Extractivism and Climate Change: A Cultural-Historical Study of Svalbard During the Late Modern Warm Period (1970–2025)

Since around the 1980s, Svalbard has undergone major climatic changes: due to the so-called phenomenon of Arctic acceleration, the average temperature in this region has been increasing nearly four times faster than elsewhere. Arguably, this has had significant socio-cultural ramifications for the archipelago, including, but not limited to, avalanches in residential areas, accelerated decomposition of historical objects, and general awareness of rapid change. On a more positive side, it has also become an incentive to reconsider our current climatic and ecological predicament in historical, religious, and not least philosophical terms. Importantly, what do these climate-driven changes have to say about human agency, and to what extent are they 'climate-driven'? Or, relatedly, what does the history of the Modern Warm Period have to say about the prospects for change? By focusing on the recent developments in the archipelago (most importantly, in Longyearbyen), this study will aim to provide some clues to answering the above questions from the perspective of climate history. Hopefully, this will help to shed some light on more general historiographical and conceptual issues concerning climate, history, and the relationship between the two.

Number of participants: 2

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Dominik Collet

Number of projects: 1

Preferred project period: July-September 2025

Preferref background: History, Climate/Environmental history, Philosophy

Outline of project work / deliverables:

1. Exploring primary historical literature on the topic, mostly in Norwegian (*Svalbardposten*, Svalbard Museum's archives, etc.);
2. Exploring relevant secondary (peer-reviewed) literature on climate change and history in Svalbard in the period from around the 1970s onwards;
3. Of particular interest could be finding sources allowing comparisons between the climate change discourse (or the lack thereof) in Longyearbyen and the Russian community in Barentsburg;
4. Interviews (most likely online) may also be considered;
5. Sharing the results of the study in a popular science article (e.g., in *Fortid*) may be considered.