

VISIONER: i Gällivare

Whose
~~Of Public~~ Interests?

Of Public Interest (OPI) Studio through Chiara Bugatti, Jonas Dahlberg, Joakim Lyth, Danae Valenza and Tobias Westerlund

Soil touching my feet and my hands touching the soil.

I've been living in symbiosis with the Earth my whole life, digging my way closer to its molten core. Since time immemorial, my desire has been burning, to conquer and possess its heart. .

After generations, I am still far. And I keep carrying bits with me, consuming them, on my way back from every disastrous attempt.

« I have names for each one of your virtues — iron, zinc, copper, gold... malm. You have none for me. Just ask and I will explain to you as good I can: what it feels like to see through my eyes, how comes my body is unrooted. But how does someone answer questions which have never been posed? »

Driven by the need of getting as far as possible, of detaching myself completely from its malleable surface, I found myself onboard of the air balloon. A weightless, timid flame was holding me up and steering.

My familiar feeling of solitude didn't last long. I realised, in fact, that I'd never felt less lonely in my entire life. My gaze was drawn beyond the shadow of a dundering mountain, where a reindeer was standing, far away from its heard.

The heard kept moving slowly, while rushing after the passing of seasons. The snow was already lukewarm and was about to melt — exceptionally early this year, again —. The lonely reindeer didn't seem to bother at all, completely absorbed and disoriented — like me — by another kind of rhythm. The silent reindeer was looking at a dark shade, of a beauty that was both terrible and monumental.

« Why are you alone? What are you thinking about? What are you witnessing? »

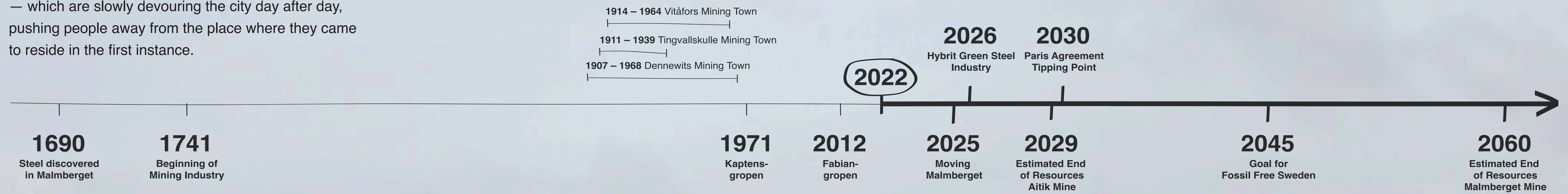
My knees started shaking when I realised what I was facing. In front of me a bottomless pit revealed, painful as a wound. It was the proof om of my attempts to dominate my love and of the attempt of the Earth to reject me and push me away.



Ralph Erskine 1958.

AN ECOLOGICAL ARCTIC TOWN
Town - Wilderness. Indoor - Outdoor. Social Contact - Privacy. Artificial - Natural. Protection for Blizzards. Open to Spring - Winter & Summer Sun. Live with Nature but Improve it, - Not Cover and Exclude it. Solar & Wind Energy. Protected Vegetation.

The name Gällivare presumably derives from the Lule-sami name Jiellevárre, which means “gap, space in between” and may refer to the valley of Malmberget. Here, in Malmberget, the microclimate is milder and the natural faces of the promontory shield the area from high winds. As of today, Malmberget is no longer inhabitable. The mining industry has impacted the land to the point of creating giant wounds — *groparna* — which are slowly devouring the city day after day, pushing people away from the place where they came to reside in the first instance.



Whose voices are we listening to? Whose perspectives and interests come first and whose are kept silent? Which values are being overseen, forgotten or omitted while planning the future of Gällivare and its inhabitants?

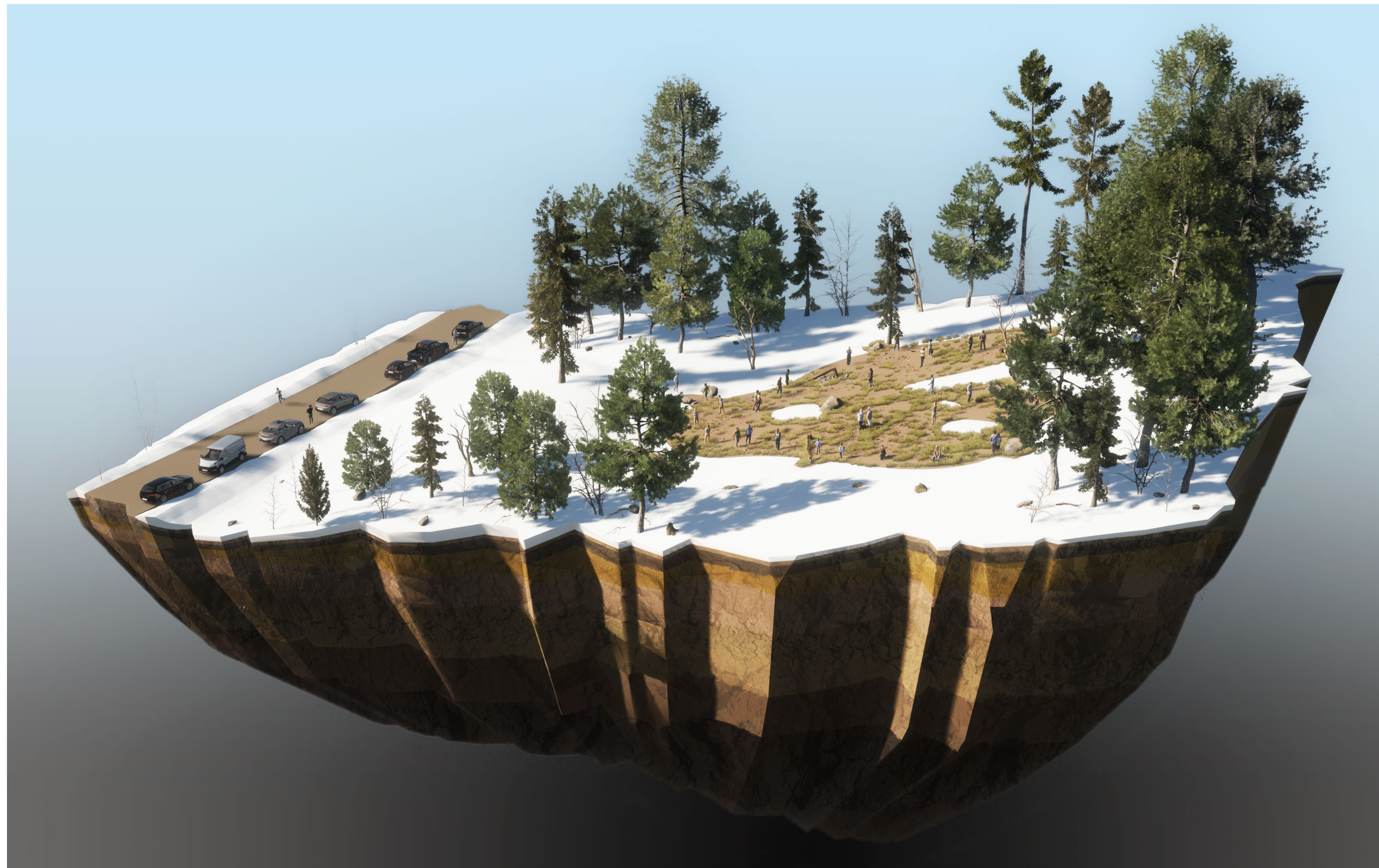
Soil is one of the most prominent materials constituting our planet and the ground on which we create our relationships. Soil can be public and private space, and the boundary between the two is often unclear. In the municipality of Gällivare these definitions are particularly ambiguous, as companies like LKAB own the ground on which people's most intimate and private experiences play out and memories take shape.

Soil is the common ground on which we live. A "we" which includes an array of divergent interests, including people that are raised in the municipality and find subsidy through the mining industry, people who have moved to Gällivare to make a change, to find a safer place, for love or relationships, people from the surrounding samebyar, skiers, hikers, northern light hunters, reindeers, moose and an abundance of flora and fauna that give the land and its people a sense of connection and identity.

On a daily basis, soil is moved from the inside out. The extraction of raw materials is the primary source of Gällivare's economic wealth. The impact of industry is not only manifested throughout the landscape and its topography, but also in the social structure of the town and in the way interactions and lifestyles are shaped and formed.

Before our visit, we spoke to various actors that have a deep knowledge of Gällivare and its surroundings, and during our stay we had the chance to meet with politicians from the municipality, residents, representatives of the two mining companies — LKAB and Boliden — and Sami villages. There are many perspectives to be considered, many (conflicting) interests. On which ground can we all converge?





A resident of Gällivare told us about a place along the road going south, where the sun hits early every year exposing the bare ground while everything else is still covered in snow. Every year, groups of people gather there to celebrate the beginning of a new season.



We spoke to a former resident of Malmberget described Malmberget in very similar terms. They told us about a park that they enjoyed visiting as a child, with flourishing plantations, lots of animals, a birdhouse with peacocks and smaller parakeets, a pond with swans, roses and rabbits. Today, a giant pit is swallowing Malmberget, the area of the municipality which naturally provided the optimal conditions to live in. The gradual fading away of Malmberget does not only entail the loss of housing but also the loss of important transitory meeting points for people themselves.

How can we prevent the places that we thrive in from disappearing? How can we ensure the preservation of areas where a diverse range of species can coexist?

The word *malm* is ever present in the city's vocabulary. It is a word that has been recurring in all our conversations. "*Malmvägen, malmberget, malmtåget, malmbanan, malmbrytning, malmfyndighet, malmruschen, malmfältet, malmkroppar, kaptensmalmen...*". Even the streets are telling us about it.

When we asked people what the word *malm* means, they responded that *malm* is soil that is valuable, that is lucrative. The fact that this word is so present in Gällivare makes visible how the town approaches the lands on which it stands, and how it has derived its identity and purpose from it.

To implement a plan that creates spaces for coexistence and preservation, we need to challenge our current hierarchy of values: from *malm* to soil, to memory. The fundamental benchmark on which we want to base our vision, is a straightforward shifting of the hierarchy of values that shapes Gällivare today, or at least an attempt towards an extension of such traits.

Our vision questions the definition of *malm* itself and aims at liberating the soil from the strict connotation of economic value. Instead, we delve into the soil further to highlight the potential of considering Gällivare's own social, geographical and geological memory as a stronger foundation for future developments.



Illustration of the walking track surrounding gropen, a transitory path which also aims at opening up a public discussion about land exploitation.



Illustration of the ground “imprints”, public platforms using the physical experience of the land as an educational tool to address our relationship to soil.

In the future, we will need to change our approach to the land and its exploitation. To start this process, we need to acknowledge the city’s mining history as a part of its identity.

Today, for safety reasons, a system of temporary fences makes the pits — *groparna* — hardly visible and completely inaccessible. Does this distance make it easier to forget about our wounds? Does this erasure also make it easier for us to keep acting the way we do, without question?

We think it would be important to highlight the restricted access to *gropen* and its proximities in a more meaningful way. The area is already enclosed and left to nature to perform some kind of repair. No human presence is allowed. The existing exclusion zone fences could be repurposed to provide a walking track to engage locals and visitors in public discussion about

land exploitation and development, in a past, present and future tense. Likewise, the track would allow us to see and experience what we no longer have access to.

Throughout the urban geography, a series of physical imprints in the ground that use soil exclusively as a material could serve as social meeting points. These

public spaces give the soil back to the people and strive to literally “transport us inside the pit”. They can be occupied following the natural rhythm of seasons and function as platforms which use the physical experience of the land as an immersive educational tool to address our relationship to soil and the multiplicity of values that it holds within it.

Our vision for the municipality of Gällivare is the result of an observation of the city's different approaches to movement, resources, and cyclicity.

It is inevitable that the city of Gällivare is in a state of constant flux and the infrastructure will change alongside this movement, perhaps it is vital to plan for these movements so that further wounds aren't created in the future.

The mining industry is based on constant movement. Demolition, construction and reconstruction are daily routines within its realm. The mine moves further, following the findings of valuable mineral resources, but only stays until there is nothing left to be exploited.

On the other hand, the spaces described by Malmberget and Gällivare's residents follow a pattern of overlay which is perhaps more similar to the movements of reindeer husbandry practices. The rhythm of the seasons guides the Sami villages, which relocate and temporarily leave areas behind, before the natural resources have been completely consumed. By doing so, the ecosystem is given enough time to regenerate and sustain itself in a circular way, and the land continues to hold its worth year after year.

The type of rotation that we propose takes into consideration the movement patterns which are already existing in Gällivare: from reindeer husbandry to winter tourism, overnight camping and seasonal employment,

to the longer timescale of generations living stably in the city and the geological timescale of the soil.

For instance, a holiday is cyclical and ritualistic. Why should infrastructures be permanent? Just as one does not need to have the dinner table set permanently waiting for a dinner guest to arrive, can we think of ways of building that are truer to the concept of hospitality itself.

Seasonality and reciprocity can make a large impact in informing architectural choices for future building. These simple philosophies could trigger interesting design and urban planning decisions. Seasonality prioritises a sensitivity to materiality and multi-functionality over

stature and impact. Reciprocity could produce designs that are not single use and centralised, but intermittent and able to respond to multiple potentialities and positions.

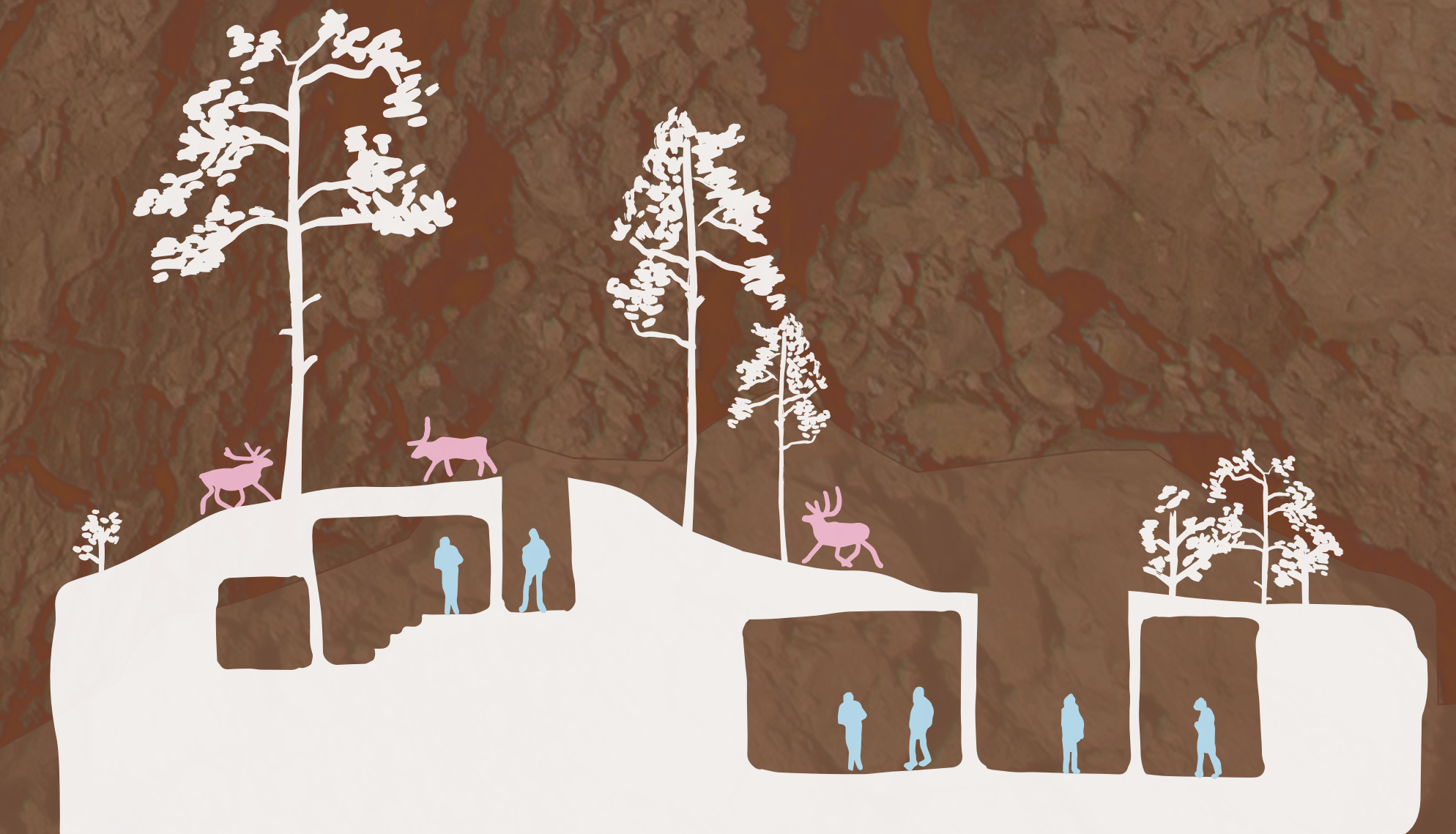
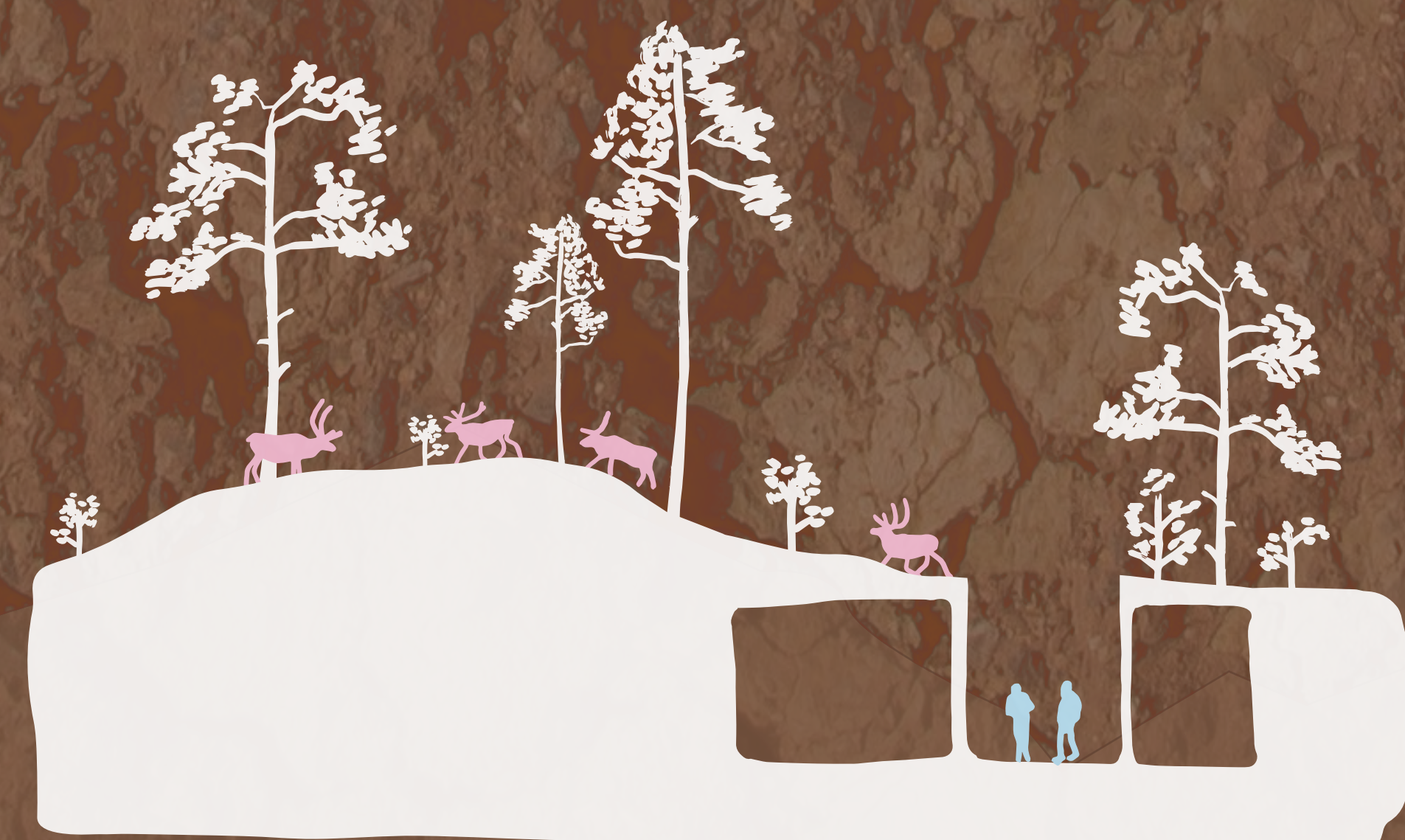
At the same time, this realignment of the value system of malm could provoke important discussions around the ownership of land, both legally and socio-politically. By reinforcing the importance of social agency and connectivity in Gällivare, perhaps there is a chance for the city itself to thrive, once there are no more earthly materials to extract. The importance of an identity for Gällivare can stem from the memory of the people and soil itself, rather than industry.

Could we implement an urban version of 'crop rotation*' in the city development plan to be able to achieve a new kind of zoning system that is guided by the value of soil and memory?

***crop rotation** [agriculture] is the practice of planting different crops sequentially on the same plot of land to improve soil health, optimise nutrients in the soil, and combat pest and weed pressure.



Sketches illustrating suggestions for "urban crop rotation", considering movement patterns existing in Gällivare, approaches to seasonal movements, resources, and cyclicity.





Reciprocal
Of ~~Public~~ Interest.