The University Centre in Svalbard
Written exam SH-201 The History of Svalbard
Monday 6th of February 2017, hours: 14.00-17.00

Part I: Multiple-choice test. Make only one cross for each question.

1.	When did the name 'Spitsbergen' appear for the first time?	☒ 1194	☐ 1596	☐ 1613
2.	The 'Muscovy Company'of 1555 was…	☐ Russian	☐ Dutch	☒ English
3.	In what period did land based whaling end?	☒ 1650-1700	☐ 1700-1750	☐ 1750-1800
4.	Which town fitted out the first Norwegian wintering hunting expedition to Svalbard?	☐ Tromsø	☒Hammerfest	☐ Vardø
5.	The so-called 'La Recherche' expedition visited Svalbard twice – when?	☐ 1764-1765	☒ 1838-1839	☐ 1872-1873
6.	How many polar expeditions by aircraft departed from Ny-Ålesund in the 1920s?	☐ 2	☐ 3	☒ 4
7.	The Svalbard (Spitsbergen) Treaty was ratified and entered into force in…	☐ 1920	☐ 1923	☒ 1925
8.	What is the name of the Russian coal company that was established in 1931?	☒ Arktikugol	☐ Grumant	☐ Barentsburg
9.	When was the last coalmine in Ny-Ålesund closed down?	☐ 1962	☒ 1963	☐ 1965
10.	Svalbard airport, Longyearbyen (LYR) opened for regular traffic in…	☒ 1975	☐ 1985	☐ 1995
11.	An important scientific infrastructure on Svalbard opened in 1996 – which one?	☐ ESRO	☒ EISCAT	☐ UNIS
12.	How many people are presently (2016) living in Longyearbyen?	☐ ca. 1750	☐ ca. 1950	☒ ca. 2150

Part II: Choose and answer <u>one</u> of the following questions:

A. **Company town**
Explain what is meant by the term "company town" and discuss how relevant that term is with regard to some of the settlements on Svalbard, in the past and today.

or:

B. **Russian Pomors on Svalbard**
Discuss the question of when the Pomors first came to Svalbard. Describe the development of their economic activity on the archipelago. When and why did the activity come to an end?

A. Company town

A 'company town' can be defined as a community that is dependent on a single organization for all or most of its employment, housing, supplies and services of various kind. It is typically associated with towns that were built around extracting industries, often mining, where the company to a large extent organized social life as well as working life. Historically, there are many examples of such company towns in Europe, the US and Russia. Some of them were designed as 'model towns' with emphasis on good community planning, social services, education and so on, particularly during 19th century industrialization.

There are many single-sided local communities around the world even today which are more or less similar to the traditional company towns. In general, though, public services and

authorities tend to replace the role private (or state) companies have had with regard to regulating peoples' lives. How relevant is the term 'company town' when it comes to settlements on Svalbard, historically and today?

There is no doubt that industrial activity is the very reason why permanent settlements were built and developed on Svalbard from the beginning of the 20th century. Coal mining required a year-round presence and consequently housing and adequate infrastructure needed to be constructed. Since Svalbard was a 'no man's land' without any prior settlement, local administration or infrastructure the mining companies themselves had to provide everything. Initially, there was no kinds of regulation – the companies decided on their own what was needed in order to carry out production and recruit labour. When the Mining Code (Bergverksordningen) entered into force in 1925 as a result of the Svalbard Treaty, it set requirements for the companies to provide adequate living and working conditions, schools for children, medical services and so on. This was a realization of the fact that there were no public services or governmental bodies in place that otherwise could take care of such needs. Consequently, the 'company town' was more or less institutionalized by the Mining Code.

There are many short-lived settlements on Svalbard, with a varying degree of community features, such as Advent City (1905-08), Hiorthamn (1917-26) or Tunheim on Bjørnøya (1915-25). These are examples of mining camps that hardly had the potential or ambition to become permanent communities. The American Arctic Coal Co. probably never intended to develop their "camp" Longyear City (1906-15) into a full-fledged local community, and little changed when Store Norske took over in 1916. The same seems to be true for the first phases of mining settlements like the Dutch Barentsburg (1920-26), the Swedish Sveagruvan (1917-25) and Norwegian Ny-Ålesund (1917-29). Ny-Ålesund closed mining in 1929, but functioned as a fishery station in the 1930s. Coal mining reopened in 1945 and continued until 1963. In this period there were families living in the town too. Thereafter, Ny-Ålesund has been a research station.

The Soviet Trust Arktikugol started coal mining in Grumant and Barentsburg in 1931-32, expanding rapidly. There were a few women and small children, but nothing like a family community. From 1949 Pyramiden was built up. Grumant closed in 1962, Pyramiden in 1998. From the 1960s the Russian settlements had a well-developed welfare infrastructure, including cultural centres, schools and kindergartens – on par with or better than Longyearbyen at that time. All the same, none of these towns were comparable to ordinary mainland communities. For example, there was a large majority of males, there was only one employer in each settlement, housing and catering was organized by the company and so on. There was even a local monetary system, both in the Russian and Norwegian towns.

Thus, all of these settlements can be characterized as 'company towns', although to a varying degree and with different development. We can illustrate this by comparing the history of the three settlements that still exist – Barentsburg, Ny-Ålesund and Longyearbyen.

Barentsburg was undoubtedly a company town during the Dutch period, when NESPICO operated there. The Soviet-Russian Trust Arktikugol took over in 1932 and still owns the settlement. Although this was and is a Russian state-owned company virtually no public services or governmental bodies have any responsibilities, save for the Russian Consulate General. Housing, cultural activities, school, hospital and infrastructure are all organized by Arktikugol. There are research activities in Barentsburg that are organized by mainland academic institutions, but they are more or less dependent upon the local mining company for housing and supplies. New economic activities, such as tourism, are organized in daughter-companies or departments of Arktikugol, and presently there is no private enterprises in Barentsburg except for the aviation company that operates helicopters. Hence, Barentsburg is still very much a traditional company town.

The same is in many ways for Ny-Ålesund, although the state-owned company Kings Bay has a different purpose now than it had before 1963. When coalmining was discontinued the company changed into being a service and infrastructure provider for research. Although the scientific institutions and their personnel are independent and not employed by Kings Bay,

they all rely on the company for virtually all services – housing, food, transportation and so on. For public services they must turn to Longyearbyen. In that sense, Ny-Ålesund resembles a company town, albeit very different from the traditional concept.

Longyearbyen was a company town for a very long time, existing and functioning for the sole purpose of producing coal for Store Norske. Changes started in the mid-1970s, when Store Norske was nationalized and the Norwegian state started modernizing the community – or "normalizing" Longyearbyen, as it was expressed. Family housing was provided, welfare improved. The opening of the airport in 1975 broke the isolation, as did the improvement of telecommunications. The number of state employees rose, creating a more varied demographic and social structure. In the 1980s this development sped up, and the first private enterprises appeared. In 1989 Store Norske was reorganized, and the community oriented services were taken over by a separate, state-owned company. The real modern phase starts in the early 1990s. The Government supported the development of new, private and (hopefully) profitable businesses in Longyearbyen as an alternative to the troubled coal company. Tourism, service industries and scientific activity expanded greatly. Longyearbyen has doubled its number of inhabitants since 1990 and has become an advanced, diversified and high-quality family community with a functional local democracy (since 2002). The demography is still unusual compared to mainland Norway, with its male surplus and a young and international population. However, Longyearbyen is by no means a company town today.

B. Russian Pomors on Svalbard

Russian exploitation of Svalbard's resources started with the Pomors' hunting and trapping. 'Pomory' means "people living by the sea", i.e. the White Sea. Pomors originate from the South of Russia and they colonized the White Sea region from the 12th century on. They developed a versatile economy consisting of farming, fishing, hunting and trade. Sea mammal hunting became one specialty, particularly walrus. Following this prey, the Pomors gradually expanded into the Arctic: the Pechora Sea, Kara Sea, Novaya Zemlya and – eventually – Svalbard, or Grumant, as they called it.

The first arrival of Pomor hunters on Svalbard is a disputed question. Some Russian historians and archaeologists argue that Pomor trappers exploited Svalbard long before Barentsz. This hypothesis was presented – not coincidentally – already in the late 19th century, at the same time as Norwegians "rediscovered" the Norse references to 'Svalbard'. Written evidence is scarce and requires interpretation. Archaeologist V.F. Starkov has dated timber in Pomor sites on Svalbard to mid-16th century and has made other finds he believes corroborate this hypothesis, such as inscriptions and objects of possibly 16th century origin. Many western scientists have been skeptical towards the evidence. Most of them believe the Pomors arrived at a much later stage. Norwegian archaeologist Tora Hultgreen says after 1700, when tsar Peter I initiated Arctic whaling and trade. She has also questioned the dendrochronological evidence. Dendrochronology is an accurate way of dating wood under certain conditions, but it remains to be proved that the buildings themselves were erected on Svalbard shortly after the timber was cut. The Pomors probably did have the experience and ship technology to sail to Svalbard in the 16th century; after all, they went to Novaya Zemlya and regularly navigated in Arctic waters. However, there is no mention of their presence in the numerous accounts of whalers and explorers frequenting Svalbard in the 17th century.

With regard to their activity on Svalbard we know the Pomors fitted out both summer and winter expeditions. Statistics and data are lacking but the winter expeditions probably numbered fewer men. However, the activity was extensive, geographically speaking. We find remains of Pomor trapping stations all over Svalbard. Close by the stations large orthodox crosses were often erected, probably serving both religious and navigational purposes. Often graves were placed nearby. Some of the stations were quite large and complex, sheltering

many trappers, and some of them were obviously expanded or rebuilt over the years. We also find remains of smaller huts at a distance from the main stations where a couple of trappers could reside for parts of the season. In this way, the expedition was able to expand the hunting and trapping area and be more productive.

While the summer expeditions primarily hunted sea mammals, the winterers could also hunt or trap fur animals (polar bears, foxes and reindeer) and collect eider-down and eggs. During later stages of their activity, around 1800, we know they also caught Beluga whales. Expeditions were usually fitted out by a local merchant, a village or – in some cases – a monastery. There were attempts to organize bigger companies as well, but they were largely unsuccessful. Although a few trappers stayed voluntarily or by mishap for more years (e.g. the famous Ivan Starostin stayed 39 winters), the regular pattern was seasonal. The winterers were usually collected by the summer expedition the following year.

It seems Pomor hunting peaked before 1800, and the last expedition returned in 1852. There are numerous possible explanations as to why the activity stopped. Competition with Norwegians has been suggested; a growing number of hunting and trapping expeditions from Northern Norway visited Svalbard from the 1820s on. The Norwegians exploited basically the same resources and continued to do so throughout the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, so a sudden depletion of game can hardly explain the Russians disappearing. Another hypothesis that has been put forward is that the activity acquired a bad reputation in the White Sea region due to a number of mishaps and fatalities. This might have had a negative effect on recruitment to the industry. Probably structural changes in the Pomor economy are also important. Fishing and trade received more attention in the 19th century, and central authorities in Russia seem to have lost interest in keeping up Arctic activities