

Bergen points the way in innovative journalism

Media City Bergen is a proposed media cluster that is to open in 2017. UiB's contribution to the cluster is a centre for innovative journalism – the Bergen Journalism Lab. **TEXT** JENS HELLELAND ÅDNANES



Given the challenges the media industry faces, the Media City Bergen (MCB) initiative is an attempt to create sustainable journalism models for the future. In an age when you are rarely worth more than the number of clicks on your webpage, the University of Bergen (UiB) wants to contribute to the production of journalistic content that aims for integrity, quality and trustworthiness in the long term – and for innovation.

“The centre will innovate in a central area of society, to secure the

public debate and public media,” says Dean Knut Helland at UiB’s Faculty of Social Sciences, who believes that this is a vital contribution to strengthening democratic processes.

MCB brings together public and research institutions, such as UiB, and several of the major media companies in Norway under one roof. Not unlike Media City UK in the Greater Manchester area of the United Kingdom, although MCB will not limit itself to broadcast media and technology, but also include traditional print media.

“When the plans for MCB were shaped it was obvious for us that the media industry has a great need for knowledge and is willing to strengthen its ties with academia,” says Professor Leif Ove Larsen, Head of UiB’s Department of Infomedia.

The result of this is Bergen Journalism Lab (BJL).

“BJL will strengthen the various stakeholders and put the media clus-

ter at the forefront of innovation and knowledge creation in tomorrow’s world of media.”

In spring 2014, Larsen’s department sent an application to the Research Council of Norway to become a Centre for Research-based Innovation (SFI), alongside partners in industry and international academia.

“By consolidating media resources in this manner, the project creates unique opportunities for all involved partners,” says Helland, who believes the centre can place Bergen in the elite of international media research and studies.

The goal is to create a state of the art media lab, inspired by media research innovators such as the Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard University.

The idea is to experiment using both existing and emerging technology to create new models for journalism. Distribution of content on mobile platforms will be another focus area for the researchers, along

with studies of how new technology affects journalism, looking at the working methods of journalists, and also looking at how new technology is implemented in journalistic practice.

“News media experiences rapid change, where it is competing for ad revenue with internet giants such as Google and Facebook. Traditional broadcasters compete for customers with streaming services such as Netflix or HBO. BJL will look at future media business models and how these affect journalism. Hopefully we can contribute to a renewal of journalism,” says Larsen optimistically.

On a more local level, both Helland and Larsen view the creation of MCB and BJL as vital ingredients in creating a vibrant media environment in Bergen.

“The creation of an innovative research centre in journalism as part of a media cluster will contribute to greater diversity in public media, and work to counteract an even stronger centralisation of the media,” suggests Larsen.

“As a central player in MCB, the university adds a strong research and education component to the media cluster. This in itself will make the centre an appealing actor in the greater media debate, both in Norway and internationally,” believes Helland. ●



Dean at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Knut Helland (right), and Head of the Department of Information Science and Media Studies, Leif Ove Larsen. PHOTO: KIM E. ANDREASSEN



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