



PYRAMIDEN is the mindset of ruthless extraction. It is an attitude towards the Arctic that, unless radically altered, will drain the continent of its natural resources and bring about countless abandoned landscapes. Preoccupied with turning the resulting ghost towns into museums for tourists, we are not seeing the forest for the trees. The most radical act of preservation in the Arctic is to turn our attention to the future instead of the past. *TAPIS VERT* proposes an on-going effort

of the Svalbard treaty states at the site of Pyramiden: the joint act of watering the artificial lawn at the heart of the town as a gesture of owning up to man-made changes in the environment and long-term commitment to their consequences.

For centuries, the Arctic was the ultimate goal of exploration. Until very recently, the unpredictability of weather and ice conditions, strong winds and sea currents, as well as the ice pack the size of a continent all created a nearly impermeable boundary. The process of glacial recession is now uncovering lands rich in metals

and minerals, and an ocean bed replete with oil and gas. The polar void, a no-mans land, is turning into a shared battlefield of overlapping economic and political interests. The resulting claims for possession are ambiguous, reaching far outside recognized jurisdiction and territory.

The mining town of Pyramiden in Svalbard Archipelago is one of many settlements born around the Arctic resources. These short-sightedly planned colonies exhaust themselves as they exhaust the resources they were born to extract. Unless this mindset is radically altered, more future ghost towns will be produced all around the region. Ghost towns are intriguing for their empty playgrounds, closets full of clothes and unmade beds, evoking in us a sense of our own mortality. Turned into outdoor museums of reconstructed history, the

absence of life in the frozen city setting ignites in tourists a nostalgic longing for times past, a longing which can never be truly fulfilled. Due to its sudden demise, Pyramiden paints an unusually sharp image of days gone by, and the totality of its isolation makes it appear more distant in time than it actually is.

Pyramiden was formulated as an expression of the ideal city. In a gesture reflecting the total appropriation of Arctic nature, the community of Soviet mine workers made life tolerable in the harsh, rocky landscape by bringing their own land with them. The imported soil enabled the cultivation of plants and helped support livestock. The entire village was arranged around an artificial rectangular lawn, lush green in Summer months in contrast to the surrounding grey tundra, and reminiscent of the unbroken expanses of greenery in the gardens of old world

palaces. The implanting of the green carpet turned out very successful. Today the grass is a part of the local ecosystem, and as an organic, living culture that is reborn every Spring it will prevail and outlive any man-made artifact at Pyramiden.

Now is the time to change direction and, instead of pursuing separate national interests, define a new common framework for the future development of the Arctic. Instead of focusing our efforts on preserving fragments of an idealised, not-so-distant past, let's divert our attention to owning and nurturing the consequences of our own action and inaction. Let's stop treating the Arctic as something that has already been lost. If there are no ghost towns there will be no need to preserve them. In the case of Pyramiden, the cold climate will stall the erosion of its actual buildings,

freezing their physical form in time and keeping the memory of the mining community alive for at least the next 500 years. Yet, their age depends on the effects of anthropogenic global warming - the warmer it gets the faster the built environment will deteriorate.

TAPIS VERT is an invitation to all the members of the Svalbard treaty to set up their own sprinkler in the main lawn of Pyramiden and water it as a joint effort to acknowledge responsibility for the permanent changes in the local ecosystem they have all contributed to. An individual sprinkler irrigates the lawn in circles within its reach, and it will be the grass in the overlapping areas that grows greenest. Subtle variations in grass will appear, like giant brush strokes of different tones of green, invisible from immediate vicinity but unmistakable when viewed from high up the mountain Pyramiden.

TAPIS VERT

Or Why Pyramiden Failed & Why It Won't Happen Again

tapis vert (*ta-pē ver*, 'green carpet', French)

An unbroken expanse of lawn used as a major element of a landscape design.



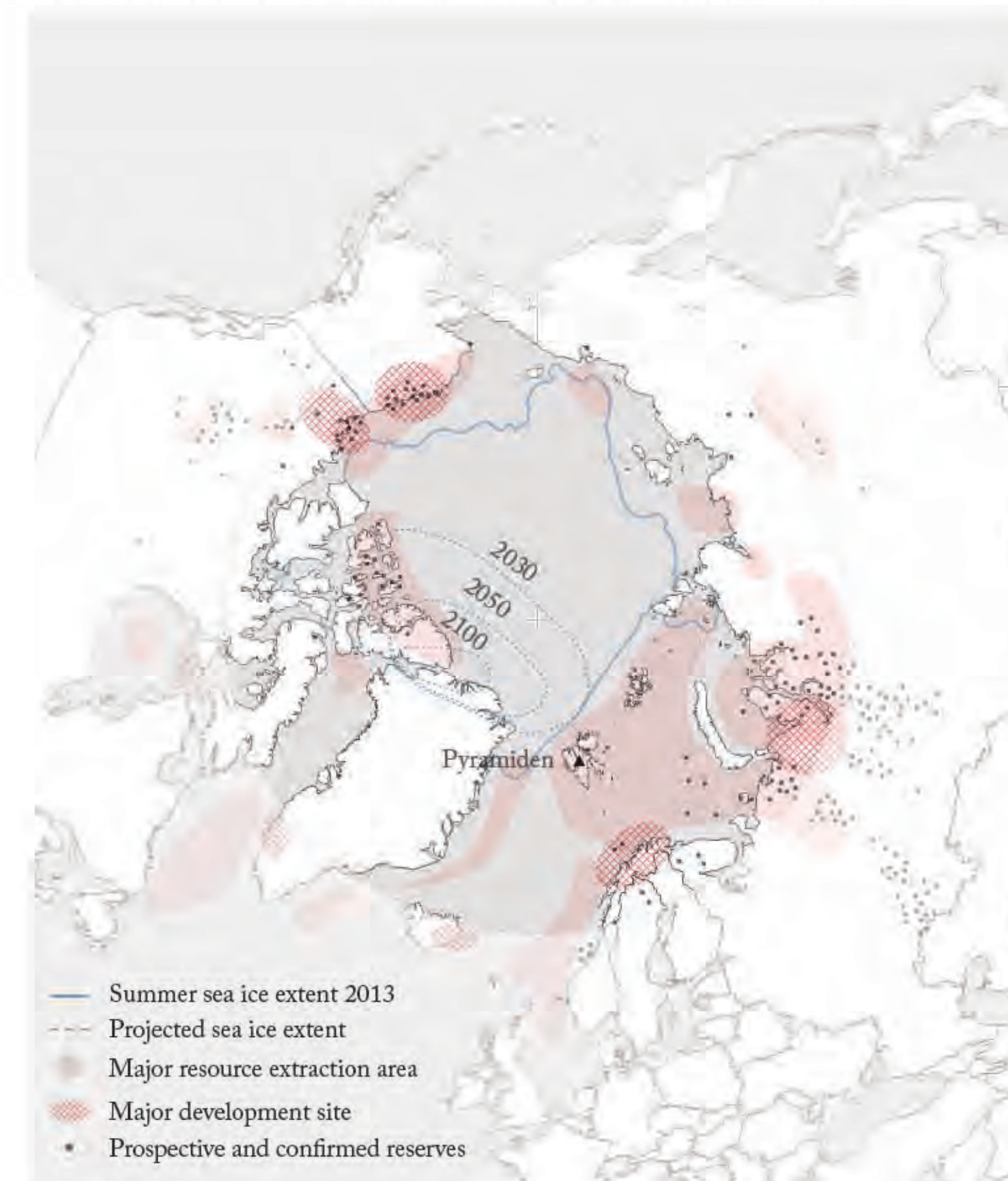
Pyramiden



Versailles

Resource Extraction in the Arctic

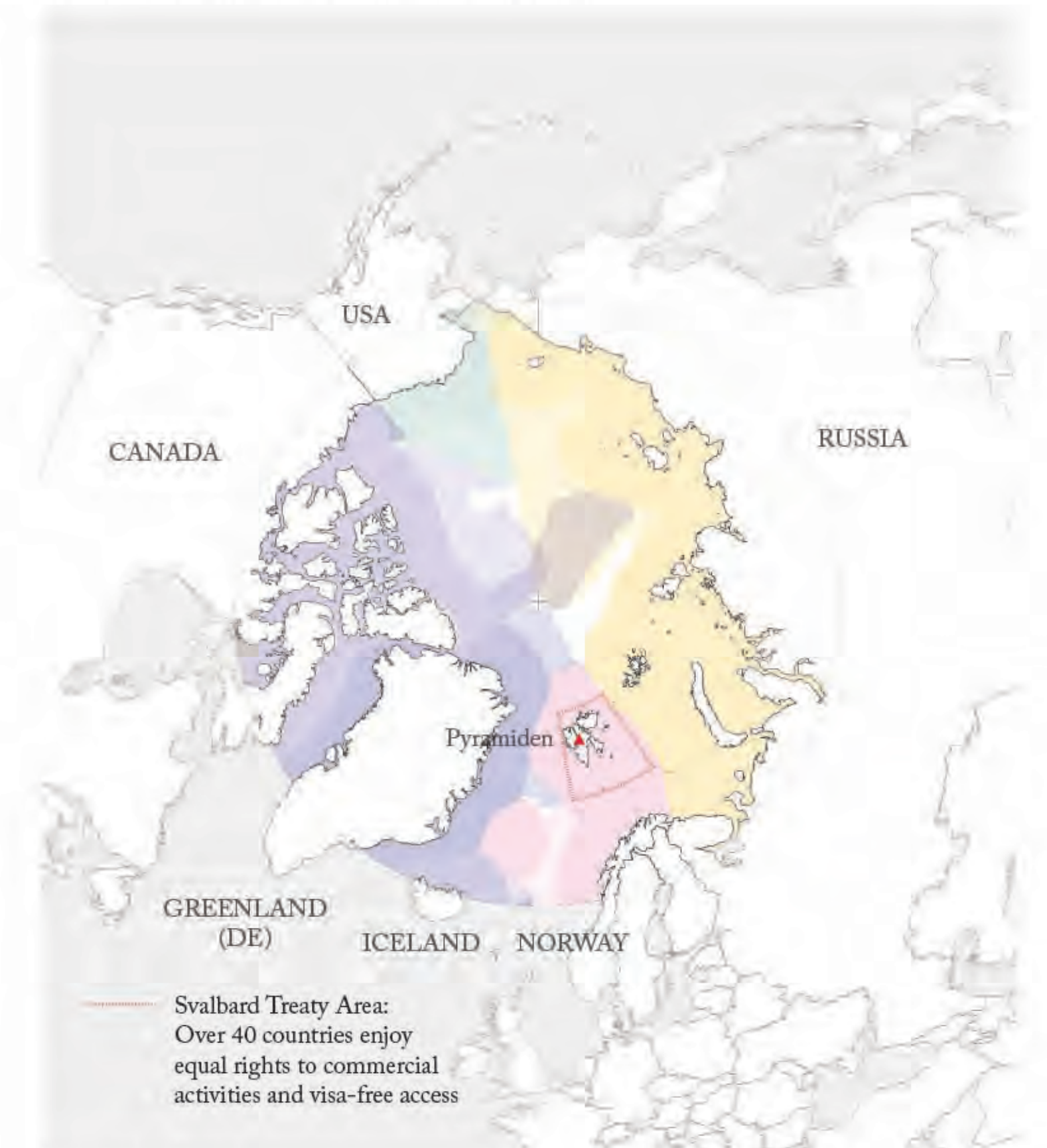
Confirmed and potential reserves, unknown reserves under ice



Source of data: Nordregio

Maritime jurisdiction in the Arctic

National territories and overlapping claims



Source of data: Nordregio