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Public interest in Longyearbyen CO₂ Lab

The Longyearbyen CO₂ project has experienced tremendous interest from media, politicians, the local community and the general public as a whole. Four years after the vision of Longyearbyen as a CO₂ neutral community was conceived we can sum up as follows:

2006: Developing the vision

In the fall of 2006 Gunnar Sand and Alvar Braathen, director and professor in geology at UNIS, publish an article in Svalbardposten outlining the vision of a CO₂ free Svalbard. Svalbard has coal mines, coal fuelled power plants and geological structures that could be suited for storing CO₂. The authors added Svalbard's ambition of being one of the best preserved wilderness areas in the world and its international attention. Longyearbyen, a community of 2000 people with a closed energy system, was chosen as the pilot.

The vision was presented to the minister of justice, Knut Storberget, who immediately asked for a report verifying that the vision was realistic. The report was written by UNIS in cooperation with NTNU and SINTEF and was handed over to Storberget in February 2007. He was pleased with the conclusions.

2007: Initiation of the project

UNIS decided to start at the geological end of the project. The first phase was defined as finding a reservoir and verifying injectivity. An application to the Climit program was successful and Gassnova decided to support the project. Two industrial partners, ConocoPhillips and Store Norske, did the same. Drilling of the first two wells started in Longyearbyen in the fall.

There was a considerable public interest right from the beginning. National Norwegian television (NRK) made a 5 minute report in the main Saturday night news program (Lørdagsrevyen). A number of newspapers and magazines followed, referring to NRK.

2008-2009: Completing Phase 1

In the following years a number of partners joined the project: Statoil (2008), Leonhard Nilsen (2009), Statkraft (2009) and Lundin Norway (2010). Four wells were drilled and all core samples analyzed before the project concluded in November 2009 that we have a reservoir with an injectivity level that is satisfactory for the project to proceed into Phase 2.

Public exposure

Throughout 2006-2010 the project experienced the following public exposure:

Media:

- 10 reports on Norwegian television in Dagsrevyen (6), Schrødingers katt (2), Newton (1) and Ut i naturen (1).
- From 1 to 4 page displays in the newspapers Aftenposten, Dagbladet, VG, Dagens Næringsliv, Adresseavisen, Bergens Tidende and Nordlys.
- A large number of smaller news articles come in addition. NTB based articles have surfaced in 80 local Norwegian newspapers.
- Reports in the magazines Teknisk Ukeblad and Geo.
- Reports by the international TV companies BBC, National Geographic, AFP (France) and Al Jazeera in addition to a large number of other Scandinavian, European and Asian television companies.
- Reports by a large number of international newspapers and magazines.

Political interest:

- All Norwegian parliament committees visited Longyearbyen in this period because of the upcoming government white paper on Svalbard. They were all introduced to the CO2 project. In general, the project caused excitement.
- The conservative party Høyre made an official decision to support the project in 2008 (Landsmøtet).
- The environmental organization Bellona supports the project.
- Visiting political delegations from many countries have been introduced to the project.
- Participants of Studietur Nord have all been introduced to the project through 2007-2010.
- Participants of the international High North Study Tour have been introduced to the project through 2007-2010.
- The local community council supports the project.

Conferences and other research activities:

- Longyearbyen CO2 Lab has been presented at approx. 20 conferences.
- Approx. 200 visiting groups at UNIS, many international, have been introduced to the project from 2007.
- The CO2 Lab newsletter was initiated in the fall of 2009 and has a target audience of approx. 60 decision makers.
- The CO2 Lab web site was opened in 2009 and makes all general information available.

Exposing our partners

The team running the Longyearbyen CO2 Lab project always stresses the contributions of our partners. Some media outlets do not include partners in their coverage. Some don't even include UNIS, they just write about Longyearbyen CO2 Lab. On the other hand we experience that many media outlets use Facts boxes to display the names of the contributing partners.

In our own presentations, articles, brochures, newsletters and web site the partners are always displayed. The volume of high ranking national and international visitors to UNIS over the past three years who have been exposed to this information is into the thousands.