

## **Interview with Lillehammer`s museum association director Bente Molvig**

For some of Latvian writer museums this is time of huge changes, and for these changes we are mainly grateful for Kingdom of Norway. Because in collaboration with Norway started Project „Restoration of the Museum of Jānis Akuraters” on 1914. For this reason five people dellegation 3rd to 6th june 1915 from Latvian Memorial Museum Association went to an experience exchange trip to visit Norways beautiful town Lillehammer's museum association and it's special museums. There are 4 special museums in Lillehammer`s museum association – The Nobel Laureate Sigrid Undset's home Bjerkebæk, The Nobel Laureate Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson home Aulestad, Norwegian Post Museum and Norwegian Olympic Museum. Director of all these Special museums Bente Molvig kindly recieved us in unforgettable landscape town and not only showed us two Nobel prized poet houses, but also took us to Lillehammer`s Open Air Museum Maihaugen. After three wonderful days Bente Molvig shared information about museum activities and strategies in Lillehammer.

**We`re very grateful for these three wonderful days, you`ve been very kind to us. Can you please tell a little bit more about yourself and the road to Lillehammer?**

For now I've been working in Lillehammer nearly for two years. And as you also know I'm a director for Specialized museums in Lillehammer. It's very interesting job and that's the main reason why I came to Lillehammer! But before I became a director for Special Museums in Lillehammers museum association, I was working not far from Norways capital city Oslo in south with culture and land in the little Horten Municipality. This job gave me opportunity to be in touch with some museums, for example, Eduard Munk Museum in Åsgårdstrand. It's a city in south of Oslo where painter Edvard Munk bought summer house. Also for about ten years I was sitting in the board in some National museums in Norway.

**So mostly your carier has been connected with museology, do you have special education in this field?**

I was studying for six years in the University of Oslo and college in Telemark and my education is based on history, art history and cultural administration.

**It seems like you have interesting past with museology, but future plans are more perspective. So could you reveal youre future goals which are connected with museum development?**

I want many visitors... [laughing] For example Sigrid Undset's home Bjerkebæk and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's and his wives Carolines Bjørnson home Aulestad are owned by the state. So it's very important for us to attract many visitors, because exactly

from this circumstances depends budget whom is granted by the state. Every museum has it's own specific. For instance you saw that from Sigrid's Undset's home Bjerkebæk there is separeated visitor center. This modern building isn't suitable for working in winter, because house has problems with heating. So Bjerkebæk is opened only in the warm season. In last year we had approximately seven thousand visitors. For us it isn't much. We want ten to twelve thousand visitors. For this reason we have to take really good care about museum advertisement. In Norway we say that we have to have „clean bed”. It means that we have to study and proceed, take good care of the memorial houses and collections. Or briefly we have to make museums as much visitable as possible.

**In Lillehammer's museums is that in almost every museum there ir restaurant or coffee shop. In Latvia this kind of practice doesn't exist, but if there is so practice the coffe shop isn't in museums structure. Could you tell more about yours expierence?**

I have to say that coffee shops and restaurant are very important for museum activity. Museum wouldn't be able to successful function without this business, but also I have to mark out that this business is very unlucrative. Thats why the coffee part we are running ourselves, because people are not interested in running unprofitable business. Although the restaurants and cafés museums is not a lucrative source of income, but they are very important in visitor service process. For example, as you noticed, visitors are not permitted to enter the memorial houses without guide, so need to completet a group and a cafe is a place where visitors can hang on drinking a coffee, while it is possible to complete the group at least of five people. During this time, with the visitors engaged by the cafeteria staff. We are a team and we work together.

**In both writers' museums where you took us, there are visitors centres with a cafe, a shop, a booking-office bisede the writers memorial houses. It's impressive how organic you have managed to connect new architecture with the old one in Sigrid Unset museum.**

Yes. In the old houses we're not aloud to do anything. The state has decided that memorial homes has to stay exactly as they were in the writers lifetimes. But also, for example, is not allowed to change anything in the new visitor center of the Sigrid Unset Museum, because the Government has ruled that we have to save the architect's original project. In 2002 architect Carl-Viggo Hølmekjøll project won an impressive competition. Visitor Center of Sigrid Unset House Bjerkebæk was built in 2007. And as you saw, the visitor center, in my opinion, has created a very interesting because of the street people rarely realise that this minimalist style constructed building surrounded the Memorial House and garden. In addition, it also well illustrates Sigrid

Unset's attitude to the world. She was a very important family, house and garden and to keep her privacy from the public and the outside world.

### **Where do you get finances for museum activities ?**

Mostly government is very responsive and they give money to our projects. Sometimes if we want to realise some special project we are searching resources in other places, but I have to say that we have quite a lot resources from government. For instance both poet homes demands a lot of money. Government are very proud about cultural heritage. One of the most important reasons why government support us so much is that Sigrid Undset and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson are fundamental personalities in Norway's history. We are very proud that these writers are Nobel prize laureates.

### **Do government delegations visit museums?**

Yes of course. They come and visit us once or twice a year because they also are very proud of this cultural heritage. Even the royal family come and visit us, I think this fact also reflects that in Norway cultural heritage is very important and it is supervised from our country history.

### **Is there a website in Norway where you can see all the items of the museums?**

Yes, we have a system that's called „Digital museum” [<https://digitaltmuseum.no/>]. You can also take a look on this digital museum, because it is available in English. In this website people are able to find many items what's in the collections for instance photographs, magazines, objects and so on. I have to say that this website isn't very advanced, but it's very interesting. You can also get information about writers manuscripts and letters. In this website totally are collected 169 museums of Norway, and together they have 1 589 069 objects which are available for any website user. Also in this website you can take a look on 196 digital exhibitions.

### **So as you told Norwegian museums are very active in social media life – do your museums also have facebook pages, twitter accounts and so on?**

Yes, we have facebook pages. But we are very glad about another innovation because soon we will have new website. As you know I am responsible for four Lillehammer museums and 90% of the employees are working in these museums, but the other 10% are working with promotions and social media. But we also work with facebook pages for example the gardener in Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson house Aulestad is an

excellent photographer, so he takes many pictures and publish them in the museums facebook pages.

**Non of these museums in Lillehammer have audioguides...**

Yes, and that's quite conceptual. Mostly we guide in Norwegian and English, but we also have museums where you can encounter many different languages. We prefer face to face contact with visitors. And the main reason for this is that museum security at the moment is not so safe. If we had audioguides we would need to put guardian in every museum room would need to put more protective glasses and closed areas, but for now visitors can go and see museum objects quite near. I think that face to face contact is the best way how visitor can get to know authors and get close to them. This is the best way how visitor can get emotions of the story. Off course there are also some problems for instance each guide in tour can complete maximum 15 people group, so in one day it's about 65 people group. And actually it's not so much!

**You also work with school classes. What is your experience of organizing cooperation with schools?**

At the moment we are working very hard and intense to make arrangement to school classes. In Norway for 15 years we have this special project with school classes "The cultural schoolbag", because we believe that cultural background for person is very important. Every school in Norway has an arrangement with cultural institutions and when child is six years old he have to start filling a special plan. Each school has a local plan, which is made together with local municipality. Ministry of education gives finances to local municipalities. And the local municipality are deciding and planning what children are going to see. So it is very important for us to have special programs for children and our tender is selected by local municipalities and schools and included it in "The cultural schoolbag" content.

Prepared Ieva Aizpure