

# How a lawyer creates a unique exhibition in Hardangervidda

Letter from Per Lykke, chairman of the board at Hardangervidda Natinal Park Centre.

I am a lawyer in Norway and a local/regional politician. Few years ago I was appointed as the chairman of the board of the Hardangervidda national park centre to solve big economic mess related to the centre. After a long negotiating process with the banks and new contributions from the owners we managed with fresh capital to get rid of considerable debts for the company and make a fresh start.

Since we were a “new born” national park centre in Norway’s largest national park, The Hardangervidda national park, we realized that we had to put ourselves on the map by making an new suitable exhibition. I was asked to be the project leader of making such an exhibition.

I had no prior experience in making exhibitions, but I have always from early childhood been interested in exhibits and art. In my youth I worked with artistic multimedia and music groups from the Art Academy in Oslo. I have always been very fond of nature and hunting has been a big part of my life. As a result I felt I had a fairly good background experience to take on the job and I possibly had a different perspective, compared to the natural scientists, which might add value to the exhibition?

I had been visiting several national park centres abroad in Germany (Bayerische walde), Scotland and in Colorado in USA. All those visits had inspired me, so early on I had a kind of picture what a proper exhibition should look like and



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which information it should contain. I had also visited most Norwegian national park centres, and to be honest, I wasn’t very impressed.

My drive was to create an exhibition of high international standard. After all we are talking about Norway’s- and one of Europe’s largest and most important national parks. Hardangervidda is the habitat of the oldest and largest wild reindeer tribe in Europe. The reindeer is also Europe’s oldest mainland animal with a fantastic and unique history.

Norway is also internationally obligated to take care of the Norwegian reindeer according to the Bern convention. Quite early we knew that the reindeer should be the central theme of the exhibition. To create an exhibition of this size and quality one needs money and funding. I collected for two years from all kinds of donors, government, regions, councils, private companies, and finally we managed finance the entire project. All donations were gifts so we have no debts today. Once the financing was secured we moved further for detail planning and hiring designers and constructors.

We had few worries to begin with. The finance was one but later we had a team of photographers, text writers, high academic consultants, and designers who had to work as a team. That is always a challenging task but we managed

to create a group which blossomed throughout the entire process in a very positive way.

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Our goal with our exhibition was to create a huge information base for the wild reindeer and its ecological system in Hardangervidda and in whole of Norway. It was to increase the public knowledge of important environmental issues and challenges. At the same time we also wanted the exhibition to be as modern and fresh regarding design and out forming and we wanted to combine the information with artistic expressions so visitors could enjoy the exhibition as an experience in itself.

As a result interactivity plays a very important role in creating the right experience for the visitors, I actually believe that proportionally there is hardly any other exhibition with as many interactives as this one. People learn through tangibility and they also get to share their views with others. We plan to grow and our next product is an ecological role play which we plan to have finished next summer.

Our exhibition has been received in

a very positive way and far over our expectations. We get exceptionally good feedback from our visitors, and also on Tripadvisor. Most of them say it’s a very interesting and fascinating exhibition, very well designed and done, and that different themes are covered and linked very well together. Many of our visitors express that it’s so much to learn and see that they have to come back. Average visiting time is over two hours.

Nearly half of all our visitors are foreigners from Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark and the exhibition has received three different and prestige international awards. By close cooperation on marketing with several other tourist attractions in the region the visitor rate will just grow year by year. Satisfied customer is of course the best marketing one can get!

Per Lykke

