

# Post Petroleum Security in Lofoten: How identity matters

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**Abstract:** Based on over 60 interviews and fieldwork in Lofoten, Norway, over a five-year period (2008 – 2013), this paper argues that local identity is a ‘missing link’ with significant explanatory value when analyzing the contested matter of whether to open for oil drilling in this region. Through a Giddensian approach to ontological security, we identify a major discrepancy between local and national discourses on ‘post-petroleum security’ concerns for the Lofoten region and its inhabitants – concerns that neither national political debates nor academic discourse have adequately included. Thus, we highlight time as a variable separating local and state-centered perspectives on what sustains (ontological) security. We show how an understanding of historically viable communities is of core concern for the re-establishment of an identity-based security. Further, environmental and societal risks associated with petroleum development influence the perceived balance between short-term needs for jobs, and long-term needs for continued production of local, practice-based knowledge upon which a specific coastal identity is built. We also discuss how Lofoten has been put on the petroleum map as one of the last petroleum frontiers, and conclude that

**an analysis including identity as a variable can inform international debates concerning the ‘opening’ of the circumpolar Arctic for extractive industries.<sup>1</sup>**

**Key words:** Arctic, environmental security, ontological security, identity, petroleum, Lofoten, Norway

## 1. Introduction

The saying goes that we, that is, Norwegians, first and foremost ‘do’ oil, that we are ‘petroleum people’. Not so here! Here, we are fishers, no matter if you have been fishing at sea or not. We all depend on the sea, and have always done so. That’s why we can’t just trade fish for oil.<sup>2</sup>

The above quote is an extract from an interview with a fisherman in 2009 where co-author Brigit Dale asked a selection of more than forty locals in Lofoten – a region positioned just above the Arctic Circle in Norway – about their concerns and wishes concerning petroleum. The stories told during interviews would typically begin with respondents making statements in which their position on petroleum was explicitly revealed, statements that can roughly be categorized as belonging to the archetypical categories of: ‘No way!’ or ‘I really don’t know’ or ‘bring it on!’ This was often followed by local respondents arguing for their position with reference to their own direct connections to geographical place, to culture and to nature. In other words: the importance of Lofoten *as a place and cultural frame of reference* was in this way made explicit. The above extract from an interview in which a *sense of place* is emphasized as a departure point thus exemplifies the complexities in Lofoten concerning *what it means to be secure* and how this is tied to local identity.

Many of the fishers in the region, both young and old, said they would try to encourage their children to avoid the fisheries as a source of livelihood. Their intention was to ensure that possibilities beyond the coastal fishing community they lived in were made available to them. The attitude revealed a complex ambivalence concerning local identity related to the embeddedness of cultural practices and experiences over time. The sense of security connected to the hands-on, culturally laden embodied practices of everyday fishing could not hide the fact that life in a fishing village in the past was chronically insecure (and to some extent still is today). Fishers often died at sea, the fish could fail to appear causing despair and economic

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1. The authors thank those following for reading and commenting on the manuscript: Gaute Wahl, Rune Ytreberg, Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørø, Laura Junka-Aikio and Kirsti Stuvøy.

2. Interview with fisherman (spring 2009) conducted by Dale.

ruin for many (a phenomenon called ‘black sea’), and hard physical labor and a harsh climate meant exposure to illness and injury. Still, a *sense of being secure* in a familiar environment will in this setting mean that people identify the threats and risks associated with the fisheries as a part of the meaningful world in which they live. Therefore they accept, and even embrace, the presence of these threats and risks without being able to eliminate them. Knowing the world in which one lives is the basis for the notion of *ontological security*, which Anthony Giddens defines as “... the confidence most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action.”<sup>3</sup> We argue that this forms an important part of the basis for local opinion-making concerning potential petroleum developments in Lofoten. Interestingly, and as we will illustrate through stories from the field, not only opponents but also the advocates of oil and gas developments in Lofoten do not want to ‘trade fish for oil’ – a simplified to-the-point slogan often used to describe local sentiments on the matter. This tension reflects a process where the considerations, perceptions and expectations around the choices made today depend on the future – what can or will happen the day ‘the oil’ comes to an end in Lofoten – and about a possible, viable and meaningful future *post petroleum*.

## 2. The national ‘front stage’<sup>4</sup>

The debate concerning whether to open the areas for commercial petroleum development (see figure one) has – to the surprise of those not familiar with the last 25 years of Norwegian petroleum politics – led to a *de facto* delay of petroleum activities in these areas now for 13 years (and counting), calculated from the first postponement decision by the first Stoltenberg government in 2001. In October 2013, after weeks of negotiations, the four victorious political parties after the parliamentary election presented a political coalition agreement that secured a change of government in Norway, replacing the second Stoltenberg cabinet after eight years in power. The two right-wing-conservative parties *Fremskrittspartiet* (Frp) and *Høyre* (H) formed a new cabinet, supported by two, smaller center parties, *Kristelig folkeparti* (Krf, Christian democrats) and *Venstre* (V, liberals). During their campaigns, the

3. Giddens, Anthony, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 92.

4. ‘Front stage’ here refers to the classical front stage/ back stage debate in sociology, most famously described in Erving Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, New York, Anchor, 1959, where “front stage” is believed to be the performative stage upon which actors present themselves and the imagery they consciously wish to present, as (re)constitutive actions with the intent of demarcating identity.

leadership of both H and Frp had assured their supporters that they would work for an opening of the seas outside the regions Lofoten, Vesterålen and Senja (abbr. LoVeSe) for petroleum development, while their minor supporting parties both had expressed their intention to block such developments. Opponents and proponents to petroleum development therefore anticipated the agreement with trepidation, locally as well as nationally. The agreement spawned an outcry of disappointment and resignation amongst the proponents of petroleum development, as Krf and V got their wish; the coalition agreement postponed further investigation aimed at opening up for petroleum development in LoVeSe for the whole parliamentary period, up until the fall of 2017.

So how can it be that in an oil-rich country like Norway there is such opposition and political controversy over the opening up of an ‘untapped’ area for oil and gas development that the industry has targeted as the most promising among the easily accessible areas?<sup>5</sup> We claim that there are additional important reasons for the delays that are not directly linked to commercial or environmental interests per se. We argue that there is a connection between matters of identity and ontological security locally and political decision making processes nationally: they constitute an important political leeway for the smaller political parties in opposing a large majority in parliament *for* petroleum development, an opposition that to a large degree is based on a string of arguments founded on strong *local* opposition. In fact, the previous Minister for petroleum and energy, Ola Borten Moe (who was often referenced as ‘Oil-Ola’ due to his eagerness to open new areas), argued in 2012 that he would have recommended opening LoVeSe, had it not been for the strong concerns voiced locally, in particular from the coastal fishers of the LoVeSe regions.<sup>6</sup> We assert that these local concerns for ontological security are one of many causalities influencing national decisions on the matter, but one that has not been appropriately focused upon in academic writings until now. Political actors, local activists, fishers’ representatives and others have regularly voiced their concerns in national media. They have appeared regularly in news reels and in media stories as investigative pieces, or – as in the campaign periods prior to the elections in both

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5. Kristoffersen, Berit, “Securing’ geography: Framings, logics and strategies in the Norwegian High North,” in Richard Powell and Klaus Dodds, eds., *Polar Geopolitics? Knowledge, Resources and Legal Regimes*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham and Northampton, 2014, pp. 131–148.

6. Ola Borten Moe at the presentation of the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy’s report on consequences for Northern Norway come petroleum development in the LoVeSe waters, Svolvær, November 11, 2012. See also news story on the meeting and the various reactions, Budalen Ander et al., “Borten Moe vil stenge Lofoten i fire nye år” [Borten Moe will close off Lofoten for another four years], *NRK*, November 23, 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.nrk.no/nordland/vil-stenge-lofoten-i-fire-nye-ar-1.8407816>, accessed May 10, 2014.

2009, 2011 (local and regional elections) and 2013 – as sites for national politicians' clarification of their position on the issue, preferably pictured with fishing rod in hand out on a boat somewhere in the Lofoten waters.

The smaller parties of the new coalition backing the Norwegian Cabinet have also claimed, unarguably in line with environmentalists, that LoVeSe is the ultimate threshold where petroleum development is concerned, and have therefore made concerted efforts to delay the process. This is, not least, based on the argument that it is necessary for Norway to cut petroleum production to meet international climate change obligations. Their efforts also reflect concerns about an oil-dependent economy spinning out of control, and about the risk of pollution and oil spills. On this basis they argue for sparing the LoVeSe area from commercial drilling, and add the potential incentive of including Lofoten on the UNESCO-list as a mixed cultural and natural World Heritage site.<sup>7</sup> However, we claim, these national processes are not their primary argument – but rather the locally based opposition and concerns about the effects of petroleum for local communities – what we here discuss as the basis for *ontological security* in Lofoten, after the oil has (potentially) been tapped.

The main political controversy we address here is the tension between opposing views from different actors concerning security in and about Lofoten when 'doing oil'. Put simply, state-based approaches towards sustaining security reflect the maintenance of ecological and social contracts, where the opening of new areas for petroleum development sustains reserves, economic growth and progress, in concert with state legislation and management, thus ensuring a predefined notion of development within acceptable frames concerning sustainability.<sup>8</sup> From a local point of view, however, the process of the state 'securing itself' might be perceived as a threat to values and assets that are important for the assurance and sustainability of local communities, ontologically as well as physically and economically. In other words, state protagonists – contrary to their intentions – create *insecurity* as well as security.<sup>9</sup> *Being secure* is not only about controlling and decreasing the consequences of *objective*

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7. The controversies surrounding the possible application to UNESCO for inclusion of Lofoten into the World Heritage list has been almost as controversial locally as has the petroleum issue, and reflects a similar sentiment concerning to what extent local actors are enabled to secure themselves, their communities and a viable future. There is a growing sentiment in Lofoten that a UNESCO status in fact would remove local and regional power to decide matters considered important for the development of viable coastal communities.

8. Underthun, Anders and Berit Kristoffersen, "Petroleum-related regional development in Norway: The possibilities and paradoxes of internationalization," in *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift*, 65 (4) 2011, p. 189.

9. Stern, Maria, "'We' the Subject: The Power and Failure of (In) Security," in *Security Dialogue*, 37 (2) 2006, pp. 187–205.

*threats*. It is just as much about *feeling secure* in a well-known environment; within *ontological references* that contributes to making sense of the world.<sup>10</sup>

What does this mean for the case at hand; the matter of whether to open up for petroleum in the LoVeSe waters? It is obvious that there is a discrepancy between the debates as they unfold on the national political ‘front stage’ and in Lofoten. Powerful stakeholders such as the petroleum industry, the environmentalist lobby, the labour unions, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) and, not least, the scientific community, all have the know-how and resources needed to make their interests and knowledge claims clear and ‘media friendly’. In Lofoten, however, petroleum development has triggered debates and reflections concerning *who we are, what we do, and what we will become*, i.e. matters of identity and of securing a (viable and desirable) future for individuals and communities that to some extent challenge these more state-centred, top-down arguments.<sup>11</sup>

Before we account for these in more detail, we need to go back to the aforementioned 13-year ‘delay’ of commercial drilling in LoVeSe. Here we analyse this as a series of political trade-offs between political parties when seeking a parliamentary basis for cabinets, and between the oil industry and the government. Proponents in Lofoten have portrayed these trade-offs as a ‘democratic problem’ and ‘a loss of opportunities’ for Northern Norway.<sup>12</sup> These trade-offs are the result of the work and desire of relatively small political parliamentary parties that have ensured that postponement decisions have had to be made.<sup>13</sup> There is, however, a curious discrepancy between the number of politicians who want to open LoVeSe and the overall tendencies in the population. For example, in the pro-petroleum Labour Party, there is a slight majority amongst the party’s voters who favour leaving the hydrocarbons in the ground in LoVeSe.<sup>14</sup> The apparent ‘democratic problem’ on

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10. Marlow, Jim, “Governmentality, ontological security and ideational stability: preliminary observations on the manner, ritual and logic of a particular art of government,” in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 7(2) 2002, pp. 242–259.

11. Dale, Brigit, “Securing a Contingent Future: How Threats, Risks and Identity Matter in the debate over Petroleum Development in Lofoten, Norway” PhD thesis at the Department of Sociology, Political Science and Community Planning, *University of Tromsø*, 2011.

12. *Ibid.*; Jensen, Leif C., and Berit Kristoffersen, “Nord-Norge som ressursprovinns: Storpolitikk, risiko og virkelighetskamp,” in Svein Jentoft, Kjell A. Røvik and Jens I. Nergård, eds., *Hvor går Nord-Norge? Politiske tidslinjer*, Orkana Forlag, Stamsund, 2013, pp. 67–80.

13. Curiously, both political blocks are dependent on these smaller parties for parliamentary backing, who then make sure that the issue of petroleum development in the Lofoten areas continues to be high on the agenda, no matter from which side of the political aisle the government is formed.

14. Andersson, A. and Høvik T. 2013. “Oljekampen som splitter Norge” [The oil battle that divides Norway] Retrieved from: <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/politikk/Oljekampen-som-splitter-Norge-7299271.html#.U1t588c7z25>, accessed May 10, 2014.

the matter is therefore a complicated issue where not only the power of a parliamentary *minority* is an issue, but also to what extent the *majority* represents the 'general interest' on this political issue. This in turn raises the classical question of what/who constitutes a 'community' – where a variety of *imagined communities*<sup>15</sup> both supplement and contrast other identities, such as locally or regionally founded identities, where the value of 'the oil' depends on who profits, at what time, and consequently in which context. The North-Norwegian (regional) identity *nordlending*, and the locally based *Lofoting* ('being from Lofoten'), are examples of contrasting identities to the nationally constructed 'Norwegianness', often evoked when arguing, for instance, for the need for increased petroleum production for the sake of maintaining a welfare state 'for all Norwegians'<sup>16</sup> as well as governmental efforts of establishing a politics for the 'High North'.

The political controversy concerning development of the sea areas outside LoVeSe has thus reconfigured national power alliances. It has also sparked debates on the importance of securing the viability and reproductive capacity of fish stocks, as well as the capacity of North-Norwegian communities to still thrive and commercially exploit these and other resources *vis-à-vis* an introduction of these areas into 'the Norwegian petroleum age'.<sup>17</sup> We will later show how this in part can be explained, by pointing to the diverging time-scale upon which these two ontologies, or world views, operate, and go on to argue that the locally based notion of ontological security to a larger extent incorporates concern about the possibility of viable and meaningful future *post petroleum*. We therefore turn our attention to the discrepancies between the interests of political actors involved in shaping the consensus-based Norwegian petroleum politics,<sup>18</sup> and the concerns of the majority in this case; concerns that, however, are not reflected in the way the majority of voters in Norway use their voting power.

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15. Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso publishing, London, 2006 (1983).
  16. Statement made by several informants representing national actors (the Norwegian Petroleum Association, oil companies, political parties, policymakers and other national petroleum stakeholders) to Dale in interviews during 2009 and 2010, and Kristoffersen in 2006 and 2011–2012. Similar expressions have been made by stakeholders in public debates and to news media during the period analyzed here.
  17. This sentiment, for example, is shared with readers in a book celebrating 40 years of petroleum production in Norway, by former Prime Minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, in Bremer Nebben, Kristin "Vi fant, vi fant – Norge feirer 40 år som olje- og gassnasjon", Font Forlag, 2009.
  18. Kristoffersen, Berit, "Spaces of Competitive Power," MA dissertation, *University of Oslo*, 2007. See chapters 6 and 8.

## 2.1 Lofoten and the petroleum fairy-tale

As we started our research on this controversial issue in 2008, we were curious about to what extent the petroleum industry's efforts in cementing the perception that 'What is good for the oil industry, is good for Norway' was understood and accepted as a *grand narrative* that helped (re)establish Norway's identity as interwoven with a petroleum-driven economy. Do 'we' – that is, Norwegians – understand potential oil and gas fields in the North as 'reserves' through which we can secure our wellbeing in the future? This link has frequently been endorsed by government officials, who have pointed to the importance of oil revenues in establishing one of the most comprehensive welfare systems in the world.<sup>19</sup> The 'petroleum fairy-tale' metaphor is well-known in domestic political jargon, and points to cultural-discursive attributes connected to the political economy of oil and gas production in Norway, which in turn exposes how choices concerning how to continue or end production are inherently value-laden.<sup>20</sup> Thus, our reference to local narratives and stories as indicative of how one locally acts as a security actor has its parallel at the national level, as narratives are created with the intention of constructing a notion of interconnectedness between petroleum resources and the ability of the Norwegian government to secure a contingent future for its population. As the Norwegian government is aware that oil is running out and seeks a basis for their political stand in "intergenerational justice", Norway directs its oil revenues to a national pension fund meant for future generations, while maintaining heavy taxation on the oil companies that helps finance generous public services.<sup>21</sup> In this way, the Norwegian 'fairy-tale' circulates widely around the world when representatives of the official 'Oil Norway' travel abroad, promoting the Norwegian way around the "oil curse".<sup>22</sup>

In an effort to understand how these narratives resonated with the general public, we took part in a national survey where we tested the claim of whether opening up new areas for oil and gas development in the Northern region of Norway is a "prerequisite for the maintenance of the welfare state in the future".<sup>23</sup> The results were

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19. Kristoffersen, Berit and Stephen Young, "Geographies of security and statehood in Norway's 'Battle of the North,'" in *Geoforum*, 41 (4) 2010, p.579.

20. Jensen and Kristoffersen 2013, op.cit p. 77.

21. Bridge, Gavin, and Philippe Le Billon, *Oil*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013, p. 141.

22. Ross, Michael L., *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, Princeton University Press, 2012, p. 1.

23. The study carried out was on people's media habits (information sources) and security perceptions. It included questions regarding the connection between environmental risks and petroleum development, in addition to the main topic of Norwegian military/defense. Marcus Buck at the Department of Sociology, Political Science and Social Planning, University of Tromsø led the project. Berit Kristoffersen and Brigit Dale contributed to the survey with additional questions related



interesting, as a large proportion of the population either fully or partially agreed with the statement in 2009 (about 41 percent), whilst the numbers in national statistics for 2012 were up to 49 percent. Just as interesting was the fact that a representative sample from Lofoten and Vesterålen (two of the three regions abbreviated as LoVeSe) showed that attitudes in the region did not differ compared to the national average, meaning that the intersection between environmentalism (including climate change – which we also asked about) and economic growth were not viewed differently in the region than elsewhere in the country. However, as studies of Norwegian election surveys make clear: Although a majority of voters favor leaving the oil in LoVeSe in the ground for the time being, climate and environmental considerations only influence voting behavior to a small degree.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, while the issue does not make people cast their vote for parties prone to say no to petroleum in the LoVeSe area, popular disagreement with a parliamentary majority out of tune with the majority of the population on this matter still, in our view, strengthens the position of these smaller political parties when negotiating for political power. Further, we argue, the above issue is blurred as the ramifications for welfare, social life, cultural heritage and identity issues are obscured by the seemingly straightforward question of choosing traditional economic development and growth based on petroleum development, over what is often presented as an inevitable process of depopulation, municipal financial decay, and lack of alternative livelihoods, as the traditional fisheries provide fewer jobs, primarily due to new efficiency measures in the fishing industry.<sup>25</sup> On this basis we claim that the underlying *discrepancy between stakeholders in understanding of valuation of petroleum, landscape(s) and alternatives to industrial development* is an important backdrop for the strong defiance of the idea that the LoVeSe petroleum is ‘up for grabs’, if only a certain level of spillover effects could be secured through political bargaining. This takes us to the last analysis of the national front stage, concerning which role as a ‘reserve’ and as a frontier Lofoten plays in the opening up of the Norwegian north.

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to environmental issues and petroleum development. The questions were posed to 900 randomly selected residents in southern Norway and 500 in the three northernmost counties, and about 50 of these were in Lofoten and Vesterålen in 2009, and 1000 at the national scale in 2012.

24. Buck, Marcus and Berit Kristoffersen, “Boring etter olje og gass i nord. Lokal strid langs nasjonale skillelinjer?” *Ottar*, 2 2011, pp. 48–54.
25. Nilsen, Ragnar E., “Kystkrise og nyskaping,” in Svein Jentoft, Kjell A. Røvik and Jens I. Nergård, eds., *Hvor går Nord-Norge? Tidsbilder fra en landsdel i forandring*, Orkana Forlag, Stamsund, 2012 p. 235.

## 2.2 Lofoten and strategic advancement

Reports and mappings by the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate have concluded that the prospects for oil and gas combined in the LoVeSe area are quite good, and the majority of potential oil resources are expected to be in the Lofoten seas.<sup>26</sup> Environmental and fisheries agencies involved in the assessment processes, through which this region's future as a potential petroleum region has been scrutinized, have concluded that these areas should not be opened for such activities due to their vulnerable eco-system, as this is the main spawning grounds for the northeast Arctic cod and other important fish stocks in these waters.<sup>27</sup> In the words of two leading Norwegian scientists specializing in fish stock viability and the fisheries:

The consequences of underestimating the environmental risk in a uniquely valuable and sensitive area such as Lofoten–Vesterålen [the LoVeSe-region] would be much more serious than in any other part of the Norwegian marine environment. Faced with such uncertainty and dire potential consequences, the precautionary approach should come into play and the government should refrain from allowing potentially harmful petroleum activity until all problems are resolved.<sup>28</sup>

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26. Indeed, the industry argued in a Konkraft report in 2008 that approximately 3.5 billion barrels of oil could be extracted from the LoVeSe shelf, not 2 billion as Statoil previously had suggested, or 1.2 billion as predicted by the petroleum Directorate. See Norwegian Petroleum Directorate, “Petroleum Resources in the Waters off Lofoten, Vesterålen and Senja”, Report, 2010, available online: <http://www.npd.no/no/Publikasjoner/Rapporter/Petroleumressursene-i-havomradene-utenfor-Lofoten-Vesteralen-og-Senja/> Retrieved April 28, 2014.

27. Misund, Arve and Erik Olsen, “Lofoten – Vesterålen: for cod and cod fisheries, but not for oil?” in *EICES Journal of Marine Sciences*, 70 (4), 2013, pp. 722–725.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 725.



LoVeSe on the petroleum map. © Norwegian Petroleum Directorate<sup>29</sup>

The map above is illustrative of the movement of petroleum development on the Norwegian shelf northwards, and is in itself an argumentative effort in terms of showing how sensitive (and often remote) areas are reachable through the ‘taming’ of frontier areas through the utilization of well-known governance technolo-

29 This map can be found at the Petroleum Directorate web-page and the annual report *Facts*, available online at <http://www.npd.no/no/Publikasjoner/Faktahefter/Fakta-2014/>

gies and management tools. In placing these areas on a map of the Norwegian petroleum shelf, they are envisioned as having a role in the prolongation of ‘the Norwegian petroleum fairy-tale’ through which information about calculation and value of natural resources can be disseminated.<sup>30</sup> One can argue that this move, while acknowledging the vulnerability and uniqueness of the areas in question, has the important aim of *excluding* the possibility of *not drilling at all*, as it is sought ontologically placed *within* the realm of petro-politics – and not, for instance, environmental politics or a more general framework of multiple resource management offshore (including fisheries, for instance).

We argue that the movement northwards for the past twenty years can be seen as a *strategic advancement*; a process in which the least controversial areas are opened first, followed by a gradual opening up of more (politically) sensitive areas. Political compromises are reached by giving the oil and gas industry portions of the areas they want, while simultaneously shielding sensitive areas – although *not permanently*. Importantly, and as expressed by the Minister of Petroleum and Energy Odd Roger Enoksen in 2006, “... before the jewel of Lofoten and Vesterålen comes to the table in the other end ...” the Barents Sea has to be thoroughly mapped and explored.<sup>31</sup> Although space limits us from probing deeper into these issues, we find it necessary to briefly show how this strategic advancement follows four lines of argument. Firstly, as an argument for drilling based on environmental concerns,<sup>32</sup> a new regime called ‘zero emissions’ was established (the area zoned as green). This regime was abandoned when new areas in the Barents Sea were opened in 2011 and the industry was granted oil and gas exploration areas much closer to shore than previously allowed (the areas zoned as yellow), which signaled they were ‘opened – but under a specific scheme’. Secondly, a focus on gas rather than oil (concretized by the first commercial project north of the Arctic Circle, the *Snow White* LNG gas project) made it much easier to establish and gain acceptance and support for the first step in the development of the Barents petroleum region in the early 2000s.

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30. Whitehead, Mark, Martin Jones, and Rhys Jones, “Spatializing the ecological leviathan: Territorial strategies and the production of regional natures,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 88 (1), 2006, pp. 49–65.

31. See Kristoffersen 2014. Op.cit. p. 141. This issue was publically discussed in 2006, when the big oil companies criticized the Minister of Petroleum and Energy at the time for ‘demanding’ that they take part in exploring the Barents Sea if they expected to participate in later development in Lofoten. See also: Ulf Rosenberg 2006, “Gigantene må satse i Nord” [The giants need to make an effort in the North], *Stavanger Aftenblad* April 5, 2006. <http://www.aftenbladet.no/nyheter/okonomi/--Gigantene-ma-satse-i-nord-2117352.html#.U2E9bE2KbAQ>, accessed May 10, 2014.

32. See Jensen, Leif C., “Norwegian petroleum extraction in Arctic waters to save the environment: introducing ‘discourse co-optation’ as a new analytical term,” *Critical Discourse Studies*, 9 (1) 2012, pp. 29–38.

Thirdly, the ripple effects following the Snow White project substantiated promises on onshore landing of petroleum and further ripple effects for the next two projects Goliat and Skrugard (promises that were later abandoned), and for the potential effects petroleum development could possibly have in Lofoten. Fourthly, how development of new technology in these projects further north could strengthen arguments that it would be possible to extract hydrocarbons from the sensitive offshore areas outside Lofoten within acceptable risk parameters and bring them onshore. The opening of new areas in 2013 of the previously disputed area with Russia (the green area with a yellow circle on the map) has sparked debate on environmental risks, especially relating to an oil spill close to the ice edge. The relevance of this for our analysis of the Lofoten case, however, is that just as the Barents Sea has been classified according to all the Petroleum Directorate's variety of colours and zones, the southernmost part of the Lofoten waters suddenly reappeared on the petroleum map in 2011 (part of area marked in yellow). This area had been closed in 2001 after 'media friendly' civil disobedience actions, organized by the environmental movement before the second exploration drilling was to take place outside Røst in 2001 in the midst of national elections.<sup>33</sup>

With this return to the starting point for what we have referred to as the 13-year delay of petroleum activities in LoVeSe, we round off our analysis of the national front stage. What is of particular essence in this is that in spite of the efforts described to *naturalise* the inclusion of the LoVeSe areas in the future plans for the Norwegian petroleum shelf, the possibility remains that LoVeSe could become the first post-petroleum region in Norway, due to a *decision not to drill*, rather than part of the *final* petroleum frontier – a possibility we ascribe at least in part to the way local debate on ontological security, in a future *with or without oil*, has influenced national decision processes.

### 3. Ontological security in Lofoten

Two extensive studies conducted a decade ago showed that a clear majority in Lofoten opposed commercial oil and gas developments.<sup>34</sup> The perspectives inform-

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33. Ytreberg, Rune, "PR, presse, penger og plagiat," in Svein Jentoft, Kjell A. Røvik and Jens I. Nergård, eds., *Hvor går Nord-Norge? Politiske tidslinjer*, Orkana Forlag, Stamsund, 2013, pp. 45–66.

34. Brastad, Bjørn, Håkan T. Sandersen, Berit Skorstad and Liv M. Årseth, "Holdninger til olje- og gassutvinning utenfor Lofoten, en studie blant befolkningen i Lofoten og Sandnessjøen" [Attitudes towards oil and gas extraction outside Lofoten – a study amongst the population of Lofoten and Sandnessjøen]. NF-rapport 2/04, 2004. Available on: [www.nordlandsforskning.no](http://www.nordlandsforskning.no). Four hundred informants in Lofoten were surveyed over the phone in 2003, and more than half of the representative sample

ing those results were assessed as a “conditional no” by the group of researchers at Nordland Research Institute in a qualitative study, contingent upon consideration of whether oil developments would become less risky for the fisheries.<sup>35</sup> The focus at the time was on “... what level of security and risk (...) is politically acceptable”<sup>36</sup>. One crucial insight that we emphasize in this article – developed after a decade characterized by a prolific production of scientific reports and political debates – is that the petroleum question is not only a question about finding a balance that is politically acceptable locally (or nationally for that matter), neither is it solely about the concrete risks, threats and possibilities stemming from petroleum production. The debate has *also* vitalized discussions in Lofoten on identity and the role of ‘the cod’ and ‘the oil’ (usually referred to in singular in local debates) for societal developments, broadly speaking, and on what can, and does, secure Lofoten in the future.<sup>37</sup>

There is a broad consensus backing the argument that the creation of a sense of security in a population is an important task, indeed the very *raison d'être*, for state politics. Through securing economic development, physical safety, civil and human rights and through this a framework for the construction of a sense of togetherness, a frame of reference through which the world can be understood – a basis for ontological security.<sup>38</sup> A timely question in Lofoten then becomes: What are the securing aspects offered through petroleum development in return for the risks involved? And importantly, what basis for security locally is *not* discussed; security that extends beyond what ‘the state’ has to offer (or not)?<sup>39</sup> Crucially, and as Jim Marlow has argued:

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from Lofoten (56 percent) stated that they did not want petroleum activities; 22 percent were positive; and about 20 percent felt that petroleum activity could be permitted if ‘certain conditions are met’. When asked directly about the possible impacts for the fishing industry, 70 percent believed that petroleum activities would have a negative impact, and more than half of the respondents believed that oil and gas exploration should not be permitted because of the interests of the fishing industry.

35. Håkan T. Sandersen, Bjørn Brastad and Berit Skorstad, “Den første olje, en intervjuundersøkelse i Lofoten om holdninger til oljeutvinning” 2002 [The first oil, an interview based study in Lofoten on attitudes towards petroleum extraction]. Available online: [www.nordlandsforskning.no](http://www.nordlandsforskning.no)
36. *Ibid.* p. 20.
37. Dale, 2011. *op.cit.*
38. See for instance Giddens, *op.cit.*; Hawkins, Robert L. and Katherine Maurer, “‘You fix my community, you have fixed my life’: the disruption and rebuilding of ontological security in New Orleans,” in *Disasters*, 35 (1), 2011, pp. 143–159; Steele, Brent J., *Ontological security in international relations: self-identity and the IR state*, Routledge, New York, 2008.
39. Hoogensen Gjørvi, Gunhild, “Security by any other name: negative security, positive security, and a multi-actor security approach,” in *Review of international Studies*, 38 (4) 2012, pp. 835–859.

... modern governance provides just *one* of the elements that contribute towards the extent in which, in Giddesian terms, ordinary people in their everyday lives feel ontologically secure [ ... ] or indeed, existentially anxious, an anxiety [ ... ] concerned with [ ... ] their place in the grand scheme of things.<sup>40</sup>

This illustrates the point that although state policies might aim at securing the population, the same processes sometimes create *insecurity* as well. Thus, the sense of ontological security created by *community* might be just as important as that which is embedded in the practices of the state, and shows that sometimes – as is the case of Lofoten and petroleum – national politics aiming at securing the whole (national) population can be seen as *opposing* locally based security.

When identifying locally based identity as an important prerequisite for ontological security,<sup>41</sup> we argue that its importance in this matter, at least in part, stems from a perceived lack of inclusion of local concerns into the decision making process from proponents and opponents to petroleum developments in Lofoten. This feeling of subjection and inability to steer important decisions for the future – if it is communities, the region or children for that matter – adds to the lack of trust in this process. Therefore, we argue, local resentment is based just as much on an inability to secure an ontologically coherent future, as it is based on environmental, economic, or welfare concerns.

As previously stated, local opposition based on these concerns is a part of the basis for the political decision to postpone. Thus, we argue that despite a sense of powerlessness in the political center-periphery relationship between Northern Norway and the southern ‘core’,<sup>42</sup> local identity and security concerns do influence national decisions concerning petroleum development in LoVeSe through intricate processes. What we find striking, as concluded in the discussion above, is that this is the first time local resentment towards petroleum has influenced national political decisions in Norway to such an extent. As it stands now, this might be the first area in which the necessary priorities for the development of industry and finance in a (unavoidable) post-petroleum Norway are tested.

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40. Marlow 2002, p. 243.

41. Giddens 1991.

42. Røvik, Kjell A., Jentoft, Svein and Jens I. Nergård, in “Det politiske Nord-Norge” in Svein Jentoft, Kjell A. Røvik and Jens I. Nergård, eds., *Hvor går Nord-Norge? Politiske tidslinjer*, Orkana Forlag, Stamsund, 2013, p. 14.

### 3.1. Time as a decisive variable

Our article started off with a quote that framed the notion of the two resources – petroleum and fish – as being mutually exclusive. Framed like this, they symbolize two different ontologies – worldviews, if one will – upon which an ontologically secure future can be built. In short, it reflects the idea that there are two oppositional alternative futures that lay ahead; one with petroleum and the other without petroleum, but also that there are two different approaches to the long-term *post-petroleum security* of the region, one local and one national, that cut *across* the pro/con-petroleum divide. The quote that introduced this article thus reveals a positioning of ‘resources’ as being *vis-à-vis* each other, in opposition, where they have competing roles in light of questions concerning economic development. This reflects how natural resources depend upon particular narratives, visions and knowledges,<sup>43</sup> and on how societies place value to them in time and space across scales.<sup>44</sup> ‘The oil’ is a potential calculable reserve, providing the state and the population with future wealth as a basis for (ontological) security. Norway’s oil and gas resource base is thus important to how future security is constructed and represented in mainstream debate. Indeed, whilst these national mainstream perspectives reflect anxieties about *whether* petroleum resources should be left in the ground or extracted now, discussions in Lofoten also reflect considerations concerning *when* they can or should be developed when people seek to secure a viable future – economically, ecologically, and physically – and thus ontologically. In the region many argue that we might as well wait – we do not know enough, the risk is not worth taking, or we should wait and see what we can use the oil for later. As expressed by one of the most important local and national figures in fishing politics during the second half of the last century, after stating that he was “too old” to really have an opinion on the matter:

... [my] attitude towards ‘the oil’ is that I am not negative to explore for it. However, I think it is too early. Let the oil lie where she is. It can benefit future generations.<sup>45</sup>

Many other informants also revealed this position to us, and argued that for the people in Lofoten, there is really no rush. Others of course disagreed, and saw this

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43. Birch, Kean, Levidow, Les and Theo Papaioannou, “Sustainable capital? The neoliberalization of nature and knowledge in the European ‘knowledge-based bio-economy’”, in *Sustainability*, 2(9), 2010, pp. 2898–2918.

44. Bridge, Gavin, “Material worlds: Natural resources, resource geography and the material economy”. In *Geography Compass*, 3(3), 2009, pp. 1217–1244.

45. Interview with retired politician and fisherman in Lofoten (Winter 2010), conducted by Kristoffersen.



as a matter of urgency – not because ‘the petroleum age’ could be prolonged, but because the region needs the incentives (such as infrastructure, capital, and new workplaces/industries) that petroleum is thought able to provide. Even so there was concern for the future after petroleum. All pro-petroleum actors the authors talked to in Lofoten unanimously argued for petroleum development that in no way hampered the future potential for the fisheries. In this, we see a discrepancy in motivation and reason, where the local perspective is geared towards both short-term and long-term concern about how to secure a viable future *for* the region – with or without petroleum – while the national debate focuses on the petroleum era (and whether or not to include LoVeSe in it).

### 3.2 Identity-based arguments

In our research then, we see clear connections between the (re)construction of a specific identity relating to the aforementioned *Lofoting* (i.e. ‘being-from-Lofoten’)<sup>46</sup> and what we have defined as *ontological security*; the sense of a continuous environment, natural and social, in which people believe that their self-identity can be securely re-established and reproduced.<sup>47</sup> The concept is, as has been briefly mentioned, clearly connected in modernity to a heightened sense of *insecurity*, for instance due to a lack of trust in experts systems and governmental strategies,<sup>48</sup> or a lack of a sense of community (or shared ontological world view). This, we argue, implies that people make efforts to secure themselves and/or others, and that we have to seek a more grounded understanding of the ways in which risks are assessed and evaluated by people and communities.<sup>49</sup>

We therefore emphasize that identity and ontological security are interrelated in Lofoten, as premises for mutual development. This symbiotic relationship eventually brings us analytically to a central question concerning social life: What rallies people together in social groups – be it in close-knit communities, nations or online communities without geographical boundaries, if not a sense of being secure in being

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46. As stated, this article deals primarily with the debate in the Lofoten region, although the political issue also spans the regions Vesterålen and Senja. Thus, as far as identity matters are concerned, we will limit ourselves to an analysis of the situation in Lofoten.

47. Giddens 1991. Op.cit. p. 92.

48. Beck, Ulrich, *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*, Sage, London, 1992; Dean, Mitchell, *Governance, Power and rule in modern society*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications, London, 2010; Giddens, Anthony, *The consequences of modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990.

49. Stuvøy, Kirsti, “Human security research practices: Conceptualizing Security for Women’s Crisis Centres in Russia,” in *Security Dialogue*, 41, 2010, pp. 279–299; Dale, Brigit, 2011. op.cit, Hoo-gensen Gjörv, Gunhild H., 2012, op.cit.

together with others and in sharing an understanding of the world? When facing difficult choices or put under pressure from what is perceived as existential matters, people often refer to those identity traits somewhat simplistically characterized as a *gemeinshaft*<sup>50</sup> – based on a sense of belonging, togetherness and, as a consequence – security, in search of reference points for important decisions concerning the future. We further claim that individuals and communities ascribe *ontological importance* to specific actions, symbols and frames of reference, and that the way debates over a possible petroleum production in Lofoten waters have stirred discussions and reflections about who ‘we’ are and who ‘we’ might become, oil or not, has been tainted by the specificities of (notions of) a regional, common identity called *Lofoting*.

In fact, self-ascribed and socially-ascribed locally-based identity still holds great merit in Lofoten in a variety of situations, and the identity *Lofoting* is to no small degree based on living close to (and to a certain degree *at*) sea, where knowledge of specific skills enabling the utilization of (and survival next to) the sea is believed to be crucial, and where the ability to live off the produce of the sea is an important identity marker.<sup>51</sup> In the case at hand, our informants in Lofoten used *identity-based arguments* when asked to describe their position on the issue of petroleum development in the area, as for instance in this extract from an interview with one of Dale’s informants – a municipal mayor arguing *for* investigating the possibility of petroleum development in Lofoten:

... I always say that it is the fisheries we live on here, in Lofoten. I have myself contributed as a crewmember, my father-in-law was a coastal fisherman (...) so I’ve had it close all along. [But] we have lost 199 fishing boats in my municipality since 1999 [... and] we cannot support our local communities with these small boats anymore.<sup>52</sup>

Our understanding of identity in this context is in line with that of Bhikhu Parekh’s as that which “... represents the way in which individuals situate and orientate themselves in the world”,<sup>53</sup> where we focus our attention on the *ontological aspects* of social life; that which makes the world definable and manageable – and thus what makes the contingent future *ontologically secure*. In this, an emphasis on the social dimension of identity is necessary that concerned with “membership in a particular group or structure of relationship”, as opposed to the personal dimension

50. Brint, Steven, “Gemeinschaft revisited: A critique and reconstruction of the community concept,” in *Sociological theory*, 19 (1) 2001, pp.1–23.

51. See also Dale, Brigit, 2011, Op.cit. pp. 75–79 and p. 153.

52. Interview conducted by Dale, fall 2009.

53. Parekh, Bhikhu, *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Interdependent World*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008, p. 23.

dealing with individual personal uniqueness, and the human dimension that identifies every human being as “a member of the universal community”.<sup>54</sup> Importantly, this focus does not exclude an emphasis on both tradition and outside influences as important when people construct identity markers that are made relevant in the debate over petroleum production in Lofoten and in the ways in which these identities are ‘filled’ with meaning.

As has been previously argued, “... identity can in this way be understood as both *ontological practice* and *symbolic ordering* of the world”.<sup>55</sup> and a focus in post-modern (or globalization) theory on the often ‘faceless commitments’ symptomatic of the impersonal, modern life<sup>56</sup> should not, in our view, make us as social researchers underrate the importance of personal relations based on family ties, adherence to a common local community or shared historical narratives for regions like Lofoten.

### 3.3 The symbolic importance of fisheries

As presented, we have found that adherence to a locally based identity influenced informants’ positions on the matter of petroleum production in ‘their’ waters, and spurred reflections on locally based knowledge and culture and its importance for individual and collective construction of identity, be they opinionated opponents or proponents to future petroleum development in the region. In Lofoten, lives lived close to and at sea has been paramount for the symbolic construction of community<sup>57</sup> and even though few people today are directly involved in commercial fishing, the symbolic importance of the fisheries by far outreaches their economic importance. This is emphasized in the following statement by a politician (who has held positions both nationally and locally), reflecting on how people on the coast see themselves as dependent upon nature, and how this dependency is reflected through a consideration of *time*:

Who will harvest from our cropland at sea? Is it those who have traditionally harvested? Or is it the oil industry that comes in with a perspective that is twenty to thirty years [...] In the same field? But worst of all: you may risk that they destroy the whole field! This is a great simplification, but that is the symbolic field. Between traditional management and the exploitation of resources that is more or less in pact with nature, and others who harvest quickly and with great risk before they retreat. For 30 years. Suddenly the cash flow dries out. Then [the questions are]; do you [still]

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54. Ibid, p 2.

55. Dale, Brigit, 2011, op.cit. p. 75

56. Giddens, Anthony, 1992, op.cit.

57. Cohen, Anthony, P., *The symbolic construction of community*, Routledge, London, 1985.

have the ones with the coastal culture in their veins? Those who have the knowledge of fishing methods and can interpret nature? What have you done to the coastal culture in the meantime? (...) This is why many see the oil industry as a real threat to a future development of the coastal culture.<sup>58</sup>

With a focus on a future extending far beyond any potential ‘petroleum age’ in the region, we here see that petroleum activities are seen both as a direct risk (through blowouts) but moreover as an ‘indirect’ danger to the viability of coastal communities in the region, *post petroleum*. It also signals a lack of trust in risk assessments presented in the debate taking place on the national front stage, where the risk involved to a large extent – at least technically – is described as being minimal. What we are then seeing is that values and livelihoods depend upon a concern for (and conservation of) nature and the services it provides, and that it is taken care of in an intergenerational perspective. As another respondent working in the fisheries processing industry expressed, we should not “leave future generations to deal with the problems”.<sup>59</sup> He related this to non-renewable resources or the tempo in which they are tapped, and concluded “...In the end [it is] a question of values”. Sustainable management of the fisheries then relies on the continuance of local practices, and reflects back on the historical, present and future interdependencies between nature, individuals and society. From this perspective then, ‘the petroleum age’ is relatively short.<sup>60</sup> This brings us to our final analysis, where we use a *post-petroleum security lens* to briefly describe recent historical developments concerning the petroleum issue in Lofoten, and to what extent these reflect ideas about future consequences and possibilities – both within and beyond the petroleum era we are currently in.

#### 4. Post-petroleum security in the high north

The rhetoric of extracting the oil and gas in LoVeSe in the near future is closely tied to the Norwegian governmental efforts of arguing that petroleum activities should be a main driver to growth and development in the Norwegian ‘High North’. This includes a notion of incentives for development and growth for Northern Norway, but unfortunately, ripple effects cannot be guaranteed in advance. Therefore, uncertainty about future benefits for Lofoten has arisen – indeed, there might not be ‘oil

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58. Interview with politician (winter 2010), conducted by Kristoffersen.

59. Interview with fisheries businessman (summer 2012), conducted by Kristoffersen.

60. Stuvøy, Kirsti and Berit Kristoffersen, “‘En feit og fin og norsk en?’ Lofottorsken i internasjonal politikk,” in *Tidsskriftet Internasjonal Politikk*, 71(1) 2013, p. 112.

for development' in Lofoten at all.<sup>61</sup> Uncertainties are thus reflected in concerns over whether Lofoten will be left with a number of risks, and only with minor positive ripple effects. This has been one of the main reasons why local discussions on post-petroleum have cut across the pro/con divide. National actors – mainly the environmental movement and small, green-labeled political parties – have promoted Lofoten (or rather LoVeSe as a whole) as a 'petroleum free zone', but have to a lesser degree reflected the concerns of the people on the ground. As we have demonstrated, LoVeSe is seen by environmentalists as well as green-labeled political parties as an ultimate threshold concerning the protection of nature and the willingness of the Norwegian state to take action when it comes to international obligations concerning mitigation efforts; efforts that ultimately require that a substantial amount of available hydrocarbon assets are left in the ground. The protection of ecosystems has become a key part of these debates, in tune with the accumulating knowledge generated as part of the new ecosystem-based principles for the Management Plan for the Lofoten-Barents Sea area.<sup>62</sup> Within the current resource management regime, LoVeSe is considered to be a particularly valuable area with vulnerable ecosystems, and therefore a major 'battleground' on the national front stage concerning the balance between extraction of natural resources and sustainability concerns.<sup>63</sup> Although the national alliance (between green-labeled political parties and environmental NGOs) has also increasingly integrated their work with the local resistance movement, where local and regional fisher's associations are active participants, we still see that a major trend since 2001 has been that national alliances working for – and against – opening Lofoten are more concerned with arguing in terms of a 'battle of the North', in the sense that they argue either in terms of integrated ecosystems that extend beyond LoVeSe or having reserves plotted on the oil map, and are less concerned with the long-term perspectives of the people of Lofoten.

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61. In several interviews conducted by Dale during the spring of 2010, industry actors in Lofoten said that whether or not the petroleum fields outside the region were opened would have little effect on their market situation as providers of services to the petroleum industry; their capacity is limited and growth potential hampered – curiously enough – by a lack of workers, due in part to the petroleum industry 'vacuuming' the Norwegian labor market, providing salaries and work conditions few can compete with onshore.

62. See Dale, Brig, 2011, op.cit. Chapter 4.4.

63. For the most recent example, see Norway's updated management plan for the marine environment in the Lofoten-Barents sea area: Ministry of the Environment, 2011. *Stortingsmelding #10, 2010–2011. Oppdatering av forvaltningsplanen for det marine miljø i Barentshavet og havområdene utenfor Lofoten (forvaltningsplan)*. Available online at: [regjeringen.no](http://regjeringen.no)

## 4.1 Preparing for the future

Based on our observations and analysis over a five-year period concerning the strategic constellations and their changing influence over national politics on the issue, we find it pertinent to conclude that a major concern locally, from both adversaries and supporters of petroleum development, is how a decision on the matter – be it a decision to open for petroleum or not – leaves the region prepared for a *post-petroleum* era. The oil and gas resources are discussed at the national scale as either being part of the ‘oil in stock’ as national reserves/production securing Norway’s future, or not part of ‘the petroleum age’ at all. The time frame for potential harvesting of these non-renewable resources is connected to narratives insisting that it should happen *now*, while ‘we’ – the Norwegians – have the know-how and there is a market for hydrocarbons *as an energy resource* – in other words: *while we are still in the petroleum era*. As we have pointed out, the potential value of the petroleum possibly available in the Lofoten waters is *not* understood locally as being limited to what Norway as a producing country can make a profit of in a reasonably foreseeable future – that is, in the hydrocarbon-driven economy; it is also believed to be valuable *where it is* – and as long as extracting it for energy consumption now is perceived as representing a threat to what Lofoten can be *post petroleum*, local skepticism and concerns about how this future is to be secured will remain as a friction between local and national interests, be they favorable to petroleum development or not.

Time and time again we have received visitors from the south: From politicians, environmentalists and oil companies. Those of us who are positive to petroleum development have not seen anything concrete come out of all these visits. The last time some petro-people came here I told them not to ‘be bothered’ anymore, unless they had something specific to come up with. They may just as well stay away – we need to focus on other things.<sup>64</sup>

This statement from 2014 from a business operator in Lofoten is an example of a familiar position in Lofoten after many years of waiting and debating petroleum-related issues – a position that in our view strengthens our argument that post-petroleum is important for many people and political stakeholders locally, across the pro/con petroleum divide. With the latest political developments, which include the aforementioned postponement of any new decision on how to proceed until after the general elections in 2017, we find the following question pertinent: With the petroleum issue again displaced and left unresolved, will local supporters and

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64. Private business operator, personal correspondence with Dale, winter 2014.

opponents gather forces toward a more general claim for a different approach to potential development – one more geared towards securing a post-petroleum future?

The work of the Lofoten Council is especially useful when seeking to understand local political shifts relating to how risks are weighed against the potential benefits.<sup>65</sup> When co-author Berit Kristoffersen went through the archives of the meetings of the Lofoten Council from the 2000s, she found that a decade ago they mainly centered around the fisheries, as was also confirmed in the aforementioned research projects from Nordland Research Institute.<sup>66</sup> As an example, the working committee of the Lofoten Council wrote in a statement in 2002 to the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy that they in the preliminary process of mapping the ecological basis in the LoVeSe area had to include a broader range of consequences and impacts than what was planned for – that they should also include environmental/ecological, economic and social considerations.<sup>67</sup> Then came a period where the Lofoten Council worked more closely with the oil industry, for example on the aforementioned studies in 2002 and 2004, financed by Statoil and the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association – studies where the petroleum actors were quite proactive *vis-à-vis* the commissioned researchers from the Nordland Research Institute, for example, concerning research aims and direction.<sup>68</sup> Through this and similar processes, then, various representatives for the petroleum industry presented and discussed the potential for petroleum development at the Lofoten Council meetings in the following years.<sup>69</sup>

The regular encounters with the industry did not pass without controversy in Lofoten, especially given the growing resistance organization in the region (such

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65. The six municipal mayors that are the voting members of the consensus based Lofoten council. Other prominent actors taking part in local debates are fisheries organizations (Norges Fiskarlag and Norges Kystfiskarlag) and ad hoc/non-governmental or voluntary organizations formed in the wake of this debate; Lo-Ve Petro and the People's Action for a petroleum-free Lofoten, Vesterålen and Senja. Lo-Ve Petro works towards and promotes opportunities that could be brought to the region, where its foremost objective is “as soon as possible to open Lofoten and Vesterålen for a petroleum industry based on stringent safety and environmental standards”, according to its articles of association.

66. Kristoffersen read all official meeting records and reports back to 2001 that dealt with petroleum development in the summer of 2010, at the Lofoten Council's offices in Vestvågøy, Lofoten.

67. The report of the meetings is not available online, but this second meeting took place in February 2002.

68. Brastad et al., 2004 op.cit; Sandersen et al., 2002. Personal communication with two researchers in these research projects in 2011 and 2014 (Kristoffersen), who as an example expressed that it was the oil industry who wanted to include Helgeland in the quantitative study, which the researchers themselves did not feel was necessary.

69. The most active stakeholders from the petroleum industry were the oil companies Shell, Statoil, and the Norwegian Oil and Gas Association.

as through the People's Action for a petroleum-free Lofoten, Vesterålen and Senja). In 2010, the debate escalated as the Council made it clear that they would support political efforts to proceed with an opening process through an impact assessment. With the conflict at its height locally, many politicians responded to accusation of being co-opted by the petroleum lobby by turning the focus towards the close ties between the local resistance movement and environmental NGOs, in an effort to de-legitimize the campaign through arguing that Lofoten would become a 'victim' of state policy, or "a climate hostage" as one mayor put it during an interview (if oil drilling was not allowed in Lofoten due to climate change concerns).<sup>70</sup> Strategies of de-legitimizing opponents *and* advocates towards drilling in Lofoten were employed on the grounds that neither the oil companies nor the bigger environmental NGOs were legitimate actors that could secure Lofoten, ontologically speaking. Today however, focus is once again back on what possibilities a future *without* (or after) petroleum might bring. In all fairness it has to be mentioned that national politicians have advocated this focus as well, to the extent that a process was initiated in 2012 with the intent of producing an assessment of *the other industries* (that is, all *but* petroleum) and their future potential in and for Northern Norway.<sup>71</sup> We will here, however, let two reports produced for the Lofoten Council, four years apart, illustrate the observable changes in focus we have identified; from a strong emphasis on petroleum to an inclusion of *other alternatives* which also includes a *post-petroleum era* – whether that occurs soon (meaning that petroleum development will be dropped altogether) or at a much later stage (after a petroleum era in the region). Firstly, the joint report by the Lofoten and the Vesterålen Councils in 2010 called *LoVe 2025 – perspectives for Lofoten and Vesterålen towards 2025, with and without petroleum*, stated that:

It is an essential requirement that oil or gas from any discoveries is brought to shore for processing. This is the only measure that ensures regional ripple effects. It may have a slightly higher cost than an offshore solution, but these must be weighed against

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70. Interview with a mayor in Lofoten, (winter 2010), conducted by Kristoffersen.

71. This 'knowledge-gathering' process is in itself an interesting case for further discussion and development of a *post-petroleum* focus. It brings attention to how the governmental intent to meet their obligations as a security actor, broadly speaking, is in flux; from a primary focus on industrialization processes, where the petroleum possibilities were seen as the 'locomotive' for change in the north, to an understanding of the need for a broader process in which other considerations have to be taken into account. The final report from this process will be released in April 2014, and its sub-reports can be found at this web site: <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/nfd/tema/reiselivsnaring/prosjekt-for-kunnskapsinnhenting-om-verd.html?id=676814>, accessed March 12, 2014.



the societal effects that developments provide. The industry has understood that landing [onshore] concepts are the only possibility in order to open vulnerable areas.<sup>72</sup>

A more recent scenario assessment (in progress) is made in collaboration with the design company Snøhetta<sup>73</sup> and represents a refocusing on how to create growth based on the capacities, advantages and values unique to Lofoten. In its introduction it states “[t]he best way to predict your future is to create it”<sup>74</sup> and focuses on scenarios which do not concretely include a petroleum era; a focus which can be either seen as an argument *against* petroleum or as an effort to see *beyond* the petroleum age, whether or not it will manifest in this region. The idea of a region where *absence of petroleum development* is seen as *an asset*, and not something to be compensated for, is typically what we would argue is part of an ontology – a world view – in which *post-petroleum* concerns inform and influence perceptions and attitudes towards petroleum development itself, and further, that this world view to a much greater extent shines through in local debates and initiatives concerning how to secure a viable future in Lofoten, moreso now than in 2010. At that time, the effects thought to emanate from petroleum production were argued for in terms of workplaces and economic ripple effects, and the arguments pitted towards the adversaries to petroleum based on their apparent lack of *alternatives* to the incentives oil could provide. Locally though, as we have shown through examples from fieldwork, the concerns were already then geared towards what to do, what would happen *post petroleum* – and that valuation of a petroleum-free region was called for. Today then, when the Lofoten Council again asks for reports on what alternatives there are for the future, petroleum or not, *post-petroleum concerns* are more explicit and given a higher potential value. In short, this trend illustrates that concerns about petroleum and its effects are reconfigured into multiple debates, reflections and reorientations in which concerns about who ‘we’ are, what ‘we’ are, and what ‘we’ become are central; concerns which reflect back to what is important for the maintenance of identity, and thus ontological security – *post petroleum*.

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72. Nordland fylkeskommune, Vesterålen regionråd & Lofotrådet (2010) LoVe 2025 – Perspektiver for Lofoten og Vesterålen mot 2025, med og uten petroleumsvirksomhet. Available at: [www.lofotradet.no](http://www.lofotradet.no)

73. Snøhetta is an internationally renown architectural and brand design company specializing among other things in place attractiveness, a competence the Lofoten Council wanted to tap into when deciding to ‘restart’ a process aiming at envisioning future possibilities for the region. See web sites [www.snohetta.com](http://www.snohetta.com) and <http://www.lofotradet.no> for more information about the project. A short film made about the process can be found here: [http://www.lofotposten.no/Video\\_import/article7123401.ece](http://www.lofotposten.no/Video_import/article7123401.ece), accessed May 2, 2014.

74. Snøhetta 2014: “Lofoten 2030: Mulighetsstudie på oppdrag for Lofotrådet”, p. 2.

## 5. Concluding remarks

We have argued that there has been a lacuna in analysis and descriptions on the discrepancies between security issues – broadly speaking – dealt with on the national political stage, and concerns and issues discussed by our informants in Lofoten. These discrepancies are tied to different foci concerning the need for ontological security of the population in Lofoten *post petroleum* – in fact, we claim that the issue almost exclusively has been grappled with locally. These sentiments, we claim, have constituted an important basis for the political decision to postpone petroleum development in these areas until at least after the next general election in 2017 (or rather, to postpone making decisions that would take the process towards an opening of the areas for petroleum development further) – a direct connection between local concerns and national politics we have found to have been insufficiently explored in academic literature thus far. When filling this research gap – through which we have also identified local identity as important for how ontological security is understood and negotiated by stakeholders and communities in Lofoten – we have emphasized that *time* is an important variable in the way risks and possibilities with regard to petroleum development are approached. One reason for this is that national supporters downplay the relevance of this long-term perspective when discussing matters of importance for petroleum policy, be they adversaries to petroleum development or supporters of policies that extend it.

Oil company logics and strategies are meant to secure reserves in the short and medium run, and the adversaries focus on risks, speaking within the same time frame when arguing against it and only to a lesser degree on future, post petroleum possibilities regionally. And although the claim to ‘future welfare’ that we discussed as part of the national narrative of the ‘petroleum age’ lies ahead in time, the rhetoric is that it depends on an understanding of a need for Lofoten’s petroleum resources to be extracted *now*, to be placed in the national pension fund that is invested globally, in order to aid in securing the future of the petroleum-financed welfare state. In this sense, the ‘oil in stock’ is both future pensions *and* national reserves. Accordingly, Lofoten’s oil and gas resources can ensure both the oil companies and the Norwegian population in the future, if the government ensures access today. And as tensions mount across the Arctic concerning the utilization of natural resources and its implications for nature, culture and future, the analysis here presented may very well be relevant for individual cases and broader analysis of, say, regional or national strategies, in which both national demand for resources *and* local concerns about a future beyond a (potential) excavation period are considered.