

# What a maritime history!

## The uses of maritime history in summer festivals in southern Norway

### Introduction

This paper focuses on maritime history presented at summer festivals in Sørlandet, southern Norway.<sup>1</sup> During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, festivals became major tourist attractions all over the world.<sup>2</sup> In Norway, the number of festivals grew extensively during the 1970s and 1980s, and particularly during the 1990s and after 2000. According to a recent report, 94 festivals of various sizes were arranged in Sørlandet in 2007. Close to 80 % were situated along the coast, with “festival clusters” in several towns. More than 50 % of the festivals were established after 2000. Researchers use the term “festivalization of the region”.<sup>3</sup> The festivals can roughly be divided into music festivals, religious festivals, sport festivals, and art, culture and heritage festivals, although one single festival may focus on two, three or even all of these elements.<sup>4</sup>

Among the heritage festivals in Sørlandet, there are also several maritime festivals. Most of them were established during the 1970s and 1980s. They build upon traditional maritime images such as shrimp, lobster, crab and salmon, wooden sailing ships and boats, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century shipping and trade, migration, water, traditional folk music and folklore.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I will be using newly-collected empirical data gathered from two of them: the heritage festivals Kjæmpestaden (Giant Town) in Arendal and Kapernatten (Privateer Night) in Farsund. In 2006 and 2007, both festivals included grand outdoor plays

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<sup>1</sup> The region of Sørlandet consists of the two counties of Vest-Agder (165,944 inhabitants by 1 January 2008) and Aust-Agder (106,130 inhabitants by 1 January 2008). Kristiansand, the largest city, had 78,919 inhabitants. Statistisk Sentralbyrå [Statistics Norway], <http://www.ssb.no> 15.11.2008

<sup>2</sup> See Pichard and Robinson 2006: Chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hjemdahl et al 2007 supplemented with my own registrations. Major festival clusters were in Kristiansand (34) and Arendal (15 festivals).

<sup>4</sup> A broad and general definition of a festival is: Official celebration, event, or feast which is arranged regularly (for example, every year), lasting at least two days with exhibitions, plays, and entertainment. The newspaper *Fædrelandsvennen* refers to the great Festival of Britain, 1951, as the earliest example. Antonsen 2005.

<sup>5</sup> The most important maritime heritage festivals in Sørlandet are: Risør Shanty Festival, Risør Trebåtfestival (Wooden Boat Festival, 25,000 visitors annually), Tvedestrand Kystkulturuke (Coastal Culture Week), Skalldyrfestivalen in Mandal (Shellfish Festival, 35,000-40,000 visitors annually), Laksefestivalen in Flekkefjord (Salmon Festival), Kjæmpestaden in Arendal (Giant Town) and Kapernatten in Farsund (Privateer Night).

based on the history of the Napoleonic Wars (1807-1814). Since Tordenskiolddagene (Tordenskiold Days) in Frederikshavn, Denmark, was the main inspiration for Giant Town, I will in addition draw my conclusions on data collected from this maritime summer festival.<sup>6</sup>

In order to determine the purposes and motives lying behind the festivals, I will focus on different aspects of the staging of maritime history at summer festivals. My main research question is: In which ways is the staging of maritime history a strategy in branding and place development? To answer this question, I will focus on the people who arrange the festivals as well as the performers and the audience.

The methodology I will employ is to connect my own observations and qualitative interviews (with local authorities and participants) with different kinds of written sources, among them being the following: newspaper interviews and reports, official statements, prospects and plans, advertisements, etc. I attended Giant Town and Privateer Night in 2006 and Tordenskiold Days in 2007.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that the growth in maritime heritage tourism during recent years may be interpreted as the local communities' responses to (relative) economic deprivation, population decrease and industrial decline. I will start the discussion by referring to Kevin Meethan's analysis of tourism in global society. Another theory I want to employ is Eric Hobsbawm's term "invented tradition". I will argue that local and regional authorities have "invented" traditions and particular stories in order to promote economic and cultural growth, thereby strengthening their competitive edge against, for example, other (rival) communities. The audience and the locals permit these stories to develop from the "real" and authentic history into modern fairy tales – but only to a certain extent. I will also refer to Tim Edensor's discussion of national identity and the politics of memory, Dean MacCannell's term "staged authenticity", Kevin Meethan's theoretical discussion of the term "authenticity", and Erik Cohen's discussion of authenticity and commoditization in tourism.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, I will argue that the staging of maritime history - and particularly the history of the Napoleonic Wars - in these festivals, and their commercial success, reflects a post-modern type of "lifestyle experience" tourism. In the analysis, I will also refer to the Danish "Chief Imagination Officer" Rolf Jensen, using the titles "The Dream Society" and "Storytelling". This, in turn, was further developed into Jan Michael Madsen's term "storyliving".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kjøbenhavn 2006, websites, see references.

<sup>7</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds) 1989, Edensor 1997, MacCannell 1976: 91-107, Meethan 2001: 90-113, and Cohen 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Rolf Jensen 1999 and 2003, Tordenskiolds By, Frederikshavn <http://www.tordenskiold.dk> 10.07. 2007

## **Inventing tradition in postmodern society; authenticity, staged authenticity and heritage**

The maritime past has been reinvented in postmodern society.<sup>9</sup> Postmodernism presupposes a break with the past, as Kevin Meethan states in his analysis of tourism in global society.<sup>10</sup> Norms, standards and hierarchies are no longer correct or incorrect but different and diverse. What has replaced modernism is a recycling of both the past and pastiches of other cultures, a condition of “hyper reality” within which the distinction between objects and their representations is dissolved, leaving everything free-floating as if the quest for some division between the real and the unreal, or even the true and the untrue, or the moral and the immoral, is futile.<sup>11</sup> Globalisation and postmodernism is closely connected. But an overall global political economy is not necessarily leading to a homogenous global culture. On the contrary, local practices can be set in this context.<sup>12</sup> Global movements become moulded and rooted in the locality.

The term “Invented Tradition” was introduced by Eric Hobsbawn in 1983. The idea is that different groups of people often pick up reminiscences of the past and adapt it to present wants, needs and visions. To put it in Hobsbawn’s own words, the references to a (largely fictitious) historical past and old situations are responses to novel situations.<sup>13</sup> He stated that “objects or practices are liberated for full symbolic and ritual use when no longer fettered by practical use”, and stressed the difference between vital, active and living societies and staged authenticity.<sup>14</sup> At the moment they become picturesque, new forces, distinctive from the original, are active.

“Tradition” – as the embodiment of authentic ways of life – has been closely related to authenticity. The term “staged authenticity” in relation to tourism was introduced by Dean MacCannell in 1976.<sup>15</sup> Focusing on the modern disruption of real life and the simultaneous emergence of a fascination for the “real life” of others, and drawing on Erving Goffman’s structural division of social establishments into front and back regions, he redefined the categories “truth” and “reality”. Primitives who live their lives totally exposed to their

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of postmodernism, see Jameson 1991 Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Meethan 2001: 25.

<sup>11</sup> Meethan 2001: 28.

<sup>12</sup> Meethan 2001: 63.

<sup>13</sup> Hobsbawn and Ranger (eds) 1989: 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Hobsbawn and Ranger (eds) 1989: 4. As an example of ‘invented traditions’ he mentions the traditional costumes: “the revival or invention of ‘traditional’ peasant costume among (de facto the richer) peasants (was) indeed adaptations, specializations or conquests of practices originally initiated by the higher social strata.” Hobsbawn and Ranger (eds) 1989: 305.

<sup>15</sup> MacCannell 1976: 91-107. Chapter 5/ Staged Authenticity.

“relevant others”, he wrote, do not suffer from anxiety about the authenticity of their lives. Sightseers or tourists, on the other hand, although motivated by a desire to see life as it was really lived, usually fail to achieve these goals. They have to be content with the obviously inauthentic experiences. “What is being shown to tourists is not the institutional back stage [...]. Rather, it is a staged back region, a kind of living museum [...]”.<sup>16</sup> He suggested a modification of Goffman’s model for the study of tourist settings, both front and back, be treated as ideal poles of a continuum. He introduced the term “stage settings” to describe these “pseudo-events” or intermediary types of social space.<sup>17</sup>

The authenticity debate has progressed considerably during recent decades. Twelve years after MacCannell’s pioneering contribution, Erik Cohen re-examined the basic assumptions regarding “commoditization”, “staged authenticity”, and the inability of tourists to have authentic experiences. In contrast to MacCannell, he suggested that “authenticity” is a socially constructed concept and its social (as against philosophical) connotation is, therefore, not given but negotiable. New cultural developments may also acquire the patina of authenticity over time – a process designated as “emergent authenticity”, he argued. Furthermore, commoditization (defined as a process by which things and activities come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade) may change the meaning of cultural products and add new meaning to old ones.<sup>18</sup> One of his most interesting observations, which may also be related to Hobsbawn’s term “Invented Tradition”, is that commoditization often hits a culture when it is already in decline. Under such circumstances, the emergence of a tourist market frequently facilitates the preservation of a cultural tradition which would otherwise perish. “It enables its bearers to maintain a meaningful local or ethnic identity which they might otherwise have lost”, he states.<sup>19</sup>

In 2001, Kevin Meethan argued that the whole notion of authenticity within tourism analysis is predicted on a false dichotomy between the non-modern, viewed as the authentic, and the modern, viewed as the inauthentic. Accordingly, he stated that it is a fundamental error to assume that there is a universal category of authenticity composed of innate, essential cultural attributes. Authenticity, he argued, needs to be seen as a category that is created and recreated in contingent circumstances.<sup>20</sup> Meethan argued that

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<sup>16</sup> MacCannell 1976: 94.

<sup>17</sup> MacCannell 1976: 100 and 104-105.

<sup>18</sup> Cohen 1988: 371, 374, 380.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen 1988: 382.

<sup>20</sup> Meethan 2001: 90-91.

“Heritage cannot be considered in isolation from both the political and cultural economy, and the processes of commodification implicated in the tourist system. As such, heritage is as much a political as an economic resource which may also act as a marker of identity. Yet heritage is also a product for the tourist market or, to be more precise, the contingent and malleable nature of heritage also means that it is not one product, but many, and as such, is partly determined by the consumer at the point of consumption.”<sup>21</sup>

Notions of heritage can be connected to the political processes involved in creating a national, regional, local or ethnic identity. In turn, this becomes the commodity to be traded in the global tourist market.<sup>22</sup>

Is the discussion of “authenticity” vital? Peter Lyth poses this rhetorical question in a paper focusing on heritage tourism in Robin Hood County, Nottinghamshire, England. He suggests that heritage should allow a more flexible approach towards historical accuracy, allowing the multiple interpretations that are more in keeping with postmodern conceptions of truth and reality. Heritage is not history, he argues, but rather the contemporary use of history. It is not necessarily concerned with what is authentic or historically correct, but presents the past to the public in a manner tailored to contemporary needs and purposes. –“Heritage fulfils the postmodern passion for collecting and consuming individual “experiences” exceptionally well”, he argues.<sup>23</sup>

What characterizes Giant Town in Arendal and Privateer Night in Farsund, two of the festivals which focus on the contemporary use of history? Do they emphasise authenticity? Do they have a flexible approach towards historical accuracy? Do they invent tradition?

## **Privateer Night in Farsund and Giant Town in Arendal**

### **Sørlandet – the centre of Norway’s traditional maritime industries**

Both Giant Town in Arendal and Privateer Night in Farsund have strong references to the region’s maritime history. From the 18th century onwards, and particularly during the 19th century, Sørlandet became the centre of Norway's traditional shipping and shipbuilding industry. In the 1870s, Arendal was Norway's – if not Scandinavia's – largest sailing ship town with around 10% of the national tonnage. But from the late 1870s, an international freight market marked by stagnation and depression in combination with a strong international trend towards steamships hit Norway hard. Sørlandet lost its comparative

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<sup>21</sup> Meethan 2001: 107, referring to Ashworth 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Meethan 2001: 112.

<sup>23</sup> Lyth 2006: 3.

advantages, and had a marked decline in its share of total Norwegian shipping tonnage as well as population during the decades around 1900.<sup>24</sup> In Sørlandet, as well as in the rest of Norway and several other European countries, traditional industries - including ship-building - were further abandoned over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, in the wake of de-industrialisation and concentration, service industries such as tourism grew.

Today, Sørlandet is one of Norway's main summer resort areas, receiving mainly Norwegian visitors. Many summer guests have been regular visitors to southern Norway for many years over several generations, and they return every summer. It is a journey back to the world of their ancestors. It is childhood and family history revised. They have a tendency to construct a romantic past, and for many people, the maritime past of their forefathers, the "days of the white sails", is an essential part of this construction.<sup>25</sup>

### **Privateer Night in Farsund**

How did Farsund (9,392 inhabitants) become Privateer Town?<sup>26</sup> The community's tradesmen introduced the term in 1981. Market Day became Privateer Day, which was subsequently pluralized to Privateer Days.<sup>27</sup> During recent years, the sales market has been arranged for three days in July. The number of visitors has been around 25,000. It attracts both tourists and townspeople. An annual prize, The Privateer Prize, links the term "privateer" to outstanding men and women of Farsund. The prize was founded to honour those who put Farsund on the map and contributed to the town's historical identity. During recent years, there has been a strong focus on the Napoleonic Wars and the district's contributions during the years 1807-1814, particularly as privateers. A wide range of arrangements and institutions have been named and renamed: The Privateer Gospel, The Privateer Kiosk, The Privateer Consult, The Privateer Collection, and The Privateer Gallery, among others.

Kaperspillet (The Privateer Play) was performed for the first time on Privateer Night in July 1996. Since then it has been one of the year's main events in Farsund, according to the home page.<sup>28</sup> A local woman, Helene Evanger, who is originally Dutch and without any formal training in history, and who is often referred to as "the wife of the local doctor", got

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<sup>24</sup> In 1885, 33% of the Norwegian shipping tonnage (net tonnage, sail, steam and motor) was registered in Sørlandet, and by 1925 the region's ship owners managed only 5%. During the second part of the 19th century, Sørlandet had more than 8% of the Norwegian population, in 1920 only 6%. Johnsen 2001: 41.

<sup>25</sup> Johnsen 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Farsund had 9,446 inhabitants 1 January 2006, but in 2008 it had dropped to 9,392. Statistisk Sentralbyrå [Statistics Norway], <http://www.ssb.no>. 15.11.2008

<sup>27</sup> "Privateer" refers to the Napoleonic Wars. When Denmark-Norway entered the war in 1807 on France's side against Britain, privateers became legal.

<sup>28</sup> Kaperdagene [Privateer Days] <http://www.lista-farsund.no/aktiviteter/kaperspill.htm> 1.07. 2006.

the idea in 1995 and took the initiative. She has always been, and still is, *primus motor* behind the event.

The general background of the Privateer Play is the Napoleonic Wars. Denmark-Norway entered the war in 1807 on Napoleon's side against Britain. Several privateers were active in the Skagerrak, and there were numerous battles. In general, the British were superior, but some Norwegian ships managed to capture British men-of-war, or even recapture some Norwegian ships previously caught by the British.

The play is based on an authentic incident whose story Helene Evanger found in a local history book: On 13 September, 1810, the Norwegian privateer "Popham" was captured by an English man-of-war. But only four days later, on 17 September, the ship, which was now called "Oldenburg", was seen outside Loshavn, one of Farsund's outports. The privateer "Veiviseren", with Captain Tønnes Jansen from Farsund at the helm, went out and managed to recapture the ship. All in all, Jansen captured 23 ships during the war, and in January 1811 he received Dannebrog, a distinguished Danish order, for his achievements.

More than 200 volunteers – mostly local inhabitants - participate in the preparation and the staging of The Privateer Play on Privateer Night. Between 7,000 and 8,000 people (mostly locals and Norwegian visitors, but also tourists) gather in downtown Farsund to watch and participate in the spectacular show. The evening programme starts with a costume parade, followed by a recreation of the 1810 incident in the harbour area of downtown Farsund. The show is performed both on land and at sea, with sailing ships and motorboats, guns and cannons, fighting and screaming, battles between frightening British privateers and brave Norwegian sailors. The peak of the show is a grand fireworks display.

### **Giant Town in Arendal**

Since 2005, the festival Giant Town has been arranged in Arendal, the capital of the county Aust-Agder, which covers the eastern part of Sørlandet. Arendal has a population of 40,700.<sup>29</sup> The festival was started in 2004, receiving broad political support and strong municipal involvement. While Privateer Days and Privateer Night are relatively dominant in the festival life of Farsund<sup>30</sup>, Giant Town – being the only maritime history and heritage festival in Arendal – is more a supplement to 14 other smaller and larger festivals and celebrations of all kinds.

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<sup>29</sup> 1 January 2008. Statistisk Sentralbyrå [Statistics Norway], <http://www.ssb.no> 15.11.2008

<sup>30</sup> The only other festival in Farsund is Nordsjøfestivalen (The North Sea Festival) in August/September, with concerts and courses. The festival attracted over 1,000 visitors in 2005.

The name of the heritage festival refers to an ironic poem published in 1887, one year after a financial crash ruined Arendal, which was up to that point in time Norway's leading sailing port. The festival itself, however, celebrates Arendal's proud maritime past and focuses on the most prosperous parts of 19<sup>th</sup> century Arendal with parades, bustling markets and tall sailing ships. Locals and visitors are invited to enter the "dream society" of Arendal: to dress in period costumes – as commoners or the upper class, farmers or fishermen, miners or servants – and "play tourists in their own town".<sup>31</sup>

For two years, 2005 and 2006, the play *Det store Kornopprøret* (The Great Grain Revolt) was performed on a floating outdoor scene in the inner harbour of Arendal during midsummer week as part of the Giant Town festival.<sup>32</sup> In 2005, the sailing ship "Marylin Ann" came from Frederikshavn in Denmark "with grain to the hungry and suffering people of Arendal" (because of the Napoleonic Wars 1807-1814).<sup>33</sup> In 2006, there were several Danish people and ships from Frederikshavn.

The main event during the Giant Town festival week was intended to be the outdoor play. All in all, between 5,000 and 10,000 people attended the festival in 2005 and 2006. An audience of approximately 3,500 people viewed *The Great Grain Revolt* in 2005, but only just over 1,000 in 2006.<sup>34</sup> There are plans for other plays - "good stories" - based on Arendal's history to be performed in the future.<sup>35</sup> However, the 2007 festival was different from previous years. Representatives of several European royal families visited Arendal on 6 July in connection with Queen Sonja's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. Over the course of two days, in pouring rain, downtown Arendal was transformed into one large scene with several stages. A large number of short plays and *tableaus* were staged instead of only one main play. Shanties were sung, and children could play with old-fashioned toys. The audience was invited to participate onboard the sailing ships and along the narrow alleyways among the town's houses. Basically, the same happened in June 2008, although the programme was simpler.

The historic background of *The Great Grain Revolt*, the "privateer drama", is the starvation which took place in Arendal during the summer of 1813, caused by the difficult grain trade between Northern Jutland in Denmark and Southern Norway during the Napoleonic Wars. For centuries coastal Norway had been totally dependent on its grain imports. When Denmark-Norway entered the war in 1807 on Napoleon's side, British men-

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<sup>31</sup> Kjæmpefestaden (festival paper) 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Kjæmpefestaden [Giant Town] <http://www.kjempefestaden.no> 10.07. 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Kjæmpefestaden (festival paper) 2006.

<sup>34</sup> The number of visitors is not clear because the whole downtown Arendal was used as a festival "stage".

<sup>35</sup> Arendal kommune [Arendal Municipality] 2004A, Project Description.



of-war blocked the Skagerrak from the start with great success. The starvation in Norway forced sailors to cross the Skagerrak in their small rowboats and sailing ships in search of grain. However, on their way back home, several ships were caught by British privateers. Norwegian ships, which were active in the grain trade, were sometimes privateers as well.

Even though the play is performed in light of historical events, it has a love story as its central theme: The young and poor boy Henrik Teriesen, whose father has been imprisoned for four years in England because he was caught on his way back home from Denmark with grain, notices the sufferings of the common people, and decides to sail to Fladstrand (Frederikshavn) in Northern Denmark in spite of the British blockade. He also notices the great balls and parties of the upper classes in Arendal, but nevertheless falls in love with the clerk's younger sister, Margrethe. While the poor and hungry people force the authorities to open the warehouses and supply them with grain, Henrik manages to cross the Skagerrak from Denmark with grain. He also crosses the social borders and wins Margrethe in the end.

Characteristic features of the plays of both Farsund and Arendal are that they deal with particularly dramatic parts of the area's maritime history. But are they historically correct?

## **The staging of maritime history – historically correct and authentic?**

### **Privateer Night in Farsund**

How are the historical incidents retold and in which ways are they staged in Farsund? The Privateer Night webpage (which has been previously cited) is correct with regard to the facts, but it only tells parts of the story. Some facts which are not mentioned on this page are:

- The privateer "Popham" was registered in Kristiansand, where all the owners came from.<sup>36</sup>
- "Den veivisende Paquet" recaptured "Popham" along with "Veiviseren". The sloop was registered in Lista outside of Farsund, and owned by people from the district and nearby towns. But a letter dated May 1810 reveals that Knud Ellingsen from Brekkestø (near Lillesand, a great distance from Farsund) was in command of the privateer "Den veivisende Paquet" when "Popham" was recaptured in September 1810.

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<sup>36</sup> Tønnessen 1955: 594. Privateer number 72 "Popham" was two Norwegian Commerselester or 4.5 tons (1 cl = 2.1 tons), with one gun and 12 sailors.

”No other privateer has ever been as famous as this one”, the maritime historian Joh. N. Tønnessen wrote regarding “Den veivisende Paquet” in his thesis.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, it is erased from the historical play. Why? Is it because the captain – the hero – was not from Farsund? As shown, the presentation on the website only reveals parts of the actual historical incidents. Important parts are omitted. But is the staging of this drama historically correct?

Both the regional and the local papers are positive with regard to the staging of the maritime drama. The author of the history of Farsund, a professional historian, on the other hand, has criticised Privateer Night for being too dramatic and not particularly realistic. He points out confusion with regard to time, style, and place.<sup>38</sup> For example, the ships do not only have sails, but also motors. The costumes are not only from the 19th century, but also from later periods and even “timeless” historic costumes. Important performers are Christianssand Artillerie Compagnie (Christianssand Artillery Company) and Arendal Borgerlige Militaire 1805 (Arendal Civil Military Corps of 1805). They come from neighbouring towns and perform there as well as in Arendal and Frederikshavn, Denmark.

### **Giant Town in Arendal**

Giant Town in Arendal has also been criticised. Visitors are invited to imagine Arendal 200 years ago. However, some people argue that central historical facts are incorrect.<sup>39</sup> For example, they mention that wings and decorations are artificial. What about the play The Great Grain Revolt?

Both the festival paper and the website reveal that the hunger was so huge in Arendal during the summer of 1813 that common people gathered on 30 June in order to force the authorities to open the warehouses and supply them with grain. There were riots and shooting, but the common people succeeded in their effort. These historically correct and well-documented facts have inspired the authors, according to the festival paper and the website, into writing a play which goes far beyond what may be found in historical sources. ”We get the chance to experience how life could be in Arendal in 1813, when suffering was great and

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<sup>37</sup> Tønnessen 1955: 586 and 604. Privateer number 19 ”Veiviseren “ and 160 ”Den veivisende Paquet”. The latter, a sloop, weighed 13.5 Norwegian Commerselster or 28 tons, it had 14 guns and a crew of some 30-40 sailors.

<sup>38</sup> Abrahamsen 2007: 382-385.

<sup>39</sup> Litangen 2006: 2, 15-16.

the lack of grain almost total because of the Napoleonic Wars and the blockade.”<sup>40</sup> Some may argue, however, that the freedom of the authors has been taken too far.

An introductory voiceover tells the audience the following information:

”It is Midsummer’s Eve in 1813. [...] The shipowners in town ask the captains to attack British ships. Privateering, which is government-sanctioned piracy, makes the shipowners even richer, the blockade tighter and the distress of the common people – who experience the great differences between rich and poor – even greater.”<sup>41</sup>

The problem is, however, that privateering was forbidden in Denmark-Norway between 11 February and 25 August 1813. Accordingly, there was no Norwegian privateering during June 1813 when the events of the play took place.<sup>42</sup>

In the historical play as well as in the festival as a whole, historical accuracy does not seem to be overly emphasized. The visitors are supposed to find – and imagine - Arendal as it was around 200 years ago, in 1813. But both historical facts and artefacts are incorrect: Although the old wooden architecture of Arendal is “an authentic scenography around the scene of the play”, according to the annual report of the foundation, the ships are much newer, and the costumes are from several time periods, or more often merely imaginative costumes that appear either historical or authentic. When people dressed in “period costumes”, accompanied by Arendal Civil Military Corps of 1805, onboard “Sørlandet” “smelled the ropes and newly washed decks of the sailing ship, and experienced the way people lived and worked on board a 19<sup>th</sup> century sailing ship”, they did not bother worrying about this school ship actually being built in 1927, and never having sailed as a commercial ship.<sup>43</sup>

### **Authenticity**

In both Farsund and Arendal, there is a strong emphasis on local heritage and the history of ordinary people. Festivals are arenas for putting oneself on stage and seeking freedom from traditional roles and role restrictions. Visitors experience heritage by “playing” the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. They move in and out of history. In both towns, the architecture is historical and authentic. Most costumes, cannons, sailing ships and small boats are replicas. But do the visitors always know the difference? The borders between the “authentic” and the “inauthentic”, and between reality and unreality, do not always seem to be clear. However,

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<sup>40</sup> Kjæmpestad 2006: 10.

<sup>41</sup> Asdal and Berg 2005: 2.

<sup>42</sup> Privateering was legal in Denmark-Norway in three periods: From September 1807 until 2 August 1809, from 28 March 1810 to 11 February 1813 and from 25 August 1813 until the war ended by 19 February 1814.

<sup>43</sup> Cited from Arendal kommune 2005.

with reference to Erik Cohen's analysis of authenticity and commoditization, the question should perhaps *not* be whether people do or do not "really" have an authentic experience in MacCannell's sense, but rather what endows people's experience with authenticity in their *own* view. Recreational tourists, Cohen argues, whose concern with authenticity is relatively low, may well accept even a substantially staged product and experience as "authentic".<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, if authenticity is considered negotiable and not given, a cultural product, or a trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic, even by experts.<sup>45</sup> To put it in Kevin Meethan's words, authenticity needs to be seen as a category that is created and recreated in contingent circumstances.<sup>46</sup>

In Farsund and Arendal, the distinction between performers and audience is also diffuse. The festivals do not only include staged but also non-staged performances. The distinction between locals and visitors is not clear, either, because most participants are Norwegian. Some locals "act" as tourists. They are "tourists at home".

The cities of Farsund and Arendal are stages – staging postmodern heritage events. The historical stagings are mixtures of old and new, authentic and inauthentic, and the audience does not always know which is in either category.

Although both Privateer Night with The Privateer Play and Giant Town with The Great Grain Revolt have moved away from historical realities and closer to fairytales, there are certain limits. Because general credibility, a sense of authenticity and the connection to the particular places have to be taken into consideration, there have to be obvious historical references.

### **Storyliving in the dream society**

What are the purpose, the ideas and motives behind this historic plays and the festivals? On 28 January 2005 the foundation Kjæmpestaden (Giant Town) was established. The local authorities as well as politicians were convinced that Arendal needed a heritage festival and a locally based play. The main object of the foundation, according to their statutes, is to promote history as creator of identity in favour of the inhabitants of the town.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the foundation is to promote cultural and historical identity in profile building and experience-

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<sup>44</sup> Cohen 1988: 378 -379.

<sup>45</sup> Cohen 1988: 379.

<sup>46</sup> Meethan 2001: 90-91.

<sup>47</sup> Arendal kommune 2004B and 2005.

based economic development. An annual historical festival is one of the initiatives to “create an interest in a new experience-based economy in the region”. The foundation will also promote cooperation between cultural and commercial interests, both locally and within a Nordic context.

More than anything else, Giant Town is an identity project with a future perspective. The focus on local culture and history may be interpreted as an answer to growing globalisation. When Project Manager Marianne Woie was asked to stress some key words, she mentioned both the authentic, openminded and internationally-oriented town, identity building, optimism, roots, coastal culture, and a future perspective.<sup>48</sup> A main goal is to make the inhabitants of Arendal aware of their rich maritime history. The festival is part of a strategy to establish Arendal as the region’s main cultural centre – not competing with, but rather in contrast to its two neighbours: Book Town by Skagerrak Tvedestrand (member of the International Organisation of Book Towns, IOB) and Writers’ Town Grimstad (hometown of the famous authors Henrik Ibsen and Knut Hamsun). The festival itself is primarily directed towards the inhabitants of Arendal, supplementing several other local festivals. It is a question of branding Arendal in order to establish a strong profile for the town.<sup>49</sup>

The people who suggested arranging the maritime heritage festival in Arendal got the idea in Frederikshavn in Northern Denmark in 2003. In the summer of 2004, 70 people sailed from Arendal to Frederikshavn to join Tordenskiolddage (Tordenskiold Days), in search of inspiration. What did the people from Arendal see in Frederikshavn? They learned about Large-Scale Storyliving.<sup>50</sup> I went to Frederikshavn in 2007 to see for myself.

Frederikshavn on Jutland, Northern Denmark, calls itself Storyliving Community.<sup>51</sup> Since 1998 the town has commemorated Tordenskiold and his relations with Frederikshavn (then called Fladstrand) through the project Tordenskiolds By (Tordenskiold’s Town) – Large-Scale Storyliving.<sup>52</sup> Norwegian-born Peter Wessel Tordenskiold (1691-1720) was an eminent naval officer during the Great Nordic War (1700-1720), and became a heroic figure

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Project Manager Marianne Woie, Arendal Municipality, 14 September 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Arendal kommune 2004A. The Project Description mentions that the festival is directed towards locals, tourists, conference participants, and businesspeople, but in 2005 and 2006, the festival attracted mostly locals, because it was arranged before the school holiday started.

<sup>50</sup> Arendal kommune 2004A. The term “Large-Scale Storyliving” is mentioned in the Giant Town Project Description: “Kjæmpestaden Arendal, part project 2: Historical festival- large-scale storyliving.”

<sup>51</sup> Tordenskiolds By [Tordenskiold’s Town] <http://www.tordenskiold.dk/index.php?zmpage=dsspage&dsspage=45> 10.07. 2007.

<sup>52</sup> The private association Tordenskiolds Soldater Fladstrand [Tordenskiold’s Soldiers Fladstrand], established 8 December 1998, is central in the project. See <http://www.tordenskiolds-soldater.dk/> 10.07.2007.

because of his victories in the service of Denmark-Norway against Sweden.<sup>53</sup> According to “Idea Artillerist” (Project Manager) Jan Michael Madsen, Tordenskiold’s primary virtues were “courage and courage”.<sup>54</sup> A sea battle outside Frederikshavn in 1717 formed the basis of the project in 2005. During the 2006 festival, “a large-scale sea battle” was “reconstructed” as a classical plot with 13 historical ships (but only three of them built before 1900!) in front of some 5,000-8,000 visitors, primarily Danish and other Scandinavians, including one thousand people performing in period costumes.<sup>55</sup> In 2007, the spectacular open air performance “Drømmen om Hvide Ørn” (The Dream About the Ship White Eagle) was staged for the first time. As in Arendal and Farsund, although historical facts and figures form the platform of the festival, historical accuracy is not overly stressed.

Jan Michael Madsen from Frederikshavn, the *primus motor* of The Tordenskiold Days, invented the term “storyliving”, a further development of the Danish “Chief Imagination Officer” Rolf Jensen’s term The Dream Society.<sup>56</sup> Rolf Jensen’s books *The Dream Society* and *Heartstorm* focused on storytelling - ‘the rediscovery of the good story’, the fairytales. Jan Michael Madsen pushes Jensen’s ideas a step further, inviting people to live the story:

The home page of Tordenskiold’s Town contains several essays written by Jan Michael Madsen.<sup>57</sup> Within the project, culture and commercial interests come together. The dream society is here, and Tordenskiold is a strong identity as well as “a good story”, he proclaims. If the inhabitants of a town can come together and celebrate a common historical identity, dress in period costumes and act, then the town itself will be viewed as being one with strong common values. Adapted in the right way, such a festival constitutes a hypermodern commercial tool of attraction as well as sales arguments based upon emotional values, he states. We live in the age of the experience economy. He invites the inhabitants of Frederikshavn as well as visitors to play themselves and be unique within a common framework created during the festival. Referring to Rolf Jensen, he states that Tordenskiold’s Town is The Dream Society for common people.

People take on roles and live the stories in theme parks – or in Arendal and Farsund during the festivals. People come to Farsund and Arendal to invent their own stories and to

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<sup>53</sup> Tordenskiold [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peder\\_Tordenskiold](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peder_Tordenskiold) 10.07.2007

<sup>54</sup> Tordenskiolds By [Tordenskiold’s Town] <http://www.tordenskiold.dk/index.php?zmpage=dsspage&dsspage=99> 10.07.2007

<sup>55</sup> The home page claims that 25,000 visitors join the festival annually, but my own impression is that only 5,000-10,000 joined the festival in 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Rolf Jensen 1999 and 2003, Tordenskiolds By [Tordenskiold’s Town] <http://www.tordenskiold.dk> 10.07.2007

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.tordenskiold.dk/index.php?zmpage=dsspage&dsspage=99> 10.07.2007

play with time, space and identity. The cities are stages where the players get inspiration, where they are influenced. This is storytelling, fairytales, adventure, romance, and emotions. Both Arendal and Farsund are enchanted zones, and they have in their own way adapted to the dream society.

With reference to Tim Edensor's paper on national identity and the politics of memory that centre upon Bannockburn and the Wallace Monument in Stirling, Scotland, I will argue that also Farsund and Arendal have become symbolic sites and centres for the social – and to some extent political – organisation of the regional – if not national – memory.<sup>58</sup> They show contemporary processes of place-production and the construction of identities. The identity of the towns is bound up with the histories that are narrated about them, how the stories are told and which history turns out to be dominant.

With reference to Hobsbawn, I will argue that local authorities in Arendal and Farsund have invented traditions – a largely fictitious historical past - in order to reach certain goals. In both picturesque towns, history lives its own life, more or less independent of historic realities. Locals have (re)invented their maritime traditions. Today, the maritime past is an important element in the building of individual and regional identity. As already shown, neither Privateer Night with The Privateer Play nor Giant Town with The Great Grain Revolt is actually a reconstruction of the past. This is not the historians' precise descriptions and analyses, but local people's interpretation of history. The people in Farsund and Arendal interpret the past selectively, and the selection as well as the presentation of the past is guided by present interests and present conditions.

### **Why maritime history? Why the Napoleonic Wars?**

In Farsund and Arendal, the heritage festivals are part of the authorities' commercialisation and branding strategy. Why is maritime history such an important element in this strategy? During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sørlandet was the core district of Norway's shipbuilding and shipping industry. Shipping marked the region for centuries. Maritime history and coastal culture are still important parts of the identity of southerners. Furthermore, maritime history makes general references to authenticity, an open and internationally-oriented culture, economic growth, optimism, and roots – all positive branding values. No wonder, then, that maritime history is selected. Furthermore, a growing focus on local culture and a well-known

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<sup>58</sup> Edensor 1997.

history may be interpreted as being the answer to – or perhaps a protest against – growing globalisation.

Thus, maritime history is a treasury for the staging of postmodern heritage. However, neither in Arendal nor in Farsund has privateering during the Napoleonic Wars 1807-1814 been particularly important, historically speaking. The heydays of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a booming shipping industry, were much more important - economically, socially, demographically and with regard to architecture. Why then focus on this turbulent period of only seven years?

- It is not regarded as dangerous or improper to stage incidents from the Napoleonic Wars, contrary to, for example, the Second World War.
- The Napoleonic Wars are well known in Norway. Many people have their family history connected to this particular war – shipping and trade, privateering, starvation, imprisonment as prisoners of war (POWs) in Great Britain, etc.
- Dramatic incidents from this particular war are suitable for visualisation, as plays and reconstructions. People can easily participate – they can “stage” themselves.
- The Napoleonic Wars include general references to traditional values and roots, like maritime history in general.
- Stories from the war can easily be structured as classical fairytales or romances. Such a story has both a goal and a moral: good fights evil, and the latter surrenders in the end. This expectation lies at the heart of the story from the start. The explanation lies in the story itself, in the intrigue of the romance.

The main reason for focusing on this short period in history is that heroes from the Napoleonic Wars – sailors and privateers as well as POWs - exhibit several key elements of the new heritage discussed above. Both Arendal and Farsund have put heroes, legends and episodes from this period into very contemporary figures and events. Stories from the Napoleonic Wars - brave sailors challenging their destiny, fighting and conquering the enemies and winning fortunes – are attractive to societies looking for attention and fighting to defend or revive their local economies.

## **Conclusions**



In this paper I have focused on maritime history presented at the summer festivals of Giant Town in Arendal and Privateer Night in Farsund. The festivals may be interpreted as the creation of success stories with fairytale plots: They contain strong values, roots, history, heroes and enemies. They contain conflicts, but also solutions.<sup>59</sup> The name of the festivals themselves contains a high level of self-esteem. The festivals are rooted in regional history, particularly maritime history. The Napoleonic Wars, which is the general historic reference as well as the historical background of the plays, had an abundance of heroes and enemies alike. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Arendal really was a “giant town” with a prosperous shipping industry. The privateers of Farsund became famous during and after the Napoleonic wars.

In Farsund as well as in Arendal, Norwegians fight the British enemy. But this is not what the plays are actually about. In Arendal, the local economy declined from 1886 onwards, and the situation is not without its problems today. For example, Arendal lost one of the campus locations of University of Agder to neighbouring town Grimstad in 2006.<sup>60</sup> Kristiansand is Sørlandet’s largest city, and always “wins”, according to second-place finisher Arendal. Farsund faces the threat of economic marginalisation and declining population. The town resembles an outpost more than a town, some social scientists argue.<sup>61</sup> It is situated far from the vital and growing centre of the county, Kristiansand and the surrounding area.

One way of confronting a poor destiny is to construct a romantic plot with a positive solution lying ready in the emplotment. Thus, on a superior level, these are the stories of Arendal and Farsund, formerly wealthy maritime communities now facing serious threats. On this level, both plays tell the audience: Go out and fight for your town! Show that you are willing to fight for our future! Only then will we manage to regain our former glory. Only then will we recover. This is a message from locals to locals. Accordingly, both performers and the majority of the audience are supposed to be locals and former locals (now back home on holiday). And most of them are. In this perspective, it is understandable that both home pages and festival papers are written only in Norwegian.

The growth in heritage festivals during recent decades may be interpreted as the local communities’ responses to (relative) economic deprivation, population decrease and industrial decline. It has become part of the authorities’ commercialisation and branding strategy. The festivals can be viewed as a form of response to social crisis – a tangible expression of

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<sup>59</sup> Jensen 2003: 59 and 95-96.

<sup>60</sup> Universitetet i Agder 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Knudsen 2004.

economic and spatial change and transition, as David Pichard and Mike Robinson note.<sup>62</sup> Here festivals are used to mobilise, negotiate and test new forms of discourse to make the new social reality meaningful. Furthermore, heritage has become a political and an economic resource which also acts as a marker of identity, as Kevin Meethan has argued.<sup>63</sup> Local and regional authorities have “invented” traditions and suitable stories in order to promote economic growth and cultural consciousness, and strengthen the communities’ position in the region. The audience and the locals permit these stories to develop from the “real” and “authentic” history into modern fairytales, even though a basic sense of reality and authenticity is important. The staging of history and heritage is, above all, guided by present needs and future perspectives.

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<sup>62</sup> The authors mention three different types of social crisis, and the festivals are broadly viewed as a form of response. Pichard and Robinson 2006: 5.

<sup>63</sup> Meethan 2001: 107.

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## **Illustrations:**

### **1 (Map)**

Sørlandet (272,000 inhabitants) is situated in the southernmost part of Norway. Along the coast, by the river outlets and ports, there are several towns, among them Arendal and Farsund. There are also several villages and outports. They are all characterised by their traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture.

### **2 (Kaperspillet / Kaperdagene)**

This advertisement in a local brochure announces The Privateer Play and The Privateer Days 2006 in Farsund. Privateers are ready to attack the British enemy.

### **3 (Kjæmpestaden)**

In this brochure from 2006 people are invited to experience Giant Town in Arendal. The Danish King is coming, are you? Join the cruise through Arendal's history! People are invited to busy markets and privateer drama - to a place where history lives.