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Abstract

The aim of the article is to add to our knowledge of reputation management efforts in municipalities. Despite the multitude of such efforts, few have been studied. The specific focus is on the contents of reputation films made by Norwegian municipalities. Is there a story in these films? If so, what is the message conveyed, and is it convincing in its attempt to present the different municipalities as unique? The analysis shows that the films lack a story, and as such they are not suitable to capture the attention of an audience, be remembered and retold. It also shows that, despite the fact that municipalities vary in size, are located in different parts of the country, have different key industries and varying topographies, traditions and histories, they struggle to convey their differences. The municipality film seems to have developed into a romanticising genre, offering little authentic representation of the specific municipality presented, life in small places as well as life in general. Thus, it may also be difficult for those who live there to identify with the message.

Introduction

In recent years, Norwegian municipalities have been captured by the reputation trend (cf. Wæraas et al, 2014). Usually this entails attempts to create an image of the municipality as an attractive place with an unique identity. This is particularly true for the smaller and less central municipalities struggling with depopulation and lack of skilled workers and capital. Other Scandinavian and western countries have also been hit by this trend (see, for example, Cassel, 2007; Gulsrud et al, 2013; Löfgren, 2005; Langer, 2002). However, we know little about the means and effects of municipal reputation management: how municipalities communicate and whether they succeed in their attempts to present themselves as unique. Local government researchers have paid little, if any, attention to municipal reputation management, as have students of place branding.

In the Norwegian context, the "municipality film" has become a widespread promotional tool. Film is an audio-visual medium amplifying a message because it hits both the ear and the eye. Hence, it can be an effective medium to capture the attention of an audience. Film also has the potential to reach far and wide in a short time, via websites, Facebook and You Tube, or as Denning (2005) puts it: "Through technology, a story can be told locally, transmitted globally, and repeated endlessly" (Denning, 2005: 102). Nevertheless, online marketing has not lived up to its expectations. One of the reasons is, again according to Denning (2005), that it is not based on "storytelling"; the "art of weaving, of constructing, the product of intimate knowledge" (Gabriel, 2000: 1).

In this article I examine the contents of reputation films made by Norwegian

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municipalities, asking whether they are stories with plots, characters, action and messages, not only in a verbal but also in a visual sense. Is there a story in these films? If so, what is the message conveyed, and is it convincing in its attempt to present the different municipalities as unique? Wæraas & Bjørnå (2011) who have studied municipality slogans found that these were of little use in setting them apart.

The aim of the article is primarily to add to our knowledge of reputation management efforts in municipalities. Despite the multitude of such efforts, few have been systematically studied, and none has studied the “municipality film”. There is thus reason to ask if reputation management in general and films in particular are suitable as a means to attract and retain resources which are considered important for developing municipalities (see Gertner, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2004), such as talented people, investors and tourists. Norwegian municipalities are of particular interest because they have been forerunners in processes of reputation management¹.

Reputation management in Norwegian municipalities

Reputation management is currently one of the most popular means or concepts for developing Norwegian municipalities and regions, particularly municipalities and regions in the less central parts of the country. A recent study shows that 33% of Norwegian municipalities have initiated a reputation project, while 66% of those that had not still claimed to maintain an active focus on their reputation (Wæraas et al, 2014). The popularity of the concept is largely due to the strong focus on reputation management at all levels of government, particularly as a means to stimulate growth in communities struggling to attract skilled workers, and stem outmigration and population decline. In other words, substantial political “pressure” has been put on Norwegian municipalities to realise the value of a positive reputation and to initiate strategies to strengthen it. A government white paper (no. 25: 2008-2009) claimed that rural municipalities have a worse reputation than they deserve because they have not focused sufficiently on the opportunities offered by their “peripheral” location. Municipalities should “market” themselves as attractive communities with untapped opportunities for work and investment and emphasise the comparative advantages of their size and location, such as personal space, community life, scenic beauty and excellent opportunities for a rich outdoor life.

One of the measures implemented (in 2008) was a government funded “reputation school”, in which 82 municipalities have participated since its inception. Furthermore, the ministry, in collaboration with the National Association of Norwegian Municipalities (KS) and several labour unions, has initiated a program called “Together for a better municipality”, which also includes reputation management. 110 municipalities have participated in this program since 2011. Finally, KS and the Norwegian State Housing Bank have supported projects, aimed at making municipalities better places to live, work and visit. In the wake of these measures, several reputation projects have been initiated, seminars been

conducted, slogans, visions and communications strategies designed, and municipal websites upgraded.

Particularly inspired by the "Drammen project", one of the first major leading urban reputation projects in Norway, the reputation film has become one of the most prevalent means to communicate what the municipality has to offer. The film "Drammen – The River City" was first shown in the autumn 2007. Since then Drammen has produced a number of films to promote the positive effects of its reputation project. Drammen is the general reference case in the Norwegian context, to illustrate what you can achieve by working systematically, thoroughly and patiently with your reputation.

Reputation management and storytelling

Common to most definitions of reputation is that they emphasise the competitive advantage by being unique, be it an organisation or a place (cf. Fombrun & van Riel, 2004; Anholt, 2007; Govers & Go, 2009). Anholt (2007) describes, for example, the attractive location as characterized by a so-called competitive identity. He claims that attractive cities score high on several dimensions. Furthermore, he argues that cities can be compared with regions, as it is possible to think of them as fairly similar in terms of climate, infrastructure and people. The attractiveness of cities are measured along the following dimensions: "presence", "place", "potential", "pulse", "people" and "prerequisites".

While presence is about how attractive, well known and visible the city is perceived, place is about the perception of its physical, aesthetic and cultural aspects. Potential is the perception of the city's economic, job and educational opportunities, pulse of its appeal when it comes to lifestyle, excitement and interesting things to do, and people about its residents being perceived as warm, friendly and inclusive. Prerequisites, on the other hand, are about the perception of the infrastructure of the city; whether it concerns housing and house prices, the level of internal and external communications or the standard of public services. Anholt emphasises, however, that the culture and traditions of the city should be integrated in its competitive identity. The culture of the city represents its uniqueness, the aspects of a place not easily copied, but it must be reframed and put into a new and relevant context (Anholt, 2007).

In general, it is assumed to be a close connection between reputation management and stories. Reputation management is about creating an emotional bond between products, organisations and locations on the one hand and their respective audiences or stakeholders on the other, and storytelling is a means to stir or engage the emotions. Stories it is argued, have an advantage over arguments, numbers based information and bullet points. They represent the most natural way of communicating, they create and shape meaning and they impact actions (Czarniawska, 1997; 2004). Equally important in the context of reputation management, they are however better suited to inspire, entertain and capture the attention of an audience, and they are easier to remember and more compelling and believable than plain text and numbers (Gabriel, 2000; Shaw, 2000).

The reason is that they generate recognition and reduces complexity by building on and enhancing the unique and specific, rather than the general and abstract. In addition, stories are easy to communicate due to their plasticity (Gabriel 2000); they need not be repeated word by word to keep the message intact.

In organisational as well as in market research it is argued that stories are more effective in communicating messages than other forms of communication. Fog et al. (2003) argue that storytelling makes the message easy to understand, and Denning (2005) maintains that core values are only abstract words, while stories makes them appear more specific and relevant. Gabriel (2000) on the other hand claims that "good stories are valuable, they can hardly be mass produced" (Gabriel, 2000: 1). A similar argument is emphasized by van Riel (2000). He argues that organisational communication will be more effective if it rests on a "sustainable corporate story" (van Riel, 2000: 157), because the story creates consistency in organisational messages and is difficult to imitate. These aspects make the story particularly suited to express the distinct and unique character of an organisation; to present the "normal" and "ordinary" in a new way. Thus, a story may as Holten Larsen (2000) puts it, be "a powerful tool for differentiating an organization, its products, and its services. In a few years, this may even become the primary vehicle for differentiation" (Holten Larsen, 2000: 197). In the following the structure and essential elements of the story are presented.

A story has a beginning, a middle part and an ending, as well as a message, a conflict, characters and action. It has a procession of movements within a limited time span in which the various components and events under review are bound together into a meaningful whole, in a plot and thus an action. The fact that events are bound together in a plot means that there is a causal connection between them; the initial events are the causes of those that follow (Czarniawska, 1997; 2004). As such a story can be differentiated from a chronology, and highlight the path (cause-effect-chain) to success of an organisation, which others who want to achieve the same, may follow (cf. Marzec, 2007).

The story begins with a scene, which sets the theme and tone and makes sure the attention of the audience is captured. Then the conflict is presented, which creates change and sets the direction for the rest of the story. The conflict is tapered and escalated to a turning point, which typically happens when the main character is forced to make a decisive choice that affects the rest of the story. Finally the conflict is further escalated and ends in a climax where the main character is confronted with an opponent before the conflict is resolved and marks the end of the story.

The conflict is important because it creates excitement and unpredictability, whether it is a conflict inside humans, between humans or between humans and nature. The greater the conflict is, the stronger the excitement. Nevertheless, the conflict must not be too violent, because the story then will lose its credibility. If the conflict is too confined, the story may be perceived as uninteresting and boring (Fog et al, 2003). The characters are however the ones who drive action and conflict ahead. Characters also make it possible for the audience to identify with and relate to the story. The function of the message is to convey a morality,

a set of values or an ideology claiming universality. Moreover, the message must be clear and easy to grasp. Hence, the story should convey a single message (Fog et al, 2003).

Methods and data material

This study is based on visual methodology. Visual methodology is used to study social phenomena through photographs, paintings, video, film, etc. (Rose, 2003; Harper 2005). Within tourism research, which is the research field most closely related to mine one has usually focused on photographs and texts. While Pritchard and Morgan (2003) did a discursive analysis of postcards, Hunter (2013) did a semiotic analysis of photographs collected from web sites. My study however, is a narrative analysis of films made available on You Tube, i.e. an analysis of the structure of the films according to the previously described storytelling elements.

I have watched 53 films presenting Norwegian municipalities, which may be understood as attempts to build the reputation of these municipalities (see appendix for a list of the films, their length and producers). I identified these by searching You Tube for the keyword "municipality", "municipalities", "reputation film", and the names of various municipalities. The searches took place in January, February and March 2014. Some of the films are presented on the web-sites of the municipalities. I have chosen to focus on those films presenting small and medium-sized Norwegian municipalities and which are not 'big city' municipalities. These are the ones that are least visible or well known, and are most likely to have a "place perspective" on their object. This means that I have left out the larger municipalities, including the 'big city' municipalities as Kristiansand, Drammen and Bodø.² I have also left out those films addressing specific topics such as bullying and films that have only emphasized the municipality as an organization and workplace.³ Moreover, I have excluded films having a regional perspective, presenting several municipalities in the same region as possessing some common regional characteristics. Overall, films from 27 municipalities have been studied and analysed.⁴

Most of the films last about three minutes, but some are longer; they vary from six to about 20 minutes. The bulk of the films I have analysed are about three minutes. Several municipalities have also produced a series of films, such as the municipality of Skaun which has made a series of five films, a major film and four "sub films" that immerse themselves in specific topics such as "Active citizens", "Attractive place to live", "Cultural variety" and "Home Care". The same applies to Rissa municipality, which is represented by 15 films, including a long and a short version of what can be considered the main film. In these cases, I have chosen to concentrate on the main film, and in the case of Rissa the short version of the main film. I would like to emphasise that it has been difficult to get an overview of the total "population" of municipality films. They range from professional productions to more amateurish attempts. Many also have an unclear origin and purpose. I have chosen to concentrate on those films the munic-

pality itself has decided to produce, or somehow seems to "stand behind" for example by displaying the address to the municipal website at the beginning or the end of the film.

The films were processed as follows: first I watched the films sequentially and noted particular scenes in the various parts, with an emphasis on pictures, music, narration, message, action, and characters. In this way, I got an impression of what was similar and what was different in the various films, and whether some of the films stood out as different. Then I watched the separate parts – the beginning, the middle section and the ending – several times. The intention was to capture the details of the individual parts and to improve the accuracy of the observations and the quotes used.

The typical municipality film - lost in harmony and community

The beginning

Most of the films start with music, often followed by the municipal coat of arms, only to bring us into a landscape. It is also common that the place is presented from a "bird's eye view", from the air, and that the geographical location of the municipality is presented by either a narrator or a map indicating its exact location.

The film about Herøy titled "The Good Life on Herøy" is a good example of this approach. In the opening scene we meet the municipal coat of arms against a light background, followed by a map of the middle part of Norway with Herøy marked in red, before we are presented to fields of green grass waving in the wind. The scene is framed by crisp acoustic guitar tones. Another example is the film about Vefsn municipality, "Vefsn municipality ... follow me now". In the opening scene of what is described as a "profile film", we meet the actor Hallvard Holmen, who became well known throughout the country for his role in a very popular TV series during 2008-2010.⁵ Here he is climbing a mountain on a bright summer day, pausing, looking straight into the camera, greeting us breathlessly in his own local dialect with the line, "Hello, hoj, my name is Hallvard Holmen and I am an actor mountain hiking; a little bit unusual, a little bit proud of it, but even more proud of being from Vefsn, so proud that I would like to show you my hometown, Mosjøen. So follow me... ". Then the scene changes and accompanied by alluring flute tones we are taken over the mountains and into an idyllic small town center on a bright summer day, before we again hear the voice of Holmen put the place on the map as follows: "The city in the middle of Norway, in the middle of the Helgeland region, and in the middle of mountains and fjords".

A third example is the "Film about Rissa municipality - Earthy happiness". With pictures of a male choir in an open landscape with fjords and mountains in the background, we hear the choir sing: "Here I see glorious fjords and villages...". Then we are presented to the municipal coat of arms and from a "bird's eye view", we see blue sea and green fields. Then a male narrator, commenting on a

map indicating the location of the municipality, announces: "Rissa is located on the Fosna Peninsula in the Southern part of Trøndelag". The voice goes on describing the adjacent municipalities and counties, making a point of emphasising the short distance to the nearest big city, Trondheim.

A fourth example is Aurskog-Høland municipality, and its film entitled "The spacious municipality". In the first scene we meet a forest lake shot in black and white, accompanied by lounge music, the municipal coat of arms and a text presenting the municipal slogan "- the spacious municipality -" before being taken across several forest lakes, bathing children, green fields and farmlands. A narrator greets us by a "Welcome to Aurskog-Høland, a gem of a municipality and in every respect a spacious municipality, with more than 300 forest lakes, hunting and hiking in abundance, nice living and upbringing conditions, and not least warm-hearted people. And all this only 45 minutes from Oslo, Gardermoen and Sweden".⁶

A final example is Stjørdal municipality with its film "Absolutely Spot On", which introduces the municipality with the text "In the middle of Norway, In the middle of Trøndelag (the region), Absolutely Spot On", with white lettering on a light blue background, followed by a map of Norway where Stjørdal is clearly marked. Framed by crispy guitar tones a narrator describes the location of the municipality as follows: "Stjørdal has a unique location close to everything." Then follow a number of examples of its unique location and infrastructure.

It is also quite common to play with symbol-laden metaphors such as "the spacious municipality", "absolutely spot on" and "earthy happiness". Another example is the coastal and fisheries municipality of Hadsel, which is playing on symbolism with the slogan "a sea of possibilities".

The middle part

In the middle part we are usually informed of the services the municipality has to offer, kindergarten and schooling, work places, the provision of care for the sick and elderly, and of course leisure activities for the same age groups. In the middle part we also meet the people living in the municipality, adults, children, adolescents and the elderly. Here we are presented to scene after scene of children smiling, playing and swimming, children and adults together in cheerful activities in the playground or hiking in the forests and mountains, youths playing soccer, handball, or volleyball, and elderly people enjoying small town life and nature. Without exception, the central focus is the family and community.

These scenes are interrupted only by pictures of spectacular scenery taken on sunny summer days, of white beaches and steep mountains plunging into the sea, vast fields and gentle hills or high mountains and deep valleys. Norwegian winter days are rarely displayed and none of the films have footage of rainstorms or rough weather conditions. Put differently: in the middle part we are introduced to happy people and beautiful nature in harmonious interaction.

The ending

The films usually end with "Welcome to...". One such example is the film about Tysvær municipality, where the ending is preceded by rapid musical beats, hard hitting guitar tones and a rough and husky voice singing in a Norwegian dialect "Take me, take me home, take me now ... Take me out in the blue ... Take me as I am ... Take me ... ", before we hear the narrator say: "We in Tysvær municipality wish you all welcome". The scene ends with a display of the municipal coat of arms and the text "LIVE IN TYSVÆR", "Tysvær municipality - good place to live, lots to see, great to work". In the ending of the film about Vefsn municipality, Hallvard Holmen is back again, with the remark "Møsjøen - welcome", after being absent throughout the whole middle section. A joint film about Levanger and Stjørdal, ends with a "Welcome to Levanger and Værdal - a region of opportunity", while the ending of the film of a third municipality in the same region, is: "Welcome to Stjørdal". The films about Øyer and Berlevåg end by the mayors saying: "You are most welcome to Øyer" and "Everyone is most welcome. Anytime".

It is also common that the films end with a display of the municipal coat of arms, either alone or combined with a version of "Welcome to..." and a slogan. An example of this is the film about Råde municipality in which the narrator finishes with: "The municipality of creative variety and a big heart" and the municipal coat of arms with the text "- the village between the towns -", a slogan also used in the opening scene. Another example is the film about Skaun where the narrator ends with the question " ... is it you and I...?", as a bemused response to the question in the opening scene of the film: "What is it that makes Skaun into Skaun?", followed by the municipal coat of arms and the text "Skaun - Active and Attractive".

The plotless municipality film

However, few of the films have a clear plot. They all have a beginning, a middle part and an ending, but there is no meaningful connection between these and the events displayed in the three parts. Thus, there is no action. The films are primarily presentations of rather disjointed events or scenes (episodes), which together convey the breadth of what the municipality has to offer.

Some films nevertheless have an opening scene that creates some expectations of a procession of movements, like the film about Giske. After a few initial pictures of a fishing boat against a backdrop of a red evening sun and the melancholic tones of a trumpet, this idyllic scene is interrupted by a male narrator. In an unmistakable regional dialect we hear the narrator say: "Take a breath, take the air in, clear your mind ... Here you will find tranquillity..." followed by a description of the municipality as located in "an open landscape, cultural treasures and a rich variety". Then we are introduced to its ancient history: "... 1000 years ago the Vikings came by the sea, today the arrival is easier than ever...". But suddenly we are placed in the present and the voice continues telling us about the short distance to Ålesund, the nearest big city, as well as the various

opportunities the municipality itself has to offer: exciting jobs, the cultural life and the local artists, the variety of leisure activities and local businesses, and its increasing and largely young population. We also get to know that the best diving areas in the world are exactly here, as well as all kinds of seabirds.

In the ending, however, we are reminded of the rich and ancient history of the municipality. The narrator informs us of a marble church from the Viking Age, burial sites from the Bronze Age, an open-air amphitheater, where a historic play described as an important part of Norwegian history, is performed. We also hear about the traces of thousands of years of settlements and of Stone Age findings, before we once again meet the new era represented by a well-known Norwegian painter living in the area and the spectacular scenery of the municipality. In the last scene we see the red evening sun disappearing into the sea.

This film is an attempt to bind together an intriguing past and a successful present, a past, which may easily be associated with the "primeval" Norwegian sound. In this respect, we see a potential and more or less explicit plot. To a certain degree the plot visualises the legacy of the past and suggests a connection between the past and the present, but without spelling out the exact nature of this connection. The connection between past and present remains unclear, in that the middle section is somewhat detached from both the beginning and the end.

Another municipality with a similar approach is Tysvær municipality. After the fairly traditional introduction (gentle music, the sun reflected as twinkling stars in the ocean, the text Tysvær, more dramatic music, Tysvær from a "bird's eye view") the flora of pictures is interrupted by the voice of a narrator, which in a regional dialect introduces us to the municipal history: "Idyllic fjords characterise the Tysvær landscape. Along these fjords, people have lived for 5-6000 years". Quickly, however, the voice takes us into more recent times with these words: "In recent times, people in Tysvær have thought new thoughts, such as Kleng Persson who started the emigration to America and the artist Lars Hertevik who was innovative through his art", as an introduction to the traditional middle part (about all that the municipality has to offer, from local artists, young people participating in sports activities, all the benefits for senior citizens, the many new projects, the solid economy and the modern and diverse business community, and a map of Norway marking Tysvær's location).

Unlike the film about Giske, there is no effort to connect the present with the past. Neither the initial gentle nor the final hard-hitting guitar tones, which also frame the rough, rusty voice singing: "take me... ", create a meaningful connection between the various parts of the film. Both these films can thus be understood as incomplete stories (cf. Czarniawska, 2004).

Only three or four of the films I have seen tell a complete story.⁷ One is the film about Svelvik municipality, while another is the film about Modalen. In the first one, which is called "The feel good movie about Svelvik", the opening scene takes us to a white picket fence and the back of a grown man and a little girl. They take each other's hands and move towards the fence where there is a box of white paint. The man starts painting the fence, while the girl is painting on a wooden board. The scene is framed by a vowel, a gentle and hoarse female voice

singing in English: "If you ask me how the world should be, I say honey you should trip from the apple tree, daisies growing on every tree, and lemon and limes entered sugar sweet. Oh what a beautiful world this world could be ... ba, bapa, bapa rei...". The next scene shows a young newlywed couple on the steps of the church, smiling and kissing. Again we hear the gentle and hoarse, female voice singing "If you ask me how the world should be, then the people would live in harmony... living with my friends so happily. Oh what a beautiful world, what a beautiful world this world could be".

The subsequent scenes alternate between the park, lake, river, rocks and small white houses, and we are continually presented to active and creative children, adults and seniors smiling and hugging each other, before we again meet the bride and groom running hand in hand towards a white car before they disappear out of the picture, only interrupted by the same song. In the ending, we are back at the picket fence, where the painting work is now completed and the man and the little girl place a wooden plank painted "Svelvik" against the fence. The film ends with the text "- small and good -" and the municipal coat of arms.

The message of the story can be interpreted as follows: by harmonious co-operation almost everything you wish for will come true, even in the smallest of places (then you will reach paradise). The message is emphasized and reinforced by the lyrics. The story should probably be interpreted as a vision of the future rather than a description of the current state of the municipality. This interpretation is based on the introductory stanza of the song: "If you ask me how the world should be, then the people would live in harmony..." and every verse ending with "Oh what a beautiful world this could be".

In the film about Modalen entitled "Small municipality. High power", we are first presented to blue skies and white clouds, before we enter a lush green valley. So far, we are met by the obligatory landscape perspective, but the music, metallic electric guitar tones, are somewhat rougher than in the typical municipality film. Instead of a narrator or a map indicating the location of the municipality we are met by a meandering green coloured vapour mist with a narrow white center stripe, which is followed by a mighty hiss. While the music switches to gentle piano tones, the vapour mist leads us to a scene with laughing and playing children. Then it meanders further across the landscape, over mountains and rivers, towards wharves located along a coastline. In that way the green vapour mist is alternating between pictures of landscape, power lines, docks and people of all ages. All are lifting their arm (s) in a move indicating muscle power. The film ends with the text or slogan "small municipality, great power" while the green vapour mist slowly dissolves and transforms into the municipal coat of arms, consisting of a white symbol on a green background.

Unlike the story in the film about Svelvik, which has a message that can be linked to small places in general, the message of the film about Modalen is related to the conditions in this specific municipality. The municipality of Modalen, which gets most of its revenue from hydropower, has only 370 inhabitants (as of 2012) and is the second smallest municipality in Norway. The municipality was the first in Norway to offer their residents free wireless network (internet). It was

also the first in the country to buy computers to all its students. Although hydropower is a natural resource, the message is probably that it is the power of the people (clever and enterprising citizens) that has transformed hydropower into a solid financial foundation for the municipality. It is not based on luck or chance.

Basically however, the message is the same in both these films, and the same as in the films without plots; people in harmony with each other and in harmony with their environments. They convey either the challenges or obstacles that the people in the municipality have had to fight to achieve this paradisiacal state. They romanticize everyday life and its culture, not to mention the community and family life in small places. Descriptions like "paradise", "postcard" and "adventure" is even explicitly used in some of the films. They also romanticize nature, which primarily provides sunny days all year round. They are all "feel good" films presenting the municipalities at their best, socially, culturally and climatically. The films provide easy associations with the concept of "Gemeinschaft" (Tönnies, 1887), the closeness and emotional bonds between people in traditional societies, which were lost in the transition to the modern industrial society. The latter, termed "Gesellschaft" was characterized by urbanism, mobility, heterogeneity, rationality and distance between people.

The films lack the excitement and drama that conflict provides (cf. Fog et al, 2003). Thus, they become boring and inauthentic. In most of the films the harmonious community is not only conveyed through pictures and music, but also through slogans and the promotion of explicit values. A somewhat extreme example is found in the film about Råde municipality, which is based on still photos and a female narrator who is very generous in using positive adjectives and words of praise. Almost every aspect of the municipality is "unique", "outstanding" or "exciting". Råde is also described as the "inclusive municipality", the "yes - municipality", characterized by "diversity", and a municipality where people are "allowed to fail" as well as a "modern, progressive municipality". In addition, in the middle section, we are presented to the official core values of the municipality, which are "generosity", "joy" and "respect", while in the ending we learn that this is a municipality of "creative development" and the municipality with the "big heart". The variety of positive descriptions and words of praise makes the message unclear and the film loses its credibility as an authentic version of the good life in small places or communities.

The films also lack personified characters, which makes it difficult to recognise and identify with them. Exceptions are the films about Dovre and about Hasvik municipality, and for that matter the films about the municipalities of Vefsn and Berlevåg. Whereas in the film about Dovre we meet a man explaining why he has moved back home, in the film about Hasvik we meet newcomers from different nations telling why they chose to move and stay in this community. The film about Hasvik also differs in that the multicultural aspects come across so strongly. In the film about Vefsn the use of a well-known actor strengthens personification and recognition, and in the film about Berlevåg the mayor fills this role.⁸

To sum up: municipality films seem to have been developed according to a specific genre with its own peculiar or defining traits. A genre is usually conceived as an institutionalized action system, which is recognisable because it is repeated (Czarniawska, 1999). The typical version of the municipality film has an introduction where we are entering a landscape from a "bird's eye view" and a statement of the geographical location of the municipality, while in the middle section we are introduced to all that the municipality has to offer, and not least, to happy and active citizens of all ages. The typical ending is a "welcome to..." supplemented by the visual or verbal identity expressions of the municipality; expressions which are concentrated efforts to sum up the uniqueness of this particular municipality. The typical version also has no plot.

Insofar as the films differ, variation rarely concerns substance. They vary in terms of perspective, as to whether there is a narrator or not, or whether the voice is external or internal. The internal narrator may also vary, for example from people moving back to newcomers. They also differ slightly when it comes to the choice of music, which vary between vocal and instrumental, alternatively the fragile or more rhythmic and dramatic. Furthermore, they vary somewhat in narrative form, from factual information to poetic descriptions and other more creative forms of communication. One example of the latter is the film about Eastern Toten, where a young woman with a guitar, standing in a green meadow, is singing about all the pleasant aspects of the municipality. Another is the film about Båtsfjord where a man sings the "Båtsfjord song" and thus has the role of the narrator. A third example is the film about Skaun, which is consistently based on questions. This creates a bemused version where we are not given the exact answers to why Skaun is an attractive place to live. Yet the answers are somehow in the questions. The only more substantial aspects, which make the films differ and creates a touch of something unique and authentic, is the narrators' use of the local dialect. However, without being able to compensate for the conformity of the general theme and message.

Conclusion

My analysis of the reputation films made by Norwegian municipalities, shows that they lack a story, and as such they are not suitable to capture the attention of an audience, be remembered and retold. It also shows that despite the fact that municipalities vary in size, are located in different parts of the country, have different key industries and varying topographies, traditions and histories, they struggle to convey their differences. Albeit emphasized differently, they all convey the physical and aesthetic attributes of the place, the people, the infrastructure, as well as the potential and the pulse. However, their distinctive histories, cultures and traditions are rarely visible. They do not appear as places with a unique and competitive identity (cf. Anholt, 2007), but seems to be captured in the conformity trap (cf. Antorini & Schultz, 2005; Wæraas & Bjørnå, 2011; Byrkjeflot & Wæraas, 2012). Thus, they become anonymous and virtually disappear in the crowd.

On the one hand one may – as Wæraas & Bjørnå (2011) – conclude that municipalities may not be so keen on standing out. The most important thing is to have a film presenting the municipality. The bare fact that they *are* concerned with their reputation and even has commissioned their own film to prove it may strengthen their external legitimacy; a reputation film makes a municipality appear modern and willing to try something new. As such, reputation projects and specific reputation activities may have an important symbolic function.

On the other hand, most of the films are aimed at the same audience and designed with an abstract and generalized character in mind; the averaged image of young adults in their start-up phases in life. Facing a more general audience, it becomes important to emerge as a "normal" place, with a range of offers as wide as possible for as many people as possible. In this respect, this study illustrates some of the challenges of municipal reputation efforts, making it difficult for municipalities and smaller communities to use reputation management as a means to the general development of the municipality. In a world with so much in common, it becomes difficult to stand out (cf. van Riel, 2000).

The auto-communicative impact, the impact on the inhabitants of the municipality itself, is possibly far stronger than the external impact of such efforts (see Didriksen and Moldenæs, 2015). Although this effect is not intended and as such often happens "behind the backs" of the people living in the municipality (cf. Christensen and Morsing, 2005), it should not be underestimated. As Löfgren (2005), in his analysis of the concept of the "experience economy" emphasises, locally it has been translated in many different ways:

... and has taken the shape of a rallying cry, a magic invocation, a spellbinder, a kick-off or a recipe. In all its various shapes and forms it has been an energizer, a filter or an arrow towards the future. It has also been a convenient bandwagon to jump on - even though it has often been difficult to identify the driver or the passengers and who decided where the wagon was heading (Löfgren, 2005: 29).

As an energiser and an arrow pointing toward the future, the reputation projects and activities of Norwegian municipalities may be important. They may provide hope and faith among their own citizens and contribute to new initiatives and implementation of measures that may eventually throw off.

The municipality film seems however to have developed into a distinctive genre, which has much in common with the early Norwegian documentary called "Norway Films" (Norgesfilmer). These films have been described as "idyll and self-bragging films" (Iversen, 2001: 52). They presented "wild fjords and large waterfalls, mountain ranges and midnight sun, wooden churches and nature idylls" and awakened "national romantic feelings at home and abroad" (Iversen, 2001: 52). The Norwegian municipalities are not only captured in the conformity trap, but also in the romanticising trap. The films offer little authentic representation of the specific municipality presented, life in small places as well as life in

general. Thus, it may be difficult for those who live there to identify with the message. The films (and the reputation efforts) may in fact have the opposite effect: instead of generating a sense of pride and belonging, they may create a distance to the people living in the municipality.

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The films

- Aurskog-Høland kommune: "Den romslige kommunen" (Aurskog-Høland Kommune, 3: 02)
- Berlevåg kommune: "Filmen som presenterer Berlevåg" (3: 28)
- Bodø kommune: "Bodø-filmen Bodø i vinden" (4: 49, Catapult film)
- Bodø kommune: flere filmer i serien "Extreme City Makeover" ("Gangham Style old people edition", "Fritid", "Bolig", "Jobb", "Utvikling")
- Bø kommune: "Tannlege Bø kommune" (1: 33, Frantz AS)
- Båtsfjord kommune: "Båtsfjordfilmen" (3: 39, Raymond Hildonen)
- Dovre kommune: (Dovrekommune, 3:13)
- Drammen kommune: "Elvebyen Drammen" (Catapult film)
- Flekkefjord kommune: "Innovasjon i Flekkefjord kommune" (5: 31, KS Agder)
- Frogn kommune: "Presentasjon av Frogn kommune" (12: 47, nettredaktør Frogn kommune)
- Giske kommune (10: 10) (Arnfinn Vartdal)
- Hadsel kommune: "Et hav av muligheter" (3: 49, Christer Gundersen)
- Haram kommune: "Derfor blir vi her" (5: 43, Haram Kommune)
- Hasvik kommune: "BO HÆR" (6: 81, Anne Olsen-Ryum)
- Herøy kommune: "Det gode liv i Herøy – en film om og med herøyfjerdinger" (4: 11)
- Hol kommune: "Blime Hol kommune" (2: 49, Hol kommune)
- Kristiansand kommune: "Kristiansand in 5 minutes" (5: 16, Mediegymnaset Kristiansand)
- Kongsvinger kommune: "Kongsvinger – Godt omdømme" (6: 32, Ole Bekkelund)
- Kvinnherad kommune (3: 53, GaiaStudie1/Sanden Media)
- Levanger kommune: (1: 48, Os Media)
- Levanger og Verdal kommune: "Levanger kommune og Verdal kommune - Velkommen!" (3: 11, Levanger kommune)
- Lindås kommune: "Saman for Lindås" (6: 02, Christer Steffensen)

Modalen kommune: "Liten kommune. Stor kraft!" (5: 37, Feber Film)

Nesna kommune: "Hjemmetjenesten" (2:29, John Brattli), og "Helsetjenesten" (to av flere filmer om de ulike tjenestene i kommune)

Nøtterøy kommune: "Ingeniører søkes" (2: 03; Nøtterøy kommune)

Overhalla kommune: "Overhalla-videoen" (10: 39, Overhalla Kommune)

Overhalla kommune: "Overhalla Kommune Introduksjon" (0:58, Hypervisjon AS)

Overhalla kommune: "Akuttavdeling Overhalla kommune" (Rissakommune, 1: 24, Overhalla Kommune)

Randaberg kommune: "Randaberg danser "Glow"!" (7: 31, MrFjellkaren)

Rissa kommune: "Filmen om Rissa kommune - Jordnær lykke" (21: 16 og 6: 52)

Røyken kommune: "Røyken kommune - Rekrutteringsfilm for lærere" (4: 52, Catapultfilmas)

Røyken kommune: "Røyken sykepleier" (3:42, Catapultfilmas)

Røyken kommune: "Røyken – vakker og levende også om vinteren" (6: 19, CnitVision)

Røyken kommune: Røyken kommune.mov (5:11, CnitVision)

Råde kommune: (3: 51, profil media)

Sande kommune: (3: 13, Catapultfilmas)

Sandefjord kommune: "Ingeniører til Sandefjord kommune" (1: 33, Sandefjord kommune)

Sarpsborg kommune: "Er du vår nye kommunikasjonsrådgiver i Sarpsborg kommune?" (3: 21, Sarpsborgkommune)

Skaun kommune: hovedfilm "Aktiv og attraktiv" (3: 15, Skaun kommune)

Stjørdal kommune: "Stjørdalen ligger midt i Norge"/"Midt i Blinken" (4: 46, Visit Trondheim/Magne Kjerkrereit)

Stordal kommune: "Happy in Stordal" (3: 33, Camilla Kleppe Nanseth)

Svelvik kommune: "Feel good filmen om Svelvik" (3: 26, Catapultfilmas)

Tysvær kommune: "Tysvær kommune omdømmefilm" (4: 05, Tysvær kommune)

Vefsn kommune: "Vefsn kommune... følg meg nå!" (3: 26, Vefsnkommune)

Østre Toten kommune: "I hoppes om en bæremann" (5: 20, Østre Toten kommune)

Østre Toten kommune: "Presentasjon av Østre Toten kommune" (8: 45, Nett-GuidenNet)

Øyer kommune (2: 51, vmproduksjon)

Notes

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² Whereas Drammen recently has produced a number of films focusing on their project-related reputational achievements, Bodø has produced four films based on the concept of "Extreme City Makeover".

³ Of the latter category a number of humorous music videos are included, like "Happy in Stordalen", "Together for Lindås", "Randaheim dancing "Glow!" and "Kongsvinger - Good reputation", and some recruiting films targeted at specific professional groups such as "Home Care" and "Health Services" from Nesna municipality, "Recruiting Film for teachers to Røyken" and "Recruiting Film for nurses to Røyken" from Røyken municipality. The same applies to "Engineers to Sandefjord municipality" and "Are you the new communications advisor of Sarpsborg?".

⁴ It encompasses both films that are aimed at broad audiences and films that are aimed at a specific audience, such as recruitment of health professionals, engineers etc. However, I would emphasize that, with few exceptions, there is little difference between films presenting the larger municipalities as places and the smaller municipalities.

⁵ The TV series was about the daily life in a small Norwegian island where things was completely changed when a woman from the big city moved to the island.

⁶ Gardermoen is the main airport and close to the Capital of Norway, Oslo.

⁷ The film about Vefsn for example may be understood as a story about what made Holmen able to fulfill his dream of becoming an (successful) actor, the qualities of his hometown. The film about Båtsfjord, on the other hand, may be understood as a story about what made the place to the "world's largest fishing community".

⁸ Also recruitment films targeted at specific occupational groups differ from the overall picture in that they focus on one or more people who is working in the municipality.