

# Narratives of Rural Hotels in Norway

*A balancing act between being daring and cautious*

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# Sogn og Fjordane – a rural region

- **Population about 100 000 inhabitants**
- **Few, if any urban centres**
- **Still some agriculture and forestry, but in decline**
- **Young people leave for education, few of them return to the home region**
- **The tourism industry suffers from high degree of seasonality in demand**
- **Main season April-September**

# The rural hotels in this region

- **Located in small villages at crossroads**
- **Developed slowly from guest houses and into hotels**
- **Reflecting local architecture in Swiss style; light yellow painted wooden buildings**
- **Family owned for generations**
- **Various integration with the local society**

## The rural hotels after WW II

- **Group tourism boomed from the 1970s and became an important market**
- **Many rural hoteliers expanded and built block buildings in functionalist style that became popular among the guests due to:**
  - Modern comfort elements such as elevator and private bathrooms
  - Safety. Hotel fires at wooden hotels had caused a fear among guests. Block buildings were the preferred accommodation.

# Rural tourism in a transition phase from the 1990s

- A changing market with increasing interest in history, culture and activities. Larger willingness to pay. The suppliers experience larger competition, larger demand for coordinated products and cooperation. A need for more sophisticated with Internet and social media.
- Group travel becomes less popular from the 1990s. The number of individual guests at the hotels increases
- The travel pattern changes from round trips to using the rural hotels as a base for excursions in the region
- The 1980s represents both a peak and a decline in guest nights at rural hotels. Signs of a small increase from 2000 and onwards. A clear polarization between city hotels and rural hotels. Still, some rural hotels perform well.

## Research questions

- **What are the perceived challenges of rural hoteliers from the 1950s and up til today? How are these challenges being met by the owners of the rural hotels?**
- **How are the perceived challenges reflected in the products of the rural hotels?**
- **What are the characteristics of the adaptive capacity of the rural hotel owners?**

# Method and theory

- **«Would you really like me to tell the story? OK then, I'll do it!»**
- **Family firm resilience**
  - Reservoir of individual and family resources that cushions the family firm against disruptions. Individual and collective creativity used to solve problems and get work done
  - Human, social and financial capital
- **But, why do they bother?**



# The hotel narratives

- **The entrepreneurial narrative**
  - «We must always be innovative»
- **The family business narrative**
  - «This is our contribution»
- **Balancing the tight-rope narrative**
  - «Our biggest challenge today is the mismatch between income and expenses»

# Findings, so far

- **Perceived challenges**
  - A constant balancing act between being daring and cautious
- **Shift in product**
  - From seeing to doing
  - Increased awareness of culture and history
- **Why did they bother?**
  - Identity
  - Attachment

# Thank you for your attention!

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