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# Caught in between and in transit: forced and encouraged (im)mobilities during the Covid-19 pandemic in Longyearbyen, Svalbard

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## ABSTRACT

When Europe shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, Longyearbyen, the main settlement of Svalbard, was moving from a coal-based economy to one based on science and tourism. The remote location of the Svalbard archipelago in the High Arctic makes it an isolated, secure haven from the chaos worldwide. But this renders its population vulnerable should the virus come since there are neither facilities to care for the sick nor other nearby communities to help in case of need. Svalbard, with its special territorial status, is in a unique geopolitical situation where people are free to come and go. Longyearbyen is an inherently transient space with a highly mobile population. Based on interview narratives of participants' lived experiences in Longyearbyen during the pandemic (both in-person and online), this paper explores how forced and encouraged (im)mobilities impacted their individual life choices during the pandemic. Participants' stories revealed systemic inequalities and vulnerabilities in Longyearbyen that were heightened and exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. By combining minor theory with politics of mobility, this paper aims to add to the discussion within mobilities studies on how the personal, emotional responses to these situations are linked to decisions about mobility.

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## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic put the world on hold, bringing with it disruption and uncertainty. The pandemic's impacts on peoples' mobility have brought research interest and attention to mobilities studies. Jensen (2021) invites us to 'think with Covid-19 (...) as a catalyst for bringing about more nuanced and deep descriptions of "banal everyday practices"' (67), further challenging the already questioned sedentarist view on mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006). We take up this invitation and explore what happened with mobilities when the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded in the High Arctic through a case study of Longyearbyen.

Longyearbyen is a place of extreme mobilities located in the Arctic Archipelago of Svalbard, where a high turnover of the population and a mobile lifestyle are accepted norms (Viken 2008). It is a place where everyone lives in a state of 'intermediaries and circulation in-between places' (Jensen 2009, 154) between departures and arrivals. As was the case worldwide, the pandemic triggered a series of government-level measures. In Svalbard, the Norwegian government implemented

restrictions on travel and the free flow of people. Although it is tempting to see travel restrictions and lockdowns as examples of how the town became immobile in contrast to the previous situation where ‘the stability of Longyearbyen is its mobility’ (Viken 2008, 147) there were also cases of forced mobility – at least at the beginning of the lockdown – for some residents of Longyearbyen. It is therefore not a lineal shift from mobility to immobility. However, the pandemic did disrupt the ‘mobile and modern society’ (Moxnes 2008) view of Longyearbyen and exposed the underlying vulnerabilities and emotions linked to individuals’ relationship with mobility.

In this article, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discussion within mobilities by showing how emotions and affects ‘are part and parcel of all the landscapes, atmospheres and trajectories of mobility’ (Glaveanu and Womersley 2021). We do this through semi-structured interviews with residents in Longyearbyen with the following questions in mind: How does a forced or encouraged mobility generated by the pandemic affect how people feel about Longyearbyen or their own (im)mobility? What can analysing these emotions and affects reveal in terms of understanding mobilities, in particular in the context of a place like Longyearbyen which is inherently mobile?

## Longyearbyen and its mobility

Svalbard has been described as a fluid landscape, where different histories have marked the land into a terrain of ‘politics, architectural preservation, arctic exploration, whaling and hunting settlements, coal mining, science and technology, and ecological material and energy flows’ (John-Alder 2019, 21). As Viken (2008) points out, ‘mobility is more or less institutionalized on Svalbard’ (144). The Spitsbergen Treaty of 1920 – often referred to as the Svalbard Treaty locally – grants Norway full and absolute sovereignty over the archipelago. The treaty stipulates the territory be open to nationals of the signatory parties without need for a visa. This ease of access makes Longyearbyen an attractive place to live for many non-EU/EEA citizens. It also means that Norway, as stated in the 2016 White Paper on Svalbard (Meld. St. 32 2015–2016), wants to maintain Norwegian presence – even while transitioning Longyearbyen from a coal-based community to a tourism- and research-based community. Paradoxically, this shift has also changed the workforce from a predominantly Norwegian one to an increasingly international one.

Located at 78 degrees north, Longyearbyen is the Norwegian state’s administrative centre for Svalbard. Longyearbyen was established as a mining company town by the American-owned Arctic Coal Company in 1906 and was purchased by the company now known as Store Norske (SNSK) in 1916. Over the years, the Norwegian government has secured its sovereignty by supporting Store Norske’s presence and the town of Longyearbyen with significant subsidies. As Grydehøj, Grydehøj, and Acrén (2012) have discussed, although Svalbard is a part of Norway, it is governed by international law. Because of this inherent double bind, the Norwegian state continues to support Norwegian presence on the archipelago. Currently, the State is trying to increase the Norwegianness of the population and the level of control it has over mobilities within the archipelago. Examples include the current propositions to remove local voting rights from non-Norwegian nationals (Government.no 2021a) and restrictions on access to nature (Government.no 2021b; NEA 2021). The shift in voting rights would fortify the position of the Norwegian residents over the non-Norwegian residents<sup>1</sup> while the restrictions in access to nature would reduce mobility for all residents and visitors, no matter their citizenship.

Initially, the mobility of residents was linked to their work contracts with the mining company. Although Longyearbyen is no longer a company town, housing is still linked to their employment for the majority of residents and the town’s population continues to be transient and mobile in nature. In the last two decades, as mining has decreased, Longyearbyen has focused on developing tourism (and its concomitant service sector), research and education as its main economic pillars. These sectors attract a mobile, and often international, labour force. As pointed out by Pedersen (2017), this presents a dilemma for the Norwegian state: Longyearbyen, the intended Norwegian settlement, is becoming increasingly international. In 2020, almost 37% of Longyearbyen’s

population was non-Norwegian<sup>2</sup> (SSB 2020a). Longyearbyen is now one of the most easily accessible towns in the High Arctic, with regular flights from Oslo and Tromsø. It is a convenient and comfortable place from which one can experience the Arctic with a wide range of tourist products such as dog sledding, hiking, glacier climbing, skiing, snowmobiling, cruises, etc.

There are also other structural foundations for Svalbard's inherent transience, defined by the Norwegian state. Longyearbyen is supposed to be a family community but not a life-long community, and there is no elderly care. Less than 15% of the real estate is privately owned and the Governor's website states, 'it's hard to get housing if you do not have a job' (Sysseimesteren.no N.d). Furthermore, social benefits are limited and many can only be accessed on the mainland. There is an official requirement to 'have the means to be able to reside on Svalbard' (Sysseimesteren.no N.d), creating a space where all who come are, de facto, deterritorialized: Longyearbyen is home only as long as it is also a place to work.

Longyearbyen is not a 'non-place', such as an airport, a railway station, or a high-speed road in Augé's (2009) description, but it is a place of transit. As one local saying goes, everyone leaves 'in the end'. The turnover of population in Longyearbyen, which can be as high as 25% (SSB 2020b), is often taken as demonstrating that change and transition are an inherent part of the town's culture and identity. Those who move to Longyearbyen are prepared for hyper mobility as normality and have made the choice to live with it. What is less discussed is what happens when this normalized transiency is disrupted, as was the case for those living in Longyearbyen during the lockdowns and periods of restricted travel due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Worldwide, the tourism sector suffered from the pandemic-related reduction in mobility. In Longyearbyen, the ensuing economic crisis for tourism and the related service industry highlighted the role of mobility as an aspect of this sector that is often taken for granted. Not only was the number of tourists impacted but so was the seasonal, lifestyle mobility of many of those working in the sector. In addition, the restrictions on entering or leaving Svalbard in 2020 and 2021 were maintained even when tourism within Norway was allowed at various times.

Longyearbyen, a place of easy-access and high mobility, changed overnight when the pandemic restricted mobility: gone were the tourists, gone were the jobs connected to tourism. At the same time, there were no recorded cases of Covid-19 and many of the restrictions in micro-movement that were felt elsewhere worldwide, as for example described by Jensen (2021) in Denmark, did not apply to the archipelago. People could still go out in nature (although cabin use was restricted) and many would meet for walks or skiing or snowmobile trips, a kind of 'locavist' tourism (Houge Mackenzie and Goodnow 2021) in the surrounding nature. Given that there is no public transport in Longyearbyen, nor roads between Longyearbyen and the Russian-owned company town of Barentsburg (the only other town on the archipelago), the restrictions that were so sorely felt elsewhere were less evident here. As a minor but meaningful daily impact, no face masks were worn in Longyearbyen until Svalbard once again opened up (intermittently) and tourists could come in the beginning of 2021, bringing with them the possibility of infection. In many ways, being in Longyearbyen during the pandemic was like being in a safe haven – for those who had jobs and a secure income. In the case of Longyearbyen, how can we understand people's experiences during this time of rupture in the heretofore established rhythms of mobility and immobility?

## Politics of mobility and minor theory

Our theoretical position is developed alongside our individual experiences of Longyearbyen, the unfolding narratives from the interviews, and the ongoing discussions in the new mobility paradigm. Through the politics of mobility (Cresswell 2010, 2021) we see how people's reactions to the enforced (im)mobilities exposed certain pre-existing systemic issues that are part of Longyearbyen's situatedness.

The theoretical framework of politics of mobility (Cresswell 2010) allows us to turn to the ways in which mobilities are productive of, and produced by, social relations that are inevitably

influenced by power production and distribution. As we consider the differentiated access to mobility, the normalized (questions of 'should' in moving, travelling or transporting) or moralized (what are good practices or motivations behind one's mobility choices) meanings attached to mobility, and the embodied and lived experiences of mobility, we start to see the ways in which mobility becomes political. Through this analytical lens we can understand the systemic issue of how mobility is inherently embedded in Longyearbyen's daily life and why people's mobilities patterns changed during the Covid-19 pandemic in Longyearbyen.

Our focus on people's emotional responses to the changes in mobilities derives from but also reinforces the need to understand mobility within an emotional and affective landscape. Simply seeing emotions as situated in the social and political constitution of mobility will risk losing sight of people's actual experiences. A focus on emotions also reveals how they are entangled within the web of power relations. We thus turn to Katz' minor theory (Katz 1996, 2017).

Minor theory was inspired by 'minor literature' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986), which refers to the literature written 'in a major language in ways that subvert the language from within' (Katz 1996, 489). By using this approach, we were able to get a deeper reading of interviewees statements. Subtexts and subversions became apparent. We were able to see how people weren't just passive reactants but also active participants in their own situation. By looking at individuals' emotional responses to their loss of control and the actions they took to regain it, we can see how people 'reworked and recomposed the major from within' (Katz 2017, 596). The analytical lens is, therefore, an 'analytical crack', through which we may see how mobility structures the affective terrain of Longyearbyen in a different way. For instance, while many start to discuss a 'new normal', exploring participants' narratives through the lens of minor theory points to how Covid-19 has exposed 'part of what has long been normal – a highly connected and often unstable networked world' (Cresswell 2021, 55).

Minor theory helps us to see emotional reactions that highlight individuals' responses to the loss of control of their own mobilities. Such reactions point to a micropolitics that 'valorizes the immediate and the individual, and acknowledges the interconnections between all scales, from the singular to the cosmic' (Wolfe 2020, 608). It is developed from within and leads to an affective approach to the political: peoples' mobilities are deeply and personally connected with their emotional state. This approach aligns with Thrift's (2008) Non-Representational Theory where mobility is the expression of an individual's practice of everyday life, and there is an affective dimension of interlocking mobility and immobility. With minor theory we aim to show how the pandemic-related restrictions impacted and disrupted individuals' chosen mobility practices, bringing to the fore their emotional connections to mobility, and thereby showing how mobility can be seen as a practice. The analysis opens up a new register of understanding where the performance of mobility, rather than the unifying norm/generalized view, is what is important. This deeper, more fluid and non-representational understanding of the town's specific situatedness would not have been possible without including an analysis of the underlying minor expressions of people's everyday lived experience in Longyearbyen during lockdown.

## Methods

This article is based on interviews conducted by three of the co-authors who were living in Longyearbyen during the pandemic. Caught in uncertainties about the global situation and its local implications, they decided to conduct semi-structured interviews using the same collaboratively developed interview guide with a set of five major interest areas: (1) impacts on personal life; (2) impacts in terms of job/company; (3) societal impacts; (4) change in perception of place; (5) futuring.

People in key institutions such as the local administration, hospital, and business association were contacted, as well as individuals representing different facets of the town's inner diversity – such as international migrant workers, freelancers, artists and students. The empirical material

discussed in the paper displays a range of perspectives without claiming to cover the full scope of lived experiences in Longyearbyen during the pandemic. Eleven interviews were conducted in July, August and September 2020. Nine were in person and two were done online since the participants had already left the island. Of the eleven people interviewed, three were Norwegian, two were European, and six were non-European.

The analysis of the interview materials was done first individually and then collectively. Based on discussions and comparative notes, themes and categories emerged from the empirical materials. Through this process, the range of responses began to fall into patterns corresponding to how participants described their experiences between March – when the lockdown happened – and when the interviews took place the following summer/autumn. Although the responses are in many ways entangled, we grouped the emerging themes in the analysis as follows: (1) reactions based on their initial situation with a direct impact on their mobility, soliciting highly emotional reactions; (2) longer term impacts on their situation (from March to when the interview was done) causing high levels of stress as they navigated the uncertainties of the pandemic; (3) issues of (in)security caused by the pandemic; (4) underlying systemic issues that were causing many of the situations the participants were facing. In each of these groupings, the participants expressed emotional reactions that were directly related to their situation of forced or encouraged (im)mobilities. It is these reactions that we have tried to bring forward here in order to shed light on how disrupted mobilities has exposed the deeply personal, minor stories embedded in their individual choices, thus revealing the affective and political aspects of mobilities.

### Forced and encouraged (im)mobilities

Analysing the interview materials with politics of mobility and minor theory helps us to see the multiple dimensions and layers of people's responses toward the change of mobilities in Longyearbyen. Following Cresswell's (2010) politics of mobility and thinking about mobilities in terms of constellations of movements, representations, and practices, we see how local institutions' restrictions on people's mobilities in Longyearbyen stem from the historical specificities of Svalbard. Additionally, politics of mobilities brings up aspects of immobility that are sometimes overshadowed by the normative discourse of Longyearbyen as a place of extreme mobilities.

Without knowing how long it would take before it was safe to travel again, the short-term solution/tool varied from encouraging some people to leave, to forcing others to return, to putting other people's life plans on hold. In each of these situations, the participants felt that they were not in control. This loss of control was destabilizing and impacted their emotional state. But instead of reading these emotional responses with dualistic slippage of control/controlled, minor theory helps us to engage with the emotions that emerged, bringing out a more nuanced understanding of how participants responded to the (im)mobilities they were faced with.

### First responses

In stories that participants shared with us about the first month of the pandemic, the inability to be an active agent in their own mobility had a deep impact on how they responded emotionally. As Jessie, a non-EU student at the University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS) who felt obliged to leave because of an edict recommending students return to their home country, explained:

I thought I had to go. I booked my plane ticket and I left two days before the deadline. That's why I left. I didn't want to. It broke my heart. *[crying]* I booked my ticket one day and then next day I was in the plane. I had to borrow money to buy it because I didn't have it actually. (Interview with Jessie, 1 September 2020)

The act of being forced to leave made Jessie feel a deep loss. This loss was then amplified by her vulnerabilities – the lack of finances to pay for the ticket to her home country and then, as she explained later in the interview, the lack of understanding from her family. For Jessie, the only

way to cope with the situation was to try to hang on to the memories: ‘The nice thing is that if I (want) to go back there, I just have to close my eyes. And I remember. [*crying*] That’s pretty cool’. Even when back in class online, Jessie felt isolated. There was no easy way to exchange with her fellow students, a common situation for many during the pandemic. In Jessie’s case, her isolation was increased by the physical distance from the place she wanted to be in, reinforcing her sense of loss and anchoring her in a liminal place where she was neither ‘home’ in Svalbard nor at home in her ‘home country’.

This deep sense of disruption was also experienced by Anne, a non-EU artist who was visiting her home country when the pandemic started. Unlike Jessie, Anne’s experience had to do with getting back to Svalbard. Her distress was triggered by a forced mobility – at a time when she wasn’t sure if she would make it back into Norway before the borders closed. This placed her in a (forced) liminal space of transit. Her description of the process of trying to get back is one of on-going stress, ‘by the time we got to [*town in Norway*] I had been up for 72 h because I couldn’t sleep. I was so anxious the entire time’ (Interview with Anne, 31 August 2020). When her adult son got Covid just after Anne went into quarantine on the mainland, she felt trapped. This forced immobility, while herself in a liminal state between two places (the home she was leaving and the home she was returning to) added to Anne’s stress. Being an artist, she responded by painting and began a series inspired by her feelings of longing. Once Anne got back to Svalbard, she felt she could no longer leave. This placed Anne in a different version of forced immobility:

I may not be able to see my family again. I may never see my sister again. She’s older than I am. If she gets sick, I won’t see her. This is ... hard stuff. And I am not 30 so what happens when I get old? I cannot go back to my country, how do I manage this? I am a single woman and I can’t go home. How do I get old in a foreign country? That is the future I have to consider. And I am lucky. Other people I know, who are not so well off, they are terrified. Absolutely terrified.

The raw emotions expressed in both of these stories, Jessie’s despair at being forced to leave and Anne’s fear of not getting back coupled with a fear of not seeing her family again, is typical of the kind of heightened emotions often experienced when undergoing a major change. What is interesting in these cases is that when the forced (im)mobility disrupted the otherwise ordered perceptions of ‘home’ and ‘not home’, it also opened up a liminal space where Jessie and Anne were forced to face their own vulnerabilities and sensitivities. In both cases, the participants found themselves in an undesired in-between state that left them feeling out of control. While the sense of losing control manifested in the magnitude of external changes, the emotional turmoil they had to confront signalled the changes happening from within. As Katz (1996) argues, the major and the minor are ‘intertwined in an exquisite and mobile tension’ (491). As the movement from both positions are mutual and relational, whatever is expressed through the tension and the in-between space will bring changes. For Jessie, closing her eyes and going back to her memories provided her space to find comfort, familiarity and a feeling of home. For Anne, creating artwork inspired by her sense of longing and disruption helped her to cope with her in-between situation and express her understandings of what was being lost, changed or perhaps created. Through finding their own ‘minor expressions’ (Katz 1996), Jessie and Anne were enacting micropolitics by taking a certain element of control over their own situation.

### ***Dealing with the situation***

After the initial shock of the lockdown brought on by the pandemic, many people began to settle into what some called the ‘new normal’. For Tom, a non-EU guide, the upheaval put him in a state where he no longer had a job (due to the halt in tourism) but he had time. Having no work engagements allowed Tom and his friends to explore the island and its opportunities for outdoor experiences at a time when they usually worked non-stop: ‘The time, I really enjoyed to have that time free, April is typically a very busy month’ (Interview with Tom, 20 September 2020). After a few months, however, the lack of employment made him question living in a place where having a job is the reason to stay:

Towards the end of the summer it started to affect me more and more, I felt like I didn't really have any purpose being in Longyearbyen. I got to do the trips I wanted to, but it was just a weird time being there.

The initial feeling of 'freedom' became bittersweet. This also points to a particular aspect of Svalbard's transiency: the absence of the need for a work visa makes it a place where it is easy to come to work – even if there are no social services or healthcare benefits once you get there (for many non-public sector jobs like Tom's). For Tom, the feeling of 'not having a purpose' had to do with his inability to maintain the mobile lifestyle he had chosen which always included a combination of outdoor experiences and an economic income. The pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities inherently linked to this mobility choice in Longyearbyen. In particular, Tom pointed out the precarious situation of working in the tourism industry:

Tourism seems to be a very fickle industry. And the guides are often the first ones to get cut if there's anything like a disruption. And that suck being a guide. When you're cut all the time. It's made me really question if I were to stay in this industry or whether to have children would be actually for me. To provide financially it's not an income that you can expect, it's very up–down.

Unwilling to continue in this uncertain state, Tom eventually left Svalbard and quit being a guide. Yet we will lose the depth and richness of Tom's story if we only see him as someone forced to leave Svalbard because of his lifestyle choice. The transition in Tom's feelings about being out in nature during the pandemic from 'feeling free' to 'feeling more affected', indicates there is an often-unmentioned space between a person's economic reality and their lifestyle choice. In this in-between space of life and work choices lies lifestyle workers' dilemma and vulnerability. As Cresswell (2010) points out, our experience of being mobile is affected by whether we have chosen to be mobile or have been forced into it. Tom's questioning of his experience of being mobile and his choices based on those experiences – due to the specificities of the tourism sector on Svalbard – bring to light a different facet of the mobility lens: people may be juggling multiple lifestyle choices at the same time and it is only when one aspect tips out of balance that they are forced to make a choice between them.

Such decision-making entails distress and emotional reactions. Sam, a service worker with children who was also supporting her family back in Asia, found herself forced into an uncomfortable in-between state where she could not make certain choices, even if her financial situation had become dire. She explained, 'If I lived alone, I wouldn't worry about it. I could stay on the mainland with friends. [...] But now I have my kids, so it is not possible' (Interview with Sam, 1 September 2020).

This meant Sam was constantly on edge, constantly walking the line between being able to support her family and failing to provide for them. Even if she knew she could get temporary work elsewhere, she couldn't leave Svalbard because her children were in school in Longyearbyen. Sam found herself in a forced state of immobility that made her feel vulnerable:

Before, I was so tired from work, I go home, I sleep, I am refreshed again. Now, I don't get enough sleep, I over-think. [...] I make my brain function 300%. Because I am afraid to make a mistake, and miss the standard of my work, because I need it so badly, my work.

Given the very real possibility of losing her job due to a lack of tourism, Sam's stress was constant. If she no longer had any work, she would no longer have any income as she did not qualify for welfare without a Norwegian passport. Tom narrated a similar situation of vulnerabilities:

It has affected me with stress [...] It was stressful being on Svalbard in Norway, having a D-number, and not getting money from NAV [*the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, providing unemployment benefits*], or from the State. I was paying taxes in Svalbard in Norway, but I didn't get any benefits. I did get 8000 kroner from Lokalstyre. [...] I have signs of depression and frustration and angst. There's just a big question mark.

Sam and Tom were forced to decide how to balance the need to provide for themselves and/or their families within the new paradigm of the pandemic. In both situations, which continued over several months, the participants had to work through the process of rationalizing why they were in Longyearbyen. Instead of coming from the forced physical movement experienced by Jessie and Anne,

Tom and Sam's in-between state was triggered by the pragmatic need to make a living. Faced with these major changes, Tom and Sam were left to find their own way of dealing with their stress and uncertainties. Instead of giving up and saying 'life is too hard', they made choices that would minimize the vulnerabilities of their situations. Tom chose to leave Svalbard to find a job, while Sam worked extra hard to ensure her job performance was above reproach. In both cases, Sam and Tom needed to create a certain sense of security for themselves.

### ***The (In)security of living in Longyearbyen***

At the same time as the Norwegian state was implementing measures to secure public health, individuals responded to the feeling of being in a crisis where the future was unknown. As Hans, a Norwegian health worker, pointed out, 'it is not easy to live on an island, you cannot go home. On the mainland, if you get sick or something, you can. Here you are stuck' (Interview with Hans, 2 September 2020). Ana Paula Souza, a psychotherapist living in Longyearbyen, confirmed that her clientele increased during the pandemic, with higher numbers among the youth, people employed in research, tourism and the service industry. With permission, we quote a client's reflection during a therapy session, 'The general shared feeling among friends is as if we were inside the Titanic and it is about to sink down in a cold dark place without a safety vest for everyone'.

These two elements, the feeling of not being in control of the situation and the inability to be an active agent in one's own mobility in case of need, combine to form a deeply embedded insecurity. Several participants expressed the need to create a feeling of security, be it emotional, financial, or health-wise. One participant, Carl, an elderly European, imposed upon himself a forced immobility in order to ensure his own safety: 'I am in the risk group so I tried to barricade myself inside but you cannot live such a life forever, it was crazy in the end' (Interview with Carl, 4 September 2020).

Others, as in the case of nationals of non-EU/EEA countries who didn't qualify for welfare and would lose access to healthcare if they lost their jobs, described a feeling of insecurity related to their physical health. One participant in this situation was Parita, an East-Asian youth. She explained her lived experience as follows:

I felt quite trapped in Longyearbyen. [...] I had no job so it would have been very dangerous for me to go to mainland Norway. Because if I would get ill or infected with corona, I don't know quite who would pay all the money I would need to recover. (Interview with Parita, 28 August 2020)

Her feeling of being trapped, of being unable to be an active agent in her own mobility, was linked to the fear of getting sick and not being able to cover the costs. In both cases, Carl and Parita chose a self-imposed immobility. In Carl's case, confined to his house; in Parita's, to Longyearbyen. Looking at their confinement through minor theory, however, we may understand it as the need to move from being out of control, and therefore vulnerable, to being in a space of safety. Even if they later realized that these efforts could not be sustained as long-term solutions, what they produced was a rupture away from the general anxiety and uncertainty of the moment that was being imposed upon them from external sources. This rupture enabled them to find a certain respite in the small comforts they had shaped for themselves by removing fear of infection (and therefore costs, financial or physical) by choosing immobility – even if it also caused them a certain level of distress that in the end was untenable.

Unlike Sam and Tom who were working in the service sector or hired as freelancers, people employed in the public sector did not experience the same exposure to insecurity or changes in their mobility patterns. However, threads of vulnerabilities were also apparent in their reflections on how minor, everyday life things were missed and valued when facilities in town were shut down. According to Svein, a Norwegian business owner,

People [*were*] tired, bored, demotivated. It's the sum of everything, plus the dark season, you can't travel ... Then one festival closes down, then the other ... And then there are all the other factors. The gym is closed, such small things that mean so much when you live here. (Interview with Svein, 30 August 2020)

For all three participants, the inability to move freely and participate in the activities that they had done before was felt as a hardship – whether self-imposed or not. Yet this hardship indicates a need of ‘revealing the limits of the major as it is transformed along with the minor’ (Katz 2017, 598). The otherwise taken-for-granted everyday convenience and comfort only became visible and precious when they were temporarily lost. Adding to this, as in the case of Svein, was the feeling that others didn’t understand the hardships he was experiencing:

There are people in Longyearbyen who walk around saying ‘it’s so nice now without tourists!’ You can afford to say that when you work in the public sector. But for those of us with our own companies, we risk bankruptcy and work without pay to stay open. So it hurts a lot to hear those comments.

For Hans, his understanding was based in a different position. He explained how the need to secure the future care of infected patients also impacted tourism, ‘... the hotels cannot have 100% full because we have to organize quarantine if people get really sick’.

As can be seen in these testimonies, the range of emotional reactions and understandings fluctuated according to each participant’s situated perspective. This multilayered and varied experience of Longyearbyen, as both the Norwegian state and individuals tried to establish a position of security in the new reality being created by the pandemic, exposed systemic differences in the town’s structure.

### ***Systemic issues/politics of mobility***

One systemic issue that came out in the interviews was the increased focus on Norwegianness in Longyearbyen. Here as elsewhere, public-sector employees were not as impacted by the pandemic as compared to those working in the private sector. However, while the public sector in Longyearbyen employs almost exclusively Norwegians, in line with the political aim of maintaining a Norwegian settlement, a large part of the workforce in tourism, and research and education, is non-Norwegian. The unequal negative impact of the pandemic on private-sector employees was thus linked to citizenship, with non-Norwegians impacted more than Norwegians. As Matts, a local Norwegian journalist, explained,

The biggest impact for the community has been the travel ban, for people in the tourism sector. They lose their jobs, they are laid-off, not permanently ... and also it is very obvious the problem with the third country citizens that fell out of every social network that we have, Norwegians. Suddenly it was so obvious, or it became so real. We hadn’t seen that before. This problem has not been this way before. Ever. (Interview with Matts, 1 September 2020)

The sense of shock Matts expresses about the inequality in terms of social security indicates a complex emotional landscape regarding how individuals deal with systemic issues. While at the official level the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis highlighted a division between the Norwegians and the non-Norwegians in Longyearbyen, at a personal level there were efforts made to minimize the negative impacts towards non-Norwegian workers. Here Maria, a non-EU service worker, reflected with mixed emotions:

Regarding my employers, really, I am very grateful, because we had priority as we were the last ones in being laid off and the first ones being re-contracted. That was really very humane of them. To prioritize people that are more in need or that are not protected by the State or ... Just because of their passport. It feels unjust, but I understand the rules in the world, that one is working, like any other citizen, and you pay taxes, like any other citizen, and just because of your passport or the place you were born you don’t have the same rights. (Interview with Maria, 8 July 2020)

For other non-Norwegians who weren’t as protected as Maria by their employers, the Norwegian state’s controversial *ad hoc* ‘travel home’ grant was seen as a way for the State to remove them from the island. The scheme’s stated goal was to make sure that people without any coverage granted through Norwegian or European legislation would be able to get ‘home’ before unemployment

put them in a precarious position. Since those who could apply for the grant were non-Europeans – generally, tourism and service industry workers – the scheme challenged what individuals had heretofore perceived as ‘home’ or ‘community’, and created a deep sense of insecurity in many non-EU/EEA citizens of Longyearbyen. As Parita said,

I always thought I was used to the society in Longyearbyen, I was thinking it will be all right, I will be safe. But I wasn't. I didn't feel safe when corona came. We could have been sent back, couldn't we? I understood how foreign I actually was ... It is so unusual for me to think that I am a foreigner here. I have lived here almost all my life, I am part of the community but still I am not Norwegian enough to get the help I need.

This transition from feeling ‘part of the community’ to feeling ‘not Norwegian enough to get help’, or the feeling of ‘animosity’ towards non-Norwegians as another participant expressed it, was shared by many non-Norwegians in Longyearbyen. For some, even though they had felt at home in Longyearbyen before, the situation of the pandemic made them realize the structural imbalances inherent in the system. Maria explained:

And after this crisis happened ... it's like there I had a different perspective regarding being a foreigner ... I am not accusing Svalbard or Norway, nor anybody in particular, I think that in every country in the world obviously certain persons, certain citizens will have benefits that others cannot access. But ... then I felt that I wasn't that integrated, that I didn't have a European passport, that you are a third-class citizen, you're not Norwegian, not Scandinavian, not European, you're the last of the last in the line.

This dynamic – of a town openly divided along national identity lines, where one segment is undesired – is a tension that has increased during the pandemic. As Matts explained, the focus on Norwegianness in Longyearbyen will have an impact:

It will be hard to be a foreigner here, I think. More and more difficult. It's expensive to live here and it will be maybe more expensive. I think we will meet quite hard times. I think corona started this, given more ... speeded up, the problems in a way. It's hard to say how this society will look like. What else can they do here? Of course, you have KSat and UNIS and you have other things. But tourism is a very big industry. But it generates almost only foreigners and hardly any Norwegians working, and only in the top positions –and even then, it's not well paid. And the Sysselmannen, everybody working there, they have so many benefits. The society is very divided with all this.

In addition to trying to control who can live in Longyearbyen, the Norwegian state has also begun exercising increased control over people's mobility in the natural environment of Svalbard. This politics of mobility will impact all living on the archipelago, Norwegian and non-Norwegian alike, and will potentially bring about frictions just as other measures did during the pandemic. However, viewing such frictions with the help of minor theory, we start to see the entangled relations between the minor (the reactions from a personal/individual level) and the major (the ones from an official/systemic level). Instead of being opposed to one another, the major and the minor are in constant negotiation, where the minor is entangled with the major from within, in an interstitial position (Katz 1996).

## Discussion

Covid-19 pandemic showed both the inherent vulnerabilities associated with the lifestyle choices people make when coming to Longyearbyen, as well as the underlying foundations that preclude the possibility of settling down and having a long-term attachment to place. This reality of transience anchors the town of Longyearbyen as a place of extreme mobilities. The interviews with our participants brought forward both structural issues and systemic vulnerabilities, often expressed in emotional tellings of lived-experiences.

These emotional tellings add to the worldwide reports on impacts of Covid-19 on people's mobility and highlight how individual responses are entangled with the socio-economic and political framework of a specific place. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, Longyearbyen was in socio-economic transition. Initially, a company town controlled by the Norwegian state, the decision

to open Longyearbyen to a diversified, market economy from the end of the 1970s led to decreased state control. The economic restructuring from coal mining to a post-industrial economy based on tourism, research and education has led to an increase in the non-Norwegian population, which rekindled the need for the Norwegian state to regain control. Each of our participants experienced changes in their mobility patterns differently, depending on their varied positions and perspectives. In addition, the State is using politics of mobility in order to increase their control, further differentiating the participants' experiences. Keeping this politics of mobility in mind allows us to link the proposed regulations regarding tourism, outdoor recreation, housing, safety, social and educational services, and voting rights, to the established patterns of mobility in Longyearbyen.

These stories from Longyearbyen also contribute to the growing literature on emotional reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic with a deeper and more nuanced understanding from the High Arctic. By reading these stories closely with minor theory, we have presented the individual, emotional, responses that emerged when participants found themselves in the in-between spaces created by a forced or encouraged situation of (im)mobility. Using minor theory highlighted the important roles of such interstices showing the interstitial perspectives in relation to how people's emotional reactions to the change in Longyearbyen's mobilities in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. The emotions that leaked through the interstices form a terrain of affect. This terrain cannot be revealed in simple descriptions of rejection or exclusion, but can only be depicted when individual emotions are understood within the situatedness of Longyearbyen – of which the systemic issues are part. This affective terrain, in turn, shows the interconnections between emotions and mobilities in Longyearbyen, and how they can only be understood in conjunction and not in isolation.

The stories therefore reveal systemic inequalities and vulnerabilities in Longyearbyen that were heightened and exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as bring forward the emotional vulnerabilities that led participants to respond and make certain choices in an effort to establish a sense of security and/or to be active agents in their own mobility.

## Conclusion

More than a decade ago, mobility scholars asked us to rethink how people's movements are part of the space and place in which these movements occur (Sheller and Urry 2006). Barenholdt and Granås' edited book 'Mobilities and Place' examines the many ways place and mobility overlap and entangle and 'become together' (2008, 1). In the northern European context, new patterns of mobilities have been examined against the background of economic restructuring (Carson et al. 2016). These analyses demonstrate the shift of mobilities studies towards more nuanced explorations of the various temporal, spatial and motivational relationships people have with mobility, transiency, and place.

In many ways, the corona virus has further troubled our views on mobilities. As Tzanelli (2021) proposes, the changing mobilities imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have changed our views of societies and ourselves, displaying the Virocene where multiple crises entangle. This points to the need to better understand the vulnerabilities of individuals and societal systems and the impact they have on each other. In this context, our case study of Longyearbyen demonstrates the complex and affective aspects of politics on an individual level by exploring the emotions connected to everyday practices in individuals' enforced (im)mobility during the time of the Covid-19 lockdowns.

The disruptions of mobility patterns in Longyearbyen, an inherently transient space, provide a rather unique situation where people's emotional attachment to mobilities is revealed. Because of this, we can see how Longyearbyen's systemic issues are enacted through the affective terrain as a process rather than as fixed categories. In this paper, we have responded to Jensen's (2021) invitation to 'think with Covid 19' through looking deeper into everyday life mobilities and individual, emotional and embodied experiences.

As shown in this article, the shift from mobility to immobility is not straightforward. Many people juggle multiple lifestyle choices at the same time and it is only when one aspect tips out

of balance that they are forced to make a choice between them. We see from the emotions expressed by participants how feelings guided their reactions to, and choices about, their change of mobility. This allowed us to gain a different understanding of people's experiences during this time of rupture in the heretofore established rhythms of mobility and immobility in Longyearbyen. In this way, we contribute to what Jensen envisions as an 'atmospheric readings of Covid-19' (2021, 78) which allows us to see the pandemic's disruptions as both material and tangible but also socially coded and affectual.

The politics of mobility lens showed how the enforced (im)mobilities exposed certain pre-existing systemic issues that are part of Longyearbyen's situatedness. By adding a second reading applying Katz' minor theory (Katz 1996, 2017), we then showed another layer, a deeper, more fluid and non-representational understanding of the town's specific situatedness, which would not have been possible without including an analysis of the underlying minor expressions of people's everyday lived experience in Longyearbyen during lockdown. This analysis highlighted individuals' emotional responses to the loss of control of their own mobilities. These responses, where people tried to regain a measure of control over their own lives, point to a micropolitics that is developed from within affective mobilities (Glaveanu and Womersley 2021).

By bringing emotions into the equation, we opened up the individual and personal connections people experience in their relationships to place and mobility. We have illustrated how mobilities can be enacted through individual (re)actions to a dominant force – in many cases by subverting a part of the situation in order to regain a certain element of control. It emerges from this that the value individuals place on (im)mobility has less to do with movement in and of itself than the ability to control that mobility. When in a forced situation, people strive to take back an element of control in order to re-anchor their life situation – even in instability. These are the reactions that we have tried to bring forward here in order to shed light on how disrupted mobilities has exposed the deeply personal, minor stories embedded in individual choices, thus revealing the affective and political aspects of mobilities.

Adding the third element of emotion to the work already done on mobility and place enables us to see the underlying relationships people have with both their mobility and the place(s) where they are mobile. It reveals the political in the flux of movement that would otherwise have been unseen. This way of going beyond a dualistic reading of mobilities and immobilities opens up the possibility for an affective approach to the political.

## Notes

1. It is proposed that non-Norwegian citizens must have lived three years in a Norwegian municipality on the mainland in order to be able to vote and stand for election for the Longyearbyen Community Council (Government.no 2021a).
2. The tax office number combines Longyearbyen with the research settlement of Ny-Ålesund, which has approximately 40 inhabitants.

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