

## (Re)unite

Transformation of an industrial heritage structure in Longyearbyen.



*Taubanesentralen* (the ropeway hub) is a listed monument situated in Longyearbyen, conveying the history of a coal mining community in the Arctic. It was constructed in the late 1950s and used to transport kibbles with coal from the mines in the mountains where it was collected and passed on to the port and out to the world. The industry was in many ways constructed around the ropeway hub. *Taubanesentralen* is a purely practical installation, most likely shaped without thought for the esthetics. The colossal ropeway dominated the cityscape like a wild and untamed animal, it was the beating heart of the coal mining industry. After the ropeway was replaced with trucks in the late 1970s, the building went from being an instrument for the industry, to a symbol of history. Together with the ropeway, the kibbles and supporting structures in the landscape (*taubanebukk* and *vinkelstasjoner*), the ropeway *hub* was a clear symbol of the coal mining industry, even after it was operational. But over the years, the ropeway, kibbles and supporting structures slowly fell into ruins, and *Taubanesentralen* was disconnected from its own past. It became a monument completely disengaged from its original function, and people's ownership of the building withered.

Today *Taubanesentralen* is in many ways' untouchable, partly due to its condition, being unsafe and unavailable to the public, and partly due to the fact that it is listed as industrial heritage of national importance (2003), restricting further changes and new use. The building stands today as a question mark, and there is no obvious answer for its future purpose. As a response to the accelerating climate change, Svalbard aspires to become a zero-emission society. *Taubanesentralen* conveys a completely different message, representing the bygone

coal mining industry. What role does it have now and how should people relate to it? How could the building be reunited with the town again?

Nobody knows how Longyearbyen will develop in the future, or how Taubanesentralen will fit in to the plans, but since it is listed Taubanesentralen is doomed to remain standing. How can we keep or cope with the memory of the coal mining industry when most of its structures are already in ruin? How do we preserve something that is actually completely disengaged from its original function? The building has become an iconic monument for Longyearbyen, but it also represents a dark past with struggling, bad and demanding conditions for the workers. There is an ambivalence between pride and shame. Should Taubanesentralen be manifested as a reminder and monument of the past, or as a part of Longyearbyen's future? How do we carry an ambiguous monument into the future?

We want to investigate these different dilemmas to avoid its ruination. We have examined the key aspects of the building and tried to understand how to unite the town and the building again.

We have looked for a new use that would fit into contemporary life on Svalbard. There are approximately 2000 people living in Longyearbyen at any given time, but nobody is allowed to live permanently on the island. Every year, roughly 400 people moves to and from the town. This gives a turnover rate of around 20 % annually. We are faced with many dilemmas when designating the use of Taubanesentralen. It is difficult to create a fixed program that establish affiliation and identity in such a fluctuating environment. However, if we look closely, we see that the building is used by the public; not as an office, housing or restaurant, but as a playground, "fitness center", concert venue, meeting point, museum and attraction for curious tourists. These already ongoing activities are an integral part of the development of the building, according to the choices and desires of the citizens through time. We want to strengthen and encourage these activities to facilitate for a new future for Taubanesentralen.



Photo above: Current situation summer



Photo above: Current situation winter

On the basis of these observations, we believe the answer to the question of how to best preserve the building lies in enhancing the sense of ownership to the building. Through ownership Taubanesentralen might tackle the uncertain future of Svalbard. Ownership is there already, but how can we enhance it? There are many ways to create ownership and we want to explore different ways this could be obtained.

In order to understand how we can optimize the sense of ownership we had to recognize and investigate the buildings character defining elements. But the strange and alien structure challenges the traditional concepts of how to assess the value of cultural heritage. In addition to the character defining physical elements, we have identified a set of intangible features that we believed is just as important. By assessing the building and focusing on its different elements, we were able to identify its characteristic details and inherent values. This made it possible for us to make a continuous value assessment of each of the elements throughout the process. The tangible character defining elements of Taubanesentralen are its shape, the steel structure, the machinery, the timber flooring and the exterior cladding. Its intangible features are sound, social activities, craftsmanship, light/darkness, inside/outside and alien-character (expression). In order to come up with one possible architectural answer we needed to investigate the building through testing and analyzing. Through numerous analyses we removed, replaced, kept, preserved, toned down, accentuated, abstracted and added different parts to the building to maintain authenticity and history, while at the same

time to accommodate for a future of the building. Every test and analysis are conducted in order to make value-based decisions for the building.

Our vision is that our proposal will make Taubanesentralen accessible again, but also create a building that the inhabitants and tourists want to use, now and for the future. Through interventions we aspire towards affiliation, facilitation for inherent use, curiosity and connection between the building and the inhabitants. Our goal is that Taubanesentralen belongs to the future, while at the same time confronts its fundamental and important past. Taubanesentralen should be something the Svalbardians should be proud of.



Photo above: Physical model illustration