

Palm Beach and Naval Battle

- Events and Experiences in a Danish Fringe Area

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TOPIC: DESIGNING THE EXPERIENCE CITY

Abstract:

The city of Frederikshavn has in recent years established itself as a city of events and experiences. Despite the Scandinavian geography, the city yearly establishes a palm beach – **Palm Beach 9900 FRH** - with reference to a southern holiday paradise. They also arrange a two day 18th century naval battle called the **Days of Tordenskiold** (Danish: Tordenskjolddagene) where the city celebrates its naval history. These events are mixed with visits of celebrities like Bill Clinton and other events and initiatives - and the city seems to be something out of the ordinary.

Frederikshavn is situated in a fringe area of Denmark with a declining population. Further, in the 1990s, the city of Frederikshavn went through rough times with the closing down of big industries and a following high rate of unemployment in the blue collar workforce. This focus on events and experiences shall be seen

as a way out of this crisis – finding alternatives to a formerly great production and maritime industry. The city's key word is experience economy, and the many events and experiences are seen as a way of positioning the city on the map of Denmark – standing out from the crowd. The question is now whether it is succeeding or whether Frederikshavn, on the altar of experience, becomes a shallow FUN city without other intentions than to entertain?

This paper will try to examine the city of Frederikshavn and all its events and experiences and through this discuss the impact of this focus on leisure.

Keywords:

experience economy, fringe area, transformation, events, decline, leisure

Events and Experiences in Frederikshavn

The year is 1717 and the sailing vessel *the Worm* is in battle during the Great Nordic War¹. It is a vital naval battle between Danes and Swedes near Frederikshavn². The canons are ignited and the air is foul. The Danes are led by the famous naval hero Tordenskiold³.

In truth, however, it is a summer day in June 2007, and what is going on is the construction of a naval battle revolving around the Great Nordic War and letters written by this famous Tordenskiold⁴ (Days of Tordenskiold, www.tordenskiold.dk). The event is called Days of Tordenskiold and can be described as a living historic presentation (Nordjyske Stiftstidende, www.nordjyske.dk, Sep. 4th 2005). The event celebrates this Tordenskiold's relation to Frederikshavn, even though this relation, in historical facts, is sparse. But the event is a success. It started in 1998 as an idea of a local teacher at the production school in Frederikshavn, and from being a local small-scale event, it is now a huge event in Frederikshavn where more than 1000 participants from all over Scandinavia dress up in costumes from the 18th century and which about 18,000 viewers visit during a couple of days in June each year.

Not far from here, further up the shore, women are sunbathing in small bikinis under the shadow of 90 palm trees, and men are playing beach volley or sitting at the beach bar. The palms are waving in the western wind, the ocean is blue and the sand dunes are white. It is Costa del Frederikshavn, or Palm Beach 9900 FRH, the holiday paradise of the north as it is called. The title, Palm Beach 9900 FRH, reminds those of us who were young in the 1990s of the title of the then must-see TV-soap Beverly Hills 90210. Palms do not normally grow at these latitudes, but in Frederikshavn they have been imported to create the right, exotic, southern mood, and it is no longer necessary to drive to the south to experience a charter-paradise.

The Palm Beach 9900 FRH is a project under the municipality's department for parks and roads. The project saw the light of day in 2004

and, according to the department for parks and roads the Palm Beach was just what Frederikshavn was missing.

These two constructed events stand in stark contrast to each other, and they seem to have a somewhat schizophrenic character – the 18th century naval battle and the summer paradise – taking place at the same time in the same city only a few hundred meters from each other; One is a transformation of a typical Danish east coast beach. This typical beach is branded with a new name and exotic equipment and has become a place with a different identity than other places along the Danish shore. Even though the palms are hibernating elsewhere in the wintertime the place name and thereby its place identity is Palm Beach 9900 FRH. The other is a festival that transforms the city of Frederikshavn to an 18th century city. This festival is not as the palm beach physically present all year but is an staging of a certain atmosphere and mood that takes place just a couple of days a year. Due to the massive exposure these events have become synonymous with Frederikshavn.

And these two events do not stand alone. A long row of different events and experiences can be listed when looking at the city of Frederikshavn. To this list one might add the visit of the former US president Bill Clinton. He gave a lecture in Frederikshavn on September 29th 2006. This was huge for a small Danish provincial town. The event gave rise to a lot of publicity, and in Frederikshavn people are still talking about using the Bill Clinton effect in a strategic manner. The city has also built some buildings that can accommodate all the events and experiences that take place in the city. The city has gone far in the construction of a house of music (Danish: *det musiske hus*), and the development of a huge sports facility, the Arena Nord, where the headline is health, sports and experiences for all (The Municipality of Frederikshavn, www.frederikshavn.dk). The city has also been nominated Christmas City of 2007 by the Santa Claus association. This means that during the summer, Santas have been gathering in the city centre. Finally, the light festival, Light Visions, lit up Frederikshavn

¹The Great Nordic War took place in the period 1700-1720

²Frederikshavn was at the time of the Great Nordic War and Tordenskiold named Fladstrand

³Tordenskiold is a Danish/Norwegian sea hero with the name Peter Wessel

⁴The days of Tordenskiold take point of departure in 32 letters that Tordenskiold wrote to Ankers v. Fladstrand in the year 1717. www.tordenskiold.dk

in the cold and dark days of November 2006, where international light artists among others decorated the buildings of the city with different kinds of light (The chamber of commerce FREDERIK, www.frederik-frederikshavn.dk).

The latest plan in Frederikshavn is the development of a golf and holiday resort called Palm City Golf & Family Resort. The project can be seen as a continuation of the Palm Beach, and the resort is within walking distance from the Palm Beach. Behind this project is the group Holiday Invest A/S and the Icelander Siggí Strendeng. The project contains a golf course, a water world and 700 holiday homes. At about one billion Danish Kroner, it is the biggest investment in the history of North Jutland tourism. The project started in 2007 and the plans are that the entire project will be finished by spring 2013 (Palm City Golf & Family Resort, www.palmcity.dk). As a way of branding the project, the investors have succeeded in entering into a contract with the famous golfer Colin Montgomerie in the construction of the golf course, and the golf course will come to carry the name "Montgomerie Course at Palm

City Frederikshavn, Denmark" (Nordjyske Stiftstidende, www.Nordjyske, July 15th 2007).

All of the above and many other things are developed in the hope of attracting economy and people from near and far to visit and settle down in the city of Frederikshavn. The city wants to stage itself as a city of events and experiences, and the city has lofty intentions of being at the front of the areas of culture and tourism. The Municipality of Frederikshavn wants to be and to appear as a dynamic and innovative municipality that dares and wants development (The Municipality of frederikshavn, www.frederikshavn.dk). All ideas and thoughts are welcome says the mayor to the Danish newspaper Politikken in 2005 (Politikken, www.infomedia, section 1, May 19th 2005, 17). And no idea seems to be too far fetched or too crazy. The key word is experience economy. The many events and experiences are perceived as a way of positioning the city on the map of Denmark standing out from the crowd – the question is then whether the experience economy is a successor whether, on the altar of experience, Frederikshavn becomes a shallow

*Entertainment has concurred Frederikshavn! Palm Beach and Days of Tordenskiold are just two of the many events it is possible to experience in the city of Frederikshavn.
Photo:
Frederikshavn Tourist Office*



FUN city without other intentions than to entertain? The many events and the uncritical realization of all events no matter the content, do, in my opinion, bring an ironic light over the city. Is the only solution for a town placed in the outskirts of Denmark to serve as a leisure landscape for temporary users? And is there in this transformation no critical distance to what is created?

Frederikshavn - a Fringe Area

The city of Frederikshavn is situated on the northeast coast of Denmark; near the top where the waters of Skagerak and Kattegat meet. Unlike other cities in its vicinity, Frederikshavn is not characterised as a scenic place with beautiful nature. Instead, Frederikshavn is a working class port city of approximately 23,499 inhabitants in 2007 (Statistics Denmark, www.statistikbanken.dk). The city is located between the high culture and scenic nature of Skagen and the educational and regional centre of Aalborg. Throughout the history of Frederikshavn, the port has been a dynamo, and it has developed from being a small fishing community to becoming a port city with shipyards, engine factories, freight transportation, fishing and fish exports, and ferry services. The port is still the main workplace in the city where different maritime businesses are located. Some of the most important sources of workplaces are the ferry services from Frederikshavn to Norway and Sweden; the naval base, and Man B&W Diesel (The Municipality of Frederikshavn, www.frederikshavn.dk).

Geographically Frederikshavn is situated in, what could be characterized as, a fringe area. Even though Frederikshavn is not an outskirt area by National Planning Report definition from 2006, the city is still facing some of the same problems as the outskirt areas⁵. The geographical location in a region facing a population decline is not a factor that contributes to the development of Frederikshavn. An increasingly unequal development both economical and population-wise is emerging in Denmark which engenders an urban concentration process in the economic growth regions on Zealand and in East Jutland (Tietjen 2006)

and a de-concentration process in the geographic outskirts of the national territory from Lolland-Falster over South Funen and West Jutland to North Jutland. This development is primarily caused by structural changes in the primary and secondary economic sectors, as well as, the shift from industrial production to knowledge and information driven businesses (Holst Laursen and Tietjen 2008). Agriculture and fishing industries, as well as, industrial production which are traditionally strong in the outskirt areas offer less job opportunities than previously, and the increasing number of knowledge based jobs are concentrated in the bigger cities (Holst Laursen and Tietjen 2008).

Frederikshavn is an example of how these structural changes can affect a city. From being a proud fishing and maritime production city, Frederikshavn currently has the status of being a plummeting industrial town in the periphery of Denmark. The population projection in Frederikshavn indicates a continuous decline of the population in the municipality where the population in 2030 will have declined from 62,877 to 57,558 inhabitants in 2007 (Statistics Denmark, www.statistikbanken.dk). During the last two decades, Frederikshavn has faced problems. Especially the 1990s was a rough period for the city. In just a few years the city lost a total of 7,500 workplaces (Politiken, www.infomedia, section 1, May 19th 2005, page 17). Doomsday prophecies were hanging over the city. The maritime businesses in Frederikshavn were experiencing bad times; the fall of the city started with the closure of the city's biggest employer, the shipyard of Danyard, in 1999. The closure resulted in the release of 1500 people from the yard which resulted in even more unemployment in the rest of the city. On top of that, the EU countries came to the agreement that from 1999 they would discontinue the tax free sale, which, in turn, stopped the flow of Swedes coming to the city for shopping. Thus, bringing a good business opportunity for the city to an end (Politiken, www.infomedia.dk, section 1, May 19th 2005, 17)⁶.

Thus, Frederikshavn is an area that has to make an even bigger effort in order to attract business and people to the city. And looking at

⁵The National Planning report defines outskirt area to be commuting catchment areas without cities with more than 20 000 inhabitants (Miljøministeriet, 2006)

⁶One of the initiatives made to support a development in Frederikshavn was the construction of a motorway from Frederikshavn to Aalborg. This motorway should support the ferry services both in addition to freight and tourism. Thus, in 1996 the motorway between Sæby and Frederikshavn opened and in 1999 the entire motorway from Frederikshavn to Aalborg was finished making it possible to be easily connected to the rest of Denmark (www.vejdirektoratet.dk).

the unemployment rate of the last 10 years, Frederikshavn has been struggling with high unemployment. In the first quarter of 1996, the unemployment in Frederikshavn was 15.7% compared to the national average of 10.1% (Statistics Denmark, www.statistikbanken.dk). In the final quarter of 2006, the unemployment had fallen to 6.2 %, but the national average at the time was only 3.7% (Statistics Denmark, www.statistikbanken.dk). So, in relation to the general unemployment situation in Denmark, unemployment in Frederikshavn continues to be very high.

From Shipyard to Host City

The National Planning Report (2006) requests the municipalities in the Danish outskirts to focus on the natural qualities in a development of these declining fringe areas, but, as mentioned earlier, Frederikshavn does not have such scenic natural resources. The city's way of trying to rise again is, thus, to create a new city-brand and turn to the creation of an experience economy. Therefore, the city of Frederikshavn tries to change the bad times to new and improved times through a deliberate investment in culture, leisure, tourism, conferences and innovation. This new image is emphasized with the new slogan "from shipyard to host city" (Danish: fra værfts til værfts by). This new slogan covers the transformation from production industry to experience industry where the experience economy is the new source of income for the city.

The city of Frederikshavn wants to tell exciting stories in order to attract new visitors and residents to the city. For one thing, Frederikshavn sees a potential in the many Swedes and Norwegians that every day come with the ferry. Normally, these people have not been able to drive out of Frederikshavn quickly enough, and the municipality will like to attract them to the city (Ugebrevet A4, www.infomedia.dk, Sep.27th 2004, 12). And some things must have succeeded; 5000 jobs have been regained in Frederikshavn after municipal investments in culture and private investments in new businesses (Politiken, www.infomedia.dk, section 1, May 19th 2005, 17).

Thus, Frederikshavn uses the construction of all kinds of events as a strategy for creating development in a city that is struggling with decline in economy and population. This event-city strategy is one of many that can be applied



*Frederikshavn is situated in the northern part of Denmark far away from the dynamic centers of Copenhagen and Aarhus.
Illustration: Lea Holst Laursen*

in declining areas. Through my research of shrinking territories, I have looked at possible ways of creating new development. Other used strategies in Denmark are landscape strategies, tourism strategies, second home strategies, rural area renewal strategies and strategic profiling with a focus on place-specific potential etc. Frederikshavn gives a proposal on how a small city in a fringe area can use experience economy or FUN as a strategy in order to position the city in the national development. The use of events is courageous as the tags of experience economy and event-city are often related to bigger cities with more possibilities. Besides the municipality, a main actor in the realization of all the different events is the company Frederikshavn Event. The outline for this organization was drawn up by politicians and businessmen in 2004 (Frederikshavn Event, www.frhevent.dk). Frederikshavn Event is a network organization financed by central actors in Frederikshavn, and it is the driving force behind the many events in Frederikshavn. The main actors that support the Frederikshavn Event are the hotels of the city, the shipping companies, the Arena Nord Foundation, the chamber of commerce FREDE-RIK, the Frederikshavn tourist association and the municipality of Frederikshavn. The main goal of the organization is to attract activities to Frederikshavn.

A culture of FUN⁷

Tracy Metz writes in her book *FUN! leisure and the landscape* that entertainment has concurred the Netherlands (Metz, 2002); this could also be said about Frederikshavn – *entertainment has concurred Frederikshavn!*

Frederikshavn's focus is very much determined on leisure in many different forms and it is thought that a culture of FUN has a great economic potential (Metz, 2002, 8). Events pop up like mushrooms in Frederikshavn without any considerations of the character and form of any given event. Frederikshavn is not being genteel. Everything is possible and there does not seem to be any critical attitude towards the content and character of the events and their influence on the city. In the name of events and the experience economy, the city of Frederikshavn adapts to the events and the city seems disneyfied⁸ (Metz, 2002). The city is "constructed" to fit a certain purpose and a certain atmosphere depending on which event is taking place. E.g. Frederikshavn is constructed into something like a Spanish summer paradise and an 18th century folk museum which are used regardless of the occasion; like when a couple of seamen dressed up with swords and wigs pop up at a conference at the Art Museum in Aalborg to make awareness about Frederikshavn. These events are supposed to give the city a certain brand, but it seems as though the events have taken over the city and that the only purpose is to entertain. The real image or soul of the Frederikshavn of the year 2007 seems, therefore, difficult to find. In the worst case one could say that Frederikshavn has escaped the image of being a dying and crude harbour city, but has transformed into is a shallow event-city where the events do not have anchorage in the city. It is okay, that a city wants to entertain, but to solely look for FUN does not seem sustainable and good for the city.

But maybe the city of Frederikshavn like other cities of its kind does not find this disneyfication brought by a number of "crazy" events desirable. It is just a bitter necessity in order to create the jobs and development that used to exist within the production industry (Metz, 2002, 165). The industrial city has been dismantled and as a replacement strategy, cities become scenes for events, meaning that the industrial society has been followed by the rise

of the experiential society (Marling & Zerlang 2007:6).

Professor Jens F. Jensen from Aalborg University researches in what makes events a success. When looking at the Days of Tordenskiold, he thinks that it has become a project where the locals are involved and their enthusiasm and joy of being a part of the event is what makes it an attraction for thousands of visitors even though the Days of Tordenskiold do not have a strong, authentic force of attraction in the sense that Tordenskiold did not have much of a connection to Frederikshavn (Nordjyske Stiftstidende, www.nordjyske.dk, Oct 30th 2007). What has happened is that the small history of Tordenskiold coming to Frederikshavn has been added the right amount of amusement and escalated into a huge festival. Another factor that makes the Days of Tordenskiold popular is the fact that "the past has become popular again, or at least, the picture of a past that lies somewhere between opportunism and honesty, between commerce and history" (Metz, 2002: 165). This means that the right mix of entertainment and history can be a useful cultural heritage when famous enough to be worth its weight in gold. But there is the risk of transforming regional folklore into fakelore (Metz 2002)!

The Palm Beach is another event, and it is difficult not to have an ironic distance to it. According to Jens F. Jensen, the Palm Beach is about constructing an attraction and blowing it up big (Nordjyske Stiftstidende, www.nordjyske.dk, Oct 30th 2007). The municipality is aware of the way some people look at the project, but they are confident in their decision and do not see it as a prank of some kind. On the contrary, they have pride in their voices when saying that crazy ideas become reality in the city. Even though it can be seen as a funny idea, the project has become quite a success, and e.g. the ferry service Stena Line uses the Palm Beach in their advertisements because it attracts a lot of people from Norway and Sweden (Palm Beach, www.palmestranden.huygens.pil.dk). The Palm Beach has transformed an ordinary Danish shore into a summer public domain for mostly young people. It is a place where both the locals and tourists can hang out and meet, and that is an asset in a city where there are not that many opportunities for the young.

⁷This headline is taken from Tracy Metz [2002] *Fun! leisure and the landscape*, Rotterdam, Nai Publishers, pp. 8

⁸Disinify and disneyfication refers to cities that become a theme park like Disney Land, see Metz, 2002

Another interesting thing coming out of the Palm Beach is the plans for the Palm City Golf & Family Resort. This project could be an asset for the city of Frederikshavn and the politicians in Frederikshavn are already thrilled [Nordjyske Stiftstidende, www.nordjyske.dk, Feb. 15th 2007]. It is a huge project both financially and in terms of size. With the location in Frederikshavn and on the specific site it is placed away from natural beauty and thereby does not affect the natural value of the area. The idea is not unique for Frederikshavn; a similar project is in the development phase in Billund where there are plans for building a new holiday resort called Lalandia Billund near Legoland. What is good about the Palm City resort is the idea of creating a train stop at the resort, thus making it possible to get to Skagen in only 10min. Also, the exclusive character and the Montgomery golf course seem to be elements that can brand the project. But, in order for such a project to be good, it has to be integrated into the city and not just be an alien with no relations to the city itself. The city and the resort have to benefit from each other and create a sense of fellowship; created by e.g. functional and infrastructural relations.

Closing remarks

The city of Frederikshavn does not seem to think there is an end to the adventure of the event-city. There are always new (utopian) ideas waiting to be realised. The mix of all sorts of events and their very different natures gives the city a character of being constructed or staged. And sometimes the different events do not correspond. E.g. the clash between Copacabana-like Palm Beach 9900 FRH and the 18th century naval battle brings an ironic light over the city. It is two fairytale settings, different in time and place, being merged together.

There are many cities that bet on events and fun as a strategy for city development in the contemporary society. But the ones that seem to actually benefit from this experience economy and succeed in creating sustainable development (create new jobs, economical development etc.) are the ones that combine FUN with something else ranging from local potentials to education. Frederikshavn has until now mainly developed an incoherent line of events which seems to have no overall strategic plan and with sparse relation to the historic and spatial identity of Frederikshavn. On the contrary, if the municipality of Frederikshavn, in collaboration with other actors in the city, makes an overall strategy for how Frederikshavn can develop events that has an educational or perceptual purpose that exceeds mere entertainment value, then the city might create something out of the ordinary which is sustainable and innovative.

When studying the future ideas for new events in Frederikshavn it seems, that these follow the same track as previous events with new events on an extraordinary FUN scale. The idea of a ski resort, which was launched several years ago, still haunts [Nordjyske Stiftstidende, www.nordjyske.dk, Oct. 25th 2007] and could be the next event in the continuously escalating event-city of Frederikshavn. The investors behind the Palm City Golf & Family Resort are willing to collaborate with the people behind the plans of an all-year alpine ski resort in a location called Flade Bakker. The municipality has already written it into the local plan and a road named "ski resort road" is established [Politiken, www.infomedia.dk, section 1, May 19th 2005, page 1]. So maybe in a few years it will be possible to take a fast ride down the snow-covered slope with wind in the face followed by a beer at the local "authentic" Austrian Bierstube before putting on the swimsuit and entering the Copacabana mood of the Palm Beach.

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