

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

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2 often attractive sites for re-development for new post-industrial
3 purposes (Dorsey, 2003).
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5 Brownfield re-investments in the original line of business of a site
6 may be attractive in rural areas due to low real estate prices and less
7 competition from other land-use interests. A closed mine, wherein
8 the mineral of value has not yet been depleted, or its use replaced
9 by new technology, is commercially dormant rather than closed,
10 dependent on global market prices. Thus far, discussions on planned,
11 active, and abandoned sub-Arctic mining sites mostly focus on the
12 related environmental, geo-economic, and indigenous issues. The
13 people living in or around the sites of continued or future industrial
14 interest have often been clustered as 'local residents' or just 'people'
15 from whom successful investors, to add to their official mining
16 permit and approved Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), must
17 earn a social license to operate (SLO) (Koivurova et al., 2015). This
18 article aims to widen this approach by demonstrating the
19 explanatory power of collective memory in the formation of the
20 attitudes behind a social license to operate, not only among local
21 residents but also including other agents and stakeholders.
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25 Arctic mining can be considered part of a 'cosmology of extractivism'
26 (Wilson & Stammler, 2016) or an exponent of neo-colonialism. It can
27 also be governed by modern stewardship and includes local social
28 investment programmes that create value for the company and the
29 communities in which they operate (Esteves, 2008). In northern
30 Fennoscandia, societal structures are comparatively strong and
31 receive stable funding from public sources. Furthermore, the
32 composition of the local community is heterogeneous and politically
33 divided. Transferring the outlooks and claims found in the
34 scholarship on other parts of the Arctic, including that mining
35 entrepreneurs must earn the trust of the local people before
36 opening operations, gives rise to the same questions as those for an
37 SLO. More than one group of local people exist.
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41 Nevertheless, the Euroarctic of Fennoscandia is a region that could
42 gain from more vigilance regarding the economic benefits that the
43 procurement of goods and services would bring if the raw material
44 extracting industry made them locally. Much can and has been
45 learned from Social Impact Assessments (SIAs) in other parts of the
46 world and how good company policies can increase the quality of the
47 local life (see for example, Esteves, Franks & Vanclay, 2012). Similar
48 issues of local taxation and job creation in the nascent off-shore
49 industry on the shelf of the Barents Sea are emphasised today in
50 northern Norway, with no unanimous support from southern
51 Norway or regions in the south-west, where the clusters of the
52 Norwegian off-shore supply industry are located (Wråkberg, in
53 press).
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57 There is reason to further explore the ontological meanings of the
58 industrial heritage of sites with a mining history and how this works
59 in the minds of residents and entrepreneurs interested in the site.
60 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

1
2 place. A collective memory exists and is shared by the following
3 groups: the residents in the village; those who have moved after the
4 last closure to seek income elsewhere; and those who, during the
5 mine's operating times, flew in and out but never settled in Kirkenes.
6 It will be argued in this article that the group stances and reasoning
7 based on the mine's past relate to both its most recent history and
8 to dramatic events, lines of development, everyday life, and
9 emotions from a period including its history back to 1906.

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

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

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

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

54 Collective memory has been applied widely to analyse identity-
55 formation and the socio-political uses of monuments and memorial
56 sites (Erll, 2011; Tamm, 2013). Likewise, it can be employed to
57 interpret the meanings of the industrial heritage of Arctic mining. It
58 includes or overlaps with the explanatory force of mentalities in the
59 history of ideas (Confino, 2008). In the case contemplated in this
60 article, collective memory can account for the slowly evolving and

1
2 not always explicit stances of local and external actors regarding the
3 future of the place of Kirkenes. This use of the concept is not about
4 identity formation but is a group-based cognitive resource for
5 everyday use by its holders to form opinions and make decisions that
6 are important to their futures. This lived and narrated knowledge
7 provides temperance in facing complex individual and group
8 challenges.
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10 Northern cultures include indigenous perspectives from native
11 peoples' ancient uses of lands, which were later transformed
12 through trade and the arrival of various settlers. In the Euroarctic,
13 relations evolved between the southern emerging economies and
14 the Sami population in medieval times, alongside Christianisation
15 and taxation. In the 16th and 17th centuries, national competition
16 over the northernmost part of Fennoscandia was still an open affair
17 between Denmark, Sweden, and Novgorod/Russia (Hansen & Olsen,
18 2004; Jackson & Nielsen, 2005). The high north, where the Norse and
19 northeast Kven and Finnish populations had settled on the coast
20 during pre-industrial times, is a special case in Norwegian economic
21 history. These groups based their livelihood on small-scale
22 shipbuilding, coastal fisheries and a seasonally limited, but
23 important, export of dried and salted fish (Bjørklund, Drivenes &
24 Gerrard, 1994; Wicken, 1998).
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28 The logging of primeval forests, establishment of sawmills, and
29 export of timber are the earliest signs of the transformation of the
30 European high north into a raw material producing periphery that is
31 dependent on transnational markets (Nielsen & Tevlina, 2014;
32 Wicken, 2010). The establishment of the Sydvaranger iron mine in
33 Kirkenes in 1906, in sparsely populated East Sami land, was the
34 result of the growing demand for iron caused by the advancing
35 industrialisation of Western and Central Europe.
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38 Part of the socio-political experience of living in the Euroarctic
39 borderlands is characterised by *la longue durée*. Here, as elsewhere,
40 some attitudes and practices tend to change very slowly or persist
41 over long periods. The phenomenon of historical inertia was
42 identified first in other parts of Europe, such as the Mediterranean
43 by the French *Annales*-school of geographic research, and is
44 epitomised in the historical-spatial understanding of its core concept
45 of mentalities. Slowly evolving mentalities explain certain historical
46 continuities and are closely related to collective memory (Confino,
47 2008).
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50 A local continuity in attitudes based on accumulated experiences
51 creates patterns in life strategies. Collective memory and mentalities
52 work behind perceived sets of alternatives for individual action, and
53 sometimes involve a subaltern social position of peripheral
54 dependence in relation to metropolitan national politics and shifts in
55 the global economy. On the other hand, these shifts and even
56 complete breakdowns of lines of power and supply have been
57 countered in the high north by regional traditions of self-reliance,
58 including an openness to trade with neighbours across national
59 borders. This enables family and group self-subsistence to operate
60 outside the centre-periphery economy. Furthermore, it has

1 translated into a rural lifestyle in the Euroarctic based on
2 pragmatism in finding ways to cope under disruptive political and
3 economic conditions (Gløersen, Dubois, Roto, Rasmussen & Sterling,
4 2009, pp. 52–65).

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

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22 Another breakdown in Norwegian centre-periphery relations
23 occurred during World War II and the Nazi German occupation of the
24 country. From 1940 to 1944, Kirkenes and the surrounding Sør-
25 Varanger municipality housed approximately 70,000 people, almost
26 10 times the pre- and post-war population, and were transformed
27 into garrisons for troops and the bridgehead for the German attack
28 on Northwest Russia. After the war many people living in other parts
29 of Norway accused their northern compatriots for lack of zeal to
30 engage in partisan operations, and suspicions of collaboration with
31 the enemy were directed especially at the east of Finnmark County,
32 Norway's north-easternmost borderland to Finland and Russia
33 (Borge, 2014; Espeli, 2013). We will return to how this has affected
34 the collective memory in contemporary Kirkenes.

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

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46 'History repeats itself: this time without matches and
47 gasoline [referring to the scorching of the county by the
48 retreating German army in 1944]. Otherwise, it is the same
49 fate we lived through 75 years ago. Finnmark was burnt
50 down. All its inhabitants had toiled for and saved by their
51 thrift was brutally stolen. The people of Finnmark, however,
52 rose and returned despite the various obstacles post-war
53 authorities instigated for their re-building initiatives. We are
54 back to the tragic forties now when Troms County will
55 "devour" that of Finnmark to get all we have of maritime,
56 geological, and other natural assets (Andersen, 2018).¹

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¹ All translations in the article are by the author.

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2 The merger was enforced by the Norwegian national parliament and
3 its conservative government, despite an 87% majority vote against it
4 in a regional referendum held in 2018 (Finnmark fylkeskommune,
5 2018). This will end the self-determination of Finnmark County, and
6 soon, its political representatives will remain a hapless minority in all
7 decisions regarding its future. We will not go further into this quite
8 inflamed, contemporary political conflict between the national
9 periphery of East Finnmark County on the one hand, and the major
10 town in northern Norway Tromsø and the conservative government
11 in the capital of Oslo on the other (for further examples on this
12 political war-rhetoric see Lind Berg, 2018). It is mentioned here
13 because it testifies to the socio-political importance of collective
14 memory in Finnmark County. It is argued in this article that this
15 collective memory is worth analysing not only because it forms local
16 and regional attitudes regarding the Kirkenes iron mine, but because
17 it influences the individuals' evaluations of their future prospects
18 and their decision-making regarding whether to continue living in
19 the town or not.
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23 Cognitive processes involving memory and simulations similar to
24 'time-travel' under various assumptions are important everyday
25 human processes used by groups and individuals to evaluate and
26 discuss their economic prospects across generations based on
27 recollections of the past. It is argued that the case of Kirkenes
28 involves conversations among a wider range of local residents and
29 recent migrants than usually assumed in heritage and memory
30 studies. Part of most people's everyday strategies involves relating in
31 a critical way to the news media, advertising of ideas and marketing
32 of business scenarios. Judgements based on collective memory can
33 motivate individuals and groups to divert from what is politically
34 correct and enable them to exercise the freedom at their disposal to
35 make choices for their futures (Certeau, 1984).
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39 The next section will propose a theoretical foundation for this view
40 on collective memory as a practical decision-making resource in the
41 everyday lives of individuals. It will do so by relating historical
42 memory studies, so far mostly focussed on the issues of ethnic and
43 cultural identity of groups, to memory studies, as practised within
44 cognitive psychology. I will go on to relate this conception of
45 collective memory as a decision-making resource to evidence of a
46 locally conceived multifactorial history of Kirkenes and East
47 Finnmark, emphasising its character as something which, I suggest,
48 largely cross-cuts individual ethnic and professional identities.
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52 **Collective memory as a cognitive resource**

53 Since Maurice Halbwachs' seminal writings on collective memory,
54 which were published from the 1920s until the early forties, the
55 strand of research he inspired has mainly addressed the role of
56 collective memory in the formation of group identity (Halbwachs,
57 1980 & 1992). James Wertsch and Henry Roediger have further
58 developed this by viewing the process of collective remembering as
59 being involved in a flexible progression of contested identity
60 manifestations and rituals. This is an important departure from the

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2 views on collective memory as passively accumulating publicly
3 endorsed or enforced writings and teachings of history (2008).

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

21
22 To address the theoretical core issue of this article, it is useful to
23 move away from the main thrust of identity-oriented
24 anthropological-historical-archaeological studies on memory and
25 sites of remembrance inspired by the research of Jan and Aleida
26 Assmann and Pierre Nora (1988, 2006; 1996–1998). The linkage
27 between what Jan Assmann termed the inner and social level of
28 memory (2008) can be taken as the starting point to move into
29 psychological memory studies, but through drawing on the sources
30 of culture, media, and discourse analyses, rather than evolutionary
31 psychology. This facilitates the considering of individual and group
32 decision-making based on collective memory as practical matters to
33 do with people's futures more than their identity. Pascal Boyer
34 criticised Emile Durkheim and other founders of modern sociology
35 for ignoring the importance of the individual experience of cultures
36 to discuss culture as functional only with reference to groups (Boyer,
37 2009). Halbwachs discussed the ways that groups of people
38 construct a common representation of their past. According to
39 Boyer, 'this is generally taken to mean that societies or other human
40 groups, just like individuals, do maintain memories, that is, encode
41 events in particular ways and retrieve them to serve particular goals'
42 (Boyer, 2009, p. 11).

43
44 Boyer goes further by 'psychologising' memory on the individual
45 level, drawing on findings from cognitive psychology regarding how
46 all humans use memory in projective ways to evaluate future
47 alternatives, form opinions on complex issues, and rationalise
48 strategies for their actions. Introducing psychology and individual
49 cognitive aspects into memory studies provides a paradoxical but
50 straightforward way to re-introduce the aspect of groups in
51 discussing how people in a certain location engage in the common
52 issues of everyday life.

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54 The literature on brownfield developments in city environments
55 often focusses on the aesthetic value of original elements of the
56 brownfield and how these can be transferred into a post-industrial

1 architectural setting with market appeal to real-estate investors.
2 Controversies regarding the inclusion or suppression of different
3 memories as the result of such processes are prevalent in urban
4 areas. Rebecca Wheeler discussed the seldom explored meanings of
5 the remains of past industry in rural landscapes, where the pressure
6 to re-use and redevelop industrial premises are less felt (2014). This
7 is relevant in the case of the Sydvaranger iron mine. She concluded
8 that regardless of whether a monument of past industry becomes
9 the subject of public preservation or place branding, it does 'act as a
10 prompt for the recollection of both personal and social place-related
11 memories. In doing so, it also extends some of the learning from
12 urban-centred studies that have explored the affective ability of
13 industrial ruins to bring memories of past people and places into the
14 present' (Wheeler, 2014, p. 22).

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

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

54 55 56 **Relating histories and industrial heritage to collective memory**

57 In its pre-mining state, the sub-Arctic village of Kirkenes comprised a
58 few houses and cabins around a church located on a low promontory
59 on the shore of the Bøkfjord, which opens north into the wider
60 Varangerfjord on the Barents Sea. The site offers shelter from ocean
swells and year-round open access to the North Atlantic. The nearby

1
2 iron ore is accessible at the surface, favourably located on the barren
3 mountain interior that is typical of this part of the sub-Arctic. It could
4 be connected to the harbour of Kirkenes by a few kilometres of
5 railroad. Preparing for mining in the early 20th century, Kirkenes was
6 expanded into a small company town on the coast of traditional East
7 Sami land, which was then regarded as part of the vast state-
8 governed commons of northern Norway.
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10 Today, Kirkenes has a stagnating population of approximately 9,000
11 citizens. The settlement is also a border town situated a few
12 kilometres from the border with Russia. The shifting and occasionally
13 dramatic history of the Sydvaranger mine and Kirkenes constitutes
14 its collective memory, in which the meanings of many events are
15 politically laden. Its industrial heritage and brownfield of material
16 reminiscences are ubiquitous in and around town. The top plateau of
17 its slag heaps forms the most elevated point in the open
18 mountainous surroundings of the village. The whole area is situated
19 beyond the northern limit of the Fennoscandian boreal forest. The
20 closed buildings of the dressing plant dominate the view to the west,
21 which is uphill from the village centre. Built on ground overlooking
22 the community, its dark rows of windows stare down at the village's
23 dwellers and visitors. As prices for iron fines and pellets have risen
24 considerably since 2015, the lights inside the mill are occasionally on,
25 testifying that the current owners maintain their facilities and are
26 making plans for the future.
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31 Looking back to the start of production at the Sydvaranger iron mine
32 in 1910, the Norwegian multi-industrialist Christian Anker had been
33 crucial in finding investors and mining experts to make the opening
34 of operations possible. Investors and technologists transferred ideas,
35 skills, hopes, and visions from afar to shape a local mining
36 community of immediate flexible meaning. From the start, it
37 represented different things to different observers. The
38 expropriation of land for the open pit mine, the harbour, and the
39 expansion of the settlement of Kirkenes had ended up in court for
40 several reasons. This marked the start of a never-ending series of
41 conflicts for the industry entrepreneurs over the use of local land
42 and water resources for the mine (Fasting, 1956; Kvammen, 2013).
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45 Sub-Arctic Kirkenes is near the national borders of Finland and Russia
46 and far from the capital of Oslo. When the mine opened, Kirkenes
47 was only accessible for visitors from southern Norway by coastal
48 steamer. The ethnic composition of the east of Finnmark County
49 included Sami peoples with slightly different languages and dialects,
50 namely, the Nord, Enari, and Skolt Sami. Alongside the coastal
51 settlements established by fishermen and their families from
52 southern and central Norway, the population of Finnmark County
53 included Finnish and Kven people residing or nomadizing in the
54 region following self-induced immigration. The border land between
55 Norway and Russia was only settled in 1826. Until then, taxation of
56 the sparse population of northernmost Fennoscandia 'overlapped'
57 geographically between Norway and Russia. Essentially, it was
58 determined based on whether the taxpayer was baptised in the
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2 Russian orthodox or evangelical Lutheran faith (Jackson & Nielsen,
3 2005).

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

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

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

52
53 During the occupation, the mine was run as part of the German war
54 effort, but Kirkenes' main asset was its modern harbour. The town
55 served as a logistic hub for bringing in troops, ordnance, and
56 equipment to prepare and support the attack on Murmansk, which is
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2 250 km east of Kirkenes across the Pasvik River. The desolate,
3 treeless, and mostly road-less tundra and wetlands of this region
4 offered logistic conditions and a climate harsh enough to bog down
5 the engaged northern units of both the Wehrmacht and Red Army
6 for most of the war. Heavy losses were experienced on both sides. In
7 1944, Soviet troops liberated Kirkenes, after it was destroyed in
8 allied air raids and, ultimately, by the scorched earth practices of the
9 retreating German contingents. After the war, the German capital
10 and influence over the Sydvaranger mine was replaced by Norwegian
11 state ownership. The mine commenced exporting again only in 1952,
12 after the village had been rebuilt based on Marshall funding and the
13 transfer of new American technology (Lloyd, 1955; Lund, 1947; Hunt,
14 2014).

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

32
33
34 The aim of this section has been to present an outline of the history
35 of mining in Kirkenes that is not the most neutral, nor the one that
36 meets the highest scholarly standards, but the one that is told,
37 interpreted and used locally. What is often overlooked in outside
38 discussions of the mining heritage of Kirkenes is that its industrial
39 history, to put it briefly, is seen locally as contradictory and dark. This
40 means, among other, that in consulting the collective memory in
41 conversations and individual or family decision-makings, the mine is
42 seen as a mixed blessing at best. However, if in operation, it remains
43 one of few businesses in the area from which many people might
44 make a living.

45 46 47 48 **Envisioning futures based on collective memory**

49 The post-1996 restructuring of Kirkenes was successful in several
50 ways and meant that the deep-seated identity of Kirkenes as a
51 company town resided in the past. State-subsidies created
52 replacement industry jobs, among others, in a new maintenance
53 wharf, and public sector office jobs of a kind attractive to women
54 with higher education were moved to Kirkenes from elsewhere in
55 Norway. Coincidentally, a contributor to this shift was the opening of
56 the border to neighbouring Russia for cross-border tourism and
57 shopping in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. This
58 made it possible to frame Kirkenes, while still a remote NATO
59 outpost in an Arctic sparsely populated periphery, as an exciting
60 gateway to a new Russia, which many in the West at the time

1
2 believed had an interesting future (see, for example, Dellenbrant &
3 Olsson, 1994). Since then, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
4 has provided funding to run a handful of small institutions in
5 Kirkenes promoting Nordic-Russian regional collaboration. Foremost
6 among these are the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and the
7 northern art promoter *Pikene på broen*, which is charged with
8 curating the Kirkenes annual international winter festival.
9

10 This kind of public institutionalisation is unusual to find in sub-Arctic
11 villages. It produced positive visibility for Kirkenes in the local and
12 national media, which was something new to the collective memory.
13 In the post-Soviet euphoria and until the backlash caused by the
14 Russian annexation of Crimea, Kirkenes served as a base for Nordic-
15 Russian business summits and political celebrity visits. Efforts were
16 made to brand Kirkenes as 'the capital' of the Barents Euroarctic
17 Region. The latter construct was inspired by contemporary EU
18 neighbourhood policies towards its non-member nations and was
19 named after the Barents Sea. Despite its name, the ministries in Oslo
20 and Moscow instructed Barents activists to stay out of the then hot
21 issue of the still unsettled delimitation line at the sea between the
22 Norwegian and Russian sectors of the continental shelf, to
23 concentrate on promoting sport and cultural exchanges and small
24 scale cross-border business (Robertsen, 2014; Joenniemi & Sergunin,
25 2014).
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30 Social scientists from southern and western Norway, often funded by
31 the same Norwegian state sponsors fanning the Barents
32 cooperation, were happy to receive the means for a trip to the
33 trendy north. Through man-in-the-street interviews with Kirkenes
34 locals, they described the 'Barents village' social phenomenon as
35 being costly for the rest of Norway, non-authentic, and not rooted in
36 local traditions. The new employees and operators in the Barents
37 institutions were labelled 'the Barents elite', implying that the
38 policy's local spokespersons were not attached to the reality of
39 Kirkenes and were opportunistic or even credulous in terms of
40 geopolitics (see for example, Aagedal, 2009; Nyseth & Viken, 2009.
41 Regarding the Barents collaboration as a fad resulting from 'Arctic
42 euphoria', see Hønneland, 2017). The old image of Kirkenes as a
43 lowbrow industrial backwater town with a tainted political history,
44 located at the end of civilised Norway, has proven more credible and
45 genuine in the collective memory of many outsiders.
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49 Given that the branding of Kirkenes as a geopolitical peace
50 laboratory was popular locally, the collective memory triggered
51 strong sentiments when in 2007, following rising iron ore prices,
52 international investors expressed interest in the iron ore at Kirkenes.
53 A holding company, namely, Northern Iron Ltd., was formed,
54 encouraged by Felix Tschudi, CEO of Tschudi Shipping Company AS, a
55 Norwegian entrepreneur in trade and shipping in Russia and the
56 owner of the mine estate. Capital was successfully raised after listing
57 the company on the ASX stock exchange in Sydney. The chairman of
58 the board officially announced the intention to re-start the mine to
59 the Kirkenes community over a direct video link from Australia. The
60 then mayor of Kirkenes struggled to hold back her tears at the public

1
2 announcement, confessing that she never believed she would
3 witness the day that the Sydvaranger mine was resuscitated²
4 (Kvidahl & Nygaard, 2009, pp. 31–46; Wisur-Olsen, 2008).
5

6 The new mine commenced production in 2009. Few of the old
7 miners were still in town, willing, or seen as fit by the new employer
8 to join operations. The mine hired fly-in-fly-out experts and operated
9 by leasing equipment and using subcontractors, including local ones.
10 Thus, it looked and operated differently than before. Nevertheless,
11 the existence and prevalence of a collective memory of mining in
12 Kirkenes was important in setting the minds and emotions of those
13 providing support as well as the demands on the new mine owners,
14 including local politicians and regional and municipal administrators.
15
16

17 Because of the dwindling demand for iron fines internationally,
18 Northern Iron Ltd. seized operations in Kirkenes in autumn 2015.
19 This latest period of mining from 2007 to 2015 was characterised by
20 globalisation and the increased importance of metropolitan centre-
21 periphery economic power vectors. The liquidation resulted in the
22 loss of 250 jobs. Regarding the miners, a few did not reside in
23 Kirkenes, others moved shortly after the closure, and several found
24 work elsewhere, to which they commuted weekly. However, the
25 redundancy payments of others had ended, signalling a difficult time
26 for them (Hamran, 2017b). While the majority of local politicians and
27 many citizens of Kirkenes held positive attitudes towards the mine's
28 latest reopening, today, many in the village consider the
29 environmental aspects of it bewildering and perhaps even
30 unmanageable (Lund, 2015).
31
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34 Global prices on iron fines have taken a turn for the better in recent
35 years, and the entrepreneurial multi-industrialist and shipping firm
36 Tschudi has bought the Kirkenes estate from its liquidator. The
37 Tschudi Enterprise Group, which was also the main Norwegian
38 partner at the upstart in 2007, has formed a new group of experts
39 partly consisting of individuals involved in the leadership of the
40 previous mine. They have filed for a new mining concession and have
41 presented plans for a leaner future mining enterprise (Hansen, 2017;
42 Mækele, 2017b).
43
44

45 In May 2018, a political majority of 17 to 10 of the members of the
46 Sør-Varanger municipality board voted 'yes' as its response to the
47 hearing regarding the application for a new mining concession filed
48 by the present owners of the Sydvaranger estate (Sydvaranger
49 Eiendom AS) with the Norwegian Directorate for Mineral
50 Management. The delegates of the social democratic (AP),
51 conservative (Høyre), and populist (FrP) parties voted in favour. The
52 issue most discussed by the municipality board was not the one
53 hotly debated from 2007 to 2015 regarding dumping floatation
54 chemicals fixed to ore residues from the dressing plant in the
55 Bøkfjord, but rather the impact of doubling the size of on-land slag
56 heaps resulting from renewed open pit mining over the planned 20
57 years of operations (Mækele, 2018).
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60

² Recalled by the author, who attended this event in April 2007 at the conference hall of the Rica [now Scandic] Hotel Kirkenes.

1
2 Bearing in mind the turbulent history of the labour movement at the
3 Sydvaranger mine, it is worth noting that one of the most audacious
4 protagonists for the revival of mining at Kirkenes today is the main
5 industry labour union of Norway, the LO. It advocates the benefits of
6 labour market diversification, which the reopening of the mine
7 would represent to the village. It highlights positive socio-economic
8 synergies regionally, and the mine's contribution to the macro-
9 economic wellbeing for all of Norway, and to the EU's goal of
10 securing its raw material supply. In January 2017, representatives of
11 the LO union in northern Norway stated the following in a chronicle
12 appealing to the collective memory, 'The mineral industry has a long
13 and proud tradition in Finnmark. [...] This industry has for
14 generations offered year-round good employment, income for
15 service and support personnel, increased community growth, spin-
16 offs that many have benefited from, and not least, is a business
17 wherein women and girls have contributed significantly. The best
18 drivers of the big mining trucks at Sydvaranger were women' (Nilsen
19 & Johansen, 2017).

23 The fly-in-fly-out system of labour management, regarded as a
24 typical drawback of Arctic mining, is currently used in several other
25 services and industries in the northern periphery of Norway. Tourism
26 in the sub-Arctic is presented by most Norwegian politicians as a
27 promising sustainable industry to complement or replace
28 environmentally unfriendly mining. Observers in Kirkenes are mostly
29 well-aware though that given the high-cost of many things in
30 Norway, the largest among the local tourism operators already
31 depend on the fly-in-fly-out system for their varying seasonal needs
32 regarding staff and for hiring foreign guides and administrators that
33 are fluent in their customers' languages (Hamran, 2017a; Winge,
34 2018).

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

51 **Arctic mining and collective memory: Discussion**

53 The collective memory of mining in Kirkenes includes a knowledge
54 component not individually lived or within living memory, but gained
55 from readings, media, and local conversations on the characteristics
56 of the mine over its 100-year history. The sample of contested issues
57 in the previous section, in which the collective memory was called on
58 in interpretations by different agents in and around the sub-Arctic
59 community of Kirkenes, is intended to demonstrate the influence of
60 collective memory and slowly evolving mentalities in contemporary
decision-making on all socio-economic levels. It mirrors a reality of

1
2 flexible meanings navigated by those engaged with the local context
3 through their economic logic, political preferences, and intuition.
4

5 Groups or individuals promoting or rallying against mining at
6 Kirkenes appeal to the collective memory by referring to processes
7 or occurrences in the history of the Sydvaranger mine. The collective
8 combination of memory and lived experiences is evolving by
9 assimilating the most recent course of events. Always in flux, it
10 enables conclusions to be drawn from the repetitions in historical
11 patterns which have recurred since before the time of the first
12 opening of the iron mine at Kirkenes.
13

14 To start mining elsewhere today in northern Norway, where no
15 experience of this industry exists in collective memory, is
16 complicated in terms of local opinion. One case is the long planned
17 *Nussir* copper mine in Kvalsund in the west of Finnmark County. It
18 has spent years fulfilling the procedures prescribed by Norwegian
19 regulation. Despite the current favourable copper prices and with
20 the EIA and official permits in place, it is unable to commence
21 operations due to a series of mostly local events, including crucial
22 shareholders not showing up at final hearings (cf. Dannevig & Dale,
23 2018). In contrast, reindeer herders around Kirkenes have had no
24 irreconcilable concerns regarding the mine in Kirkenes.
25
26

27 As pointed out by the Kirkenes and Pasvik valley reindeer herder Egil
28 Kalliainen, accepting the concessions for mining of the Northern Iron
29 Company entailed yielding areas of his family's reindeer district. This
30 meant losing routes for moving animals as well as land for grazing (E.
31 Kalliainen, workshop communication, 30 October 2015). Negotiations
32 over Sami land uses regarding concessions for mining are regulated
33 by Norwegian law. According to some, such as Jarl Hellesvik, a critical
34 debater of Sami issues in Finnmark County, the yielding of Sami land
35 is not necessarily a one-way historical result of industrialisation and
36 urbanisation (2015). Over recent years, major areas of land well-
37 suited for reindeer herding have been freed elsewhere in Finnmark
38 County because of closures of unprofitable small-scale farming and
39 the outmigration of youth from remote fishing hamlets, according to
40 Hellesvik. This may be true for Finnmark County but does not help
41 reindeer herding districts that lose ground and routes locally to
42 mining, wind power plants, etc., unless the land made free by the
43 outmigration of non-herders is within reach of their herds.
44
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46 Familiarity with a place based on collective memory provides an
47 individual basis to calculate life alternatives from a thick experience
48 of both positive and negative phenomena. This does not entail that
49 people knowing about hazardous conditions at their work-place or
50 violations of environmental regulations by their employer would
51 accept this, but acknowledges the outlook on mining in the
52 brownfield of Kirkenes—as presented by Steinar Wikan (2006) and
53 Svein Lund (2015) and shared by the present writer—which
54 summarises this history as mixed. It contains dark periods and tragic
55 experiences and is remembered as such in the collective memory. In
56 so doing, it provides realism for the ones having access to it, making
57 them more prone to cope with mining and to decide to attempt to
58 make a living from it in the future by balancing its pros and cons.
59
60

1
2 Families with one but not all its bread-winners at the mine will
3 spread their socio-economic risk in contrast to those who go 'all in'
4 for jobs created in the innovative 'place renewal' of Kirkenes.
5 Regarding the town's role as the 'capital of the Barents Euroarctic
6 Region' and the Barents regional 'euphoria', its series of visiting
7 foreign ministers and small stream of government funding may
8 prove to be as short-lived as the last round of mining. Collective
9 memory as a form of wisdom enables its carriers to make their own
10 decisions based more on lived experience and subaltern knowledge
11 than those who based their opinions on the media, statements by
12 visiting experts, and paid lobbyists arguing for or against Arctic
13 mining.
14

15
16 Individuals willing to offer conditional support to new industry
17 developments based on relevant prior experiences, including
18 collective memory, seem to be in a credible position to provide a
19 social licence to operate (SLO) for the business in question. However,
20 the literature on SLOs remains unclear on whether the concept is
21 fully relevant to the Euroarctic, how it relates to scientific institutions
22 trusted by law to issue licenses to operate industries, and what is
23 gained by industry developers hiring consultants to handle local
24 public relations to gain the necessary SLO (Koivurova et al., 2015).
25 Being in favour or against something is part of political democracy,
26 but so is the rule of law. Being able to make decisions for yourself
27 depends on your economic means, socio-political influence, and
28 access to knowledge. Offering an SLO to anything beyond that seems
29 dubious, as questions emerge about who is regarded as a
30 stakeholder; who is a paid lobbyist; and who likes cheap raw
31 materials and reasonably priced merchandise manufactured from
32 them but is not prepared to see it produced in 'their own backyard'?

33
34 Kirkenes' collective memory is not exclusive to local residents; it
35 provides inspiration for many. The shipping firm Tschudi Group has
36 been the most active entrepreneur and private investor in Kirkenes
37 in recent decades. Presenting the group's current business at
38 industrial conferences, its CEO Felix Tschudi occasionally refers to
39 the long tradition of Norwegian shipping in the Arctic seas and
40 especially the role of the Norwegian businessman Jonas Lied in his
41 efforts to launch shipping along the Northern Sea Route in the
42 beginning of the previous century. Lied's business acumen and
43 dexterity in operating his social networks in Russia even included an
44 attempt to rescue the Romanov Tsar family. His ambitions were
45 directed elsewhere only in the late 1920s, when Josef Stalin and the
46 economic planners of the Soviet Union closed the door on foreign
47 capitalist enterprise for some time (Tschudi, 2012, slide 16. On Jonas
48 Lied, see Nielsen & Tevlina, 2014). To the Tschudi Group, re-
49 establishing Kirkenes as a mining town is no more interesting than
50 developing it into a supply base for the Barents Sea offshore industry
51 or a transport hub for currently expanding shipping along the
52 Northern Sea route to Arctic Russia and South-East Asia.
53

54
55 The Euroarctic takes on the character of a heterotopia, a world
56 within the world. It contains different landscapes visible to various
57 groups, i.e., political, ethnic, and professional. In chapter four of *The*
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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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