Ethnologia Europaea

Journal of European Ethnology

Volume 41:1
2011

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and Robert Willim

MUSEUM TUSCULANUM PRESS · UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

DESIGNING A WATERWORLD
Culture-Based Innovation and Ethnography in Regional Experience Industry

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This article is a postanalysis of a culture-based regional innovation project with different partners in which "art and culture" and "experience" were supposed to inform the design of a new outdoor waterworld establishment in southern Norway. Through ethnographic fieldwork the surrounding maritime landscape was investigated as a possible resource for waterworld stories and artistic expressions in the establishment design. This design was nevertheless disregarded by the waterworld management and a more conventional playground theme was chosen. This article thus discusses the various reasons why a culture-based innovation project like this can fail. Traditional business routines can collide with an innovation project structure, but culture policy ideals on the meaningfulness of the arts might also be too abstract when materialised into a tourism business.

Keywords: tourism, culture policy, business routine, art, imagineering

The artist and I had arrived at the small seaside village two hours away from the main town in the southern region of Norway. It was in the winter of 2010 and the thick snow slowed everything down. However, summer was already being planned by the local waterworld manager and his team. He had called me on the phone and asked us for assistance in the cultural theming of the new outdoor expansion of the waterworld. "People want to escape the indoors to experience the fresh air, sea views and coastal leisure life as soon as the weather allows it," he had explained. Summer was bad for indoor leisure, hence the new expansion.

The construction meeting had already begun. The manager introduced us to the architect: "This is the creative artist and the ethnologist or ... experience economist ... who is going to assist us in creating a theme for the new coastline establishment." "Is this important?" the architect responded. Without disengaging his attention from the building plans spread out on the table in front of him, he continued: "my workers are on a payroll here... An experience economist and an artist ... we must really be in trouble!"

We were daunted by the entrepreneur's greeting, but the manager's telephone call had not been coincidental, although he had probably forgotten to mention us to the architect. I had previously worked with this waterworld on a fieldwork based consumer survey (Kjær 2008) and had asked the guests about their most memorable indoor and outdoor water experiences.

The manager was also aware of the possibility of accessing publicly funded academic and artistic resources (such as mine and the artist's) if the waterworld business participated in a regional innovation project that was informed by cultural and regional policy and partly subsidised by the Research Council of Norway.[1] In other words, our gathering that winter day was part of a regional innovation project, also defined as a culture-based innovation project. In this sense the meeting presented different perspectives: culture politics of a regional development on the one hand, represented by me; entrepreneurial practices and business processes of building a waterworld establishment on the other, as represented by the waterworld staff, board members and construction entrepreneurs; and the artist who represented innovative and artistic resources.

This article discusses working with policy informed innovation in the field of a local small and medium sized experience and tourism industry. How does one negotiate different viewpoints when deciding on the aesthetic and the experience designs of a recreational establishment owned partly by the local municipality and partly by private investors? What cultural and natural resources informed the theme of the waterworld? What is a relevant waterworld theme story in this particular landscape?

I will furthermore discuss how culture-based innovation can be understood as a form of applied ethnography that, according to national and supranational culture policies, promotes "culture and art" as stimulating tools to theme and design regions, cities and businesses in experiential ways. Instrumentalising these resources has the goal, it is hoped, of creating wealth and prosperity in a local community. Based on academic and political trends, awareness of business competition and not least the tastes of an experienced (and financially healthy) consumer, the purpose of these projects is to regenerate places. In reality, however, innovation projects like this that are informed by culture policy are only in their infancy. It appears to be difficult to organise and fuse diverse resources in innovative ways. Hence this article is a postanalysis of a project that aimed at



Ill. 1: The outdoor waterworld, "Sørlandsbadet". Construction site. (Photo: Sarah Holst Kjær)

artistic uniqueness but which failed. All good political, academic and artistic intentions were discarded, and instead a waterworld playground that was routine business based, conventionally themed and mass produced was established.

Waterworld Landscape

After the meeting we escaped to the outside, shaking off the disinterested architect who did not have even the minimum amount of time to give to our presentation. Before we left the office, the manager explained that because of the lack of time, construction work had already begun (see ill. 1). The manager had changed jobs and this meant that he needed to finish quickly the project he had begun.

Outside we were met by a view of the natural bay which leads to a large river enclosed by mountains. Two camping areas – one a Christian bible camp, the other owned by the beach hotel further down the coast – and a large, ex-industrial fishing port that was now closed were the waterworld's closest neighbours. We had been there several times before to do our ethnographic studies of the area, but this time the beach was filled with construction workers. This probably explained the architect's attitude towards us.

The indoor waterworld was first established in 2007 as a conventional bathing pool and leisure centre whose main function had been a value creation project that brought new jobs to the region by focusing on leisure activities, culture, health and exercise for the local community. It was mainly used by schools, workplaces and families at the weekends and during the winter, but during the summer the facilities stood more or less empty. The pool was supposed to revitalise a seaside town where there was no more work in the traditional fishing industry that had closed down. At the time of this fieldwork, there was nevertheless a large pharmaceutical factory, several schools and many residential houses in the area.

The local community had an affection for the abandoned industrial fishing port. As seen in larger cities around the world, the idea of recycling postindustrial establishments into new urban areas, cultural centres, convention halls or shopping districts (Kjær 2010) was already in people's minds. The place presented different groups with various convictions that in many ways were in harmony when it came to developing the area. The region was also quite traditional, a place where family life was very important. This was reflected in the waterworld manager's encirclement of just one potential guest segment of society as being of interest as potential users of the future outdoor establishment, namely that of the nuclear family with children, and not considering other groups in society such as young adults, colleagues, friends or grandparents.

Culture-Based Innovation

Since the beginning of the 1990s, "culture and art" in their broadest definitions have been instrumentalised in order to increase market value and improve the brand effects of a place. The idea is that impressive architecture can transform places. The first example of this was the building of the opera house in Sydney, Australia, in order to transform a sad looking terminus for trains into a unique place brand by using art and culture as a resource. On a global scale, culture is viewed as attractive capital: places rich in culture thrive by means of different sectors of society who are able to capitalise on it, writes the American management theorist Richard Florida (2008: 59). Florida's book, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (Florida 2003), has been extremely influential in the writings on current culture policy, at both the national and the supra-national level (McGuigan 2009). Florida's thesis resonates clearly, for example, in *A Creative Economy Green Paper for the Nordic Region* (Fleming 2007) and in the EU report, KEA European Affairs' *The Impact of Culture on Creativity* (2009).

"Culture-based innovation" is defined as a tool for developing regions and traditional businesses, and especially the tourism and experience industries. In *The Impact of Culture on Creativity* (KEA 2009: 3), "culture and art" are viewed as a resource to develop, innovate and design experiences, attractions, sights and businesses. It is argued that culture and art have

a "significant influence" on the ability to compete, to develop stronger brands, to communicate values and to increase the quality of service and products. Furthermore, in order to succeed in the era of a postindustrial experience economy, the report states:

> This culture-based creativity is linked to the ability of people, notably artists, to think imaginatively or metaphorically, to challenge the conventional, and to call on the symbolic and affective to communicate. Culture-based creativity has the capacity to break conventions, the usual way of thinking, to allow the development of a new vision, an idea or a product. The nature of culture-based creativity is closely linked to the nature of artistic contribution as expressed in art or cultural productions. The spontaneous, intuitive, singular and human nature of cultural creation enriches society. (KEA 2009: 3)

This romanticising statement about art has an implicit Richard Florida notion, namely that not all places – such as Sydney, for example – possess what is considered a sublime cultural or natural heritage to capitalise on. Thus, in order for a place to compete, to develop new ideas or products, contemporary art is viewed as an alternative to cultural heritage and a practical way to "art up" a place. The goal is furthermore to create uniqueness and avoid mass produced culture products. Thus, the role of late modern creativity, carried by an artist, is beginning to be defined as an important, and even necessary, economic resource in the culture policies of regional regeneration (Smith 2006: 8).

Accordingly, in relation to the waterworld project, the artist and I followed the idea that a culture-based innovation project would be an experiment of cultural, regional and artistic value which was supposed to enhance the success of the waterworld expansion by strategies of unique theming, by avoiding mass produced products and by designing symbolic experiences. In general, we thought that this project could improve the development of a place, similar to other "leftover" places where postindustrial revitalising projects usually take shape as a consequence of local job loss (Hansen 1999). However, as the English culture policy researcher Jim McGuigan (2009: 299) argues, it might be too much to ask for more or less subsidised art and culture to be the means to solve "deep-seated economic and political problems in the postindustrial society." In culture politics, he explains, "culture" has become, with the influence of Florida's hypothesis of the regenerated place, a far fetched economic rescue plan.

Furthermore, what is apparent in culture policy reports is the metaphorical language in which regeneration and value creation are described. A national advisory report, *Innovasjon i opplevelsesnæringer* (Innovation in experience industries, 2008: 18–23, my translation), by the consultancy groups InFuture and Econ Pöyry, reflects the abstract, aesthetic and symbolic dimensions to which a local experience industry is supposed to adapt. The creation of economic prosperity is, for example, about stimulating the "customer's emotions, sensing and spiritual experiences." The experience business is supposed to produce reflexive meaning, or as it says: "entertain, challenge, please, appal, surprise, make sense and create identity."

Well informed by ideal suggestions like these, the artist and I perceived our role of cultural entrepreneurs as being relevant and needed, although we were challenged by the fact that the architect had not perceived us like that at all. The question, though, was how political and metaphorical notions of the instrumentality of art and culture could actually come about in the field of practice. What happened when we followed aesthetic abstractions such as sense making, emotionality and identity creation when designing a place?

Waiting for a Wave

In order to find out what the element of water meant at this particular waterworld, I had conducted a qualitative survey, with the help of the staff, in a similar type of innovation project a couple of years before the outdoor expansion (Kjær 2008).

We wanted to know how adults and children experienced and defined the indoor facilities of the waterworld. In many ways, "water" was organised

around the tourist imagination that swimming in and playing with water should take place in warm and pleasant surroundings. A water leisure environment should, it seemed, promote positive cultural feelings of relaxation, comfort and cosiness. Variation in the indoor establishment's facilities – such as a sauna, sun terrace, pools, spa baths and water slides – was also important, when we asked, for both adults and children. To bathe, jump and play or simply to "have fun" were some of the children's responses, although the level of intensity in the indoor activities was criticised. Children with shaking blue knees were freezing while they waited to jump into an artificially produced wave. Furthermore, it seemed that the children compared this waterworld to other waterworlds when they asked for new climbing walls, water wave tunnels and new water play props. The children clearly expected a tropical theme with a pleasant climate and the sun shining. This theme could easily be designed via mass produced props and thus resemble their imagination and the design of many other waterworld establishments.

Nevertheless, following the guidelines in *The Impact of Culture on Creativity* (2009), the goal was to promote artistic uniqueness and avoid mass produced products. Thus, there was a clear contradiction between what the children wanted and what the policy stated. In order to overcome this contradiction, and still hunting for uniqueness, we tried to focus on other aspects presented in the survey's contextualising, open ended questions: the children in general, while on their summer vacation, most appreciated "driving around in the car," "buying [comfort] food" and "looking at nature" (Kjær 2008: 9). The last response – looking at nature – was surprising to me. Was nature not boring for fun seeking children? Either these children (who were Norwegian) were culturally trained to appreciate nature, or maybe the natural surroundings could actually compete with the children's everyday amusements and even with their imagined ideas of what a waterworld ought to be like. From this last response, the artist and I decided that "nature" would become the resource which informed his design of the establishment. The natural particularities of the maritime coastal area would challenge the children's preconception of a tropical holiday and instead inform the sensory experience of the waterworld theme.

Media-Based Preconceptions and Creating Totality

As opposed to a cultural site or a museum that displays historic events – both of which, in many ways, are bound by notions of culture and official standards of true and untrue representation of how we imagine the authenticity of a particular place to be – a designed and themed leisure environment, such as a waterworld, does not have to be true to anything else but the chosen story.

The children's expectations of the waterworld were that it would have a "tropical" theme, preferably with exotic palm trees, blue lagoons, pirate ships and colourful animals that belong to this type of topography. This theme connotes a homely fantasy of hedonistic leisure in what is, especially for residents of northern Europe, a strikingly beautiful place. In addition, a waterworld's infrastructure usually contains a mass produced and themed playground of water slides, fibreglass props, signs, transformation zones for getting into and out of the water, convenience food and sunbeds for relaxation.

In a globally informed media world, most Western people do not need to have been to an exotic place to know what it looks like. Thus, our aesthetic expectations have to correspond to our collective and media informed imaginations in order to be valued as correct and relevant. Consequently, the experience industry has to take into consideration that the guest is experienced, has already travelled or knows about a cultural theme both from actual experience and from the visual media (MacCannel 1999: 135–136).

A common goal in regional innovation projects is to expand the season by making tourists stay longer. The waterworld management was building the outdoor establishment in order to attract guests during the summer and was therefore following this imperative. It would, however, be a permanent part of the landscape all year round. Sun and summer in Norway is a two month experience, no matter how much we might wish for it to be different, and in order

for the construction not to appear deserted, and to make everyone long for a summer vacation when it is covered in snow and showered with rain and fallen leaves, "weather" was not only an attractive fantasy, it had to be one of the parameters when designing the outdoor establishment.

A selective touristic gaze would have difficulties in compensating for snow and rain, and hence large financial investments would be needed in order for a leisure business to create an experience of totality, and not contradiction, in a built environment. As the English tourism researchers Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (2004: 244) explain, this totality needs to be carefully constructed in order to stimulate all the senses into an experience of being fully absorbed in the theme. It might therefore also be impossible, or appear aesthetically *misplaced*, for an attraction in a Norwegian coastal area where, for example, the weather is not very tropical, to reproduce these cultural imaginings. The cultural content of these different locations will simply create opposing meanings. Hence, besides the financial cost of creating a totality in the establishment, there could be difficulty in convincing the media informed and experienced guest if the tropical environment is moved outside of its site specific origins.

Current culture policy reports (e.g., Fleming 2007) additionally state that unique and local culture products are about avoiding the copying of other places and challenging the Internet based purchase of vacations, where one place can be as good as the next as long as it is accessible and affordable. In order not to resemble other places, things have to stand out and offer something else. In accordance with this, and in aiming at the children's (to some degree) enthusiasm for nature, the artist and I convinced ourselves that the local maritime landscape was an unlimited resource in the culture-based theming. The innovation of a waterworld could, practically speaking, take any imaginative form.

The Seal Meeting the Cow

Drawing on other waterworld businesses of both small and medium sizes,[2] it appears to be a common practice that the company's staff and management are the primary drivers and decision makers when it comes to the cultural theming of a new leisure facility. This is especially the case when the enterprise does not have the resources to establish a specialised department to undertake new product developments. Various waterworlds also study and copy each other. Thus, the management of this particular waterworld had already been on several study trips to Denmark, Germany and the United States and had held a number of workshops, which had included the staff, in imagining a theme for their outdoor establishment.

The manager had also asked a local cartoonist to invent a digital story in which the logo animal of the waterworld, the seal, met another animal, a cow. The cow was chosen because it was the animal presented on the local town's coat of arms. At one of the workshops, the cartoonist had supplied everyone with a colourful storyboard where the seal and the cow were dressed up as a boy and a girl and were enhanced with human features and ambitions. The idea was to create an interesting children's story which could be turned into a computer game and used on the waterworld's website. The waterworld would also capitalise on seal and cow souvenirs. This would also, potentially, market the town and the waterworld. The computer game suggestion followed the idea of the mass distribution of local culture and, in this sense, it approached a culture policy ideal of an experience economy, where culture via technology can be productified (Fleming 2007).

It seemed that the staff did indeed feel included in their workplace's future and the changing processes, although the innovation process and the responsibility to make the "right decisions", as some of the employees explained, felt "too difficult and overwhelming." Furthermore, these workshops came on top of their daily job routines, and even though the management had provided the staff with different choices, they still found it hard to be certain that they were choosing the best one.

"I know what happens next," said a young woman I had previously seen behind the ticket counter. Now she was spontaneously interrupting one of the early business meetings, continuing the storyline. Every-

one was keen to suggest new angles to the story and add to the adventures of the seal and the cow. At the waterworld, there was a great buzz of new storylines that continued to develop in the lifeguard area and at lunch breaks in the canteen.

However, it seemed that no one wondered whether or not it was plausible that a seal and a cow would make friends and form a boy-girl relationship, regarding the "natural fact" that these animals live very far apart. After all, it was a children's cartoon and a computer game. Although the game format fully lived up to the policy of mass distribution of unique culture products, would the story's content be plausible?

Pleasurable landscapes, or recreational establishments such as waterworlds, are often put forward as examples of how a guest can experience something extraordinary and, at the same time, be given education through entertainment. A culturally themed environment always promotes more or less ideological storytelling, in the sense that it conveys certain values of learning and meaning. This form of "edutainment" refers to the taste or choice of particular social and cultural narratives, as the cultural preferences of some groups are promoted while others are not (Shaw & Williams 2004).

Maybe the storyline of the cow meeting the seal would fill the purpose of engaging the parents in discussing a complicated meeting point between the two animals with their children. However, in the broader perspective of regional revitalisation projects, the planning and building of maritime areas and establishments does not sometimes take into consideration that there are historical, cultural and symbolic borders between coastlines, farmland, cities and towns. The cow in the computer story might be associated with this general tendency. It referred to the town's coat of arms and symbolised a history of dairy and meat production. Maybe this choice of character was indeed a gesture towards the local people, their tastes and their identity, but viewed from the perspective of a maritime topography – or from the perspective of producing a fully themed experience environment – the cow was out of context.

The seal, on the other hand, corresponded to the logo of the waterworld and the area's natural history. The bay used to be filled with salmon and hence also the seals that hunted for them. However, to the fisherman – whether as a hobbyist or someone working in the fishing industry – the seal is an obnoxious creature that destroys the nets and the catch. Nevertheless, for the children, the seal is a cute animal and to everybody working within the experience industry, animals (particularly with fur) are a great selling product. Not only could the waterworld provide gaming, merchandise and edutainment about the seal and the loss of its local habitat and environment, the business could also demonstrate corporate responsibility by working for the return of seal, donating money from sales of merchandise to advance this project and hence promote and present the business's identity and social values.

Waterworld Coolness

In policy informed, culture-based innovation – and in the experience economy in general – the strategy is to utilise culture and art in order to produce a "cool place". The goal is to attract young, creative and tolerant people. This is Richard Florida's thesis of the creative class. It is expected that these people are drawn to places with an alternative and spectacular atmosphere (McGuigan 2009: 294). In order for a local community not to disintegrate, it seems vital, then, to encourage the town's young adults to return home after finishing their studies and when they are searching for a place to begin a family and raise children. To be a magnet for educated youngsters is one of the reasons why "the creative class" has become relevant in regional revitalisation projects.

But these educated youngsters could present a certain taste that might differ from that of waterworld children. During fieldwork, the young adults segment was not studied, simply because they were not there. Instead we followed the implicit assumptions in current culture policies to arrive at appealing, emotional and spectacular designs that would greet them in the case of their return. But what is "a cool place" exactly? And would this abstraction not collide with the children's holiday dream of fun and play?

The Swedish ethnologist Robert Willim (2008: 21–22) defines "cool" as an aesthetic but also an emotional state. When a place is "cool" it is perceived as appealing, right and classy, or corresponding to a current *Zeitgeist*. In other words, a cool place is trendy and hip. Places that are defined as cool are, at the same time, defined as the right place to be and are valued as more attractive than other not so cool places which are not as promising and prosperous. The metaphor of coolness distinguishes one place from another by referring to what's in or what's out. The superiority of one place and the inferiority of another are thus established via distancing and possibly mockery. So what is so cool about cool?

Coolness falls right into the marketing strategy promoted by culture policies, where art and culture are drivers creating a unique place brand. Distinguishing one place from the other is not only about separating places, it also has a symbolic meaning: to produce a place with certain values, people and ideals that are better than those in other places. Would not local people, businesses or politicians want their places to be just as equally advanced, or more so, than other places? When the Norwegian business advice report *Innovasjon i opplevelsesnæringer* (InFuture & Econ Pöyry 2008) calls for the production of "challenge, appeal and surprise" in the experience industry, it is about marking a place as cool and daring. Coolness is thus a metaphor for competition and distinction, but at the same time it is an abstract code. How is coolness supposed to be materialised, productified and made tangible?

Different consumers demonstrate different, but particular, sets of taste interests, for example, by enjoying cool and hip pleasures and places, or by playing with summer holiday imaginings of blue lagoons. At the waterworld establishment, there was thus a gap between the ideals of a cool place and the production of the establishment's cultural content. It could affect the coolness of place – and hence its attractiveness to a young and creative consumer – if the manager primarily wanted to provide facilities for the nuclear family; a policy which, according to the manager, is formed by the idea that "as long as the children are happy, the parents are happy." The consumer thus informs the design and has an impact on the project's materiality.

Ethnography of Imagineering

The local landscape could still be a qualified place for coolness. The neighbouring, ex-industrial fishing port was an example of this and had already been discussed as a possible new town district, a shopping mall or convention centre. This reuse of the old port represents trendy postindustrial coolness (Willim 2008). Following this imaginative clue in the fieldwork observations, it might thus be possible to do ethnography to find abstractions in the landscape.

"Imagineering" (after Hjemdahl 2004) is a widespread concept today in the applied experience economy and in the development of new establishments, regions or cities. Originally, the concept was invented by the Disney Company in the United States, combining the words "imagine" and "engineering". It refers to the craftsmanship of actually materialising things when dreaming and imagining something not yet seen.

The ethnographic study was not only about following, and influencing, the organisation's various processes of culture-based innovation. Imagineering also seemed an appropriate concept when transforming the natural coastline – and its materiality of mountains, plants, flowers, camping sites, animals and sea views – into an artistic expression of the location's sensations and atmosphere. Informed by local geological facts, we wanted the coolness to originate from and be a plausible part of the landscape, and not least to transform and visualise it into the design of the establishment. Thus, the artist and I wandered around, equipped with cameras and notebooks, imagining the place as cool and trying to find coolness.

According to Willim (2008), what could be cool would, at the same time, be distinct from other things. It would have a surprising and unique quality and would differ from conventional lines of association, such as, for example, when an industrial fishing port is transformed into an urban area with shops, cafés and leisure activities, or when a waterworld avoids the expected preconceptions of being a themed tropical paradise.

A unique place brand could thus be informed through imagining the coolness of *this* particular place and not any similar looking fjord in Norway. The formation of these mountains, this habitat of animals, and this specific sea view would have to be regarded as standing out, in order to materialise uniqueness and distinction in the artistic expressions.

Inspired by the English anthropologist Sarah Pink (2009: 25, 30–33) and her method of "sensory ethnography", we additionally understood the landscape as something that constitutes bodily experiences and offers people ways to participate in a certain order of a particular place. By describing, and artistically aspiring for, a close interrelationship between body, mind and environment, certain imaginative and material elements of the landscape could be promoted in the waterworld establishment. These elements might also, according to the ideal of an experience environment being fully themed (Shaw & Williams 2004), hold the place together: the landscape's resources could be transformed into ways of balancing the coastline's thrown togetherness of camping sites, industrial fishing port, waterworld, hotel, sea view and mountains.

Back at our desks, we informed ourselves of the geological history of the area, which came to affect our imaginative and creative associations. To our great surprise, the landscape had pink coloured flowers that correlated with the granite. The mountains were pink. We learned from the geological definitions that these specific pink granite mountains were fairly rare in Norway, but happened to be present at this particular site. Was the pink granite – hard for the unimaginative eye to actually see – a far fetched resource for innovation and creativity? Perhaps, but it was in tune with our method for imagining the coolness of the place while at the same time tracking down something unique.

Designing Experience

The Norwegian ethnologist Kirsti Mathiesen Hjemdahl (2004: 219) writes that developmental projects in the experience industry are often steered by opposing innovation strategies: either the unthinkable and the imaginative ("imagineering") guide the innovative processes, or, as often happens, routine business strategies guide similar businesses to copy each other in the design of new attractions. There is a reluctance to experiment with anything else but what "the market" asks for, and the goal is to keep within the limits of a given budget. Consumer surveys about how the guest perceives service standards and the attractions on offer are the primary tool in guiding developments in an experience business. But these consumer opinions can only be taken into consideration after an attraction has been built, if one does not ask for the consumers to be imaginative, which is also a possibility. There is a great difference in customising the experiences to the expectations of the loyal or dissatisfied guest and creating experiences that the guest could not have imagined beforehand.

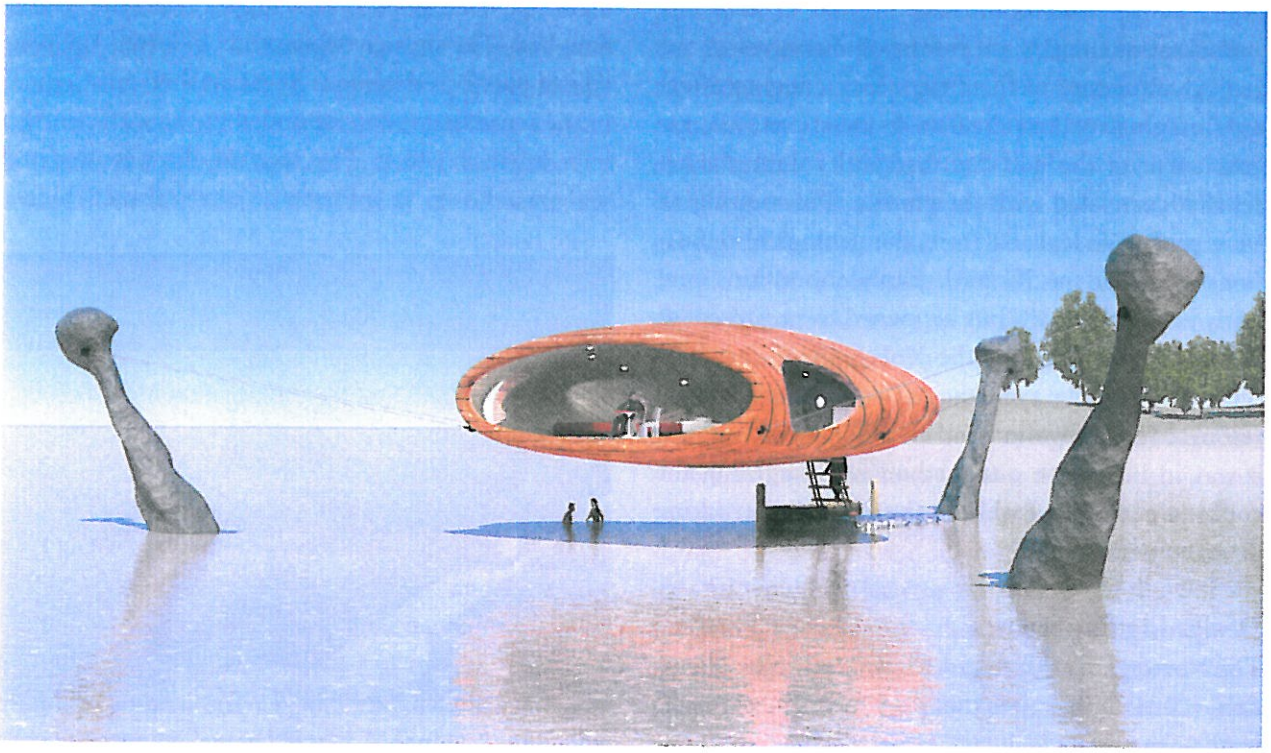
As we watched the busy construction site (ill. 1), I asked the technical manager from the waterworld why the water basket at the playground area was orange. What happened to the choice of the cool pink colours, similar to the landscape, but which were new in the waterworld setting? The new establishment had been given the same colours as the indoor area had. The orange colour thus followed the routine of previous choices and was aesthetically logical in the sense that it corresponded to the waterworld's own business story. The logo of the personalised seal was chosen to inform the establishment's now



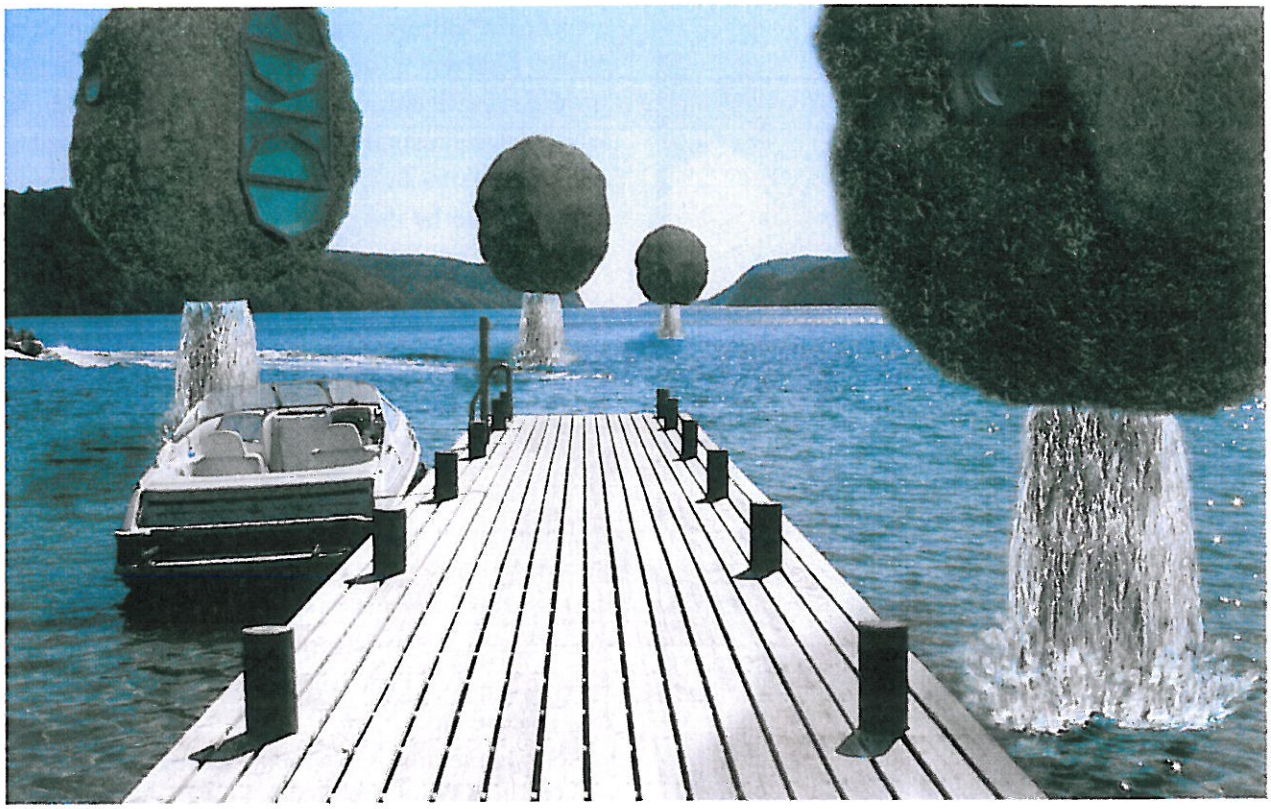
Ill. 2: The seal. Waterworld Establishment. (Illustration: www.soerlandsbadet.no)

seal shaped platform (ill. 2). The manager explained that it had also been difficult to find investors. It was thus only possible to finance a mass produced playground. It was designed for children and consisted of a couple of water slides, a pool and some props that included the large orange bucket that would tip with the weight of water.

A comparison on visualisations between one of the graphic models of the outdoor leisure area produced by the waterworld (ill. 2) and some of the 3D drawings produced by the artist shows that the materialisation of the exact same place was understood in different ways. Each was designed with the tastes of different consumers in mind. The waterworld team's models followed more mass produced conventions while the artist's proposals were unique and original. The artist's visualisation took as its point of departure the materiality of the landscape. A flying café and some small huts with a sea view (ill. 3 and 4) were the concretisation of this experiment. But the artist furthermore had the idea that an experience design should consist of phenomenological and existential edutainment. One of his suggestions, *The Black Hole* (ill. 5 and 6), was designed to give an experience of natural forces. The sensation of being pushed through a black hole became a water slide built inside a mountain wall. The artistic elaboration of nature's materiality meant converting the surrounding nature into thrilling, and maybe adult, experiences. The artistic design with its complex association line and experimental quality clearly contradicted the waterworld's playground theme designed exclusively for children. The conflict in design taste points to the different consumer groups in mind. The playground produced for a family and children segment connotes unproblematic, conventional leisure and relaxation, safe for the parents to send their children off to play in. The artistic design was equally safety guaranteed, but was playing with cultural imaginations of bodily thrills. It was produced for a reflexive and creative consumer group. It was demanding and not relaxing. Engaging in physical activity would have to include intergenerational explanation, guidance and evaluation of the bodily and mental processes. The conflict in design taste points to the difficulties when including art in the traditional tourism industry which, in many cases, primarily promotes positive, safe and neutral



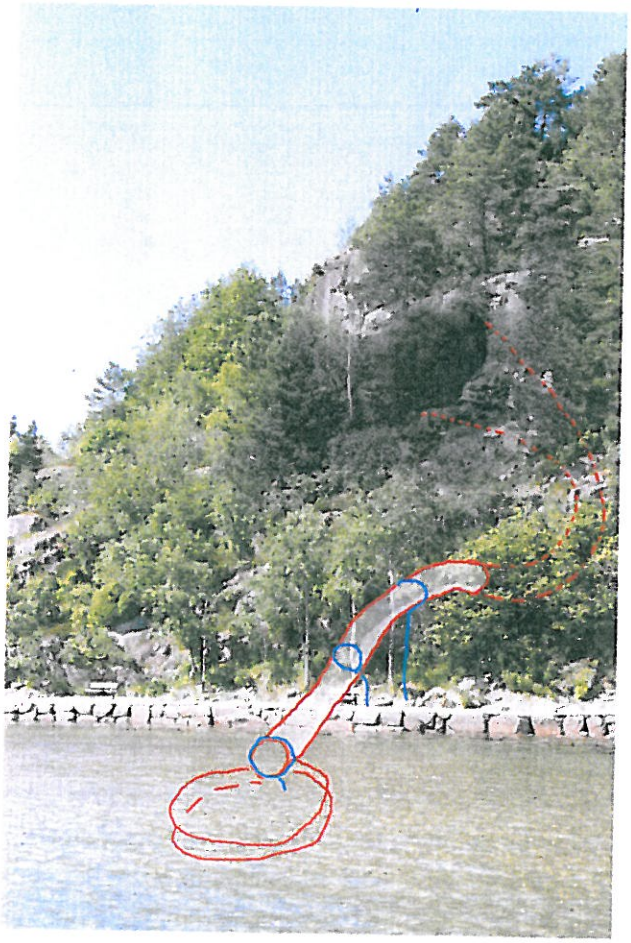
Ill. 3: *A Flying Café.* (Artwork: Erik Pirolt)



Ill. 4: *Small Huts with a Sea View.* (Artwork: Erik Pirolt)



Ill. 5: *Jump. The Black Hole.* (Photo and artwork: Erik Pirolt)



Ill. 6: *The Black Hole.* (Photo and artwork: Erik Pirolt)

cultural associations, often carried by the imaginations of what a nuclear family wants. Arts' logic on the other hand is often to create thoughtfulness by promoting a tension between negative and positive cultural associations.

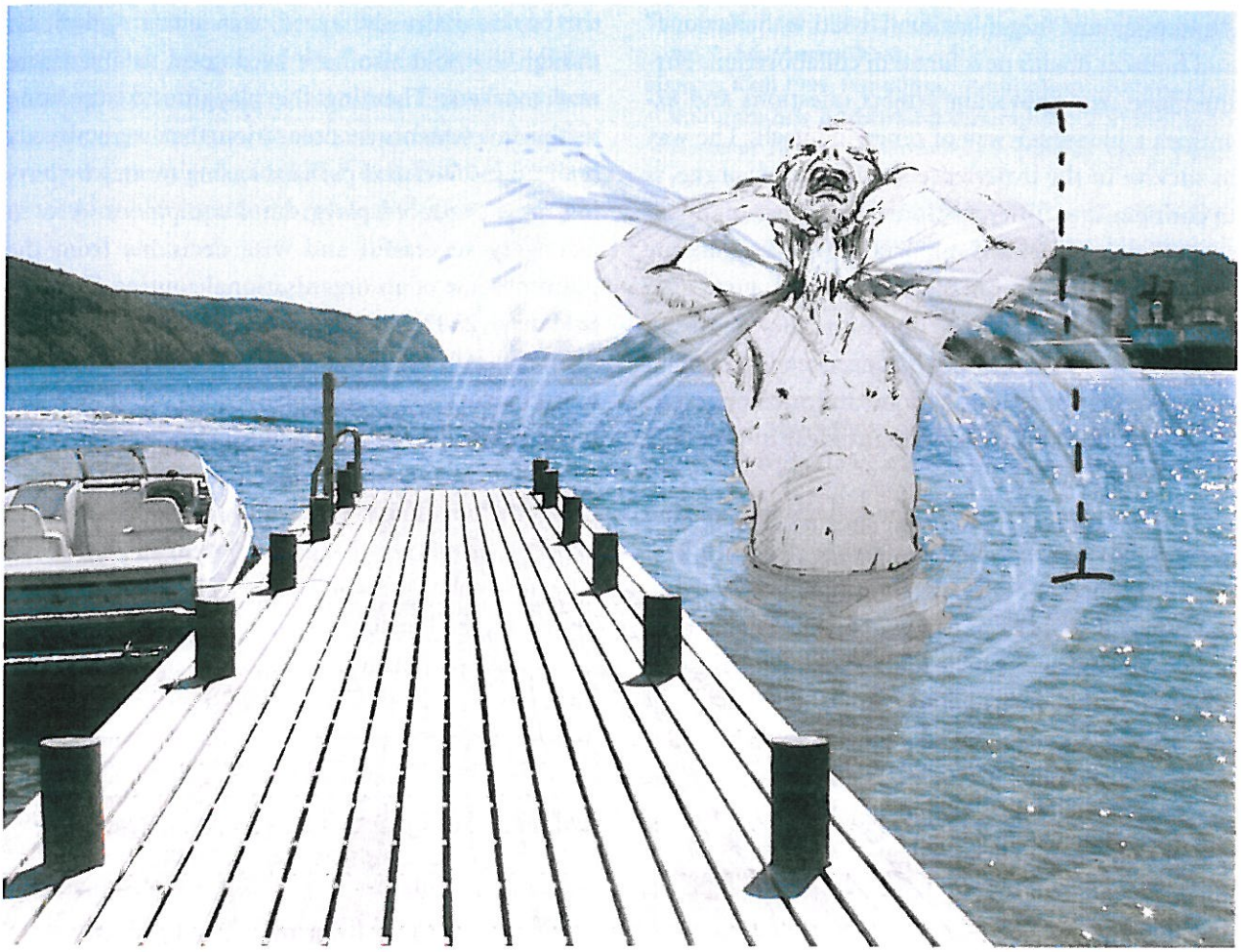
Artwork as Place Branding

When the arts – as promoted in culture policy documents – enter the local experience industry, the quality and ability of art to shock and provoke can collide with a leisure establishment's emotional setting, where the primary feelings are about escapism, hedonism, comfort and ease.

"I'm not interested in any artwork that is not useful, relevant or understandable," the manager had said at an early meeting. He referred to the early phase of building the indoor swimming pool where, as is customary in many Scandinavian businesses, he had felt it necessary to buy art pieces in order to present the cultural capital of the company to the public. This was quite understandable to the artist: "I call art as decoration 'roundabout art'. You know, art as decor is usually to be found in circular junctions where the only artistic meaning is that you can get killed by the piece if you crash." The artist had convinced the manager that not only would he create relevant maritime art that would work as an experiential landscape for fun seeking children and adults, "I am also able to place-brand the natural bay by my spectacular art. The waterworld establishment will not need any marketing – it will sell by itself," he said. The managing director had nodded and seemed satisfied. At this point in the process it seemed that the artist and the manager were speaking the same language, as stated in the culture policy reports, and the artist promised a water sculpture park that would make the whole town proud of its new place identity.

Art has previously been considered an "add on" or token that can be lifted in and out of a context that was never really organised around its intentionality. This "tokenistic approach" to the arts is, as the American tourism and technology researcher Melanie K. Smith (2006: 4–5) clarifies, a widespread societal attitude. Art is viewed as something external and extra. But perhaps by entering the era of experience economy where architecture is the new tool for commercial place branding, art has also changed in value. In current culture policy reports, art is perceived as more than decoration and is supposed to play a key role in an establishment's design.

Yet, when I presented one of the suggestions for a sculpture, more specifically a water fountain named *Family Man Tearing Off His Head* (ill. 7) that would have worked as a dramatic view of splashing water from the waterworld playground and as a place brand, this was perhaps understood but was still disagreeable to the waterworld management. "It makes me feel really bad," the technical manager said. "It is art with uniqueness and function," I tried to explain, disregarding the fact that art sometimes seeks to provoke by its symbolism. The particular piece was not abstract but clearly readable. But it could not be rescued simply because it had a maritime and



Ill. 7: *Family Man Tearing off His Head.* (Artwork: Erik Pirolt)

functional purpose, which the manager had specifically asked for. Instead, the water fountain's possible existential meaning of a father tearing off his head collided with the general and specific expectations of a conventional waterworld's light hearted, family oriented, leisure atmosphere. Thus, a daring, artistic place brand, though informed by both the element of water and by the social setting, appeared to be in bad taste and misplaced in intention.

Routine or Innovation

The waterworld project was defined by an unfruitful asymmetry in its organisational structure. The management and the architect came up with a different waterworld matrix than the artist and I did. This is not necessarily surprising, when viewed in the context of Scandinavian cultural policy, where the primary goal is to democratise diversity and the availability of culture and art through the public sector. The promotion of culture-based innovation projects might be a political ambition, but the language of legislation can be too metaphorical and difficult to apply in a semi-public business setting and in a regional area where the citizens do not necessarily belong to the ideal creative class. Although the trend in current culture policy is that "creativity in artistic practice and business management are roughly the same kind of thing" (McGuigan 2009: 297), the political impact on cultural production inside and outside the experience industry is still in the early phase of exploration (Birch 2008).

A culture-based innovation project opposes "traditional business thinking," as the Danish experience industry researchers Per Dramer and Lars Bo Hansen (2007: 96, 107) explain. In order to produce new combinations of experiences, this type of project

dismantles an "organisational routine behaviour" and replaces it with new forms of collaboration. Furthermore, an innovation project questions and examines a business's way of renewing itself. The way to survive in the experience industry, they argue, is to consider it as different from other types of industries. For example, it is important to investigate the consumer's perception of relevant and surprising edutainment, and also the opposite. They define an "authentic experience" as the consumer's feeling of experiencing something unique and incomparable. This, they explain, is a dominant ideal in this type of industry.

Thus the conduct of business development and the immediate experience design are closely linked. But the choice of materialisation is also adapted to the expectations of a particular consumer's taste. In order to be innovative, the ideal of culture-based innovation is that creative and cultural competence is regarded as a core resource and not as "added on" tokens. If included right at the beginning of the project, innovation happens when dissimilar and incompatible fields of knowledge are brought together, and when an experimental and creative phase is allowed.

A waterworld establishment is not only about sensory experiments and experiential play with natural forces. The decisions made are not necessarily informed by a site specific locality or the uniqueness of a natural and coastal environment. These resources are not automatically circulated in the design of an establishment. More often, the management – as at the waterworld considered here – will choose "business as usual," which means being governed by a budget, a time frame, the need for a primary consumer segment and an estimate of the competition from similar and neighbouring businesses. Thus, the waterworld's choice of an affordable, mass produced playground, and the strategy not to theme in a fully "tropical" way by excluding, for example, palm trees and pirate ships, was good for the budget. Seeking not to disappoint the children's expectations of a nice summer holiday was sane in relation to the competition. Delivering to the children, or the primary consumer segment of the nuclear family that the business already served, was a safe option, although it would also have been good to investigate new markets. Theming the playground according to the investments in decoration that were already realised indoors and perhaps saving money by buying mass produced playground equipment were, in fact, very successful and wise decisions from the point of view of an organisational routine (Dramer & Hansen 2007).

Conclusion

In current culture policy, "culture and art" have become equivalent to regional wealth creation, but it might be too ambitious and an oversimplification to expect that culture-based innovation can work as a cure for global mass tourism. Nevertheless, I have discussed the ideologies of culture policies that aim at locating regions on the map and preparing communities for global competition in the era of postindustrial society. Hence, culture and art are regarded as instruments that will create spectacular places, increase a place's brand quality, support local feelings of identity and encourage young adults to come home.

The experience economy is occupied with the possible business advances in the re-use of more or less imaginative and predictable cultural themes. Thus culture-based innovation implies a discussion of aesthetic values, taste and relevance of storytelling and cultural theming. Additionally, innovation projects can involve using imaginative tools such as sensory ethnography, the coolness of a place or artistic meanings of being in the world. Nevertheless, in this particular project, culture, creativity and the arts were not instrumentalised as innovative starting points; neither were they used to negotiate the commercial and media informed conventions of what family leisure is, and what kind of social feelings a tourism establishment should or should not promote.

My discussion of culture-based innovation took as its point of departure the practical organisation of a project in the small and medium sized regional experience industry. The degree of innovation eagerness, the courage or hesitation, depends on the busi-

ness's organisational routines. But innovation in this sector is also a result of the dedication and efforts of co-workers, managers, investors, board members and local politicians. It could be claimed that this group of people decides the materialisations and sensations of a social and cultural place.

Notes

1 The project (2009–2010) was led by researcher Emma Lind, Agder Research AS, Department of Culture Industries, Kristiansand, Norway. Its partners were Sarah Holst Kjær, BI-Norwegian Business School, Centre for Experience Economy, Kristiansand, the artist Erik Pirolt, Kristiansand, and the waterworld's ("Sørlandsbadet") management and staff. It was partly financed by the Research Council of Norway's regional development fund, VRI-Agder.

2 The beach resort Skallerup Klit in Denmark, has used "association and sport activities" as its theme. This resembles what an average family in Denmark would fill their weekly leisure time with. Playing different sports, producing sweets and small hobby creations, or learning about the natural area's animals and flora, indicate that most activities are designed for educational purposes. Still, the "feeling" of the place connotes a mix of health benefits with experiencing the natural elements of sand and wind and with architectural (Danish) design-awareness. When the managing director of Skallerup Klit was asked about the "un-exotic" or homely theming of the leisure experiences, he answered: "People are very satisfied that our activities remind them of everyday life – they feel safe here."

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