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“Given the increasingly interconnected world, various local specificities should be well mapped and engaged to build community resilience to transpiring changes and to nurture knowledge commons.”

## Morgan Ip

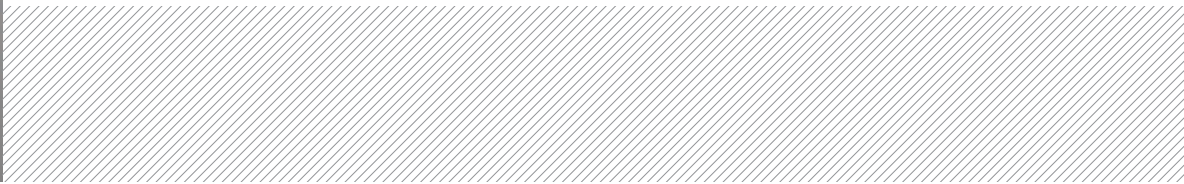
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My doctoral work takes place within the Future North project, a collaboration between the UiT Barents Institute and the Institutes of Design, and Urbanism and Landscape at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design. Our group of architects, literary scholars, designers, social scientists, and artists is funded by the SAMKUL programme (Cultural conditions underlying social change) of The Research Council of Norway. Together, we are mapping the cultural landscapes of the circumpolar North, in all its myriad descriptions and delimitations and in the face of climatic, technological, and social changes. I'm looking in particular at the Arctic borderlands between Norway and Russia, from my residency in the Barents Institute in Kirkenes, on the Norwegian side. Here, differentiations can be seen even in architectural typologies, with predominant Soviet blocks in neighbouring Nikel standing in contrast to Scandinavian wood-frame buildings in Kirkenes. It is a regional neighbourhood that has seen incredible transformation in the short time since I moved here in 2014, with a sudden migration influx from Russia to Norway because of turbulence in faraway nations, a global routing of resource stocks, and the resulting closure or downturn of local mining operations on either side of the border, and imperilled plans for further resource development in the area, to name a few.

I'm privileged to be no stranger to the Arctic, having spent the last decade peering at the north through a variety of lenses. I received a Master of Architecture from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, with a thesis centred on participatory co-design of a cultural centre in Cape Dorset, Nunavut, Canada. Here, environmental and cultural relevance in the Arctic were given equal measure. I also worked as a research assistant on two interdisciplinary International Polar Year university and government projects, one using plant herbaria and community photo collections compared over time to instigate discussion on arctic changes, and the other a study on environmental contaminants and local food choices in Southern Baffin Island. I then worked at Lateral Office, a renowned Toronto firm with extensive experience tackling architectural and cultural design challenges of the Arctic. In all cases, engaging local people in the project was crucial in ensuring research was relevant to on-the-ground concerns and responses to change. During this time



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I was also an active member of the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS), and was able to see a wealth of knowledge emerge in the natural and social sciences on Arctic affairs at various conferences. These plural lenses capture a few of the many layers that can be deciphered when engaging the peoples who live in the North. For me, the Canadian context provides a springboard from one Arctic region to another, but also from architecture to larger material and social spatial systems and practices.

My research takes advantage of the team's interdisciplinary influences, bringing ethnography to urbanism and landscape research with the aim to understand and communicate cultural landscapes of this Norwegian-Russian border. As research methods adapt in keeping pace with social and technological evolution, I incorporate locative social media to reveal and situate the human voices of Kirkenes and Vardø, Norway, and Nikel, Russia. One main tool to gather these disparate voices is mybarents.com, an offshoot of mycity.io, which is an online platform and forum for plotting ideas of civic improvement on a map. Who uses this sort of platform, and why? Does this digital dialogue contribute to place making, and how so or not? What are the ideas brought forth, and how do they reflect local narratives? Such accessible interfaces may reflect the character of a location, and its challenges and opportunities heading into the future, as voiced by the people that live here. These understandings can be deepened when used with other classic ethnographic methods such as participatory observation and semi-structured interviews. The challenges and opportunities that come with change are conceived in manifold ways. The perspectives of the miner, the politician, or the artist all converge in co-creating ever-shifting everyday realities and futures. Capturing the cultural landscape of the Norwegian and Russian border area is thus also a fluid and living process of speculation.

I'm thrilled to be a part of the Future North research team in working in what may previously have been considered a mysterious or exotic periphery to all but the relative few who have consistently lived here. Given the increasingly interconnected world, various local specificities should be well mapped and engaged to build community resilience to transpiring changes and to nurture knowledge commons.

