EVS 24 – THE POSTSCRIPT

By Harald N. Røstvik

Photo: Harald N. Røstvik & Stavanger Forum

Can I see you for a moment
Can I sit with you a while
I know it's late
But everything is late.

Morten Harket is being introduced by Harald N. Røstvik

With these words, written and sung by a-ha lead singer Morten Harket during the EVS 24 opening plenary on May 14th 2009, I invite you to read my backstage EVS story, the uncovered and naked truth.

This is the final message from me - the Chairman of the EVS 24 International Steering Committee and EVS 24 Stavanger Organising Committee. I think you deserve a "from the heart message", a personal message as to how EVS 24 was conceived, planned and carried through. My main objective is to offer facts so that everybody can learn and improve from this EVS so as to make the next one even better.

As by a strike of irony I left Stavanger one week after EVS 24 was completed on a pre-EVS programmed trip to work with my fellow architects in Athens.

I am writing this during the last weekend in May and I spend it out of the big city. I am in Hydra, the car-free island. Donkeys carry all on land transportation out. It is a quiet island and I enjoy the tranquillity after years of hectic EVS 24 preparations. It is also the island where Leonard Cohen bought a small-whitewashed house in the seventies. It is here he wrote "Bird on a Wire" as a response to the first electric and telephone wires being poled up on the island. With them "civilisation caught up with me", he wrote. But along came also the birds sitting on the wires and the wonderful bird song.

Here in Hydra, here in "Douskos", the favourite tavern of Leonard Cohen, I write this last "Message from the Chairman" on my Mac (civilization certainly caught up with me too, like it reached Hydra). I am in the middle of a wonderful meal consisting of Greek salad swimming in olive oil, red beans and salt cod. It will be complemented with Baklava honey cake and strong Greek coffee.

Douskos Tavern, Hydra, Greece.

THE EVS-SERIES AS I SAW THEM

Five years ago Rolf Gjessen and Hallvard Ween of Stavanger Forum AS contacted me. I was asked to help them try to get EVS to Stavanger and then to design its content. We succeeded in the first matter in March 2006 and since then we have been at it as engaged consultants on an hourly basis, along with all my other engagements as an architect and sustainability specialist.

I set a condition to take on this huge project : I wanted to shape EVS, in its 40th jubilee, to be broader and relevant to a wider audience than the traditional EVS core persons. This condition became part of my contract.

Organising an EVS in the outskirts of Europe was challenge number one. The next one was the fact that Stavanger is the oil- and natural gas capital of Norway and I met a lot of resistance inside the EVS/AVERE deciding boards from people that

considered going to the European oil capital was like "going into the lion's nest" as some correctly put it. They were right, but my contra-argument was that it is exactly here we must initiate the debate; facing the oil crowd. All the international oil companies have their North Sea headquarters in the Stavanger region and the national Statoil Hydro alone, in its headquarters in Stavanger, employs almost 10.000 well-oiled persons. Certainly, I argued, we shall debate with the energy industry as regards the future energy challenges in the overall conference theme of "Towards Zero Emission", "The cities of the Future, its Buildings and Transportation systems". They will turn out in hundreds I argued. In addition we have The University of Stavanger (UiS) and an energy focused International Research Institute (IRIS). Both the City of Stavanger and the County of Rogaland have politically expressed that the region shall be Innovative, Energetic and Open to new ideas. They too will add local flair and turn up in hundreds. In addition, several local companies express at least rhetoric interest in matters related to renewable energy. They will ensure many participants too. This was my strategy to compensate for not being in a city in Central Europe with millions of inhabitants.

Did we succeed? Did the local energy companies, the municipalities and county councils hunger for new knowledge? Were they Innovative, Energetic and Open? Read on and the question will be answered by figures. Then judge for yourself.

A Statoil representative talks to Harald N. Røstvik and Morten Harket.

HSH Prince Albert II arriving to the Rally.

Aim at the Sun

"Aim at the sun", was my EVS 24 shaping motto. I targeted the arrow towards a high goal in order to try to reach a target way up there. Knowing that even if I failed, the arrow would hit higher than if I aimed low. The plan was the following:

Create an ambience of a birthday party, an intellectual celebration of 40 years of EVS. Like in any birthday party, invite the people you find valuable and intellectually

stimulating. We decided to exclude the obedient servants. They only waste our time. Invite also people you want to draw the attention to because they are stuck undeservedly in the shade. All of this worked well.

Instead of, like in many conferences, also EVSs, where world famous names are figured as invited, while those that invite must know that they will not turn up, I decided and got the approval of my committee that we shall only publish names we have a signed contract with; confirmed and contracted names. I did not want to trick people to travel to Stavanger just to be met by a range of cancellations. I wanted to be honest. From experience there will be cancellations for natural causes anyway, so let us limit them. In this way we designed from day one an honest EVS with a programme as predictable as possible, as regards the top keynote names.

The Jubilee Dinner

At the closest table looking at the camera is Per Arne Skramstad and to his far right Jacques Mollard

I pretended I had a *birthday and* invited favourite outspoken intelligent people. I really stuck my neck out as many of them were people I had close contact with in earlier projects and had faith in: Hermann Scheer, Amory Lovins, Margot Wallstrøm, Colin Campbell, Rudolf Rechsteiner, Andrew Scott, Susan Roaf, Morten Harket and many more, among those His Sovereign Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco and His Royal Highness Haakon Magnus, the Crown Prince of Norway.

HSH Prince Albert II arrives.

The Debate is over.

Robin Haycock, Amory Lovins, Rudolf Rechsteiner, Chelsea Sexton, Graham Smith, Colin Campbell and Hermann Scheer during the debate.

They all delivered and confirmed that we should trust our intuition. In addition hundreds of others performed in parallel sessions and at the exhibition. They were marvellous. But as we were on the way to the goal, to success, disasters struck. All the conditions we worked under changed. It made our work extremely complicated:

First of all, the only full time paid person and the person with the longest EVS experience, AVERE's Secretary General was unfortunately taken ill and remained so for the last year and a half up to EVS 24. This was very serious as AVERE according to the licence contract with us should provide advice and work in return for the licence fee we paid. It was like a wall fell out of the construction we were about to realize. A paid person from AVERE did not replace him. But as compensation, the WEVA president Robert Stussi put his full working capacity at our disposal.

Secondly, six months before the opening date, the worst global financial crisis since the 30-ies hit the global economy, leading to cancellations of booked and contracted exhibition space as we were on the way to seeing the largest exhibition ever. Many other exhibitions and conferences were simply cancelled and for a short while we considered doing exactly that or putting our weight into working even harder to survive. But survive meant not loosing money. That was the goal for quite a while.

Thirdly. A couple of months before the opening, Swine flue hit in Mexico, leading to hysteria and conference cancellations also from a large Japanese delegates, in spite of the fact that there were at that time no cases of Swine flue in Norway no Mexican exhibitors or conference participants were booked to come to Stavanger.

Fourthly. On April 27th - two weeks before the opening of EVS 24 - the main water supply pipe for the sprinkler system at the EVS24 venue was broken and flooded the major areas of the Conference facilities. At that time I lost a little sleep for a night or two and wondered if the signals that EVS 24 should perhaps be cancelled was not

now clear enough to everybody. The next day we decided to carry on. Days and nights of repair and drying work followed and we opened as scheduled mid-May, a little shaken but still going strong. That in itself was a great personal victory, not only for me but also for the whole and great team at the venue, Stavanger Forum.

The particular Norwegian Financial challenges

Normally an EVS is well supported financially by the host nation's central and regional Governments. When we started the work of trying to get EVS to Norway, we immediately approached the central Government consisting of the green left coalition led by Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. He never replied. Several reminders and years later the final reply was "no". We also approached the Ministry of Finance, the Ministries of Transportation and Environment. They all rejected our applications. We did hardly believe our eyes and tried over and over. They all kept rejecting our applications for four years. The richest nation in the world with an internationally clear pro-environment rhetoric did not have any Euro to spare for EVS 24. Years later, however, just before Christmas at the end of the year 2008, less than four calendar months before the opening, the office of the Ministry of Transportation called. They had some leftover small funds and wondered if we could make use of them? If so, it was important for them to get funds out fast and before the new-year so that they were ensured the same financial support the next year for their budgets. We accepted the "peanuts", 20.000 Euro. That was the only support we ever got from the super rich oiled Norwegian Governmental Ministries over the four years we worked with EVS 24.

The Stavanger Institutions and EVS

Stavanger is struggling to get rid of its reputation as an oil capital. Processes to rename the city from Oil Capital into Energy Capital, is ongoing and city loyal persons from the University of Stavanger (UiS) and the International Research Institute in Stavanger (IRIS) are used in this process to green wash the image of the oil city. In practice, however, very little happens. The CO^2 emissions of the City are rocketing, and The Research Council of Norway classify UiS and IRIS as "oiled" and "gassed" places without sufficient know-how of the energy systems of the future. To involve people with competence do not seem to be a high priority there, perhaps because that means they have to go outside their own circles?

In spite of many information meetings with UiS/IRIS/Municipality of Stavanger and the County Council, nobody along with the Mayor and Chairman of the County Council turned up at the conference apart from one (1) person from UiS. None from IRIS tuned up.

For the many professionals in Stavanger this was also an opportunity lost. The EVS theatre came to Norway for the first time in its 40 years history. An EVS simply need the support of the local community. In "oiled" Stavanger the local community said no thanks, so this piece of theatre was completed with thousands of people from 50 nations, *but hardly any from walking distance*. Here are the facts:

Of the approximately 1000 paying conference participants only **five** (0,5%) came from Stavanger. Including those five, only 80 participants (8%) came from Norway.

In contrast, two weeks before EVS 24 The Mayor of Stavanger headed a Stavanger delegation to the sister oil city, Houston in Texas. Over **130** persons from Stavanger Municipality, institutions and private companies travelled.

This offers reply to the question as to how far Stavanger have moved in its shift away from being the "Oil city" of Norway and towards becoming an "Energy city".

As regards financing EVS 24, a similar experience was made. As mentioned it appeared very hard to get Government support and other public support for EVS 24. As it turned out and throughout the full period from the day when it was decided to try to get EVS 24 to Norway, the income contributions turned out as follows:

Sponsors	20%
Exhibitors	32%
Conference	42 % (paying participant)
Support	6 % (government departments, county council, municipality)
Sum	100%

Robert Stussi, Margot Wallstrøm, Harald N. Røstvik, Urs Muntwyler and the Icelandic State representative.

HSH Prince Albert II talking to a Magna representative.

Amory Lovins

Hermann Scheer, Andrew M. Scott

Chelsea Sexton

HRH Crown Prince Haakon
and Harald N. Røstvik

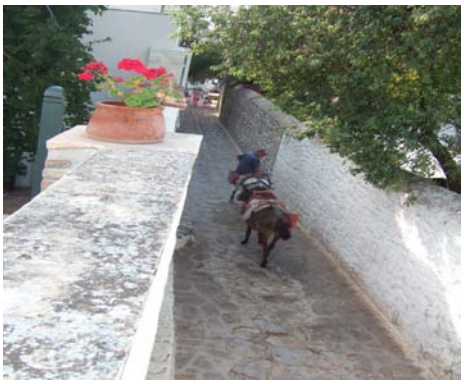
Margot Wallstrøm

Robert Stussi, Sean Theiss
And Harald N. Røstvik

So, back to Hydra

The donkeys are still trucking the narrow streets, the luxury yachts keep coming in. I have had my share of Greek salads, red beans, baklava and coffee. Leonard Cohen's house is still standing; the garden is more beautiful and colourful than ever. His wife keeps watering it. I finish this report on the terrace. It is Saturday night at 2100 and the church bells chime. The hundreds, it seems, small sparrows in the shade from the tree next to my room have gone to sleep and are silent after a tremendous singing until dark fell. The two doves seem to be sleeping too. They will all wake me with their joyful, apparently happy, sounds as the sun rises at 0400.
Their sounds illustrate EVS 24 the way I experienced it:
Joyful, happy and full of songs and good stories.

Writing the final message at Hydra, Greece…



..while the donkeys truck the streets.

I close now.

Thank you for coming to Stavanger!

Your important contribution was part of the huge puzzle that in sum made EVS 24 the greatest ”birthday party” I have ever had. Thanks to the great team at Stavanger Forum AS especially Sondre, Bodil, Elisabeth and Jakob, to the key players at WEVA and AVERE, Robert Stussi, Joeri van Mierlo and Peter van den Bossche.
Thanks to the many committee members and thanks to Camilla and Inger.

I greet you from Hydra, Greece.
Tomorrow Athens and another working week.
Until then, I hear the singing carries on at Douskos Taverna.

Harald N. Røstvik
EVS 24 Chairman
Now Architect – again (ww.sunlab.no)