

# Innovation and Embodiment in a Small Town Hotel

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## A hotel and its owners

An invitation to ‘Experience the idyllic atmosphere of Lillesand at Hotel Norge’ appears on every page of the hotel’s website. It also states that ‘at many hotels, you wake up in the morning not knowing whether you are in London, Oslo or New York’. Hotel rooms are often similar the world over, and somewhat nondescript. Claiming that this is not the case at Hotel Norge (Hotel Norway) in Lillesand seems rather bold. To the question ‘Could Hotel Norge be anywhere else than in Lillesand?’ the answer is ‘Hardly’. The website presentation also describes how the hotel and town were and still are intertwined – for example how this once important seafaring town was linked to Europe, and that many of the town’s architectural elements originate from this golden age, with their traditional English sash windows, Dutch tiles and half-hipped roofs.

The historical aspects are also covered. The earliest parts of Hotel Norge date from 1837 and were originally a tanning mill. To give it an extra twist, we are told that the tannery was built by an escaped Irish rebel. The town of Lillesand was given its privileges in the following year. In 1873 the mill was converted into a hotel, by which time the town had become an important centre for trade and shipping. This also meant that the hotel became the heart of the town’s flourishing cultural life and enabled it to expand. The First World War was a time of crisis for shipping in general, and both the hotel and town experienced difficulties. This was followed by the Nazi occupation during the Second World

War. For the remainder of the century the town experienced peaks and troughs. In 2006 the hotel's current owners, Beate and Wolfgang Töpfer, took over and decided to continue the work to restore it to its original style. This proved to be a major undertaking – externally the buildings were restored to reflect the 1890s, with copies made of details that had disappeared. As Beate Töpfer is quoted as saying, 'We have tried to preserve the cultural history of the hotel, while still daring to look into the future' ([www.hotelnorge.no](http://www.hotelnorge.no)).

In her work Beate pays much attention to feelings and intuition: 'If you had known how much I base my choices on feelings and intuition, you wouldn't believe it. I don't have a single thing written down. I run everything based on how I feel.' By this time Hotel Norge had become a member of a cluster called USUS, a project in which local business life, Innovation Norway, the Norwegian Research Council and academia work in consort to develop the tourism and culture industry.<sup>1</sup> Here, more than one hundred studios and businesses work together to encourage tourists visiting the region to return and to recommend the destination to others. The aim of the cluster is to explore and strengthen the potential for innovation, value creation and competitiveness. Hotel Norge is an active member of the cluster, involved in the research and innovation programmes offered by USUS, and visited regularly by members of the project team and the research team for interviews and follow-ups.<sup>2</sup> It amounts to a kind of applied ethnography, in which members of the team converse with the owners for a period of five years, starting in 2010. In 2011 the hotel became a dialogue partner for the development of innovation projects, and in 2012 was made a formal partner in research projects on innovation praxis in the field of tourism, culture and creative industries (TCCIs).<sup>3</sup> This essay is based on a collection of interviews and conversations with the owners. In this way, the material from Lillesand constitutes a paradigmatic case for other members of the cluster.

It eventually became obvious to the research team just how much innovative activity is based on affects and the ability to take in both the material and the social environment – *Umwelt* to use a Heideggerian term – through the senses, and how meanings are often hidden or neglected. This kind of intuitive scheme can be difficult to put into words and structures. To the owner of the hotel, the art of formulating what had hitherto been done at will turned out to be a learning process, where

experience was put into words and plans, and its role in choice-making and implementation became visible to us as researchers.

In most research on tourism, this and similar areas are dominated by the academic disciplines of economics. Its ability to describe and measure parameters in quantitative terms has been indispensable in a sector experiencing rapid expansion. Today, Norwegian tourism contributes over 2 billion Euros to the national economy and makes up over 6 per cent of the GDP. However, the outcome of the TCCIs venture is more easily described and measured than the incentives and ideas that make creativity flourish. After working on this for some time as ethnologists, we have noticed how easily discourses containing concepts such as business models, profit, turnover and regional outcomes seep into our minds and language. What is constantly left out, of course, is the answer to our pertinent question of what makes people take the initiative at all, and how they become and stay entrepreneurial. The study of Hotel Norge has helped us to focus on the complexity of the entanglement between innovator and environment. This analysis of a specific entrepreneurial case thus starts by looking at how the entrepreneurs begin on a small scale by caring for the hotel, staff and guests, and after some time expand their activities so that – quite unexpectedly – this enterprise turns into something that gathers together many of the cultural activities of this small coastal town.

### Affecting tourism

What are the special traits of entrepreneurship in the tourist sector? How, for instance, can they be distinguished from artistic activities like the performing arts or technical inventions? In the first place they seem to share the entrepreneur's strong passion – the affect that builds up towards the object. But the differences between working in a world that you also inhabit and constantly augment and having a secluded studio or workshop (see Hauge, Chapter 9 in this volume) that is totally dependent upon creativity, are multiple. How do you keep deadening habits, routines and duties at bay when running a hotel? How do you make the milieu vibrant and energetic day after day? We met proof that profit is not sufficient a stimulus. The traits that Beate and many other entrepreneurs in the hotel business constantly demonstrate are personal qualities that have something to do with skills such as presence, charm, friendliness, empathy and the ability to listen to guests and visitors. The

ability to share your enthusiasm with the staff is also of crucial importance; running a hotel is teamwork. But equally important is the capacity to stay in dialogue with the material surroundings and the geographical location. The analysis below demonstrates how these attitudes add extra value to the local community, and ultimately the entire region.

During the interviews Beate shows affects that are close to love for her hotel. She talks about the building and the rooms with their different wallpapers, curtains, windows and paintings with passionate commitment. They seem to give her energy and it is as though the two have a reciprocal relation. Like many entrepreneurs she has an all-engulfing relation to her projects that permeates her entire way of life. 'We see' write the psychologists Cardon et al. (2009) 'evidence of this in entrepreneurship research, where for example passion has been described as "the underlying force that fuels our strongest emotions. It is the intensity we feel when we engage in activities that interest us deeply. It fills us with energy and enables us to perform at our peak"' (ibid. 6). This is the mood – or *Stimmung* as Heidegger would call it – through which she encounters her environment; the affective state that makes her perceptive to its potential, body and soul (see Gilje, Chapter 2 in this volume).

In order to understand how Beate feels about being part of the material environment we need to parallel such affects with the phenomenological insight of what happens when things are 'worlding'. Heidegger uses the concept to describe the phenomenon that people can be seen as porous; that the environment seeps in and 'affects' the way they feel, think, dream and get on with their lives. Or, to put it differently, that people often function like batteries that are energised and charged by their environment. Heidegger's use of worlding is similar to how affects are treated by Brian Massumi (2002). Affects are mostly pre-conscious experience; a potential that does not have to be realised in language. Following Spinoza, Massumi describes affect as the body's way of preparing itself for action, which adds the dimension of intensity to worlding. For Beate the environment is obviously worlding in multiple ways and radiates energy. But the different parts and dimensions of the hotel also 'gather' into new meaningful wholes, in that she includes significant traits in the local milieu and makes them accessible to guests (see Frykman, Chapter 7 in this volume).

Phenomenology has falsely been accused of being 'stuck in repetitions and preventing the emergence of the new', in that it deals with

the pre-reflective and leaves intentionality out (Leys 2011: 457; Massumi 2002). As will become evident in this presentation, our research shows that Beate's project of managing the hotel and successfully changing it into a profitable business is guided by affect – in this case a combination of a non- or prelingual capacity to gather dormant potentials in the environment and a solid training within the trade. This training includes four years of education at the *École hôtelière de Lausanne* in Switzerland in economics and management, and experience of working in big hotel chains, in which daily reports are a decisive theme. All this training shines through in the way she runs Hotel Norge. Despite this, Beate knows that this knowledge and experience is not sufficient to come to grips with how the hotel could develop. On the contrary, she fears that formal plans or structured schemes will lead to eternal repetition and habituation.

### Things that inspire

When the Töpfer family bought the respected but run-down old hotel in the centre of Beate's home town in 2006 the challenges facing them were enormous. The hotel had only 26 rooms and turnover was NOK 7 million. Besides the renovations, personal service was their hallmark. Not a penny was spent on marketing. The emphasis was on delivering the best to guests and relying on word-of-mouth recommendations. However, the business idea proved so successful that within the space of ten years turnover had risen by 142 per cent to NOK 17 million. Every year since then the family hotel has shown a healthy profit. Beate's way of running the business, invigorated by the way she feels her way forward, obviously works:

It sounds totally – when hearing myself saying it – it sounds as though the business is run on a whim. But I feel that everything becomes so much better when it has been adjusted in line with what I have observed, what I have felt, what I have seen and the reactions of the person standing in front of me. So it becomes a form of memento, or a kind of experiential basis. I feel I make a qualified judgement as we go along – a choice. At least up to now this has resulted in very little time being spent on writing long-term strategies or plans. It has worked for me, or for us, to work in this way.

How creativity works for this entrepreneur became clear to us as we followed – literally ran – in her wake as she went about her daily business, doing our best to put her actions into words and reports. It turned out that a large chunk of her inventiveness comes from plans – she has them at her fingertips. ‘It is wrong to say that I have no strategy, because I have!’ she says. ‘But it is not expressed in a written format and put into a document. Perhaps that’s a bit silly, because it is distressing to have things only half expressed. By working in this way it is still possible to be flexible and make changes. I am still in the process of convincing myself that I have to go down that road.’

When talking things through with us, Beate also *walked* them through. She took us into the hotel garden, where the walls had been restored and all the windows replaced. ‘Our most captivating renovation’, she jokingly called it. Continuing her tour she showed us the latest development in the back garden – an outdoor stage where only temporary permission for performances had been granted and for which the future is uncertain. She told us about her dreams for the use of the stage and the plight of having to submit a full application to the authorities when the visions she had were still in the making. ‘Look now! I have decided to update you on everything as I have come across it. Some of these things might be totally irrelevant, but I can’t bother brooding on what might have been!’ she said. When leaving the garden and climbing the stairs to the first floor and the building’s ballroom she filled us in on some of the key ideas for future performances, how they fitted with the hotel’s other activities and how they related to experiences from previous years.

What we are presented with in the ballroom is a pleasant intimate atmosphere consisting of a patterned parquet floor, dark brown wallpaper that makes you feel as though you are back in the good old days and a huge painting of light playing on the surface of water created by a renowned local contemporary artist.

Looking around Beate notices scuffs on the wallpaper and marks on the wooden floor. ‘What we think of doing now, just here, is moving the stage over to the other end of the room’. She stands where the new stage was planned and seems to be remembering the past and envisioning the future as she surveys the scene. ‘We had a theatre performance recently and the actors discovered that it was more convenient to have the stage here. I don’t remember exactly why, but it was something about the feeling of the room. I then realised how such a radical change could work

really well.’ She goes on to describe a planned new curtain, the kind of technical equipment and musical instruments that will be acquired and put to use, and how the room can be reverted to the theatre it once was. ‘This was the town’s theatre. It was here that things happened. It’s so much fun to put it all back. You can almost picture the tragedies and such.’ As Beate continues to talk we gain a good sense of how she pictures the future of the space:

For a person like me who’s always talking about the multiple uses of things it is so great to see the possibilities that a partition made by a curtain might lead to. It has to be equally nice on both sides, so we also can turn this into a *chambre séparée*, a chef’s table. The entrance is here, the exit to the balcony is there, the staff entrance is there and above it is a chandelier. Fantastic!

Beate’s fluid way of managing and developing Hotel Norge in Lillesand, without any real office space and apparently dependent on the knowledge and inspiration received from a direct contact with the objects and immediate surroundings, demonstrates how her entrepreneurial acting is embodied. Bourdieu (1977) refers to well-developed skills in his description of *habitus* as a set of dispositions that are formed in relation to work and the material culture that people are dealing with (see Frykman, Chapter 7 in this volume). When Beate enters the hotel’s rooms, dreams, possibilities and new initiatives come to life, take shape and fill functions. To use Kathleen Stewart’s words (1996), as Beate walks through the rooms ‘it was the things that remembered’. Beate is like a ‘battery’ and is energised and charged by her *Umwelt*. In all her openness, she incorporates what Stewart in *Ordinary Affects* (2007) calls a ‘highly affective subject’; a subject drifting through scenes letting life wash over her, feeling empowered and thus embodying ‘a collection of trajectories and circuits’ (ibid. 59).

### From infrastructure to content provider

Being entrepreneurial in the hotel business also means being able to draw energy from and mutually inspire the local community. The relationship between Hotel Norge, the town of Lillesand and the region serves as an example of how such an activity is dependent on the ability to energise

the surrounding community and identify its slumbering potential. In Beate's case, this process is animated by her contacts with USUS and our year-long discussions.

Becoming a member of the regional cluster in 2013 and taking part in an USUS Conference was a turning point. The purpose of this was to promote repeat visits, referrals and recommendations based on cooperation between businesses involved in tourism. The goal of TTCIs – culture and experience industries – is to improve guests' total experience. Presentations were given and workshops arranged to show and discuss how public and private risk capital could be made available for enterprises engaged in innovation projects. Prior to this it had never occurred to Beate that public investment could be available for the renovations and cultural upswing of the hotel. This put her in line with the majority of tourism companies in Norway (Aas and Hjemdahl 2015).

An eye-opener for Beate was a graphic presentation of the different functions in the tourism sector. A Power Point presentation (see Figure 1) showed a hierarchical, pyramid-shaped model displayed the most important factors. At the top of the pyramid were the companies providing the guest streams: national and international companies transporting visitors by water, land and air. The next level consisted of companies

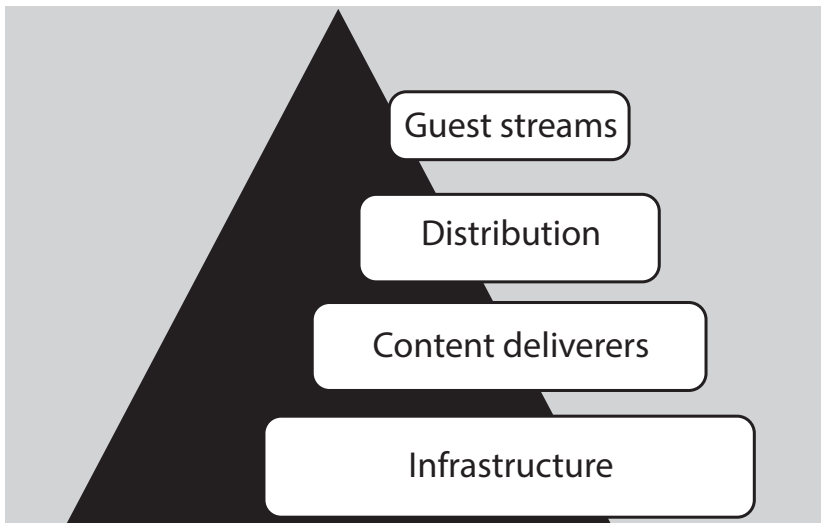


Figure 10.1. The 'value chain' of the tourism, cultural and creative industries, as presented by the USUS cluster ([www.usus.no](http://www.usus.no)).



providing distribution, working mainly through digital channels or as niche companies. Third in line were the content deliverers, the art and cultural institutions and other members of the ‘experience industry’. At the bottom of the pyramid model Hotel Norge in Lillesand was represented under the label infrastructure – meaning traditional locations where guests could sleep and eat.

Beate reacted instinctively on discovering that her hotel belonged to the bottom section. This was too challenging a position to be in! ‘It seems as though I am too dependent on other actors to attract any stream of guests to my hotel. I have to develop the hotel so that it includes the broader parts of the value chain. The hotel must grow so that it takes a much more active part as a content deliverer and does not remain under infrastructure. Could Hotel Norge Lillesand be turned into a Culture Hotel?’ she wondered. The very next day she appeared at a workshop discussing just those possibilities.

For the following two years she systematically worked with different programmes from public agencies to develop such projects. The first to invest was the corporate fund Innovation Norway, which gave a preliminary grant. The Norwegian Research Council then provided funding for another preparatory project, and finally a main project was funded by Innovation Norway. The requirement for such a financier was that the project should meet the demands of particular stakeholders, in this case the County of Lillesand. At the end of the first year of the project Beate said,

Having a strategy in your stomach is not the same as having a document on the shelf.

*Why, because you know where you are going?*

Yes, so it’s wrong to say that I have no strategy and no plan.  
Because I have!

Having to formalise the different steps of the innovation process, partly due to the public funds she has received, also made her look at her previous experiences in a new way. Writing applications, reorganising her actions into side and main projects and delivering reports on results help her to clarify what was originally embodied knowledge and sensations. However, formalising the steps does not mean having to change her

winning concept. Writing reports is one thing. Successfully managing her innovative business is another.

This project has forced me to ... look at the description in a new light, tick off what has been done and see what has not been done, just the work with reporting – like before Christmas when I had deadline for reporting to Innovation Norway, to actually see what I had done, I was totally shocked. It was a really good feeling, to be honest, and one that I am not really used to. For the nine years before you arrived I didn't have anyone to report to about anything.

*And you haven't really been properly aware of what you were doing?*

Yes, it is sort of... like a carousel.

*But how do you orient yourself, give substance to what you are doing?*

I am not conscious of what that might be!

*I have tried to picture what I see you with, and it's ...*

... the phone?

*Yes, the phone!*

Haha.

*Because that seems to be your entire office.*

Yes, that is correct.

*Don't you have an office?*

No, not at all, I don't have anywhere special to work. I walk and walk and sit down wherever possible with the laptop and the phone.

*What are your tools for innovation, besides instinct and emotion?  
Do you employees understand that 'now Beate has a clever idea'?*

I talk a lot with them, so they are very involved in what's running around in my head. Yes, very much!

*Do you think that they understand that you're immersed in new ideas? Do you think they sense it?*

Yes, because they know me very well.

*What are you like in that mode?*

Well, it depends what I am up to. When I am into arrangements, which is something I really love to plan and deliver, I am in my element. If a customer has asked for something specific it's our task to make the practical arrangements so that it happens, so it will be perfect for them. Then I am up and about and all over. Well, I'm not sure. Someone else has to observe, I have no conscious relationship to this at all. But it is probably a hands-on experience. But I always seem to land on my feet.

*How do you know that you are landing?*

When I deliver! That is usually obvious when the guests arrive.

In a success story such as Beate's, creativity and innovation in the field of TCCIs is very much a matter of the unspoken, of experience, and also the capacity to be affected by the milieu and the project ahead. Joy, struggle and uncertainty are the brick and mortar of this particular type of innovation.

### Town and total concept

Schemes and business models are available that show how innovative enterprises can be structured. As summarised in Figure 10.2, the innovation management literature (e.g. Frohle and Roth 2007; Tidd and Bessant 2013) suggests that the innovation practices of enterprises can be divided into two broad categories: (1) process-oriented practices including sub-categories such as strategy, portfolio management, development process, tools and effect measurement, and (2) resource-oriented

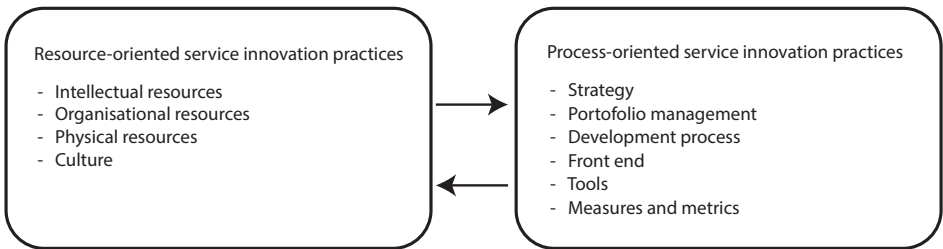


Figure 10.2. Resource- and practice-oriented practices in innovation (Aas et al. 2015).

practices including the establishment of the resources needed to carry out innovation processes.

Seen from the outside, the developments at Hotel Norge in Lillesand align with many of the points in the above boxes, especially as in this case the process is both supported and controlled by external financiers and evaluators. However, in practice the development project becomes something quite different; something that captures chance and opportunity and is able to tune into the surroundings, people, places and objects. This way of working proved to be helpful when Beate took the daring step of trying to engage a larger section of the town and region in 'a total concept'.

Beate invites us for breakfast and we sit in a room with a beautifully restored light-blue wallpaper on the wall. Outside we can see the archipelago that has made this part of Southern Norway so beloved and widely known stretching into the horizon. Beate wants to discuss how to develop the project from a preliminary to a main phase and encompass the 'whole' – the whole being the participation of the town and the region. Up to now she has trusted her intuition, energy and moods, but wonders whether this is too risky and provisional for a major project.

USUS Art was called in to help.<sup>3</sup> They engaged a site-specific artist – Laura – who helps USUS companies to sense the place, take in the atmosphere, and capture the vibe. USUS Art is only available for companies that are capable of being challenged, because the artist often contributes with insights and suggestions that are offbeat. Beate regards this as strength:

The really good thing on the day that USUS Art was here was that she made me see things in a new way. Seeing her in this house and inspecting the most everyday objects was liberating. Suddenly we saw the rooms from a new perspective. We discovered the attic and the possibilities there, and got several creative angles on things. It was really exciting! But it was also a difficult starting point. She had no concrete mission. No agenda for the day. In order to get acquainted with the hotel she touched and in a way altered the way we saw things. I was aware that she was feeling her way through the terrain. But with the wrong person it could have been a total failure.

The result was that Beate was put on the track of exploring a dramatic historical background for the hotel that would later prove useful. The hotel,

as we have seen, began with an Irish rebel, who for various reasons had to escape from home on a trading ship. Close to the Norwegian coast he was placed in old trunk, put in a smaller boat and hoisted overboard. He drifted ashore in Kristiansand, where he made his fortune and eventually became one of the most powerful men in town. He owned three ships, two pirate ships and one cargo ship. He then moved to nearby Lillesand and bought the tannery from a man called Reiersen.

As we sat eating breakfast and after hearing about the outcome of the meeting between Beate and USUS Art, the entire USUS team started to throw ideas and possibilities around. USUS Culture suggested that ‘You could have Irish Days!’ USUS Art filled in with ‘Did you know that he married here and had seven children and then killed himself? Henrik Wergeland wrote the poem ‘Robert Major’ for his funeral.<sup>5</sup> How cool! You could put someone in a trunk to be washed ashore every year.’

This was so much fun. I started to think more freely, and it made my imagination move in a new directions ... Being a midwife for ideas and pointing to a totally different starting point, when you don’t have to think about anything to do with economy and all that. Matching these two worlds! I mostly get totally tied up thinking about costs and limitations. That is the drawback of everyday management.

Beate kept on tossing ideas around, all the time anchored in the town of Lillesand and what she had learned about its history, sensing the possibility of creating something that could have happened there a long time ago.

### Staging the past

Beate had an outdoor summer stage built in 2012 (see Figure 10.3). A number of different shows and concerts were staged, all of which were a sell-out. She got a glimpse of what a Culture Hotel could be. The town was ready for live events and performances. Together with local artists and cultural institutions the hotel sizzled with enthusiasm.

However, the most decisive moment came in the shape of a request from an event company. The company had been promising special treats for international customers with high demands. Could Beate stage something really different in the town of Lillesand? A group of media people

who had already surveyed many different sites in Norway were now on the lookout for a 'real deal' and something unusual. The company had checked Lillesand out a couple of times, liked the location and its beautiful architecture and now wondered how much more there was to



Figure 10.3. The hotel garden with an outdoor stage erected temporarily during the summer of 2012. Beate has big dreams for the stage. Photo: Beate Holm.



offer in the shape of events. This request made Beate aware of how she had packaged and presented the hotel and how similar this was to other places, but also how much there was still to explore and develop.

When searching for the ultimate local experience Beate first turned to the maritime museum. The director was thrilled by the unorthodox possibility of staging a joint event. They decided to present a dinner table in late nineteenth-century style. The theme, 'The Captain's Table', was portrayed in the living room of the former owner of what later became the museum, the famous Captain Carl Knudsen. The event was preceded by intense discussions about whether one was allowed to use museum objects, move hotel furniture into the museum and how to organise the tableware and food. In the Hotel Norge kitchen the answer to all the challenges was standard: 'no problem'. Preparing the food, setting the table, serving the meal – all were swiftly managed by the hotel. The female museum director dressed up in authentic clothes and styled her hair in turn-of-the-last-century fashion. She took her seat as one of the guests at the dinner table in a room that had not seen food for 60 years. Story-tellers were summoned and contributed something extra to the staging. The event turned out to be a re-enactment, where the actors blended in as guests. By the end of the evening the museum director was visibly touched and taken by the atmosphere of a reconstructed past: 'Imagine, this must have been how they lived there and then'.

The following evening, an actor impersonating the Norwegian author Knut Hamsun appeared at Hotel Norge. In fact, a suite at the hotel was reserved for this Nobel Laureate in the 1930s. Given that Hamsun became a most controversial figure in national literature when he joined the Norwegian fascists and collaborated with the Quisling regime during the war, this was a daring step. Nothing about this background was on display, however. The hotel website instead claims that:

Knut Hamsun was a quiet and modest man. When life became too troubled at home in Nørholm, or when one of his books was released, he 'escaped' to Lillesand. He didn't enjoy all the media attention. But he loved the quiet and peaceful life of the small town. Here he got his inspiration from wandering along the piers and chatting with people. In the early 1930s he came on several occasions and at Hotel Norge was given room 302 and special care. The room was big and airy with a fantastic view of the harbour ...

Whether Hamsun wrote any of his books in room 302 is highly uncertain, but there is no doubt that he came to the town and the hotel for inspiration. Some of the characters in the August trilogy are recognisable. ([www.hotelnorge.no](http://www.hotelnorge.no); translated by the authors)

The guests who were invited to the re-enactment were served an aperitif on the building's third floor. In smaller groups the 20 or so people were taken on a tour that ended on the fourth floor, where the actor sat reading from one of Hamsun's books. When he had finished reading, Hamsun led the group down to dinner at the Kings Table, situated in the ballroom. Here he continued to play the grand author while eating and conversing with the guests (perhaps not the ideal company for a person who was said to love the quiet life). During the meal the leader of a local literature festival gave a lecture on Hamsun. The event was totally constructed to enforce the feeling of 'being there', combining a lecture, presentation and live performance by Hamsun.

The event company experiencing the two Lillesand evenings clearly enjoyed the different ways of creating new impressions. They wanted to return the following year, if possible to follow in the footsteps of Henrik Ibsen. The museum staff were also thrilled. They gained new insights by letting the pieces in the exhibition come alive. The increase in the museum's economy occasioned by this event was welcome too. The hotel too saw new possibilities ahead. Beate said: 'Sure it was a lot of work, but we still have treasures to unpack. If we had managed to put it into our marketing system we could have reached out to more people'. She also started to wonder how such an event could be made sustainable. According to her calculation, the hotel would break even with ten events per year. What other concepts could be themed and staged? 'Imagine if we could focus on preparing theme packages for international tourists, we would develop even further qualities that would make us unique and stand out.'

### The ultimate local experience

Research and development projects both demand an intense contact with local stakeholders at the town and county level. In our case it initially proved more demanding than simply changing the concept for Hotel Norge, especially as such cooperation is based on the ability to



persuade by means of budgets, long-term activity plans and detailed working schedules for employees. However, the main obstacle was the possible merging of publicly administered cultural activities and commercial ones: “What kind of prioritising is this? The hotel is a business actor! What are you doing?” You can understand the reaction from a body traditionally concerned with optimising the conditions for the development of local culture.’

During our conversations Beate explained how it took ‘quite some time to get the library, the museum, the office for culture at the town-and-county level as well as artists to understand that this was not only about our plans for Hotel Norge. It was about contributing to the already existing cultural activity in the region. We wanted to engage in what was already going on in Lillesand’s cultural sector. We thought that together we could make it flourish even more.’ Her most important message was promising but blunt: ‘we already have a guest stream; we have the infrastructure and if we can manage to cooperate this could take off for all the agents of art and culture in Lillesand’.

Instead of presenting the plans for innovation hinted at above, Beate stuck to her informal pattern and invited representatives from different local cultural bodies to lunchtime talks and a dinner. ‘Did you get the impression that they understood your ambitions?’ we asked. She answered:

To start with no one knew exactly why they were summoned. I had invited them to brain storm and no one managed to spot any common thread for the meeting. But everyone was a bit curious and perhaps even honoured, in a way. I had not prepared a presentation but trusted the usual dialogue. Starting with the USUS context I told them that Hotel Norge was regarded as infrastructure in the value chain and I found that a problem. Yes, they seemed to understand what I am trying to accomplish with this project.

As the discussion continued and the ideas became more concrete, it was clear to everybody that the hotel could increasingly be seen as a stage for different activities and performances. The outer facilities of a hotel garden and rooms already existed, but were too one-dimensional. Beate’s vision – aided by her cooperation with USUS – was to develop the hotel from a place for eating and sleeping in nice surroundings to one permeated by the sensation of entering a different world. She explained:

Regardless of whether you drink hot cocoa in the library, attend a conference, stay overnight or are a garden guest, I want you to feel invited to a specific cultural experience. One way or another we want to unpack parts of the history of Lillesand that mean something unique for the place. The project can be copied in other places and hotels, but they would have to build on their own unique material. I've spent a lot of time making sure that this is not only about the four walls of a hotel. Everything is in close proximity in town and the more our guests are invited to discover something of what there is to experience the more value they will get for their money. This was why our potential partners understood that we genuinely wanted to offer our visitors a full package and we that have something unique for everyone who wants to join in.

'So you managed to get everyone to pull in the same direction?' we asked. 'Definitely! This is what I have sown, and so far so good. This meeting went really well. It was so much fun!'

One of the pillars turned out to be something called Together for Culture, where different local initiatives were offered to the hotel and its garden stage. Together with a local design bureau the hotel staff worked to brand the concept. Prior to every arrangement they produced posters to put up all over the town, were present in social media, on digital screens, in advertisements and in the editorial columns of the local newspaper. As many partners as possible could be gathered under one heading. The idea was that people would recognise the concept, even though the content changed from time to time. According to Beate, the entire event was 'an example of something that is anything but profitable. This will only be cost, no revenue ... we will still do it, because it is important for us to connect to such good partners'.

There is no doubt that Beate has initiated the project with profit in mind, not only for her hotel but also for all the partners involved. According to her, in the long run it is certain to pay off. Her main idea is to establish new market positions using this innovative business model. In addition to increasing and retaining guests looking for that little extra in terms of regional conferences and seminars, the targeted groups are national and international tourists on the lookout for something genuine and romantic at the same time (see Kjaer, Chapter 11 in this volume). By branding the

town, different actors are perceived from the perspective of the travelling visitors. Beate believes that: 'With a good dialogue and a sincere wish that the others will succeed the cake is big enough for everyone'. She seems able to express the same hope for what it is possible to achieve to the other partners. In other towns and localities the cooperation between art, culture and business have failed because the different parties do not know enough about each other's' reasons for joining and what a common outcome might be. Leadership, a belief in making dreams come true, building trust and sharing knowledge among the participants are all important. Although this proves to be hard to capture in words, it is obviously something that is felt by the participants and emanates from Hotel Norge in the town of Lillesand.

## Conclusion

In her book *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart (2007) advocates the importance of focusing on affects as an alternative to a rigid or too systematic approach to the cases under study, irrespective of whether this is a well-known totalising system like structuralism, a 'linguistic turn' in ethnology or anthropology, models of globalisation, neoliberalism, capitalism in other disciplines, or mainly trying to squeeze the everyday processes in ordinary lives into overarching patterns (for a discussion see Jansen, Chapter 3 in this volume). In Stewart's writing the central matters are always about how people are 'affected and affect others' in the Spinozian way (see Gilje, Chapter 2 in this volume). Using what are now classic formulations she wants to 'draw attention to immanence, to bodies, to their attunement to each other and to objects. ... to bring them into view as a scene of immanent force, rather than leave them looking like dead effects imposed on an innocent world' (ibid. 1). Something new may arise when the environment starts 'worlding' to the people living in it and their ability to make objects, people and places 'gather' in ways that were not seen before.

As became evident to the team following Beate in our many walk and talks, interviews over meals and helping her to formulate applications and reports, structures such as 'resource-oriented' and 'process-oriented' faded into the background. Instead, her attunement to places, people and objects was exceptional and was constantly displayed to us. Beate paid more attention to her gut feelings than to pondering rationally on

resources or portfolio management. It seemed as though her creativity was affectively based on, her strategy situated in, embodied knowledge – ‘whim as a method’. In this way she managed to sway not only the librarian and the museum director who felt so deeply moved when staging a captain’s table, but also the guests and the representatives of the town and council as well. As she expressed it: ‘I have so much faith in this project. I draw so much energy and inspiration from it.’

To some extent, helped by the USUS cluster and taking part in innovation conferences, Beate’s contribution expands the notion of being a Culture Hotel for wider purposes – a total concept. In a complex landscape of new partners she manages to cover wider parts of the value chain than we had foreseen and thus gives important feedback to the wider TCCIs project. The project is still in its initial stages and to some extent the future seems to lie in the hands and mind of the innovative owner. After following the processes at Hotel Norge in Lillesand for several years we can see how things are still in the making. As researchers we are more used to looking back at cases that are settled and closed. So when Beate says ‘so far, so good’, it captures our understanding of the innovative process precisely.

## Notes

- 1 A USUS cluster consists of more than 100 businesses in the tourism, creative and cultural industries in southern Norway that works towards the development of innovation capability, value creation and competitiveness by means of a systematic, holistic and coordinated development of existing guest streams (see [www.usus.no](http://www.usus.no)). USUS Advanced is the research programme of the cluster, which involves numerous national and international research projects, all of which are user-driven and cooperate with some 20 different research milieus and universities.
- 2 The research team, led by Kirsti Mathiesen Hjemdahl, visited the site regularly for a period of four years.
- 3 Her key contribution was as a specialist within culture projects, and in addition as a specialist within site-specific art and experience design.
- 5 Henrik Wergeland 1808–1845, Norwegian patriot, poet, playwright, historian, and linguist.

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