

## ARCTIC NEGOTIATIONS\_ case Svalbard 78°N



Impermanence is the constant condition of the arctic archipelago of Svalbard. A remote melting pot of cultures, Svalbard's natural and scientific extremes reveal a sensor of global tendencies. As these landscapes are transforming rapidly, its future belong to all of us.

The ice melting in the north redefines accessibility, opening new potential sea routes for commerce, research, resource extractions and tourism. This geopolitical complexity, with its environmental consequences, will provide the frame for a studio where these conflicting stakeholders, interests and settlements with its different temporalities, will be explored.

On this battlefield of global processes, we aim to formulate strategic scenarios and relevant design speculations and projects.

The studio is linked to the Oslo Architectural Triennale 2016; *After Belonging: A Triennale In Residence, On Residence and the Ways We Stay in Transit* that will explore how the new objects, spaces and territories define our transformed condition of belonging under global regimes of circulation.

### FLOATING BORDERS

From *no mans land* to *strategic hot spot*, Svalbard is situated midway between Norway and the North Pole. With the opening of the North Passage; it is also midway from Asia and the US. The Svalbard archipelago, also known as Spitsbergen, was discovered by the vikings in 12<sup>th</sup> century and rediscovered by the Dutch in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The administrative town of Longyearbyen is named after John Longyear (US) who opened the Arctic Coal Company in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, initiating resource extraction in coalmining.

In Paris in 1920, 12 countries signed the Svalbard Treaty. Norway was granted sovereignty in 1925. Today, 42 countries have signed the treaty, and by that given equal rights to natural resources, trade and research.

Still – it is not Norway. It is not Schengen.

It's a VAT free zone where everyone needs a passport to enter. A place closer to the concept of the cloud-polis, "the CITY" and the practical sovereignty proposed by Benjamin Bratton. ("Stacks, states and clouds"). Even the Norwegian building codes do not apply here.

The 3 main principles of the Svalbard treaty are:

Non-discrimination, militarily restricted, and environmental conservation.

Today the ice melting opens new definitions of boundaries for oil drilling rights and fishing zones. Strategic positioning by Russia and China keeps coalmining running or 'maintaining' its former infrastructure as ruins, while triggering a new market for global land acquisition. (Saskia Sassen in "The New Global Market for Land" in "Expulsions. Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy.")

The Global Seed Vault or "doomsday vault" in the dystopian vision of agricultural warfare, was established in Svalbard in 2008; a subterranean storage receptacle for every species of seed-producing plant life on Earth, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Norwegian tax payers. NASA accelerates investments in expansive satellite parks, spearheading scientific research and recordings on environmental effects of climate change.

### **FLOATING POPULATIONS**

The perfect utopia; you are not allowed to die – or get old in Svalbard.

Nor is it allowed to give birth there.

Everything is imported, people and goods.

The multicultural community and the precarious nature of the workforce are evolving. Today it is the place with the highest IQ density and greatest number of PHD's anywhere in Norway. The Svalbard University Centre offers international graduate and postgraduate degrees in Arctic studies. With its unique legal humanitarian status, part of Norway, but free from the Norwegian immigration laws, 42 nationalities are represented.

Seasonal migration follows extreme contrasts of daylight; 4 months of polar day and the midnight sun, and 3 months of polar night, Aurora Borealis the only flash of light.

Svalbard has never been a place where people settle down for life. Local traditions are not passed down through generations, rather open for constant renewal and redefinition.

### **FLOATING STRUCTURES**

As the permafrost is thawing; three main agencies aim to solidify its position;

- Arctic research
- Fuel extraction
- Tourism

Paradoxically, the satellite parks recording climate change are located directly on top of the coalmines, pragmatically dictated by the available infrastructure and roads. This again, surrounded by the arctic oceans where global oil drilling rights are heavily disputed.

*"Svalbard is a contradictory and hypocritical landscape—a place where fuel has historically and continues to be extracted while also supporting some of the world's premiere research of the effects of climate change. Tourism is the most recent industry and it serves as a voyeur to the other two which can't exist without the other"*

*Rori Knudtszon\_ Dead Reckoning*



## STUDIO

In this contested landscape, based on temporality itself, we will question the dynamics of hosts and visitors in Svalbard.

*Who is hosting, who visits – how long, where and why?*

New exotic forms of tourism are emerging; Arctic nature tourism, Polar extreme sport tourism, “Ghost town-/ruin tourism”, science tourism and climate change tourism. The yearly arrival of 300 cruise ships and 150 expedition ships triggers a need of a new ferry terminal and new resorts and infrastructure.

Through the research filter of the Floating Borders, Populations and Structures, the course will investigate the evolution and contemporary condition of the transitory state, interface and settlements of the archipelago of Svalbard. Through the initial research analysis and material, each student will define the strategy and program for the semester project.

The research on the area and topic will be organized in different phases and formats in the first part of the semester:

- phase 1. ATLAS / MAPPINGS of Floating Borders
- phase 2. TIMELINES of Floating Populations
- phase 3. CATALOGUE of Floating Structures and Infrastructure.

Students are encouraged to follow the seminar *After Belonging. Architectures of Residence for a Life in Transit* that will be held in GSAPP by Ignacio G. Galán, Carlos Mínguez Carrasco and Alejandra Navarrete Llopis with Lluís Alexandre Casanova and Marina Otero Verzier. (not a requirement)

g\_bo

Architecture should have  
little to do with problem  
solving - rather it should  
create desirable  
conditions and  
opportunities hitherto  
thought impossible.

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*Cedric Price*