DOI: https://doi.org/10.18778/0867-5856.2025.03 e-ISSN 2080-6922, ISSN 0867-5856

Member since 2019 JM14487

Turyzm/Tourism
2025, *35*(1)

The historical legacy of Norwegian mountain destinations: Current challenges and opportunities for development

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How to cite (APA style): Owusu, K., & Tjørve, E. (2025). The historical legacy of Norwegian mountain destinations: Current challenges and opportunities for development. *Turyzm/Tourism, 35*(1), 67–83. https://doi.org/10.18778/0867-5856.2025.03

ABSTRACT

This study explores the historical legacy of mountain destinations in the southeastern region of Norway to understand the challenges they face and their opportunities for development. It identifies exogenic (external) and endogenic (internal) factors that have influenced the destinations' development from historical accounts in order to understand the different levels of success among them. The literature study and the emerging discussion are based on locally-sourced documents in order to bridge the gap between academic literature and little known or less available sources of destination history and development. The findings are that exogenic factors such as transportation, climate change and commodifiable slopes, which may primarily affect all destinations for alpine skiing but are not sufficient to determine the variation in success between them. Endogenic drivers such as ownership, management and leadership qualities strongly explain the different levels of success in a destination's development. This study demonstrates those with favourable exogenic conditions struggle without effective endogenic drivers. Conversely, some destinations have overcome challenges from historical development and these are largely influenced by endogenic drivers. This research contributes a historical perspective of development that uncovers a range of underlying drivers, providing a framework for understanding how exogenic and endogenic factors shape mountain destinations' success, sustainability and capacity to innovate.

KEYWORDS

mountain-destination development, exogenic and endogenic factors, ownership and management, tourism evolution

ARTICLE INFORMATION DETAILS

Received:
6 December 2024
Accepted:
3 March 2025
Published:
4 June 2025

1. Introduction

Historians often argue that the future replicates the past, suggesting that it should be possible to scientifically analyse historical patterns to inform the present and shape the future (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2020). In this context, we ask what can insights from the stories of tourism destinations offer about the challenges they face and their current opportunities for development.

The history of Norwegian mountain destinations is not unique, yet their stories remain largely untold in academic literature. Much of the reason the literature's

Funding information: Not applicable. **Conflicts of interests:** None. **Ethical considerations:** The Author assures of no violations of publication ethics and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

discussion has become overly theoretical is the lack of a background understanding of how the destinations have evolved. Without a grounding in concrete historical examples, arguments about destination development often lack the context to fully understand successes and failures, or the different fates of individual destinations.

This approach is consistent with recent trends in tourism literature, which emphasise the importance of considering long-term historical perspectives when examining destination development (Brouder et al., 2016; Saarinen et al., 2019). Destinations with comparable histories and conditions sometimes exhibit very different levels of success. Which mountain destinations will succeed or survive under present or future conditions depends on many factors, which include changing visitor preferences and climate change. These may hit smaller destinations harder as these need a stronger economy for the investments needed. Other destinations will face problems due to their spatial attributes, for example, distance or travel time to main markets or lack of mountain slopes to expand the alpine area.

We identify these as exogenic factors as they influence destination development but are largely outside the control of stakeholders and management structures (Page, 2009; Welling & Árnason, 2016). We also find that they cannot sufficiently explain success, sustainability and the capacity to innovate, prompting us to look closely at endogenic factors. These affect the destination mostly through its internal forces (Mühlinghaus & Wälty, 2001), and examples include ownership, management models and leadership.

Destination development has been depicted as going through sequential phases or "stages", a directed and ordered inherently related succession (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2020). Knafou (1978) proposed four successional types of ski resorts in the French Alps. The first were created from old villages down in the valley, whereas in the three later stages resorts were created ground-up at higher altitudes, shaped by changing types of planning regimes.

Central to this idea is that succeeding stages depend on each other and that this process has a direction (e.g. Butler, 2006; Prideaux, 2004). However, these theoretical views may need further enhancement as destination development may be more complex than a mere linear history of sequential stages. McKercher (1999) compares tourism system complexity to those of ecological communities, which are also highly variable in space and time. Consequently, rather than an expectation of a rigid, predestined linear development, as predicted by Butler's (2006) tourism area life cycle (TALC) theory, we should expect more chaotic and unpredictable developments (Russell & Faulkner, 2004). This also means that the future effects of different driving factors are as difficult to predict today as they have been in the past, for example, some factors were essential in transforming summer-tourism destinations into ski resorts, causing the survival of some and the death of others. This would have been impossible to foresee when the first mountain destinations appeared about 150 years ago, therefore, in order to be able to discuss, understand and predict shifts in competitiveness, sustainability and ultimately the destiny of tourist destinations, it is pertinent to investigate what historical factors have influenced, and continue to influence until present day, as well as future opportunities and challenges for mountain destinations. The first step in doing so is to recapitulate the history of these destinations and to establish describable time periods. This in turn provides a foundation for identifying exogenic and endogenic driving factors that have shaped destinations and culled or promoted future possibilities. In doing so, we provide in the discussion examples of how the observed success of sample destinations may be explained by their historical legacy and how the importance of different driving factors for development changes through history.

In doing so, this research advances theoretical understanding through a historically grounded framework that integrates exogenic and endogenic factors. The framework extends beyond linear models to provide a nuanced tool for analysing destination development, whereas existing research largely overlooks historical influences on destination success, this historical perspective addresses that gap. The emphasis on context enhances its relevance to international tourism research, providing findings applicable to destinations worldwide.

In this study we review local and historical documents, which constitute a basis for the presentation of a historical framework followed by a discussion of the effects of historical legacies. However, first we establish a conceptual framework for destination development as a theoretical basis for the historical analysis.

2. Conceptual framework

Tourism destinations evolve through stages which are influenced by changing visitor preferences, facility renewal and attraction transformation (Butler, 2006). Theories like Butler's (2006) TALC model propose a destination development pattern based on the idea of a product life cycle, while the resort development spectrum (Prideaux, 2004) relates resort development to market drivers of supply. These prescribed unidirectional models propose that destinations follow a set evolutionary sequence; however, they often fail to capture the complex and diverse development paths of individual examples. Growth rates and evolutionary

stages differ and this is crucial in order to recognize destination development (Agarwal, 2002).

Norway's mountain destinations have developed through diverse influences well suited to a discussion challenging linear development concepts. The classic development informs intervention possibilities (Poole et al., 2000); in the case of Norwegian mountain destinations it was pioneered by farmers and their families who began hosting visitors as early as the mid-19th century.

Increasing visitor numbers stimulated the creation of new businesses (Blekastad, 2001), triggered local government policy making (Hall, 2012) and destination 're-engineering' approaches (Agarwal, 2012). Soon, other local residents recognized tourist visits as an emerging market opportunity and engaged in entrepreneurial initiatives (Komppula, 2016) such as leadership functions (Kozak et al., 2014). This led to a shift in perspective that facilitated the transition from seasonal summer-farm operations to year-round tourism-oriented businesses, demonstrating adaptive supply chain management and entrepreneurship in response to visitor needs (Elshaer & Saad, 2022). Further, it highlights the role of tangible and marketable products in driving destination development (Presenza et al., 2015).

These interventionist approaches required creating several activities contributing to the gradual slow shift from primary economic activities (agriculture) to tourism-dominated communities (Pröbstl-Haider et al., 2019). Nevertheless, later some destinations developed with little connection to local socioeconomic structures, with particular interest in heavy financial investment and generating economic benefits through corporatization (Pröbstl-Haider et al., 2019). The Hafjell and Kvitfjell destinations, which were developed for the Lillehammer Olympic games in 1994, are prime Norwegian examples (Hanstad & Lesjø, 2020).

Structural forces beyond acting as just agencies of change become important in destination development patterns, emphasizing the co-adaptive (Bramwell, 2006) or nonlinear nature of change processes (Pavlovich, 2014). Such changes occur through heterogeneous connections of factors demonstrating how diverse driving forces of change can create novelty. Tourism destination development does not always follow a hierarchical pattern; change can occur unplanned (Pavlovich, 2014) or through externally induced events or even crises (Nordin et al., 2019; Pforr et al., 2014).

A key limitation of existing destination-development concepts is their tendency to oversimplify the complex, multi-factorial nature of change as it typically occurs through a prolonged series of interconnected events and processes (Haugland et al., 2011). Tourism research has traditionally categorized factors influencing destination changes as exogenic (external) and endogenic (internal) (e.g. Gill & Williams, 2011; Hall et al., 2024). This binary framework distinguishes between influences intrinsic to a destination and those from outside. We follow this established approach, discerning between exogenic and endogenic drivers, to analyse destination development. This dual categorization helps capture its complexity and provides practical value; by differentiating between controllable (endogenic) and uncontrollable (exogenic) factors, stakeholders can develop more targeted and effective strategies (Bramwell & Cox, 2009).

While the graphic models of exogenic and endogenic factors presented here are not exhaustive, they serve as valuable tools for illustrating historical development and guiding discussions about these legacy effects.

2.1. Exogenic driving factors

Exogenic drivers are external factors that influence destination development (Gunn & Var, 2002) but are largely outside the control of local actors, management structures and stakeholder efforts (Page, 2009; Welling & Árnason, 2016). They directly affect destinations by restricting or facilitating physical growth and indirectly by influencing the tourist markets. Mühlinghaus and Wälty (2001) find that exogenic drivers can create a feeling of helplessness among local actors, however Pröbstl-Haider et al. (2019) encourage tourism actors to find ways to adapt, mitigate or navigate through them to remain competitive and sustainable.

Exogenic drivers relevant in Norwegian destinations are outlined in Figure 1. The geography of the destination and its surroundings determine the presence of commodifiable nature (Kaltenborn et al., 2007); in this case, mountain slopes and pristine nature determine their placement, along with other spatial attributes such as distance to markets. Travel time depends not only on distance but also on accessibility through

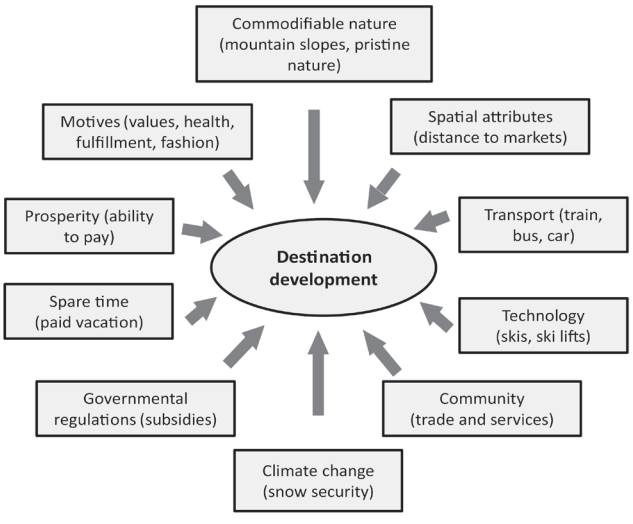

Figure 1. Exogenic driving factors
Source: authors

transportation. The tourism market's response to distance or travel time may be presented as a distance-decay relationship (Müller & Hall, 2018).

Technological advancements in skiing equipment and infrastructure (skis and ski lifts), influence the appeal of destinations (Mayer, 2019). A report from the Menon Economics (Dombu & Jakobsen, 2020) shows that Norwegian ski resorts with more cable cars, surface lifts and pistes consistently have more winter overnight stays and higher turnovers.

Governmental regulations and economic policies (e.g. taxation and subsidies) also affect destination development. For example, from 1946 to 1960, many mountain hotels received favourable loans from the Regional Development Fund to stimulate regional growth (Svalastog, 1992). Spatial planning regulations can influence such development by controlling access to areas suitable for establishing trade and services (Tjørve, 2022; Tjørve et al., 2022). The impacts of climate change will also vary heavily among destinations, impacting smaller businesses more than larger ones (Pröbstl-Haider et al., 2019). Tourists' preferences may depend not only on trends in motives but also on historical and recent changes in prosperity and leisure time (Dwyer et al., 2020).

2.2. Endogenic driving factors

Endogenic factors affect the destination through ownership and management models, local governance, stakeholders and actor networks (Figure 2). Page (2009) refers to these factors as internal environment forces from within while the management model refers to the strategies and approaches used to operate and develop the destination (Flagestad & Hope, 2001). These are closely linked to the ownership type e.g. family-owned, corporate, community or public-private partnership. These models preserve essential functions such as planning, organising, leading and controlling (Ryan, 2020); functions are executed by and through networks of actors such as managers, businesses and organisations to achieve the objectives (Page, 2009). In a family-owned business both ownership and leadership are handed over to the next generation. Thus, leadership competence is also part of the legacy, securing not only economic stability but also the transfer of managing skills and knowledge about how to run a tourism business and the industry in general.

Local actors and networks, and also local destination management organisations (DMOs), are tightly related to management and ownership models. The influence of landowners and other stakeholders depends on ownership and network types (Beritelli et al., 2007). It may also be beneficial to discuss the characteristics of managers, including leadership style, knowledge and

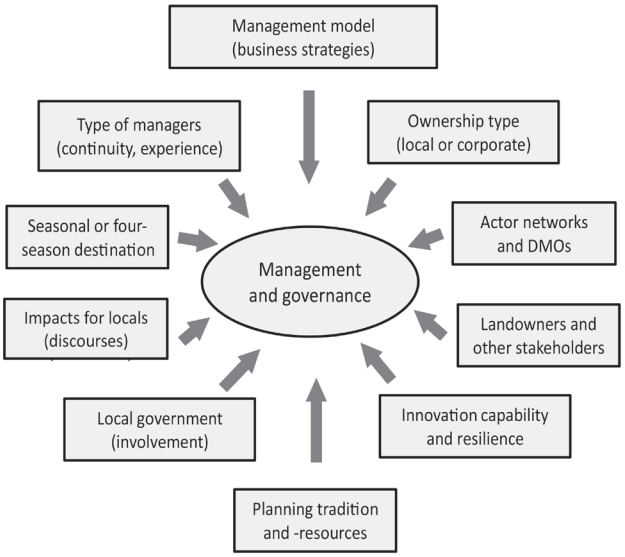

Figure 2. Endogenic driving factors
Source: authors

abilities such as fostering innovation, as leadership may constitute an important driving factor (Bichler & Lösch, 2019). Managers, even at the enterprise level, often find themselves involved in diverse destination- or community-level issues that extend beyond managing their individual enterprises (Valente et al., 2015).

Planning traditions, local governance and other local involvement can be of great importance. For example, Tjørve et al. (2022) find that a neoliberal planning culture seems to have caused local governments to partly lose control over physical planning in mountain destinations. Seasonal choices of when to stay open may also challenge development (Hudson & Cross, 2007). Smaller destinations and even larger ones that operate only during snow seasons often face harder competition from other forms of vacation offerings, as well as challenges to recruitment and increased training costs; challenges that are amplified by loss of snow cover and a more variable climate (Engeset & Velvin, 2016).

3. Methodology and study area

3.1. Methods

Commercial mountain tourism in Norway has a rich history spanning more than 150 years. Regardless, most of these stories exist only in pieces from Norwegian-language sources and they deserve a more thorough treatment in the international academic literature. This literature analysis aspires to bridge this gap between the academic literature and local and regional accounts of destination history and development (Table 1) enabling a historical reconstruction and critical

Table 1. Written sources of local historical accounts (in Norwegian), including newspapers, destination websites and digital archives such as Digital Museum

Sources	Description	Access/Examples
Atekst (Retriever)	A news analysis tool that provides access to Retriever's database of local, regional and national newspapers	Accessed through the University of Inland Norway (INN) databases: INN (n.d.)
Norske elektroniske aviser [National Library's newspaper service]	Also provides full-text access to Norwegian newspapers. The library is currently digitizing its entire collection	Accessed through the INN databases: INN (n.d.)
Digitalt Museum [Digital Museum]	Houses an extensive collection of information from Norwegian museums. The platform makes its resources available for image searching, research, teaching and joint knowledge building	DigitaltMuseum (n.d.)
Store norske leksikon (SNL) [*The Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*]	The Great Norwegian Encyclopaedia, is an online encyclopaedia containing approximately 200,000 articles, with some entries dating back to 1906	SNL (n.d.)
Destination websites, historical books of some destinations (including landowners' history, agreements and contracts with new destination operators)		e.g. Blekastad (2001), Brusletto & Medhus (2023)

Source: authors.

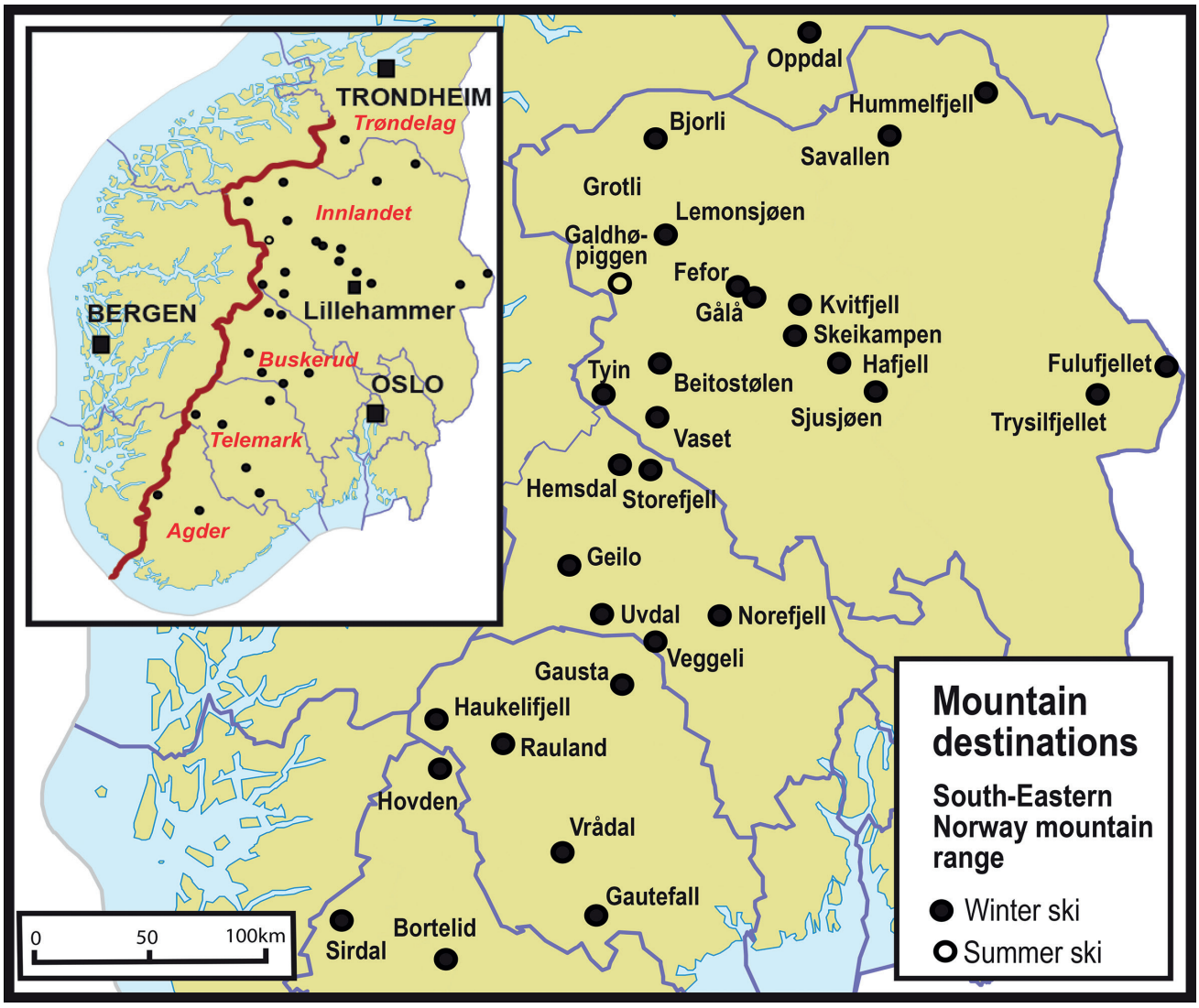

Figure 3. Present placement of the main destinations in the mountain regions of southern Norway with the unbroken lines delineating the counties
Source: authors

analysis of developmental patterns, revealing current challenges and opportunities. Several types of source are included to verify the information. In addition, common knowledge and personal observations are also reflected upon. Considering the wealth of information constituting the basis for the work, abstracting data from all these sources becomes inconceivable. Most of the material researched for the literature review will be in Norwegian and from sources that have not been accessed in the international research literature. Historical material from local, regional and national newspapers was accessed from the Atekst (Retriever) database, which goes back to 1945 (after World War II). This has been complemented with material from the Norske elektroniske aviser [National Library's newspaper service], which substantially overlaps with Atekst (Retriever). The webpage Digitalt Museum [Digital Museum] is a common database for Norwegian and Swedish museums and collections. Its purpose is mainly to present historic photographs and illustrations, but also with accompanying texts, covering all time periods of interest for this study. The website of *Store norske leksikon* (SNL) [*The Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*] will provide a number of relevant subject articles. In addition, magazine or journal articles and books (or edited books) from local-history societies and other local publishers also constitutes a rich source of information. Again, almost all of this information is in Norwegian and often difficult to find.

3.2. Study area

The study area comprises the mountainous parts of southern and eastern Norway (Figure 3). This region's mountain range has the highest number and the largest mountain destinations in the country. The main map in Figure 3 shows the most important destinations in study area, found (from north to south) in the counties of Trøndelag (southern part), Innlandet, Buskerud, Telemark and Agder. The inset shows the location of the study area relative to the three largest cities in Norway.

4. Destination legacy (findings)

There are significant differences in success, resilience and sustainability among Norwegian mountain destinations. However, many factors affecting opportunities and challenges are heavily influenced by destination history (Saarinen et al., 2019). Understanding the history and location of mountain tourism requires consideration of societal changes, technological developments, new ownership and management models, entrepreneurship, innovation and local involvement. Even the managers themselves, often charismatic and of local origin, may largely be products of a destination's legacy (Aguzman et al., 2021). The history of mountain tourism in Norway can be divided into distinct eras (e.g. Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2020), beginning with the first summer tourists to the Norwegian mountains.

4.1. Early beginnings: Summer farms as catalysts (1820–1870)

Mountain tourism first emerged in the 19th century at summer farms, which had begun to cater to summer tourists who initially came from urban areas. Cities had grown rapidly in size during early industrialization and this had also brought about the emergence of an upper-middle class and an intellectual elite. During this time, the upper classes embraced the national romanticism that swept over Europe, and with it came a search for a Norwegian identity and the ideal of wild, untamed nature, praised by contemporary poets and painters (Samios, 2020).

The exploration of mountains from the early 19th century attracted cartographers, botanists, geologists and landscape painters (Eiter & Potthoff, 2007). Foreigners, often British aristocrats, including salmon anglers, mountain climbers and other explorers, also arrived in search of adventure and unspoiled nature (Whalley & Parkinson, 2016).

Summer farming in the Norwegian mountains peaked during the mid-19th century, coinciding with the dawn of mountain tourism. Tønsberg (1875) describes how farmers in many places began offering accommodation in purpose-built cabins on their summer farms, which soon developed into regular guesthouses (Flognfeldt, 2006), along with the guiding of mountaineers by 'patent guides' from Den Norske Turistforening (DNT) [The Norwegian Hiking Society] (Bele et al., 2017). These developments mark the beginning of mountain tourism in Norway, and this explains why many old mountain destinations are situated in former summer-farm areas. It means that one important driving factor for early destination development was visitor motivation, evolved from national romanticism and the drive to explore, and facilitated by commodifiable nature that included summer farms which is still a part of the legacy with their early beginnings in this period (see Figures 1 & 5).

Today, summer farms, once a significant part of Norwegian romanticism and tourism, have largely disappeared despite their appeal. With the increased need to bolster summer seasons amid growing competition and climate change impacts on winter seasons, whether summer farms could be reintroduced in some destinations to help diversify tourism offerings may be more dependent on endogenic influences.

Figure 4. Gausdal sanatorium (four miles north of Lillehammer), the first large mountain hotel in Norway, opened in 1876

Note: this photograph has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights (CreativeCommons)

Source: Wilse (1935)

4.2. The sanatorium era (1870–1900)

The first large hotels in the mountains were built as "sanatoriums". They were inspired by those in the Alps, which offered "mountain therapy" with repose, short strolls and fresh air as healing remedies. They did not accept patients with tuberculosis or other grave conditions but were built for people in need of restitution from everyday toil, strain and low spirits. Those were the days when it was not shameful for a man (or woman) of the upper classes to feel anxious, frail and worn down.

The transformation of mountain tourism in Norway began with the introduction of the first railway in 1854, connecting Oslo to Lake Mjøsa. Visitors would then use the paddle steamer Skibladner (launched in August 1856 and still operational today) to travel to Lillehammer in less than a day. From there, they would journey either by horse-drawn carriage or on foot to reach the mountains on the following day. Tønsberg (1875, p. 107) writes:

> Travellers now generally take the rail to Eidsvold, proceeding from Eidsvold to Lillehammer, till the lake is frozen, by steamer. If you leave Christiania [now: Oslo] in the morning, you can reach as far as 3 or 4 miles north of Lillehammer, … before nightfall.

It is evident that main driving factors for the development of mountain destinations in this period were transportation and spatial attributes such as distance to markets (see Figures 1 & 5). It was the transportation revolution that laid the foundation for early destinations, noticeably the Skei summer-farm area, 40 km from Lillehammer. In this period, it developed into Norway's first full-blown mountain resort with a real mountain hotel, Gausdal høifjeldssanatorium [Gausdal sanatorium], that opened in 1876 (Blekastad, 2001; Figure 4). It could accommodate around 200 guests but attracted too few and went bankrupt within three years (Blekastad, 2001). Nevertheless, Skei soon became the first important mountain destination, though it quickly faced competition from several new mountain hotels in the same region. Examples include Fagerhøy (1882), Hornsjøen (1886), Gålå (1892), Fefor (1891) and Musdal (1901), and by the end of the century, more than seven new sanatorium hotels had opened within a 50 km radius of the first one (Granum, 2006; Gravråk, 2019; Grøndahl, 2013; Lauritzen, 2024; Skaug, 2019; Wedum, 2011).

Other counties in the mountain range also developed their "sanatoria" (see e.g., Brusletto & Medhus, 2023; Kløve, 1999; Mosebø, 2011), though not as many as in the Lillehammer region, which benefited from easy access via the new railway between Oslo and Trondheim. All these sanatoria were built in summer-farm areas, which today constitute several of the modern mountain destinations in southern Norway. As the new century dawned, most "sanatoria" changed their names to "hotels", mirroring similar trends in the Alps and Rocky Mountains.

Just a couple of decades later, Gosse (1898) noted that "The length of the railway system has increased fourfold…" (p. 534) and that "…inside the country there have sprung up in these last years a profusion of the most delightful little Alpine hotels … which form a distinct new feature of Norway" (p. 535). By 1898, the railway from Oslo (then: Christiania) had extended past Lillehammer to the town of Otta. The proximity of suitable mountain areas to Oslo and the new main railway was clearly the primary driver for the rise of this first mountain-destination cluster, featuring large hotels and budding winter tourism in the Lillehammer region.

In 1909, the railway from Oslo to Bergen opened, providing access to new large mountain areas for the development of mountain resorts easily accessible by train, such as Geilo and Finse. At Geilo, Dr. Holms hotel opened on the same day as the railway to Bergen, November 27, 1909 (Brusletto & Medhus, 2023; Kløve, 1999). Similarly, at Finse, accessible only by train, the first hotel opened the same year as the railway (Jørstad, 1998). Communities and destinations strategically positioned along the railway line leveraged and reaped the benefits of this new mode of transportation. However, with the later proliferation of bus transportation and, much later, private cars, Finse's golden age subsided due to its lack of road access. The changes in transportation and resort development during this period illustrate how new trends in transportation modes (as a driving factor) may alter opportunities and challenges for mountain resorts. However, the growth of a prosperous upper class in the cities also became an important driving factor during the "sanatorium era" (see Figures 1 & 5).

4.3. Dawn of winter tourism (1900–1930)

Up until the turn of the 20th century, mountain destinations had primarily been visited during the summer. However, the evolution of ski equipment, including Norheim ski bindings and waisted skis, along with the increasing popularity of cross-country skiing, created a market for ski tourism. Winter tourism commenced both in Scandinavia and in the Alps at the turn of the century (Barton, 2008; Kowalczyk, 2009). The first establishment to accommodate winter tourists in 1901 was Winge Sanatorium, north of Lillehammer (Skaug, 2019). Only a few years later, in 1905, Fefor Sanatorium also opened its doors for the skiing season (Lauritzen, 2024), and within a decade, several others had followed suit. At most destinations, winter tourism initially began with hotels opening during Easter. This first era of winter tourism was dominated by cross-country skiing, but the main driving factors behind winter tourism became the technological development of skis, combined with a surge in popularity of cross-country skiing during the first decades of the 20th century (see Figures 1 & 5).

Another important factor was the arrival of hotel buses. When the main railways were built, around the turn of the 20th century, guests were collected by horse and sled at the railway station in the valley below (Skaug, 2019). The 1920s marked the introduction of hotel buses, and throughout the 1920s and 30s, many hotels acquired their own coaches and later buses to collect guests from the train station, even in winter (Skaug, 2019). This development further benefited mountain destinations located close (but still not directly adjacent) to railway stations.

4.4. Growing winter tourism (1930–1960)

During the 1930s, the popularity of winter tourism increased sharply, especially during the Easter holiday. Still, at most of the old destinations summer was the main tourist season. However, during World War II, mountain tourism in Norway was all but absent, and many hotels were seized by the Wehrmacht and used as headquarters or for quartering.

The time after the war saw a drive to attract more tourists from abroad. Norway needed foreign currency, and the mountain destinations and their hotels offered such an opportunity. Therefore, the central government established in 1946 a loan fund for hotels, to provide cheap funding and subsidies (Svalastog, 1992). This boosted the expansion of mountain destinations and illustrates well a period where governmental regulations and subsidies appear as an important driving factor for destination development (see Figures 1 & 5).

Already before the war, ski lifts had made their arrival in both the Alps and North America. In Norway, the first ski lifts were built by sports clubs for their members: one outside Oslo in 1938 and another in Voss in 1948. It was only during the 1950s that the first Norwegian ski destinations opened their ski lifts: Fefor and Oppdal in 1952 (Gisnås, 2004), Geilo in 1954 (Brusletto & Medhus, 2023), Skeikampen in 1959 (Blekastad, 2001) and Hemsedal in 1961 (Bryhn & Jørgensen, 2024). This marked the beginning of the Alpine era, during which the summer season became less important. Even today,

cross-country skiing remains an essential product for many destinations. However, for destinations without usable hills for alpine skiing, this shift marked the beginning of the end.

4.5. The alpine era (1960–1990)

The 1960s and 1970s became the golden era for the larger mountain hotels, with large dining halls and often also swimming pools and tennis courts. The growing prosperous middle class created a large new market. Now, several new destinations appeared, not necessarily at summer-farm areas but on valley and mountain slopes suitable for alpine skiing; for example at Hemsedal, Trysilfjellet and Myrkdalen. These were all built from the 1960s to the 2000s, primarily as ski resorts and they have therefore been struggling to become successful four-season destinations.

Even though at Norefjell the first lodge was opened in 1895, it only became a real destination with the construction of the venue and the first ski lift ready in 1952 for the winter Olympics (Viker, 1997). Two other destinations emerged after serving as venues for the 1994 winter Olympics, Hafjell and Kvitfjell, joining the new breed of "valley destinations", built as dedicated ski resorts. Other such winter destinations that emerged in this period include Hemsedal (Dokk & Snerte, 2003) and Trysilfjellet (Grundius, 2015), but most of the older destinations also developed in the direction of ski resorts: for example, Beitostølen, Skeikampen and Gålå. In this period the number of ski lifts in Norway increased from a mere nine in 1960 to 417 in 1990 (Teigland, 1991). With alpine skiing came the ski schools, for example at Beitostølen in 1965, (Møller, 2003), ski rentals and even on-site sports stores. Still, cross-country destinations and "combined" cross-country and alpine skiing destinations existed side by side, though the competition gradually greatly favoured the latter.

Until the end of the 1950s, most ski tourists came by train (Dahl & B.A., 2023). In Norway, the rationing of private cars was lifted in 1960, causing the number to double in just four years (Monsrud, 1999) and soon, proximity to the railway became less important than driving time from major cities and urban areas (Tjørve et al., 2013). This caused a major disruption in competition based on the location of destinations. The 1980s marked the start of the decline for traditional hotels which used to stay open all year (Flognfeldt & Tjørve, 2013). The summer season was still important in many places, but soon hotels began to close outside the skiing season, and more hotels than before changed hands, paving the way for the corporate invasion.

To sum up, for this period, important discerning drivers for destination development, determining legacy differences, include the presence of commodifiable slopes, technology for building ski lifts and transportation through the proliferation of private cars (see Figures 1 & 5).

4.6. Corporatization and second homes (1990–present)

Until this time, most mountain hotels were family-owned, but with the winter-tourism transition came larger companies and investors who began to buy up hotels, ski lifts and other businesses to gain control over destinations. A typical example is Skeikampen in the Lillehammer region. By the mid-1970s, it had three hotels owned by three different families which then had little more than 400 beds, but by the beginning of the new millennium, the number had increased to over 1500 (Blekastad, 2001). An investor with a city-hotel chain bought two of the three hotels in 1990 and 2000, including several chalets or cabins. In 2003, the investor also bought the then family-owned ski-lift company and invested heavily in new lifts and pistes (personal observation).

Family-owned hotels and establishments could no longer compete. Ski resorts had become big businesses requiring larger investments. The 1994 Lillehammer Olympics catalysed significant changes, especially in Hafjell and Kvitfjell, as these destinations underwent larger-scale development. The transformation had also spurred the construction of modern, high-standard second homes around these areas. At the same time, the Norwegians own increased international travel experience raised expectations for development at the domestic destinations, and in this period, several more of the largest became corporate-owned, including Trysil, Hemsedal, Hafjell, Kvitfjell and Myrkdalen.

Until the 1980s most second homes built in the mountains were rather primitive, without modern amenities, and they were primarily the choice of the working and lower-middle class, whereas the rich and upper-middle class typically stayed in the mountain hotels in the comfort of electric lighting and bathrooms with running water and water closets (Flognfeldt & Tjørve, 2013). By the 1990s this all changed. New large-scale second-home developments at almost every mountain destination provided the opportunity to have a modern second home with electricity, running water and sewage. The new second homes became as luxurious as the families' first home. Consequently, the Norwegian upper- and upper-middle classes largely abandoned the mountain hotels, and those Norwegians who stayed in commercial accommodation increasingly preferred to rent apartments, chalets or even private second homes (Flognfeldt & Tjørve, 2013).

Despite many traditional hotels having closed, there is still a large overcapacity of hotel beds. Bankrupt hotels are often sold again and again, with the bank

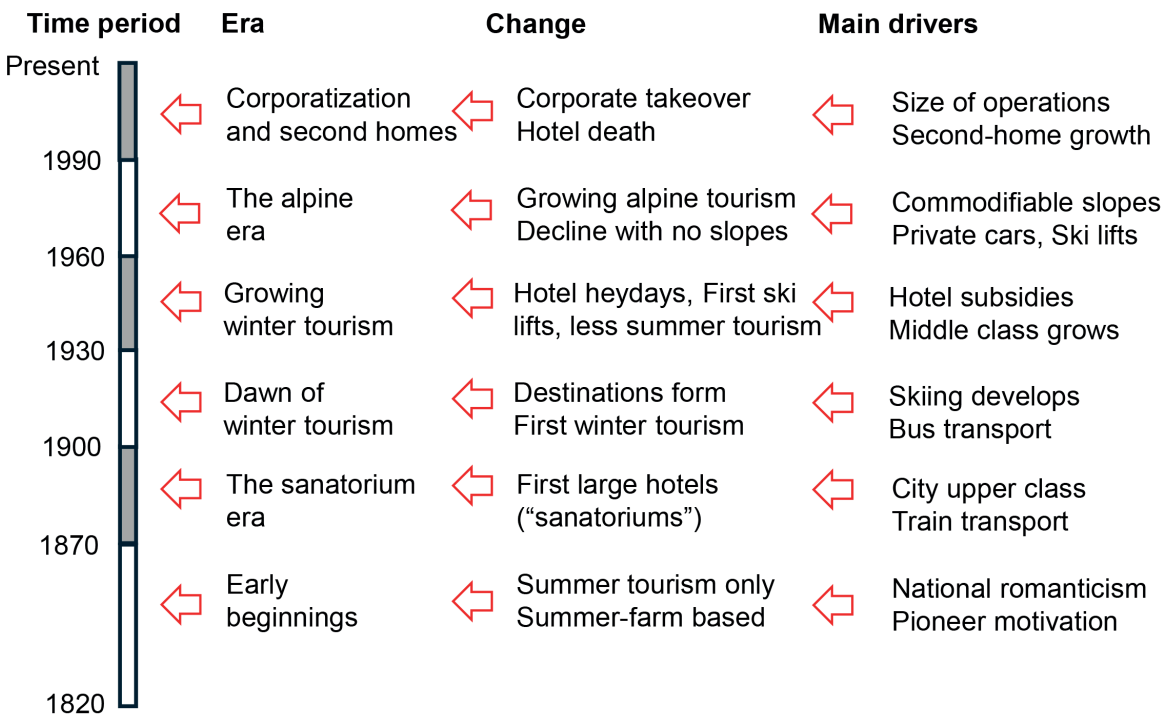

Figure 5. Summary of the successive eras of tourist development, changes that occurred and the main drivers of change for each period or year. These only reflect some of the changes and drivers discussed for the era
Sours: authors

giving loans and taking the financial loss. It appears that the willingness to change strategy or innovate may sometimes be lacking. Despite the era of large hotels being on the wane, many new hotels have been built and old ones refurbished. One new trend is the building of so called "lodge hotels", as found in large destinations such as Hafjell, Geilo, Trysil and Hemsedal. Lodge hotels are large blocks of rental apartments, or a combination of hotel rooms and apartments, typically with facilities such as restaurants, bars, spas, training facilities and shopping. Some new lodge hotels are purpose built, whereas others are merely repurposed old hotel buildings.

Today, foreign tourists are crucial for the survival of the remaining traditional mountain hotels. At the large destinations, for example Hemsedal and Trysil, they make up more than half of the hotel guests (e.g. Mangelrød, 2017). Despite increasing numbers of foreign tourists, most mountain hotels continue to struggle with a low number of guests. Foreigners are often repeaters, returning to the same destination that they have visited before. During their first visit, they often stay at a hotel, but on returning they typically prefer an apartment or other self-catering accommodation (Tjørve et al., 2018).

A main driver in this last period has been the rapid increase in numbers of modern, high-standard second homes. Now, every other Norwegian has access to a second home and of approximately half a million close to 150,000 are found in the mountains (Tjørve & Tjørve, 2022). The new modern second homes are used more frequently than traditional second homes, not only during vacations but also during weekends throughout the year. The desired distance from home has therefore shrunk, from "vacation distance" to "weekend distance" creating a significant second home market for destinations (Tjørve et al., 2013) and which means that those further away than a three-hour drive from home have become less desirable. Foreign markets are not affected as they necessarily lie within vacation distance; markets dependent on air travel, however, may be affected by distance from the inbound airport. The newest trend is that more foreigners are acquiring second homes at the most popular, largest Norwegian mountain destinations (e.g. Hyvang, 2024).

Today, tourists increasingly tend to prefer larger or "complete destinations" with a wide offering of organized leisure activities, shops, restaurants, bars, etc. As ski tourists, visitors gravitate towards large alpine areas with a considerable number of pistes, modern chair lifts, cable cars and snow cannons (e.g. Hudson & Hudson, 2015). Modern destinations are expensive to run and require large investments, therefore there is a trend towards seeking to keep them open all year round, creating "four-season destinations". Some larger, successful destinations manage this, whereas others have resorted to closing down for larger parts of the year. The pressure for non-snow activities is further exacerbated by climate change and loss of snow

Table 2. Summing up some differences between a selection of destinations in the region

Destination	Skeikampen	Beitostølen	Geilo	Trysil	Hemsedal
Origin (area)	Summer-farm	Summer-farm	Summer-farm	Valley slope	Valley slope
First hotel	1876	1964	1880	1966	1905
First ski lift	1959	1960s	1954	1966	1961
No. lifts (pistes)	11 (21)	7 (23)	20 (46)	31 (69)	20 (52)
Corporatisation	Hotel chain	Family corporate	Ski resort & fragmented ownership	Ski-resort corporate	Ski-resort corporate
Acquisition year	1990–2002	1987–2003	2017	2005–2015	2000
Second homes	2000	1600	5000+	5000+	3000
Travel time (car) from main markets (hours)					
Oslo	3.0	3.5	3.5	2.5	3.5
Bergen	7.0	5.0	3.5	8.0	4.5
Trondheim	4.7	5.0	7.0	5.0	6.7

Note: "acquisition year" refers to the time when the main providers at the destination were bought up by a corporate or investor.
Source: authors; ski-lift history is taken from Støyva (2009) and the present number of ski lifts (Fnugg, n.d.).

Table 3. Ski hill altitudes (top and bottom), altitude range (vertical drop) and the number of ski days including those with artificial snow

Destination	Ski-hill bottom (m a.s.l)	Ski-hill top (m a.s.l)	Altitude difference (m)	Ski days 1986–2016	Ski days 2050/2080
Lemonsjøen	875	1250	475	169	163/159
Hovden	775	1150	375	173	162/149
Beitostølen	900	1100	400	172	158/138
Vaset	850	1050	300	171	158/145
Hemsedal	650	1450	800	169	155/148
Skeikampen	775	1125	350	169	152/138
Gålå[a]	800	975	175	169	152/138
Trysil	400	1100	700	169	151/145
Oppdal	575	1125	550	165	147/143
Geilo	800	1150	350	164	146/134
Norefjell	200	1175	975	156	145/129
Sirdal	625	800	175	154	131/126
Bortelid	575	825	250	148	126/121
Hafjell[b]	200	1050	850	137	119/88
Gautefall	450	650	200	140	121/74
Gaustablikk	750	1150	400	132	112/50
Vrådal	275	725	450	129	87/18

[a] Some lifts are closed.
[b] High-altitude pistes may stay open longer.
Source: authors; altitudes and altitude range are calculated from the official Norwegian map site (Norgeskart, n.d.), whereas ski days are taken from Gildestad et al. (2017).

cover, so the need to offer non-snow activities is bringing back more "community-type actors" or locals into destination planning. These actors, or local entrepreneurs, specialize in small-scale activity suppliers of "bucket list" products, compensating for the large destination businesses stern concentration on only core products.

From the above we can identify the main driving factors in this period and this is characterized more by changes in endogenic than exogenic drivers. With the increasing importance of the size of operations, the industry has seen a shift in ownership type and management model towards the corporate (leaving aside the community model; Flagestad & Hope,

2001) (see Figures 1 & 5). Corporatization comes with professionalization, capital injection, better control of the value chain, new robust marketing strategies, service quality and efficiency (Flagestad & Hope, 2001), allowing destinations to compete internationally. However, concerns over the loss of family or local ownership, a neoliberal planning culture and questions about the distribution of economic benefits within local communities keep growing. Moreover, corporatization may cause loss of family-transferred managerial skills and knowledge across generations.

5. Legacy effects (discussion)

Many of the driving factors behind destination development have historical origins. Thus, the history or historical legacy continues to affect significantly their future opportunities and challenges. This is evident when comparing eras as during the summer farm period, destinations primarily faced basic infrastructure challenges while capitalizing on opportunities presented by national romanticism and pristine landscapes. In contrast, the modern corporatization era brings more complex challenges, including climate change adaptation, the need for year-round operations and pressure to diversify offerings.

Figure 5 summarizes some of the most important driving factors and changes within each era (or time period), illustrating how conditions and driving factors have changed through time, determining future competitiveness and sustainability.

The impact of historical legacy varies in significance across destinations. While many locations face common exogenic factors, such as spatial placement, transportation access, commodifiable slopes, climate change and local community 'availability', these manifest differently in each destination based on its unique historical context. Similarly, endogenic factors like ownership, management models and actor networks have evolved distinctly at each location, influenced by their historical differences.

5.1. Commodifiable slopes

Destinations that arose during the early beginnings were, as mentioned, created around summer farms (see examples in Table 2). Their recent success or failure depends primarily on whether there were commodifiable mountain slopes nearby enabling them to become alpine winter destinations. Present ski or mountain resorts started as summer destinations and at the time there was no need for usable slopes for winter sports. Examples of destinations lacking this opportunity include Nordseter and Hornsjø (in the Lillehammer region).

Nordseter, one of the old "summer-farm destinations", 14 kilometres northeast of Lillehammer, did not have slopes suitable for modern alpine skiing. These destinations struggled to compete with destinations with mountain slopes, such as Skeikampen, Geilo, Norefjell and more. Consequently, although the two large traditional commercial hotels survived at Nordseter for decades, they eventually had to close.

5.2. Climate change

Today, natural snow is still more important than artificial snow. The number of days with snow sufficient for alpine skiing already differs significantly between Norwegian alpine skiing areas but is likely to increase dramatically in the coming decades (Gildestad et al., 2017). The lower-altitude slopes and the coastal areas will be disproportionally more affected than the higher-altitude valley destinations leading to those relatively low-lying being more susceptible to climate change than those at higher altitudes (see Table 3). However, stakeholders generally believe that Norwegian destinations will have more snow for more days in the future compared to the Alps. This should stimulate endogenic drivers, providing more opportunities for future planning, with innovation capacity playing a key role.

Nonetheless, a culture of too much focus on alpine skiing has been evident among the destinations for quite some time now. This comes with challenges such as vulnerability to climate change, the need for more infrastructure investments and concerns with snow fluctuations. Again, endogenic forces should leverage finding innovative solutions to mitigate and adapt to changing climate conditions and the consequences of market fluctuations.

5.3. Local community

Old-established ski destinations developed in former summer-farm areas that had no year-round residents and the local communities were mainly situated in the lower valleys. These destinations have rarely developed into complete destinations, with commerce covering many trades and services or with a significant local resident population.

More commonly, destinations in municipalities with larger resident populations can sustain trade and service offerings; Trysil and Geilo are prime examples. However, smaller destinations have very limited offerings within their communities, and consequently, they face challenges such as losing potential revenue, having limited employment opportunities and experiencing depopulation, which affects tourism and, to an extent, local economies. For instance, tourists heading to Spåtind often shop in Dokka, while those visiting Nore

and Uvdal bypass local options to shop in Kongsberg. Similarly, tourists to Bjorli in Lesja Municipality do not attract visitors from Vestlandet beyond the Skjåk community centre (unpublished data). What these destinations have in common is that their development has progressed at a minimal pace.

Beitostølen is an exception to the rule that destinations close to larger communities grow faster as it has developed from a summer farm to a complete destination with a considerable resident population and a high level of trade and services rivalled by few of the same size. This development results from its success in creating four-season attractions with stable year-round employment. Through these successes, the destination further boosts its opportunities to be more successful and sustainable through continued diversification of trade and services such as shops, a bank and, recently, electronic charging locations for modern vehicles. Later discussion may show that the key to all these opportunities results from endogenic forces such as leadership and management.

5.4. Spatial placement and transportation

The historical legacy of spatial placement and transportation infrastructure has profoundly shaped the development paths of the destinations. Their placement depends heavily, not only on the distance to markets, but also on the dominating mode of transportation at the time of its formation. The growth of many of the older destinations was promoted by proximity to the expanding railway network at the turn of the 20th century. A mountain destination with winter sports developed at Finse as a direct result of the railway being built from Oslo over the mountains to Bergen and this railway also brought about another one at Geilo. However, only Geilo survived as a ski resort and today it is one of Norway's largest. Finse failed because it had no road access; when the private car took over, in about 1960, it was all over as the upmarket winter destination it once was.

Road access is crucial today, as are commodifiable slopes for alpine skiing. Nonetheless, with traditional "accommodation markets" losing customers to "second-home markets" (Flognfeldt & Tjørve, 2013), some destinations have also fallen outside the "weekend distance" from the major markets such as Oslo, Trondheim and Bergen. This illustrates that those outside the proximity of weekend distances to second homes may struggle to increase visits (e.g. Ericsson et al., 2022; Slätmo & Kristensen, 2021).

For Geilo, its early growth was catalysed by its proximity to the Oslo–Bergen railway which reached the town in 1908. This early access to efficient transportation gave Geilo a significant headstart in tourism development. In contrast, Beitostølen's growth was initially hampered by poor accessibility. Despite a railway extension to nearby Fagernes in 1906, the final 40 km to Beitostølen remained a low-quality road until much later. This transportation deficit delayed its development, with car winter access only becoming possible during Easter in 1946 and significant growth not occurring until the 1960s private car boom.

These contrasting histories demonstrate how transportation infrastructure can act as a catalyst or as a constraint for mountain destination development. Geilo's early railway access allowed it to establish itself as a prominent destination well before the era of mass car ownership. Beitostølen, on the other hand, had to wait for the democratisation of car travel before it could fully capitalise on its tourism potential. Today distances to airports and good roads are the most important.

Interestingly, both destinations have experienced strong growth in recent years despite being situated more than three hours from some of Norway's largest cities, a distance that puts them at the outer limit of weekend travel for many potential visitors. This further suggests that while historical transportation advantages were crucial for early development, other factors may now be more important in driving destination success.

Geilo and Beitostølen have diversified their offerings beyond just skiing, now providing a wide range of year-round activities. This diversification strategy appears to be helping them overcome the potential disadvantage of their distance from major population centres. It also highlights how destinations can adapt to changing transportation realities – what was once a prohibitive distance for frequent visits has become more manageable as car ownership has increased and road quality has improved.

The cases of Geilo and Beitostølen thus illustrate how the legacy of historical transportation infrastructure continues to shape mountain destinations today. They also demonstrate the potential to overcome initial disadvantages through strategic development and diversification, thus bringing into the discussion the importance of endogenic forces as important drivers for creating opportunities for development.

5.5. Ownership

For several larger destinations, endogenic drivers such as ownership have changed; for example, the transition from family-owned businesses to corporate (examples in Table 2). The smaller destinations are still primarily comprised of many small family-owned or landowner-owned businesses, however they struggle to provide enough activities and amusement for the contemporary tourist. Even developing and maintaining modern alpine skiing facilities may become difficult, as seen

in the Gålå, which has recently experienced several hotel bankruptcies and has lost three out of four alpine areas (Utgård, 2023).

Corporates are less interested in small destinations, which, to a greater extent, struggle economically. Still, as many hotels and alpine skiing facilities have gone bankrupt, some of them have been bought by non-local investors. Consequently, many of the larger destinations have one dominant owner, such as Trysilfjell, Skeikampen, Beitostølen and Hemsedal. However, Geilo has been, up until now, a significant destination with no dominant owner and many companies, though the larger hotels have been concentrated in fewer hands, and most of the ski lifts have now been bought up by a single owner (Berglihn, 2017). Beitostølen again differs from the pattern, where a local family started their acquisition in 1987 and, through the 1990s and early 2000s, bought up, among others, four hotels and the ski-lift company.

Beyond these endogenic forces, destinations today are challenged to compensate for non-snow seasons and shorter winters with increasing non-winter offerings. This brings more "community-type actors" or local activity suppliers into destination planning and marketing strategies. Examples are seen in larger destinations, such as Geilo, Trysil and Beitostølen where ownership is starting to become complex. Such catalytic development depends to a greater degree on the actions of local governments and local communities (Żemła, 2004).

5.6. Management models and leadership

The management model, as well as the type and competence of managers, is an important endogenic determining factor for the success or failure of a destination. Local knowledge and competencies handed down within families are valuable assets that may be lost with investor or corporate takeovers. Not only local background but also charismatic leadership with an ability to build relationships and make the best use of these assets is expected to promote opportunities for innovation and destination sustainability (Aguzman et al., 2021; Paulsen et al., 2009).

Hjalager et al. (2008) assert that the Beitostølen has had such a "visionary" entrepreneur for decades. It is reasonable to presume that endogenic forces, to a degree, explain Beitostølen's success and its ability to build a mature innovation system concerned with managerial innovation (Hjalager et al., 2008).

The discontinuation of family ownership may cause the loss of the leadership legacy. However, some corporations pursue engaging such successful leaders with local or former family ties to the industry. The Swedish corporation Skistar, which owns two Norwegian ski resorts, has employed Norwegian site managers with local and family ties to manage both destinations. This illustrates how the importance of leveraging endogenic forces such as the legacy of local expertise, family ties or local family businesses can create opportunities for destinations to develop (Chauhan & Madden, 2020; Engeset, 2020).

6. Conclusion

Histories differ between Norwegian mountain destinations and ski resorts. Consequently, so do the opportunities and challenges the destinations are facing. Some exogenic factors (Figure 1) are the same for all: motive, prosperity, spare time, government regulation and climate change. It is understandable that some exogenic factors differ more between destinations, such as distance to markets, road access, alpine slopes, high-altitude position and a local community with trade and services, and these determine success and sustainability. Introducing new technologies such as ski lifts, cable cars and snow-making machines requires capacity to invest, though it ultimately depends on whether there is commodifiable nature, meaning usable mountain slopes, to start with.

Favourable exogenic factors do not sufficiently explain success or sustainability. Today two destinations, Beitostølen and Skeikampen, are both corporate owned and both with favourable and comparable conditions. Still, at Beitostølen, the commercial tourism industry seems to be thriving, and Hjalager et al. (2008) describe its "performance and development" in later years as impressive. At Skeikampen, on the other hand, traditional tourism actors have been in decline and it has been heading towards becoming a second-home destination with ski hills.

Destinations without readily marketable natural features, notably mountain slopes, face even more dire challenges, such as in the case of Nordseter, where the hotels, built in the pre-alpine era, have all been forced to close down. At the other end of the spectrum, Beitostølen has grown to about 2000 commercial beds, with two traditional hotels and one large apartment hotel open all year, as well as more than 15 restaurants and pubs.

Realizing the need to innovate and create resilient and sustainable destinations, it is timely to ask whether the ownership and management models, or the qualities or qualifications of the managers or leadership, can explain the very different fates, success, sustainability and ability to innovate in Norwegian mountain destinations.

We recommend that future research builds upon the approach employed in this study to investigate additional driving factors and conduct in-depth analyses of those factors that exert the most significant

influence on destination development across diverse geographical contexts. We realize that our historical accounts and discussion are far from exhaustive. It is evident that the histories of the Norwegian mountain resorts, their legacy and impact on present and future opportunities and challenges, deserve further attention.

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