Collective memory of the Kirkenes iron mine in sub-Arctic Norway: Its role in forming the future

Abstract
This study argues that collective memory is a relevant concept that can be used to analyse how the outlooks on industrial futures are shaped in remote northern locations. The case in question is the Sydvaranger iron mine in Kirkenes in the north-easternmost part of Norway. By drawing attention to the long periods of time often involved in forming collective memory this study questions the viability of top-down processes of forming opinions aiming to set local minds on the track towards either ‘place-renewal’ into an unknown post-industrial future or towards attaining a ‘social licence to operate’ for any new or continued raw material producing industry. This exploration includes a discussion of memory studies, an overview of the industrial history of Kirkenes as part of a Euroarctic borderland, and a study of the manifestations of collective memory in the contemporary local media. Revealing insights were obtained in Kirkenes through informal conversations and participant observation.

Keywords: mining, collective memory, industrial heritage, centre-periphery relations, Kirkenes

Greenfields and brownfields of the Arctic

The Sydvaranger iron mine in Kirkenes in sub-Arctic Norway stopped operations for the fourth time in its history in autumn 2015. Today, no clear-cut positive or negative stance towards mining dominates local opinions. However, the discussions among individuals and groups are on-going. These are based on insights regarding what mining means to different local people, as well as an awareness of its dependence on shifting global markets and environmental impacts. This functions as a local platform to pragmatically discuss any plans to reopen the mine.

In older business accounts of the geographic options for industrial foreign direct investments, the so-called greenfield development projects were often considered the least complicated alternative. The type of project would be implemented in a territory of pristine natural conditions and include little to hamper the execution of the entrepreneurs’ state-of-the-art plans to construct an optimal industrial site from scratch (for definitions, see Meyer & Estrin, 2001, p. 576). However, this outlook has little bearing in the Arctic currently. Given that the sub-Arctic part of Europe is more sparsely populated than the temperate parts of the northern hemisphere, any uses of its land for industrial purposes are regulated by law and subject to various regimes of state and democratic control. A brownfield industrial site has a previous history of industry. When operations cease, it contains sometimes useful, but more often derelict, machinery and real estate as well as grounds and sea beds in need of decontamination. In urban areas today, brownfields are
often attractive sites for re-development for new post-industrial purposes (Dorsey, 2003).

Brownfield re-investments in the original line of business of a site may be attractive in rural areas due to low real estate prices and less competition from other land-use interests. A closed mine, wherein the mineral of value has not yet been depleted, or its use replaced by new technology, is commercially dormant rather than closed, dependent on global market prices. Thus far, discussions on planned, active, and abandoned sub-Arctic mining sites mostly focus on the related environmental, geo-economic, and indigenous issues. The people living in or around the sites of continued or future industrial interest have often been clustered as ‘local residents’ or just ‘people’ from whom successful investors, to add to their official mining permit and approved Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), must earn a social license to operate (SLO) (Koivurova et al., 2015). This article aims to widen this approach by demonstrating the explanatory power of collective memory in the formation of the attitudes behind a social license to operate, not only among local residents but also including other agents and stakeholders.

Arctic mining can be considered part of a ‘cosmology of extractivism’ (Wilson & Stammler, 2016) or an exponent of neo-colonialism. It can also be governed by modern stewardship and includes local social investment programmes that create value for the company and the communities in which they operate (Esteves, 2008). In northern Fennoscandia, societal structures are comparatively strong and receive stable funding from public sources. Furthermore, the composition of the local community is heterogeneous and politically divided. Transferring the outlooks and claims found in the scholarship on other parts of the Arctic, including that mining entrepreneurs must earn the trust of the local people before opening operations, gives rise to the same questions as those for an SLO. More than one group of local people exist.

Nevertheless, the Euroarctic of Fennoscandia is a region that could gain from more vigilance regarding the economic benefits that the procurement of goods and services would bring if the raw material extracting industry made them locally. Much can and has been learned from Social impact Assessments (SIAs) in other parts of the world and how good company policies can increase the quality of the local life (see for example, Esteves, Franks & Vanclay, 2012). Similar issues of local taxation and job creation in the nascent off-shore industry on the shelf of the Barents Sea are emphasised today in northern Norway, with no unanimous support from southern Norway or regions in the south-west, where the clusters of the Norwegian off-shore supply industry are located (Wråkberg, in press).

There is reason to further explore the ontological meanings of the industrial heritage of sites with a mining history and how this works in the minds of residents and entrepreneurs interested in the site. One sub-Arctic case is the closed or dormant Sydvaranger iron mine in Kirkenes in the north-easternmost part of Norway. This mine is a brownfield in the minds of those with prolonged familiarity with the
place. A collective memory exists and is shared by the following groups: the residents in the village; those who have moved after the last closure to seek income elsewhere; and those who, during the mine’s operating times, flew in and out but never settled in Kirkenes. It will be argued in this article that the group stances and reasoning based on the mine’s past relate to both its most recent history and to dramatic events, lines of development, everyday life, and emotions from a period including its history back to 1906.

Collective memories recalled, re-considered, and retold can be traced in local discussions and related to the Kirkenes’ built industrial heritage. These lived and narrated memories are not reducible to a binary of simplistic ‘romantic’ ideas of the ‘good old days’ of mining or real experiences of its many drawbacks. Furthermore, they do not merely exist in a myriad of individual life stories and idiosyncratic statements based thereon. The collective memory of the past mining held at brownfield sites provides a ‘familiarity’ with mining, which includes awareness of both its benefits and drawbacks, and a repository of reminiscences of past events on which to base forecasts of local futures with or without mining.

In this article, I will use the history, collective memory and contemporary debates on mining in Kirkenes to argue that the social license idea, i.e., that a social license to mine already exists or could be earned from the “people” in Kirkenes, has to be tested against, first of all, the heterogeneous and politically divided social reality that this place exhibits. All villages, towns and city boroughs are, of course, different in socio-economic terms. In the Kirkenes case, most striking is its character as a border town in an ethnically mixed borderland with a partly violent and tragic history – a setting in which the mine always played a central role.

The next section will illuminate what the status of remoteness of the place has meant in the Kirkenes case, both as a tainted heritage in outsiders’ eyes and in material terms at the uncertain end of lines of supply, export and communication. In the following section, I will present a way of combining memory studies and cognitive psychology to arrive at the more practically oriented conception of collective memory as a decision-making resource that I apply in this article. I will go on to outline the historical events most often referred to locally in discussions on mining, and in the final section, I conclude by stating how I think this functions in political and socio-economic practice, all based on studies of relevant secondary literature, media sources and my own participant observations, for more than a decade, of those living in Kirkenes.

**Evolving collective memory in a sub-Arctic borderland**

Collective memory has been applied widely to analyse identity-formation and the socio-political uses of monuments and memorial sites (Erll, 2011; Tamm, 2013). Likewise, it can be employed to interpret the meanings of the industrial heritage of Arctic mining. It includes or overlaps with the explanatory force of mentalities in the history of ideas (Confino, 2008). In the case contemplated in this article, collective memory can account for the slowly evolving and
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not always explicit stances of local and external actors regarding the
future of the place of Kirkenes. This use of the concept is not about
identity formation but is a group-based cognitive resource for
everyday use by its holders to form opinions and make decisions that
are important to their futures. This lived and narrated knowledge
provides temperance in facing complex individual and group
challenges.

Northern cultures include indigenous perspectives from native
peoples’ ancient uses of lands, which were later transformed
through trade and the arrival of various settlers. In the Euroarctic,
relations evolved between the southern emerging economies and
the Sami population in medieval times, alongside Christianisation
and taxation. In the 16th and 17th centuries, national competition
over the northernmost part of Fennoscandia was still an open affair
between Denmark, Sweden, and Novgorod/Russia (Hansen & Olsen,
2004; Jackson & Nielsen, 2005). The high north, where the Norse and
eastern Kven and Finnish populations had settled on the coast
during pre-industrial times, is a special case in Norwegian economic
history. These groups based their livelihood on small-scale
shipbuilding, coastal fisheries and a seasonally limited, but
important, export of dried and salted fish (Bjørklund, Drivenes &

The logging of primeval forests, establishment of sawmills, and
export of timber are the earliest signs of the transformation of the
European high north into a raw material producing periphery that is
dependent on transnational markets (Nielsen & Tevlina, 2014;
Wicken, 2010). The establishment of the Sydvaranger iron mine in
Kirkenes in 1906, in sparsely populated East Sami land, was the
result of the growing demand for iron caused by the advancing
industrialisation of Western and Central Europe.

Part of the socio-political experience of living in the Euroarctic
borderlands is characterised by la longue durée. Here, as elsewhere,
some attitudes and practices tend to change very slowly or persist
over long periods. The phenomenon of historical inertia was
identified first in other parts of Europe, such as the Mediterranean
by the French Annañes-school of geographic research, and is
epitomised in the historical-spatial understanding of its core concept
of mentalities. Slowly evolving mentalities explain certain historical
continuities and are closely related to collective memory (Confino,
2008).

A local continuity in attitudes based on accumulated experiences
creates patterns in life strategies. Collective memory and mentalities
work behind perceived sets of alternatives for individual action, and
sometimes involve a subaltern social position of peripheral
dependence in relation to metropolitan national politics and shifts in
the global economy. On the other hand, these shifts and even
complete breakdowns of lines of power and supply have been
countered in the high north by regional traditions of self-reliance,
including an openness to trade with neighbours across national
borders. This enables family and group self-subsistence to operate
outside the centre-periphery economy. Furthermore, it has
translated into a rural lifestyle in the Euroarctic based on pragmatism in finding ways to cope under disruptive political and economic conditions (Gløersen, Dubois, Roto, Rasmussen & Sterling, 2009, pp. 52–65).

The most often recalled historic example of this in conversations on north-easternmost Norway is the so-called Pomor trade. It took place along the Arctic coast between northern Norway and the Pomor coastal communities of the White Sea of Northwest Russia. It was mainly based on barter, grain products, timber, and tar from Russia for salted and dried fish from Norway. Initially, this practice was illegal and in breach of various southern trade monopolies. The now extinct pidgin language Russenorsk developed over the years of this trade, confirming its importance. The Pomor trade was crucial in ensuring the wellbeing of the small coastal communities of north-eastern Norway especially during the times of the British blockade in the Napoleonic Wars when crucial supplies through domestic trade with the south were halted (Broch & Jahr, 1984; Nielsen, 2001).

Another breakdown in Norwegian centre-periphery relations occurred during World War II and the Nazi German occupation of the country. From 1940 to 1944, Kirkenes and the surrounding Sør-Varanger municipality housed approximately 70,000 people, almost 10 times the pre- and post-war population, and were transformed into garrisons for troops and the bridgehead for the German attack on Northwest Russia. After the war many people living in other parts of Norway accused their northern compatriots for lack of zeal to engage in partisan operations, and suspicions of collaboration with the enemy were directed especially at the east of Finnmark County, Norway’s north-easternmost borderland to Finland and Russia (Borge, 2014; Espeli, 2013). We will return to how this has affected the collective memory in contemporary Kirkenes.

The ongoing political hassle of a merger between traditionally social democrat Finnmark County and the more populated and politically liberal neighbouring county of Troms adds to the bleak image of national centre-periphery relations among many living in and outside northern Norway. In a letter to the editor of the regional newspaper Finnmarken, a citizen of Finnmark County remarked,

‘History repeats itself: this time without matches and gasoline [referring to the scorching of the county by the retreating German army in 1944]. Otherwise, it is the same fate we lived through 75 years ago. Finnmark was burnt down. All its inhabitants had toiled for and saved by their thrift was brutally stolen. The people of Finnmark, however, rose and returned despite the various obstacles post-war authorities instigated for their re-building initiatives. We are back to the tragic forties now when Troms County will “devour” that of Finnmark to get all we have of maritime, geological, and other natural assets (Andersen, 2018)”.

1 All translations in the article are by the author.
The merger was enforced by the Norwegian national parliament and its conservative government, despite an 87% majority vote against it in a regional referendum held in 2018 (Finnmark fylkeskommune, 2018). This will end the self-determination of Finnmark County, and soon, its political representatives will remain a hapless minority in all decisions regarding its future. We will not go further into this quite inflamed, contemporary political conflict between the national periphery of East Finnmark County on the one hand, and the major town in northern Norway Tromsø and the conservative government in the capital of Oslo on the other (for further examples on this political war-rhetoric see Lind Berg, 2018). It is mentioned here because it testifies to the socio-political importance of collective memory in Finnmark County. It is argued in this article that this collective memory is worth analysing not only because it forms local and regional attitudes regarding the Kirkenes iron mine, but because it influences the individuals’ evaluations of their future prospects and their decision-making regarding whether to continue living in the town or not.

Cognitive processes involving memory and simulations similar to ‘time-travel’ under various assumptions are important everyday human processes used by groups and individuals to evaluate and discuss their economic prospects across generations based on recollections of the past. It is argued that the case of Kirkenes involves conversations among a wider range of local residents and recent migrants than usually assumed in heritage and memory studies. Part of most people’s everyday strategies involves relating in a critical way to the news media, advertising of ideas and marketing of business scenarios. Judgements based on collective memory can motivate individuals and groups to divert from what is politically correct and enable them to exercise the freedom at their disposal to make choices for their futures (Certeau, 1984).

The next section will propose a theoretical foundation for this view on collective memory as a practical decision-making resource in the everyday lives of individuals. It will do so by relating historical memory studies, so far mostly focussed on the issues of ethnic and cultural identity of groups, to memory studies, as practised within cognitive psychology. I will go on to relate this conception of collective memory as a decision-making resource to evidence of a locally conceived multifactorial history of Kirkenes and East Finnmark, emphasising its character as something which, I suggest, largely cross-cuts individual ethnic and professional identities.

**Collective memory as a cognitive resource**

Since Maurice Halbwachs’ seminal writings on collective memory, which were published from the 1920s until the early forties, the strand of research he inspired has mainly addressed the role of collective memory in the formation of group identity (Halbwachs, 1980 & 1992). James Wertsch and Henry Roediger have further developed this by viewing the process of collective remembering as being involved in a flexible progression of contested identity manifestations and rituals. This is an important departure from the
views on collective memory as passively accumulating publicly
endorsed or enforced writings and teachings of history (2008).

Here, the issues also pertain to claims on epistemological differences
or rules of conduct that apply to establishing the professional
historical research and its claims on objectivity from collective
memories shared by groups and mirrored in their narratives about
the past. In regions where officially endorsed accounts of history and
collective traditions divert, clashes between different
historiographies and worldviews will emerge. The extent to which
the building of nations has been based on the construction of
histories has been extensively demonstrated (Smith, 2003). Many
recent studies of collective memory have shown how the choices of
historic places and occurrences to present to, e.g., local
schoolchildren or foreign tourists are determined by various agents
with different access to material, economic, and legal resources
(Rigney, 2005). Naturalisations of ethnic identities and class
differences are among the ‘rationalised’ mystifications of differences
among people that Europe has seen too much of.

To address the theoretical core issue of this article, it is useful to
move away from the main thrust of identity-oriented
anthropological-historical-archaeological studies on memory and
sites of remembrance inspired by the research of Jan and Aleida
between what Jan Assmann termed the inner and social level of
memory (2008) can be taken as the starting point to move into
psychological memory studies, but through drawing on the sources
of culture, media, and discourse analyses, rather than evolutionary
psychology. This facilitates the considering of individual and group
decision-making based on collective memory as practical matters to
do with people’s futures more than their identity. Pascal Boyer
criticised Emile Durkheim and other founders of modern sociology
for ignoring the importance of the individual experience of cultures
to discuss culture as functional only with reference to groups (Boyer,
2009). Halbwachs discussed the ways that groups of people
construct a common representation of their past. According to
Boyer, ‘this is generally taken to mean that societies or other human
groups, just like individuals, do maintain memories, that is, encode
events in particular ways and retrieve them to serve particular goals’
(Boyer, 2009, p. 11).

Boyer goes further by ‘psychologising’ memory on the individual
level, drawing on findings from cognitive psychology regarding how
all humans use memory in projective ways to evaluate future
alternatives, form opinions on complex issues, and rationalise
strategies for their actions. Introducing psychology and individual
cognitive aspects into memory studies provides a paradoxical but
straightforward way to re-introduce the aspect of groups in
discussing how people in a certain location engage in the common
issues of everyday life.

The literature on brownfield developments in city environments
often focusses on the aesthetic value of original elements of the
brownfield and how these can be transferred into a post-industrial
architectural setting with market appeal to real-estate investors. Controversies regarding the inclusion or suppression of different memories as the result of such processes are prevalent in urban areas. Rebecca Wheeler discussed the seldom explored meanings of the remains of past industry in rural landscapes, where the pressure to re-use and redevelop industrial premises are less felt (2014). This is relevant in the case of the Sydvaranger iron mine. She concluded that regardless of whether a monument of past industry becomes the subject of public preservation or place branding, it does ‘act as a prompt for the recollection of both personal and social place-related memories. In doing so, it also extends some of the learning from urban-centred studies that have explored the affective ability of industrial ruins to bring memories of past people and places into the present’ (Wheeler, 2014, p. 22).

People speak and communicate, read the local news, watch television, and engage in debates on social media. Some also read historical articles and books and discuss their thoughts with others. The historical knowledge appropriated and memories upheld locally regarding the iron mine in Kirkenes appear in public discourses and local conversations, testifying to la longue durée of the mentalities and life patterns in and around this town. Active selections of history writings are woven into the group phenomenon of collective memory. One example among those recurring in local conversations is the labour union’s conflict with the mine direction during the years before the mine closed in 1996. The conflict focussed on whether the mine was being operated according to a hidden agenda to extract its mineral in a technically unsustainable way to ‘cause’ its closure as a fait accompli. This accusation of betrayal was never settled publicly, leading to a lingering sense of treason related to southern mining executives and the owner of the mine at that time, the Norwegian State. The logic of this conspiracy theory was that the then social democratic government wanted to rid itself of the costs of running the mine during a period of low prices on iron fines internationally (Lund, 2015, pp. 123–169).

Such events and narratives are weighed against others and included in the array of knowledge used in individual ‘time travels’ under various assumptions and other verbal cognitive processes to simulate possible futures. This is, in foresight, based on the intuitive uses of experience that Boyer outlines in his emphasis on the everyday uses of collective memory and its power to form the future. Appropriated and interpreted pieces of historical writings merge into the collective memory. In the following, an interpretative overview is provided of the Sydvaranger case to show how published historical writings have been interpreted and woven into the collective memory and important group narratives.

**Relating histories and industrial heritage to collective memory**

In its pre-mining state, the sub-Arctic village of Kirkenes comprised a few houses and cabins around a church located on a low promontory on the shore of the Bøkfjord, which opens north into the wider Varangerfjord on the Barents Sea. The site offers shelter from ocean swells and year-round open access to the North Atlantic. The nearby
iron ore is accessible at the surface, favourably located on the barren mountain interior that is typical of this part of the sub-Arctic. It could be connected to the harbour of Kirkenes by a few kilometres of railroad. Preparing for mining in the early 20th century, Kirkenes was expanded into a small company town on the coast of traditional East Sami land, which was then regarded as part of the vast state-governed commons of northern Norway.

Today, Kirkenes has a stagnating population of approximately 9,000 citizens. The settlement is also a border town situated a few kilometres from the border with Russia. The shifting and occasionally dramatic history of the Sydvaranger mine and Kirkenes constitutes its collective memory, in which the meanings of many events are politically laden. Its industrial heritage and brownfield of material reminiscences are ubiquitous in and around town. The top plateau of its slag heaps forms the most elevated point in the open mountainous surroundings of the village. The whole area is situated beyond the northern limit of the Fennoscandian boreal forest. The closed buildings of the dressing plant dominate the view to the west, which is uphill from the village centre. Built on ground overlooking the community, its dark rows of windows stare down at the village’s dwellers and visitors. As prices for iron fines and pellets have risen considerably since 2015, the lights inside the mill are occasionally on, testifying that the current owners maintain their facilities and are making plans for the future.

Looking back to the start of production at the Sydvaranger iron mine in 1910, the Norwegian multi-industrialist Christian Anker had been crucial in finding investors and mining experts to make the opening of operations possible. Investors and technologists transferred ideas, skills, hopes, and visions from afar to shape a local mining community of immediate flexible meaning. From the start, it represented different things to different observers. The expropriation of land for the open pit mine, the harbour, and the expansion of the settlement of Kirkenes had ended up in court for several reasons. This marked the start of a never-ending series of conflicts for the industry entrepreneurs over the use of local land and water resources for the mine (Fasting, 1956; Kvammen, 2013).

Sub-Arctic Kirkenes is near the national borders of Finland and Russia and far from the capital of Oslo. When the mine opened, Kirkenes was only accessible for visitors from southern Norway by coastal steamer. The ethnic composition of the east of Finnmark County included Sami peoples with slightly different languages and dialects, namely, the Nord, Enari, and Skolt Sami. Alongside the coastal settlements established by fishermen and their families from southern and central Norway, the population of Finnmark County included Finnish and Kven people residing or nomadizing in the region following self-induced immigration. The border land between Norway and Russia was only settled in 1826. Until then, taxation of the sparse population of northernmost Fennoscandia ‘overlapped’ geographically between Norway and Russia. Essentially, it was determined based on whether the taxpayer was baptised in the
Russian orthodox or evangelical Lutheran faith (Jackson & Nielsen, 2005).

Given the rise of nationalist movements and conflicts based on language minorities across Europe since the late 19th century, the Norwegian governments launched a policy to ‘Norwegianise’ its heterogeneous borderland with Russia and Finland. The Sydvaranger mine was seized as an instrument of this policy when the Norwegian state required that anyone employed there must have Norwegian language skills. This discriminatory regulation was difficult to uphold because of the lack of Norwegian-speaking skilled labour. The first mining director, Henrik Lund, held technological training credentials from Sweden, and German banks became the major lenders of capital to the mine. Subsequent German shareholders gained influence over business strategies, including which customers to prioritise. Later, research indicated that this was part of a national German policy aimed at securing international access to strategic raw materials for its growing steel industry. The Sydvaranger mine depended on export markets and transfers of technology and expertise from the start; thus, it was European in character as much as a product of its sub-Arctic location (Eriksen & Niemi, 1981; Støyva Arvola, 2004; Schröter, 1988, p. 426).

The first decades of operations at the Sydvaranger iron mine were characterised by strife and a high accident rate among workers. It was of little local comfort to be informed that such things were not unheard of elsewhere in the industrialisation of Scandinavia or globally. Labour unions were ideologically divided between communists, socialists, and syndicalists. The first bankruptcy of the mine was declared in 1925, mainly because of falling market prices on iron fines. An upstart was achieved in two years, and new rounds of union busting led to a major strike. The ensuing court proceedings ended in a win for the mine owners, with unions being prohibited at Sydvaranger until 1938. The memories of this may have faded, but the event is still written about, read about, and discussed. Thus, cheerless reminiscences of conflict and social disruption are central in the understanding of the pre-war past in the collective memory of mining in Kirkenes (Wikan, 2006).

The German occupation of Norway from 1940 to 1945 added another dark chapter to the history of the Sydvaranger mine. For demographic reasons, the occupation had a greater social impact in sparsely populated northern Norway than elsewhere. Every household housed military personnel as forced tenants, and the local economy became dependent on doing business with the occupiers. After the war, the south accused the northerners of failing to resist and collaborating. Active partisans in the county, who were trained in the Soviet Union, brought their intelligence to the Red Army and were denied official recognition in Cold War Norway because of their intransigent communist sympathies (Borge, 2014; Jacobsen, 2005).

During the occupation, the mine was run as part of the German war effort, but Kirkenes’ main asset was its modern harbour. The town served as a logistic hub for bringing in troops, ordnance, and equipment to prepare and support the attack on Murmansk, which is
250 km east of Kirkenes across the Pasvik River. The desolate, treeless, and mostly road-less tundra and wetlands of this region offered logistic conditions and a climate harsh enough to bog down the engaged northern units of both the Wehrmacht and Red Army for most of the war. Heavy losses were experienced on both sides. In 1944, Soviet troops liberated Kirkenes, after it was destroyed in allied air raids and, ultimately, by the scorched earth practices of the retreating German contingents. After the war, the German capital and influence over the Sydvaranger mine was replaced by Norwegian state ownership. The mine commenced exporting again only in 1952, after the village had been rebuilt based on Marshall funding and the transfer of new American technology (Lloyd, 1955; Lund, 1947; Hunt, 2014).

The decades following the post-war restart forms the only period of mining in Kirkenes in collective memory viewed as peaceful and harmonious. Kirkenes became a paternalistic company town where unions were allowed but at rest, and exports were booming. The national centre and the sub-Arctic periphery were on speaking-terms politically. Housing standards enabled miners’ families to live and raise their children under conditions equal to those in the south. Nevertheless, the iron curtain at NATO Norway’s closed border with Cold War Russia caused security tensions. Secret and overt police and military surveillance was prevalent and felt in some way by everyone residing in the east of Finnmark County in this period. In the 1980s, prices on iron pellets fell below the cost of production of the Sydvaranger mine, annual losses accrued, and as mentioned, the mine again shut down in 1996 (Kvammen, 2013; Fagertun, 2003).

The aim of this section has been to present an outline of the history of mining in Kirkenes that is not the most neutral, nor the one that meets the highest scholarly standards, but the one that is told, interpreted and used locally. What is often overlooked in outside discussions of the mining heritage of Kirkenes is that its industrial history, to put it briefly, is seen locally as contradictory and dark. This means, among other, that in consulting the collective memory in conversations and individual or family decision-makings, the mine is seen as a mixed blessing at best. However, if in operation, it remains one of few businesses in the area from which many people might make a living.

**Envisioning futures based on collective memory**

The post-1996 restructuring of Kirkenes was successful in several ways and meant that the deep-seated identity of Kirkenes as a company town resided in the past. State-subsidies created replacement industry jobs, among others, in a new maintenance wharf, and public sector office jobs of a kind attractive to women with higher education were moved to Kirkenes from elsewhere in Norway. Coincidentally, a contributor to this shift was the opening of the border to neighbouring Russia for cross-border tourism and shopping in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. This made it possible to frame Kirkenes, while still a remote NATO outpost in an Arctic sparsely populated periphery, as an exciting gateway to a new Russia, which many in the West at the time...
believed had an interesting future (see, for example, Dellenbrant & Olsson, 1994). Since then, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has provided funding to run a handful of small institutions in Kirkenes promoting Nordic-Russian regional collaboration. Foremost among these are the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and the northern art promoter *Pikene på broen*, which is charged with curating the Kirkenes annual international winter festival.

This kind of public institutionalisation is unusual to find in sub-Arctic villages. It produced positive visibility for Kirkenes in the local and national media, which was something new to the collective memory. In the post-Soviet euphoria and until the backlash caused by the Russian annexation of Crimea, Kirkenes served as a base for Nordic-Russian business summits and political celebrity visits. Efforts were made to brand Kirkenes as ‘the capital’ of the Barents Euroarctic Region. The latter construct was inspired by contemporary EU neighbourhood policies towards its non-member nations and was named after the Barents Sea. Despite its name, the ministries in Oslo and Moscow instructed Barents activists to stay out of the then hot issue of the still unsettled delimitation line at the sea between the Norwegian and Russian sectors of the continental shelf, to concentrate on promoting sport and cultural exchanges and small scale cross-border business (Robertsen, 2014; Joenniemi & Sergunin, 2014).

Social scientists from southern and western Norway, often funded by the same Norwegian state sponsors fanning the Barents cooperation, were happy to receive the means for a trip to the trendy north. Through man-in-the-street interviews with Kirkenes locals, they described the ‘Barents village’ social phenomenon as being costly for the rest of Norway, non-authentic, and not rooted in local traditions. The new employees and operators in the Barents institutions were labelled ‘the Barents elite’, implying that the policy’s local spokespersons were not attached to the reality of Kirkenes and were opportunistic or even credulous in terms of geopolitics (see for example, Aagedal, 2009; Nyseth & Viken, 2009. Regarding the Barents collaboration as a fad resulting from ‘Arctic euphoria’, see Hønneland, 2017). The old image of Kirkenes as a lowbrow industrial backwater town with a tainted political history, located at the end of civilised Norway, has proven more credible and genuine in the collective memory of many outsiders.

Given that the branding of Kirkenes as a geopolitical peace laboratory was popular locally, the collective memory triggered strong sentiments when in 2007, following rising iron ore prices, international investors expressed interest in the iron ore at Kirkenes. A holding company, namely, Northern Iron Ltd., was formed, encouraged by Felix Tschudi, CEO of Tschudi Shipping Company AS, a Norwegian entrepreneur in trade and shipping in Russia and the owner of the mine estate. Capital was successfully raised after listing the company on the ASX stock exchange in Sydney. The chairman of the board officially announced the intention to re-start the mine to the Kirkenes community over a direct video link from Australia. The then mayor of Kirkenes struggled to hold back her tears at the public
announcement, confessing that she never believed she would witness the day that the Sydvaranger mine was resuscitated\(^2\) (Kvidahl & Nygaard, 2009, pp. 31–46; Wisur-Olsen, 2008).

The new mine commenced production in 2009. Few of the old miners were still in town, willing, or seen as fit by the new employer to join operations. The mine hired fly-in-fly-out experts and operated by leasing equipment and using subcontractors, including local ones. Thus, it looked and operated differently than before. Nevertheless, the existence and prevalence of a collective memory of mining in Kirkenes was important in setting the minds and emotions of those providing support as well as the demands on the new mine owners, including local politicians and regional and municipal administrators.

Because of the dwindling demand for iron fines internationally, Northern Iron Ltd. seized operations in Kirkenes in autumn 2015. This latest period of mining from 2007 to 2015 was characterised by globalisation and the increased importance of metropolitan centre-periphery economic power vectors. The liquidation resulted in the loss of 250 jobs. Regarding the miners, a few did not reside in Kirkenes, others moved shortly after the closure, and several found work elsewhere, to which they commuted weekly. However, the redundancy payments of others had ended, signalling a difficult time for them (Hamran, 2017b). While the majority of local politicians and many citizens of Kirkenes held positive attitudes towards the mine’s latest reopening, today, many in the village consider the environmental aspects of it bewildering and perhaps even unmanageable (Lund, 2015).

Global prices on iron fines have taken a turn for the better in recent years, and the entrepreneurial multi-industrialist and shipping firm Tschudi has bought the Kirkenes estate from its liquidator. The Tschudi Enterprise Group, which was also the main Norwegian partner at the upstart in 2007, has formed a new group of experts partly consisting of individuals involved in the leadership of the previous mine. They have filed for a new mining concession and have presented plans for a leaner future mining enterprise (Hansen, 2017; Mækele, 2017b).

In May 2018, a political majority of 17 to 10 of the members of the Sør-Varanger municipality board voted ‘yes’ as its response to the hearing regarding the application for a new mining concession filed by the present owners of the Sydvaranger estate (Sydvaranger Eiendom AS) with the Norwegian Directorate for Mineral Management. The delegates of the social democratic (AP), conservative (Høyre), and populist (FrP) parties voted in favour. The issue most discussed by the municipality board was not the one hotly debated from 2007 to 2015 regarding dumping floatation chemicals fixed to ore residues from the dressing plant in the Bøkfjord, but rather the impact of doubling the size of on-land slag heaps resulting from renewed open pit mining over the planned 20 years of operations (Mækele, 2018).

\(^2\) Recalled by the author, who attended this event in April 2007 at the conference hall of the Rica [now Scandic] Hotel Kirkenes.
Bearing in mind the turbulent history of the labour movement at the Sydvaranger mine, it is worth noting that one of the most audacious protagonists for the revival of mining at Kirkenes today is the main industry labour union of Norway, the LO. It advocates the benefits of labour market diversification, which the reopening of the mine would represent to the village. It highlights positive socio-economic synergies regionally, and the mine’s contribution to the macro-economic wellbeing for all of Norway, and to the EU’s goal of securing its raw material supply. In January 2017, representatives of the LO union in northern Norway stated the following in a chronicle appealing to the collective memory, ‘The mineral industry has a long and proud tradition in Finnmark. [...] This industry has for generations offered year-round good employment, income for service and support personnel, increased community growth, spin-offs that many have benefited from, and not least, is a business wherein women and girls have contributed significantly. The best drivers of the big mining trucks at Sydvaranger were women’ (Nilsen & Johansen, 2017).

The fly-in-fly-out system of labour management, regarded as a typical drawback of Arctic mining, is currently used in several other services and industries in the northern periphery of Norway. Tourism in the sub-Arctic is presented by most Norwegian politicians as a promising sustainable industry to complement or replace environmentally unfriendly mining. Observers in Kirkenes are mostly well-aware though that given the high-cost of many things in Norway, the largest among the local tourism operators already depend on the fly-in-fly-out system for their varying seasonal needs regarding staff and for hiring foreign guides and administrators that are fluent in their customers’ languages (Hamran, 2017a; Winge, 2018).

When searching for cheap accommodation in the built mining heritage of Kirkenes, local tourism businesses identified the barracks used by the Northern Iron Company as housing for its short-contract foreign helpers. After receiving ‘positive’ feedback regarding the experiences of renting some of these barracks, local tourist operators want to make this arrangement permanent. Many of the municipality’s politicians have found this unacceptable. Given their connotations in the collective memory the barracks are regarded as too ugly, and tainted by their bad reminiscences of lone male workers’ lifestyles, for the municipality to approve their resumed service for new temporary staff (Sandø, 2016; Mækelæ, 2017a).

**Arctic mining and collective memory: Discussion**

The collective memory of mining in Kirkenes includes a knowledge component not individually lived or within living memory, but gained from readings, media, and local conversations on the characteristics of the mine over its 100-year history. The sample of contested issues in the previous section, in which the collective memory was called on in interpretations by different agents in and around the sub-Arctic community of Kirkenes, is intended to demonstrate the influence of collective memory and slowly evolving mentalities in contemporary decision-making on all socio-economic levels. It mirrors a reality of
flexible meanings navigated by those engaged with the local context through their economic logic, political preferences, and intuition.

Groups or individuals promoting or rallying against mining at Kirkenes appeal to the collective memory by referring to processes or occurrences in the history of the Sydvaranger mine. The collective combination of memory and lived experiences is evolving by assimilating the most recent course of events. Always in flux, it enables conclusions to be drawn from the repetitions in historical patterns which have recur since before the time of the first opening of the iron mine at Kirkenes.

To start mining elsewhere today in northern Norway, where no experience of this industry exists in collective memory, is complicated in terms of local opinion. One case is the long planned Nussir copper mine in Kvalsund in the west of Finnmark County. It has spent years fulfilling the procedures prescribed by Norwegian regulation. Despite the current favourable copper prices and with the EIA and official permits in place, it is unable to commence operations due to a series of mostly local events, including crucial shareholders not showing up at final hearings (cf. Dannevig & Dale, 2018). In contrast, reindeer herders around Kirkenes have had no irreconcilable concerns regarding the mine in Kirkenes.

As pointed out by the Kirkenes and Pasvik valley reindeer herder Egil Kalliainen, accepting the concessions for mining of the Northern Iron Company entailed yielding areas of his family’s reindeer district. This meant losing routes for moving animals as well as land for grazing (E. Kallianen, workshop communication, 30 October 2015). Negotiations over Sami land uses regarding concessions for mining are regulated by Norwegian law. According to some, such as Jarl Hellesvik, a critical debater of Sami issues in Finnmark County, the yielding of Sami land is not necessarily a one-way historical result of industrialisation and urbanisation (2015). Over recent years, major areas of land well-suited for reindeer herding have been freed elsewhere in Finnmark County because of closures of unprofitable small-scale farming and the outmigration of youth from remote fishing hamlets, according to Hellesvik. This may be true for Finnmark County but does not help reindeer herding districts that lose ground and routes locally to mining, wind power plants, etc., unless the land made free by the outmigration of non-herders is within reach of their herds.

Familiarity with a place based on collective memory provides an individual basis to calculate life alternatives from a thick experience of both positive and negative phenomena. This does not entail that people knowing about hazardous conditions at their work-place or violations of environmental regulations by their employer would accept this, but acknowledges the outlook on mining in the brownfield of Kirkenes—as presented by Steinar Wikan (2006) and Svein Lund (2015) and shared by the present writer—which summarises this history as mixed. It contains dark periods and tragic experiences and is remembered as such in the collective memory. In so doing, it provides realism for the ones having access to it, making them more prone to cope with mining and to decide to attempt to make a living from it in the future by balancing its pros and cons.
Families with one but not all its bread-winners at the mine will spread their socio-economic risk in contrast to those who go ‘all in’ for jobs created in the innovative ‘place renewal’ of Kirkenes. Regarding the town’s role as the ‘capital of the Barents Euroarctic Region’ and the Barents regional ‘euphoria’, its series of visiting foreign ministers and small stream of government funding may prove to be as short-lived as the last round of mining. Collective memory as a form of wisdom enables its carriers to make their own decisions based more on lived experience and subaltern knowledge than those who based their opinions on the media, statements by visiting experts, and paid lobbyists arguing for or against Arctic mining.

Individuals willing to offer conditional support to new industry developments based on relevant prior experiences, including collective memory, seem to be in a credible position to provide a social licence to operate (SLO) for the business in question. However, the literature on SLOs remains unclear on whether the concept is fully relevant to the Euroarctic, how it relates to scientific institutions trusted by law to issue licenses to operate industries, and what is gained by industry developers hiring consultants to handle local public relations to gain the necessary SLO (Koivurova et al., 2015).

Being in favour or against something is part of political democracy, but so is the rule of law. Being able to make decisions for yourself depends on your economic means, socio-political influence, and access to knowledge. Offering an SLO to anything beyond that seems dubious, as questions emerge about who is regarded as a stakeholder; who is a paid lobbyist; and who likes cheap raw materials and reasonably priced merchandise manufactured from them but is not prepared to see it produced in ‘their own backyard’?

Kirkenes’ collective memory is not exclusive to local residents; it provides inspiration for many. The shipping firm Tschudi Group has been the most active entrepreneur and private investor in Kirkenes in recent decades. Presenting the group’s current business at industrial conferences, its CEO Felix Tschudi occasionally refers to the long tradition of Norwegian shipping in the Arctic seas and especially the role of the Norwegian businessman Jonas Lied in his efforts to launch shipping along the Northern Sea Route in the beginning of the previous century. Lied’s business acumen and dexterity in operating his social networks in Russia even included an attempt to rescue the Romanov Tsar family. His ambitions were directed elsewhere only in the late 1920s, when Josef Stalin and the economic planners of the Soviet Union closed the door on foreign capitalist enterprise for some time (Tschudi, 2012, slide 16. On Jonas Lied, see Nielsen & Tevlina, 2014). To the Tschudi Group, re-establishing Kirkenes as a mining town is no more interesting than developing it into a supply base for the Barents Sea offshore industry or a transport hub for currently expanding shipping along the Northern Sea route to Arctic Russia and South-East Asia.

The Euroarctic takes on the character of a heterotopia, a world within the world. It contains different landscapes visible to various groups, i.e., political, ethnic, and professional. In chapter four of The
Collective Memory, Maurice Halbwachs vividly describes the difference between professional groups, such as farmers and lawyers, in experiencing the meanings and practical aspects of landscapes, which remain hidden to other people (1980). This article has geared the analysis of the functions of memory in cognitive psychology to collective memory studies to show this combination’s usefulness in interpreting attitudes, mentalities and the decision-making practices of many different agents. This approach has been based on a case study of the former mining town of Kirkenes. The town’s collective memory of mining contains striking but also nuanced narratives, including both the bad and good times of the mine. These narratives set the pragmatism and outlooks of the town’s brownfield dwellers apart from those of people living in greenfields, where real mining has never been experienced and no collective memory of it exists, and thus, the uncertainties and unfamiliarity of it would always make it a thing to avoid.

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