

The Northern-Most Overtourism?

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Dr. Sam Saville
@Samsaville
www.samsaville.org





Overview

Cruise ship La Boreal, Hornsund, June 2019.
Photo: Polish Polar Station Hornsund

- Context and extent of overtourism in Svalbard
- Practical problems
- Societal change and well-being
- Comparing now and then
- Management tools and tactics



Svalbard: Accessible, once in a life-time



POLAR SUMMER
17 May – 30 September. The Midnight Sun, beautiful colours and contrasts add an extra dimension to glaciers, majestic mountain formations and the endless Arctic tundra.



NORTHERN LIGHTS WINTER
1 October – 28 February. In late October, the sun casts its last rays over the landscape this year, and Svalbard enters the magical and mystical Northern Lights Winter.



SUNNY WINTER
1 March – 16 May. As the light returns, the activity level and energy increases. All you want is to be outside, to see and explore the frozen land.

visitsvalbard.com

Svalbard: Small but significant?



- Population: 2700 (2150 Longyearbyen)
- Organised tourism started mid 1990s
- Has grown quickly since 2015 (growth of 45% from 2014 to 2019)
- 'Mass' cruise tourists: 45 000
- Expedition cruise visitors: 15 000
- Overall arrivals: 72 500 (2018)
- 40% employed in tourism (2016)

Is this Overtourism?

“Where the capacity of destinations to cope has reached tipping points...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)



Longyearbyen town centre, cruise tourists. Photo: Dina Brode-Roger

Local factors of influence



Polar Jazz festival 2019: JG Hansen singing: “Coal mining problem, in a tourist town, the government wants to shut us down...but there’s still places where silence can be found and where only locals are allowed”

- Norwegian overtourism
- Small population
- Coal mine closure (2015/16)
- Strict environmental protection
- Climate change: less fjord ice, greater marine navigation
- Limited visitation sites
- ‘Sustainable destination’

Practical Problems

"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. It would be better if they could be staggered because **the facilities are not really able to handle that many people**"



Mein Schiff, nearly 2500 passengers disembarking. Photo: Christopher Engels for SvalbardPosten 14th June 2019

Svalbard Visitor survey, 2018

Changing society

Photo: Zdenka Sokolicková

"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 multinational place. And **people resent it.**"

Interview, February 2019



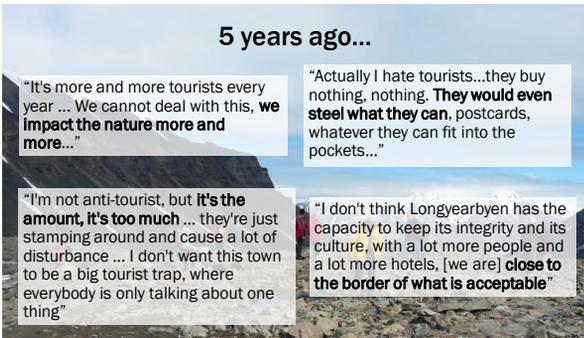
5 years ago...

"It's more and more tourists every year ... We cannot deal with this, **we impact the nature more and more...**"

"Actually I hate tourists...they buy nothing, nothing. **They would even steel what they can,** postcards, whatever they can fit into the pockets..."

"I'm not anti-tourist, but **it's the amount, it's too much ...** they're just stamping around and cause a lot of disturbance ... I don't want this town to be a big tourist trap, where everybody is only talking about one thing"

"I don't think Longyearbyen has the capacity to keep its integrity and its culture, with a lot more people and a lot more hotels, [we are] **close to the border of what is acceptable**"



This year



Photo: Zdenka Sokolicková

This year

Want to shield the kids

Kindergartens find that tourists enter the kindergartens with the highest degree of self-esteem. This will steer Trine

Told about mass tourism

Here are some statements from central politicians in Longyearbyen.

Photo: Zdenka Sokolicková

Tired of ongoing tourists around the homes

"If tourism and the local population are to live happily together we have to stop some things" says Svalbardposten.

Statsbygg sets up surveillance camera

Illuminated tourists ignore ban signs at the seed vault: - Dangerous and unacceptable

Mindre svinn og mer opplyste turister

Både politi og butikksamtne mener å se en bedring i oppførselen til turistene denne sommeren.

Christopher Engels



Management options

Photo: Zdenka Sokolicková

- Governor's office: Tourism Act and Environmental Protection laws, police presence
- Local area planning and building regulations
- Port fees
- Community guidelines
- Sustainable destination status
- Masterplan



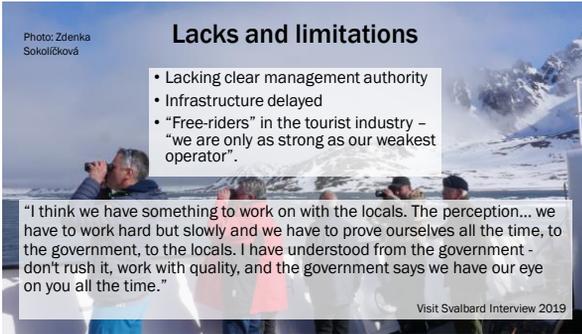


Photo: Zdenka Sokaličková

Lacks and limitations

- Lacking clear management authority
- Infrastructure delayed
- “Free-riders” in the tourist industry – “we are only as strong as our weakest operator”.

“I think we have something to work on with the locals. The perception... we have to work hard but slowly and we have to prove ourselves all the time, to the government, to the locals. I have understood from the government - don't rush it, work with quality, and the government says we have our eye on you all the time.”

Visit Svalbard Interview 2019



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