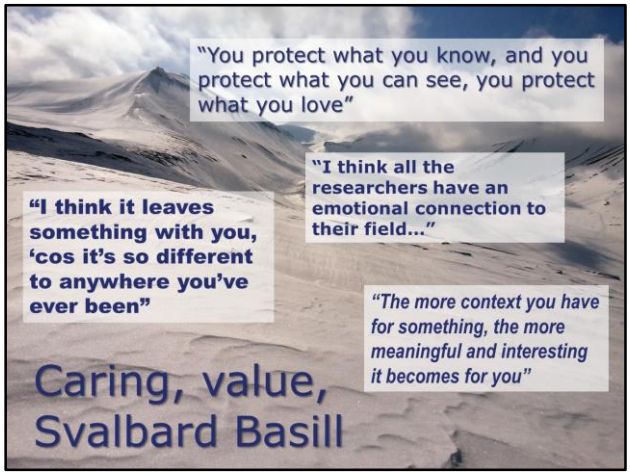
When I was here the discussion was about whether sysslemannen would allow a different snow scooter route to Pyramiden as the fjord was not frozen, this time around it looks like there is another discussion going on about routes over the fjords to avoid polar bears .

So there needs actually to be a negotiation between residents, tourist companies, the governors office and the physical environmental conditions.

Other confusing issues are whether to prioritise cultural or biological species or whether to categorise something as cultural or biological affects how it is managed.

For example in Pyramiden, the guano from the nesting birds creates an interesting and rare orthonogenic meadow as the biological assessment calls it – and can be a tourist attraction in themselves, but their droppings also erode and damage the buildings.

The grass in the central square has been protected as cultural heritage, although biologically it could be a threat – alien species to the area, but so long as it is monitored and doesn't spread, the cultural aspect is being protected.



In the second chapter I concentrate more on how people put their values of wilderness and cultural heritage into practice in everyday life.

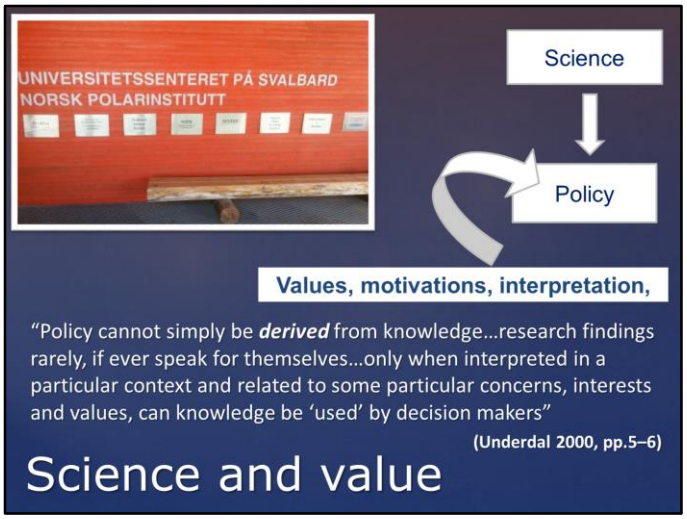
Photographers and artists explained how they practiced respect to the species and wilderness that enchants them to take photographs and make works.

Historians described how they tried to document items of industrial history before they were sent away as scrap metal. Tourist guides described the small actions and stories they told that tried to foster care from tourists about Svalbard.

The importance of being in Svalbard and experiencing it brought out the notion of the Svalbard bug that some people get infected by.

The relationship of doing fieldwork for scientists often develops a strong emotional connection to the landscape and species they study, so this scientist was saying the more they study something, not only the more you understand the data, but you find it more meaningful as well.

Then I argue that such feelings and strong connections to landscape, and place in Svalbard inevitably have an effect on the values people have, and some of that feeds in indirectly to knowledge used to develop protection policies, but mostly it is written out, both of the science, the policy and the decision making process.



The final chapter looks at how knowledge is incorporated into value categories and the environmental protection policies. It starts by recognising how political scientific activity in Svalbard.

Science is important, a legitimate actor and economic sector, but that does not mean that scientific knowledge is prioritised in the practice of environmental protection it is rather subject to regulation as well.

Scientific knowledge doesn't go directly into policy, even when we hear about 'evidence-based policy', there are always values, interpretations and motivations at play. Underdal goes on to suggest that sometime science will be used to verify and legitimise the position that they have already chosen.

I then look specifically at how the East Svalbard management plan was devised – over a 9 year consultation period with stakeholders, and one that was full of tension and conflict .

As part of this process the ‘values’ of the East Svalbard Area were catalogued in terms of what cultural heritage resources, species, habitats and potential scientific resources are contained in that area.

It ignores the other significant factors that have certainly fed into the policy decision making processes: the wider implications of increasingly restrictive access to wilderness areas, locally and globally, what stakeholders themselves value about this area, what approaches they would take to protecting this value and why,

Some participants pointed out to me the multiple values, intentions and motivations behind restricting access to wilderness areas in Svalbard – geopolitically it looks good to be seen to have strict environmental controls and it lines up better with mainland policies (one informant described Norways approach as banning things on principle).

But those involved in making these policies were also genuinely concerned about protecting the wilderness. At the Sysselmannens office I got the message that some areas should definitely be no go, and we should not see any trace of humans when we go back there in 50 years time, that in some areas at least, wilderness protection should come first.

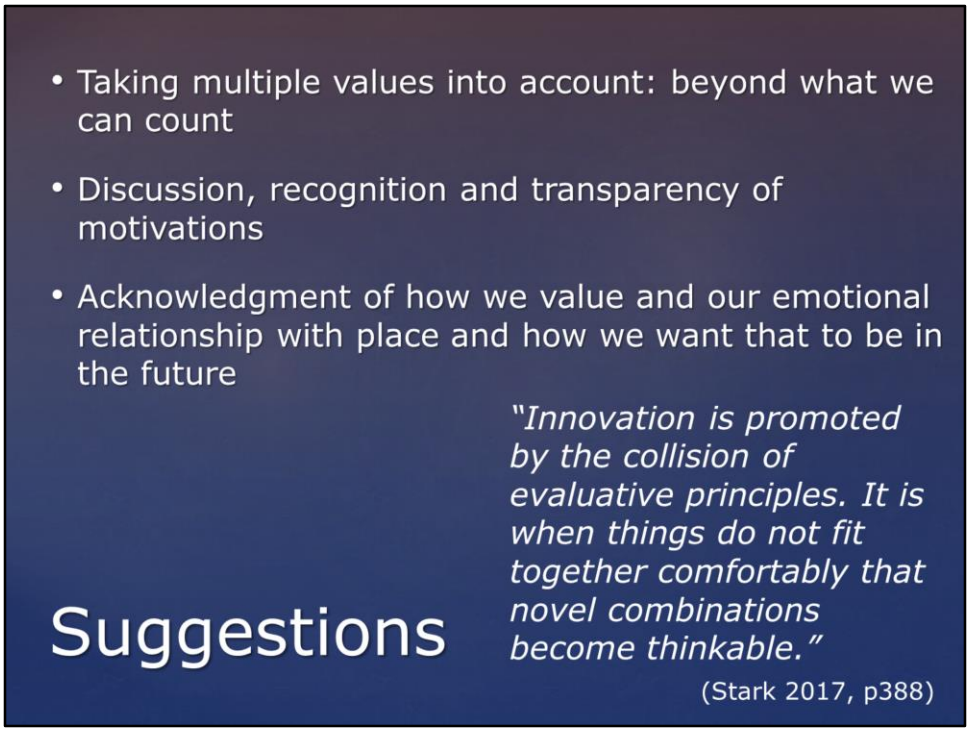
Obviously then there are different areas of disagreement with this, and I analysed these using a framework from science-policy interface studies – CRELE – that both science and the way it is used in policy making, needs to be credible, relevant and legitimate to succeed.

Threatening residents freedoms to roam Svalbard which is a key value meant that many saw the restrictions as not relevant to protecting the environment in a significant way, not proportionate to the small numbers of people and small amount of damage they would expect to see.

Some argued it would be better environmentally to let scientists, film makers and restricted numbers of tourists to these areas so that they can learn about them and experience them –, it might be better for instigating action on climate change elsewhere to allow some visitors. The same holds for cultural heritage protection, with questions raised over the value of saving something no one is allowed to visit, akin to putting things in a museum which no one is allowed to go into.

Credibility is the quality of exchange between science and policy making and this was also questioned by some following the stakeholder process -not all the evidence was used if it didn't fit the plan. It was also held that the process of making the plan was lacking in legitimacy – fairness and balance,

Overall, this has eroded trust in the governors office and other legislation -not everyone is willing to follow the rules.

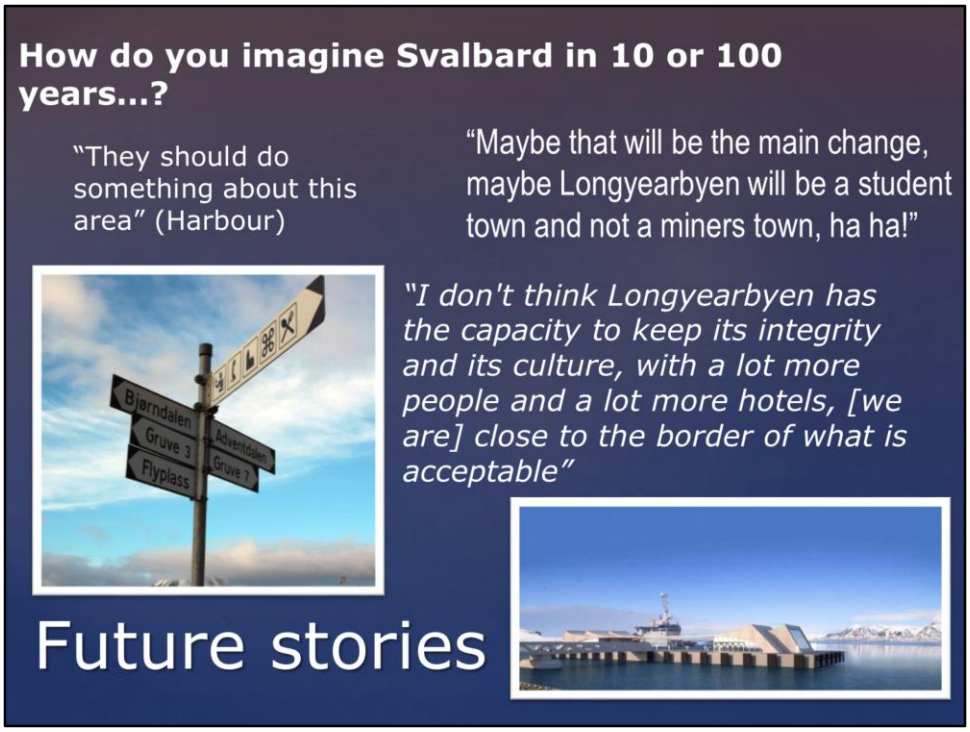


It is absolutely not my right to say what should be done in Svalbard, but it is also a duty to share what I think I have learned, so I offer some suggestions, some of which may now be irrelevant as perhaps lessons have been learned.

I see a need to move beyond measuring, counting cultural heritage sites and measuring distance we should stay away from, numbers of birds etc, these are still important, but we also need to discuss why we are making policy, what the motivations are and what motivations oppositions and challenges.

Conflict is not necessarily bad, it can be creative, if we can be transparent and open to change and working out what we want and how we might integrate as part of nature rather than as separate to it.

So, then there was a lot of stuff that didn't make it into the thesis. …



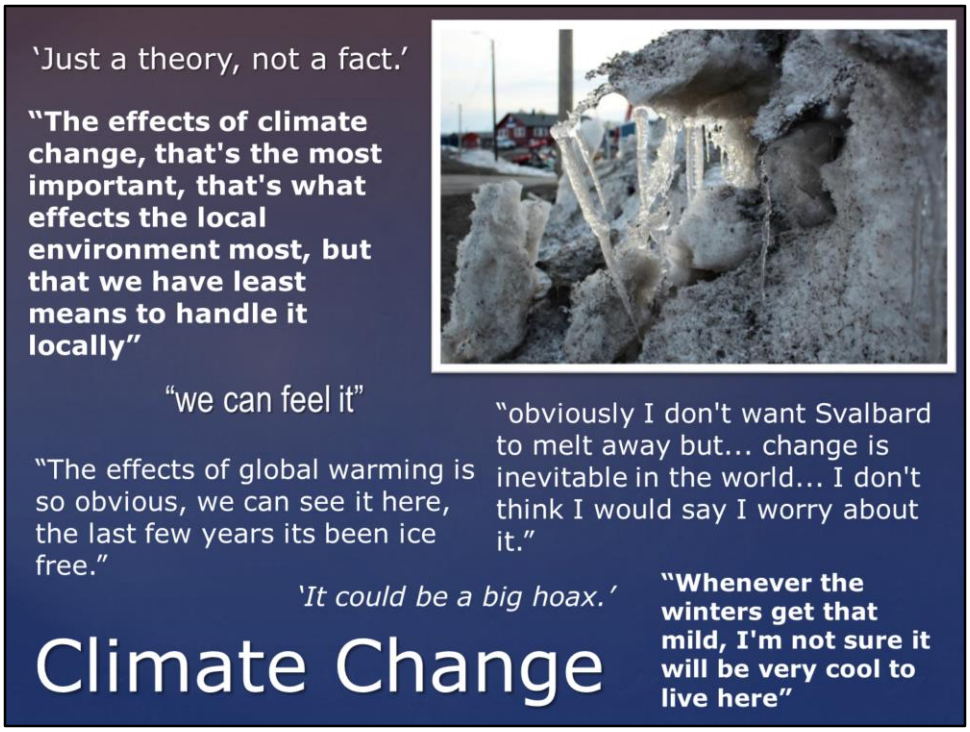
5 years ago…these were some of the views people had about the future of Svalbard

(almost) everyone thought coal had longer than it did.

Lots of hopes but also doubts in the plans to expand the port and develop Longyearbyen as an arctic shipping and logistics hub.

Worried about the lack of planning and direction in development in Longyearbyen – lots of potential in the sea side area.
Optimistic about growth in tourism and UNIS activity but concerns over losing the character of both.

Need to prepare - be ready for more tourist and port infrastructure needs, but it was felt that change would likely be gradual.



Thinking of the future, the issue of climate change did come up. There were a range of views, obviously.

More scepticism of human, anthropogenic causes than I had anticipated. Many took a practical view point in that there is little effect from the activities from a couple of thousand people, and saw a need to look at opportunities or at least worry more about the things that can be acted on at a local level.

Have things changed?

I did not explore these issues fully, but would be interested to see if these have developed …

Briefly, there were under-currents of dissatisfaction with the level of support for those with for example special educational needs or needing social support that is not offered in Svalbard.

There were worries that the increasingly international community is not fully represented by democratic processes and that language barriers might be an issue.

What next?

Update this research - Have values changed?

Spread the word:

- More academic papers
- Public resources- Story Maps
- Policy-maker advice
- Exhibition?

Ways you can help

- Interviews (confidential, anonymous)
- Mini –interviews (video)
- Ideas and views (now, later…)
- Pass it on – who else should know about this?

Discussion

- Questions about the research
- How have things moved on?
- What do you think are the most important things to 'save'?
- How would you like to see Svalbard and Longyearbyen in 10 years time?

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