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**The Bergen Wave and the Media, 1990-2008**

**by**

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## **The Bergen wave and the media, 1990-2008**

### **Abstract:**

Music scenes have frequently been closely related to geographical locations; Merseybeat and Liverpool; Motown, techno and Detroit; and grunge and Seattle. In Norway, the term ‘the Bergen wave’ characterizes periods where specific artists from Bergen have been particularly prominent. The term emerged in the beginning of the 1990s, but resurfaced – linked to a new generation of artists – around ten years later.

This working paper has two main aims. The first is to investigate to what extent a specific phenomenon within music, such as the Bergen wave, is evident through chart and critical success. The data shows that while the second Bergen wave was characterized by both high sales and critical acclaim, the first wave was primarily a media phenomenon, with critical acclaim but limited commercial success. The second aim is to analyze the relationship between the main stakeholders and the scene, in particular the role of media in creating and promoting a local scene.

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## The Bergen wave and the media, 1990-2008

Several music genres or scenes have been linked to geographical locations. Terms such as Merseybeat, The Dunedin Sound, Detroit techno and The Philly Sound are examples of how place of origin has been used to identify, categorize and characterize musical output.<sup>1</sup> This Working Paper analyzes one example of this phenomenon – *Bergensbølgen* ‘the Bergen wave’. The term has been used both domestically and internationally to refer to artists based in Bergen, Norway’s second-largest city.

The Working Paper has three aims. The first is to suggest a method that can be used to measure the impact of ‘local scenes’; the empirical basis of *Bergensbølgen* is analyzed through quantification of media attention and commercial and critical success. The second aim is to analyze how the term has been used in the local and national press. The third aim is to evaluate, on a qualitative basis, the manner in which the artists that are associated with the term relate themselves to the phenomenon.

Several explanations may be offered in order to understand the relationship between locality and music.<sup>2</sup> Musical hotspots may be the result of self-reinforcing effects, such as media attention or new possibilities following the early success of artists from a given locality.<sup>3</sup> There have also been explanations based on economic theories, eg the ideas of industrial clusters and regional innovation systems.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Bergen, the position as Norway’s ‘second city’ might also be a factor; according to Brabazon and Mallinder (2008: 64) ‘DJs and producers not resident in [the] centres can “hide in the light,” developing a sound, skill base, and experience without preliminary pressure.’<sup>5</sup>

How is the concept of locality used in the music industry? Shuker (2001: 210) points out that ‘while the cohesion of their “common” musical signatures is frequently exaggerated, local sounds provide marketing possibilities by providing a “brand name” which consumers can identify with.’ Indeed, in some genres, locality in itself may be the main selling point; ‘for world music, place is central to images and marketing strategies’ (Connell and Gibson, 2004: 353). Shuker’s point about branding is undoubtedly valid with for *Bergensbølgen*. On the one hand, there was substantial stylistic variety

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<sup>1</sup> Connell and Gibson (2003: 98) provides an overview of thirteen examples of ‘regional sounds’, from the 1950s to the 1990s.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the relationship, see eg the special issue of *Popular Music* 19/1 (2000) or Stokes (1994).

<sup>3</sup> This is the case when locally-based record companies provide funds for new local acts, or when successful artists use their status to champion other local performers in wider markets.

<sup>4</sup> Hallencreutz, Lundequist and Malmberg (2004); for a critique, see Hesmondhalgh (2007: 157-188).

<sup>5</sup> See also Power and Hallencreutz (2002: 1850).

among the artists associated with the Bergen scene. On the other hand, 'the Bergen factor' was used as a marker to generate publicity and, to some extent, functioned as a 'seal of quality'. Thus, it is evident that the references to Bergen might be seen as a kind of branding.

The 'Bergen'-brand was not only used within Norway. The British newspaper *The Independent* referred to 'a musical phenomenon [that] UK journalists were calling "The Bergen Wave"' and *The Guardian* highlighted 'the Bergen scene'.<sup>6</sup> The international music press has also been struck by Bergen's 'seemingly relentless flood of talent' and 'unreal musical pedigree'.<sup>7</sup> Bergen has been called a 'hotbed of musical variety', 'an unlikely hive of musical activity' and a 'city that has sired an impressive stable of heavyweights'.<sup>8</sup>

In 2005 *The Times* presented 'Bergen, Norway' as 'the new Seattle', linking the music scene in the city to other cities that had left their mark on the popular music business (Paphides, 2005).<sup>9</sup> Tellingly, these 'capitals of sound' were related to specific time periods (for instance 'Liverpool 1978-82', 'Manchester 1988-90' and 'Seattle 1988-92'), thus underlining the temporality of such scenes.

## I. Mapping the phenomenon – *Bergensbølgen*

The term *Bergensbølgen* first surfaced in the early 1990s, when it was used to characterize a handful of Bergen-based artists that received critical acclaim in the Norwegian music and daily press. The term was revamped – and also used internationally – around a decade later. This second coming was initially referred to as *den andre Bergensbølgen* 'the second Bergen wave' or *den nye Bergensbølgen* 'the new Bergen wave'. However, relatively soon the generic term *Bergensbølgen* 'the Bergen wave' was used to characterize the second, and stronger, phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>

There appears to be a relatively clear understanding about the artists considered to be the most important *Bergensbølgen*-acts. However, the term has been widely used – and abused. A survey of 239 Norwegian newspaper articles using the term shows that around 70 different artists have been

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<sup>6</sup> Quotes from McNair (2009) and Hann (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Quotes from, respectively, *Billboard* and *Spin*; see Barrett (2002) and Gaston (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Quotes from, respectively, *Drowned in Sound*, *Blender* and *CMJ New Music Monthly*; see Appleby (2006), Slaughter (2004) and Kampwirth (2007).

<sup>9</sup> The Seattle comparison had previously been made by Steve Pross, of legendary US indie Emperor Norton Records; see Engelstad (2002).

<sup>10</sup> In 2009 another 'new' Bergen wave appeared, related to artists from the Bergen suburb of *Loddefjord*. In contrast to all previous *Bergensbølgen*-artists, these acts had lyrics in Norwegian. This phenomenon is, however, too recent to be included in the analysis in this paper.

referred to in connection with the phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> Based on these newspaper articles it is possible to identify a pattern of leading artists and also-rans. If we consider only the bands active in the first part of the wave, ie from around 1990 onwards, a very clear division emerges. Table 1 shows that three of the bands, Pogo Pops, Chocolate Overdose and Barbie Bones, are typically referred to in articles that use the term *Bergensbølgen*, with Poor Rich Ones also fairly often associated with the phenomenon.

Table 1. The early 1990s acts – references in articles using the term *Bergensbølgen*, 1990-2008

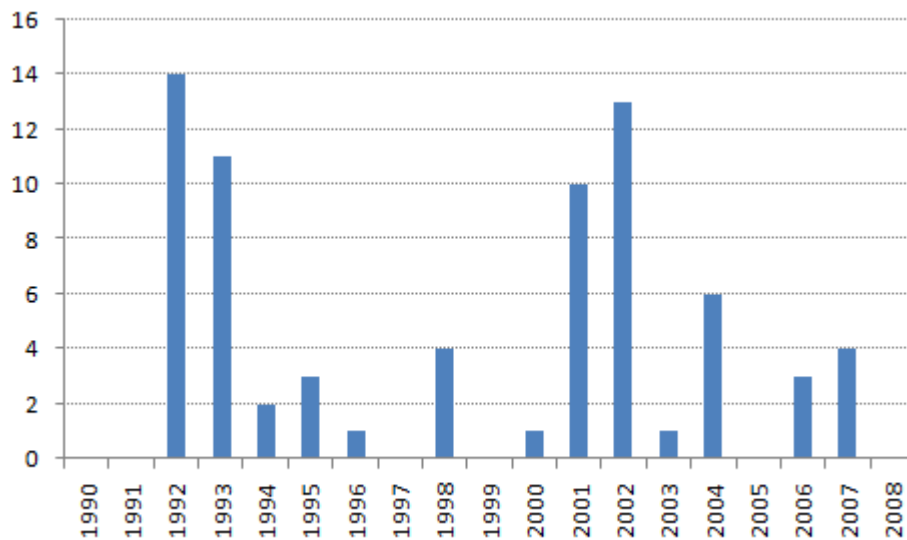
Act	Number of references/acts
<b>Pogo Pops</b>	18
<b>Chocolate Overdose</b>	16
<b>Barbie Bones</b>	14
<b>Poor Rich Ones</b>	9
<b>Butterfly Garden</b>	3
<b># of acts mentioned once</b>	4

The top three artists are undoubtedly those considered to be the major participants of the first part of the wave, not only in the media, but also within the music community.<sup>12</sup> Figure 1 shows that the media attention awarded to this triumvirate follows a wave-like pattern. The bars show the number of times all three bands have been mentioned in the same article.<sup>13</sup> These artists were often lumped together during their heyday in the early 1990s. Subsequently, there is a lull in media attention, until around 2000, and the start of the second part of the Bergen wave. By this time, retrospective articles that identify these artists as protagonists of the first wave are increasingly being published.

<sup>11</sup> The analysis uses a purpose-built data set created on the basis of *Atekst*, the Norwegian digital newspaper archive. Data were compiled in August 2010. The data set is based on printed (not online) articles that use the term *Bergensbølgen*, and covers eight Norwegian newspapers 1990-2008.. The number of newspapers included in the database increases with time (see Appendix a for an overview), and it is also likely that the coverage of popular music is growing; see Schmutz (2009). These two factors imply that, *ceteris paribus*, we may expect the use of the term to show an increasing trend.

<sup>12</sup> Blom (2009) refers to the three bands as ‘The Three Greats’.

<sup>13</sup> The sample is not, however, confined to articles that use the term *Bergensbølgen*. The source of the figure is the previously mentioned *Atekst*-database, supplemented by the internal cuttings archive of the newspaper *Bergens Tidende* for the years 1990 and 1991.

Figure 1. The number of articles naming all three of the leading acts of the first wave, 1990-2008<sup>14</sup>

A similar ranking of importance is evident for the second part of the wave. A total of 57 contemporary artists are referred to in the newspaper articles on *Bergensbølgen* after 1997, but almost half of these acts are mentioned only once or twice. As shown in Table 2, three acts – Røyksopp, Kings of Convenience and Sondre Lerche – stand out with regard to media coverage. Again, this corresponds with the common notion of the most important contributors.

Table 2. The second wave acts – references in articles using the term *Bergensbølgen*, 1998-2008

Act	Number of references/ acts
Røyksopp	43
Kings of Convenience	34
Sondre Lerche	31
Ephemera	25
Ralph Myerz & The Jack Herren Band	22
Sergeant Petter	21
Magnet	15
# of acts mentioned 10-14 times	6
# of acts mentioned 5-9 times	10
# of acts mentioned 2-4 times	12
# of acts mentioned once	22

<sup>14</sup> The starting point for this figure is 1990, when Barbie Bones, the first of the triumvirate, was first covered in the newspapers.

Tables 1 and 2 have shown that certain acts were frequently associated with the term *Bergensbølgen*. However, not all of the articles that used the term referred to music. Slightly less than ten per cent of the articles used the term to denote a Bergen-bias within other cultural areas: football, cinema, theatre and even furniture design. Such usage started as early as 1992, and this indicates that the term had by then acquired an identifiable meaning – a clustering of Bergen-based agents. Another example of the acceptance and definition of the term is the existence of articles that use the term *Bergensbølgen* to refer to the city's popular music scene, but do not clarify the meaning or contents of the term by referring to specific artists. There are 64 such articles in the database, and around half of these are related to discussions of cultural policy.

## II. *Bergensbølgen* – the empirical basis

There are various ways in which to measure the impact of recording artists from specific geographic locations. However, to my knowledge, none of the previous explorations of local scenes have taken a quantitative approach. As such, this Working Paper provides a potential blueprint for quantitative analyses of the importance of musical hotspots.

In this Working Paper three different measures are used to gauge the existence and development of the Bergen wave. The first is a measure of commercial success, created on the basis of chart presence and positions. The second is critical success, measured by nominations and prizes given to Bergen artists at *Spellemannprisen*, the Norwegian equivalent of the Grammy Awards or Brit Awards. The final measure is media exposure, based on the use of the term in newspapers. While none of these measures are fully satisfactory empirical evidence of the existence of Bergen wave, they all point in the same direction; recording artists associated with the Bergen wave had particular impact in the early 1990s and then again, after a prolonged hiatus, just after the turn of the century.<sup>15</sup>

The basis for the evaluation of commercial success is the artists' impact on the Norwegian charts. There is a long social scientific tradition of using chart positions as a measure of the development of the recording industry.<sup>16</sup> Figure 2 shows the number of records by Bergen artists in the Norwegian Top 20 chart, presented as a 52-week moving average. The blue line represents all Bergen and Bergen-based artists in the charts, whereas the red line refers only to those artists that were

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<sup>15</sup> There is of course some correlation between the three measures. For instance, both media attention and winning awards may affect record sales, and *vice versa*. See for instance Anand and Watson (2004: 74-75) or Anand and Peterson (2000).

<sup>16</sup> See for instance the contributions by Peterson and Berger (1971 and 1975) and Gourvish and Tennent (2010).

commonly associated with the Bergen waves.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 2. Chart success and the Bergen waves, 52-week moving average, 1990-2008<sup>18</sup>

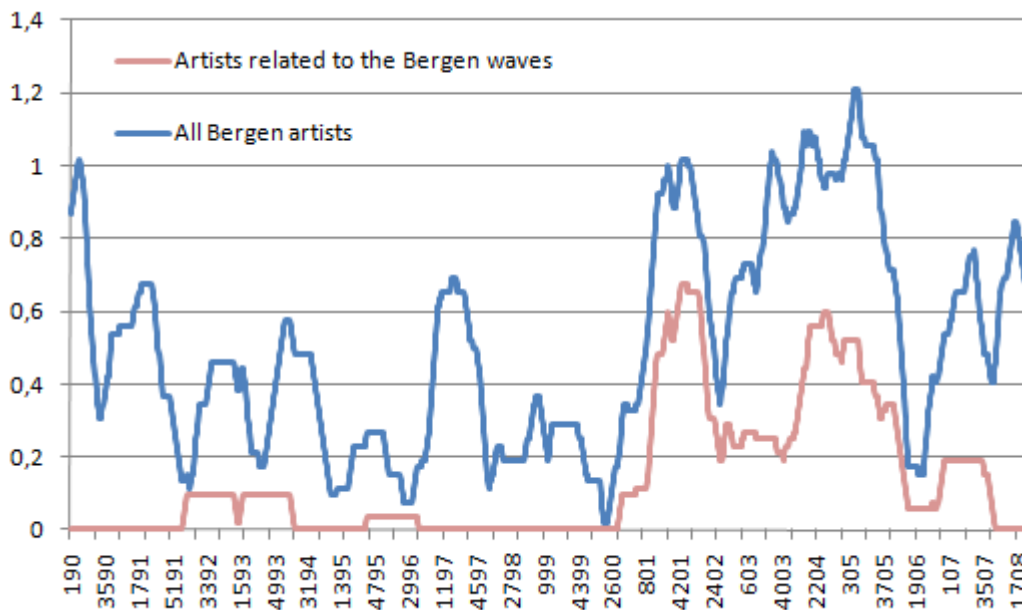


Figure 2 shows that the impact of the Bergen wave on the charts was limited in the 1990s. The only one of the first-generation bands to even enter the charts was Pogo Pops, who saw three of their four albums in the Norwegian Top 20. The debut, *Pop Trip*, sold 20,000 copies, and was also released in Japan and Sweden. In fact, the band was, for a while, 'Big in Japan', and was in the middle of a Japanese tour when they decided to call it a day in 1996. The two other main acts were less successful with regard to record sales. After releasing two albums on EMI, both in Norway and internationally, Barbie Bones split up in 1993 after disappointing sales, blaming lack of support from the record company (Myhre, 1999). The story was much the same for Chocolate Overdose; 'Despite brilliant reviews and the fact that Warner Brothers poured money into the promotion of the band, the records sold badly' (Kvamme, 1995). After selling around 5,000 copies of each of their two albums, Chocolate Overdose ended their connection to Warner in 1994.<sup>19</sup>

The bands associated with the second part of the Bergen wave had vastly more commercial success, both in Norway and abroad. The undisputed champion was Røyksopp, an electronic duo whose

<sup>17</sup> On the basis for this categorization, see the discussion in the previous section.

<sup>18</sup> The source of the figure is the official Norwegian Top 20 Album-chart, which is published on a weekly basis in the newspaper *Verdens Gang*. From 1995 onwards, the newspaper published a Top 40 Album-chart. However, for comparison purposes the analysis has been restricted to the records in the Top 20 after 1995 as well.

<sup>19</sup> After reforming in the second half of the 1990s, the group, with a slightly different line-up, released two albums on independent labels, though, again, without commercial success.



debut album *Melody A.M.* went platinum in the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom.<sup>20</sup> The album spent 28 weeks on the Norwegian Top 20 (and in sum more than a year in the Top 40 chart) between the middle of 2001 and the beginning of 2003. Interestingly, the two members of Röyksopp, which Table 2 shows is the band most clearly associated with the Bergen wave, originally hailed from Tromsø, more than 1,000 miles away from Bergen in northern Norway. However, by the time of their breakthrough, Bergen had become the band's undisputed home base, and their first records were also released on a local label. Subsequently, their records were released via Astralwerks (EMI/ Virgin) in the United States and Wall of Sound in the United Kingdom.

The other act with substantial commercial success internationally was the acoustic duo Kings of Convenience. Stylistically, the band was far removed from Röyksopp. However, Erlend Øye from Kings of Convenience was a guest vocalist on the first Röyksopp album, and the band also featured on the first CD-release from Tellé, the local label that had been responsible for Röyksopp's first singles. The band is an anomaly, in the respect that their second album sold far more than their first – their influence on the charts was thus greater in 2004 than in 2001. The band signed to EMI in Europe, and after first releasing an album in the US on Kindercore, followed in Röyksopp's footsteps to Astralwerks.

The third artist commonly associated with the Bergen wave is Sondre Lerche, who to some extent mimicked the early 1990s bands, with great critical acclaim, but limited commercial success. Signed to Virgin in Norway, Lerche's 2001 debut was released the following year in the US by Astralwerks. In addition to these three artists, 19 records by other acts frequently associated with the Bergen wave entered the Norwegian Top 20 in the period 2000-2008. However, while the majority of these releases made very little impact on the charts, it does not imply that the artists and the records were unimportant. Indeed, in the music industry, commercial success is not necessarily a good measure of the impact and legacy of artists. Certain acts may enjoy the acclaim of critics and the *musical cognoscenti*, without a parallel influence on the charts. Von Appen and Doehring (2006: 21-39) provide good examples of this, when they show the revealing differences between a meta-canon of great albums and a list of best-selling records.

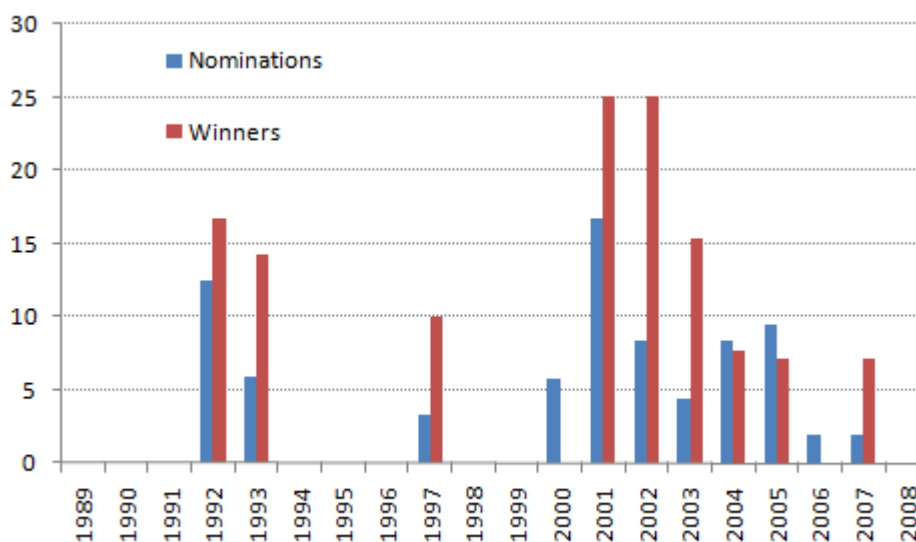
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<sup>20</sup> Based on awards information from the searchable databases at, respectively, [www.nvpi.nl](http://www.nvpi.nl), [www.ifpi.no](http://www.ifpi.no) and [www.bpi.co.uk](http://www.bpi.co.uk). The sales necessary for a platinum record at the time were at least 50,000 in the Netherlands and Norway and more than 300,000 in the UK.

The second measure of *Bergensbølgen* is an attempt at capturing this aspect of the popular music industry. The empirical basis used here is the nominations to and winning of *Spellemannprisen*, a number of annual awards originally organized by the Norwegian chapter of the IFPI (International Federation of Phonogram and Videogram Producers). Nominations are decided by a jury of five to seven representatives from various parts of the music industry. In most categories the jury members – independently and anonymously – vote for their nominees, and then vote for the winner among the most frequently nominated acts.

The number of categories and the number of nominees within each category vary from year to year. The analysis is therefore based on the proportion of nominations received by *Bergensbølgen*-acts, as well as the proportion of winners. Only the relevant categories have been included.<sup>21</sup> Figure 3 shows that there was a clustering of nominations and prizes awarded to Bergen wave artists in 1992 and 1993, and then a flood of prizes in 2001 and 2002, when Bergen wave artists won a quarter of the prizes in the relevant categories. The success in the year 1997 is surprising; that year Poor Rich Ones, a relic of the first Bergen wave, won *Spellemannprisen* for their album *From the makers of Ozium*, thus disrupting what would otherwise have been a pronounced ‘two-era’ award pattern.

Figure 3. *Spellemannprisen* – *Bergensbølgen* nominations and winners, per cent, 1990-2008

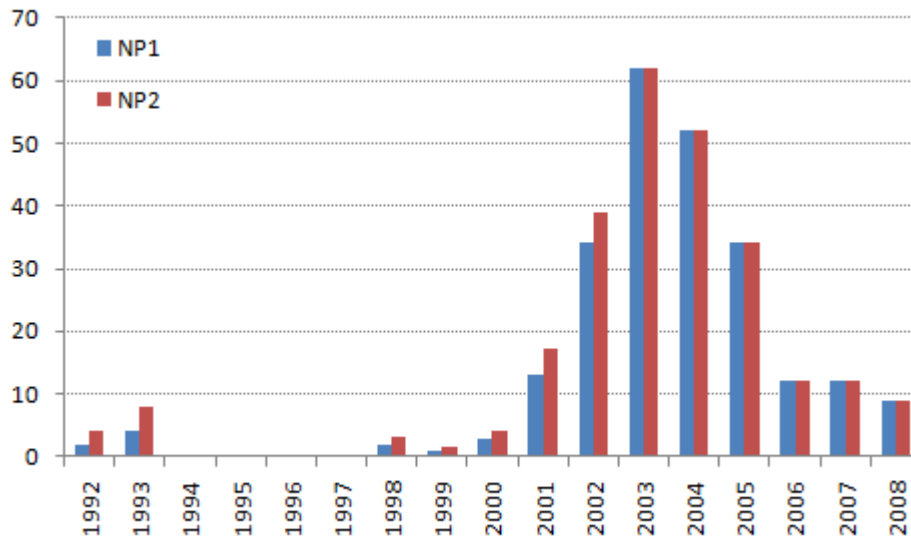


The final measure used to illustrate the ebb and flow of the Bergen wave is the use of the term in the media. Again, the source is the *Atekst*-database, and the measure is the frequency of the use of the term ‘Bergensbølgen’. Figure 4 gives two different measures of this – one is the number of

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix b for the categories included in the data, as well as those categories that have been omitted. Not all categories were represented every year.

references annually (NP1), while the other (NP2) is the number of annual references, adjusted for the increasing number of newspapers included in the database.

Figure 4. The use of the term *Bergensbølgen* in newspapers, number, 1992-2008



A wave-like pattern is evident in media attention as well, with some use of the term in the early 1990s, and then extensive use from around 2000 onwards, after the term had been more or less absent from the newspapers in the previous six years. Following the peak in 2003 there is a steady decline in the number of articles using the term. The frequent occurrence of the term in the period 2002-05 of course primarily reflects the relative strength of the Bergen music scene at the time. However, several of the articles from this period made a point of mentioning the early 1990s wave and its main bands. As such, the legacy of the first part of the Bergen wave is clearly strengthened as a result of the second part of the wave; see Figure 1, which illustrates the same point. This is not unique; Bennett (2004:205-220) for instance, shows that the notion of local scenes – in his example the Canterbury Scene – may be perpetuated posthumously.

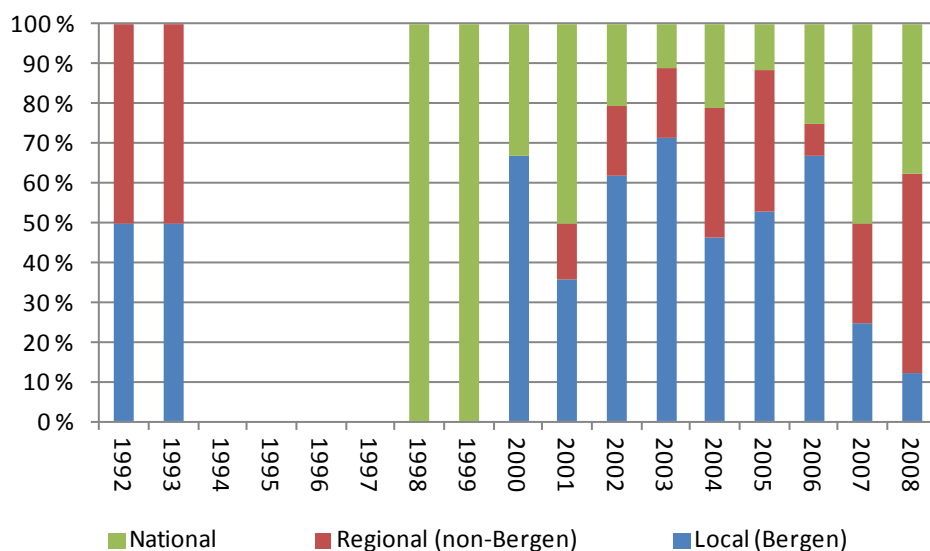
The use of the term *Bergensbølgen* in the newspapers can be further analyzed, for instance by distinguishing between different types of newspapers. Figure 5 divides the Norwegian newspapers into three categories:

- local (Bergen) newspapers, ie newspapers based in Bergen
- regional (non-Bergen) newspapers, primarily targeted at local readers, but not based in the Bergen-region
- national newspapers, aimed at readers in all of Norway with no distinct regional profile

The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 5, which reveals an interesting pattern. The term

*Bergensbølgen* was not picked up by the national newspapers in the early 1990s. Indeed, it was confined to a handful of articles in two different newspapers – one based in Bergen and one in northern Norway. After the term had disappeared for a period of four years, it was resuscitated. However, the initial kiss of life was given by the newspaper *Dagbladet*, which had national distribution and national readership. Only after the term had been used in articles in *Dagbladet* in 1998 and 1999, when the Bergen scene regained some of the momentum it had lost earlier on in the decade, it was adopted on a more general scale. In 2000, it was used both in national and local newspapers. From 2002 to 2006, Bergen-based newspapers dominated in the use of the term, before it again gained more widespread use.

Figure 5. The use of the term *Bergensbølgen* in different types of newspapers, 1990-2006<sup>22</sup>



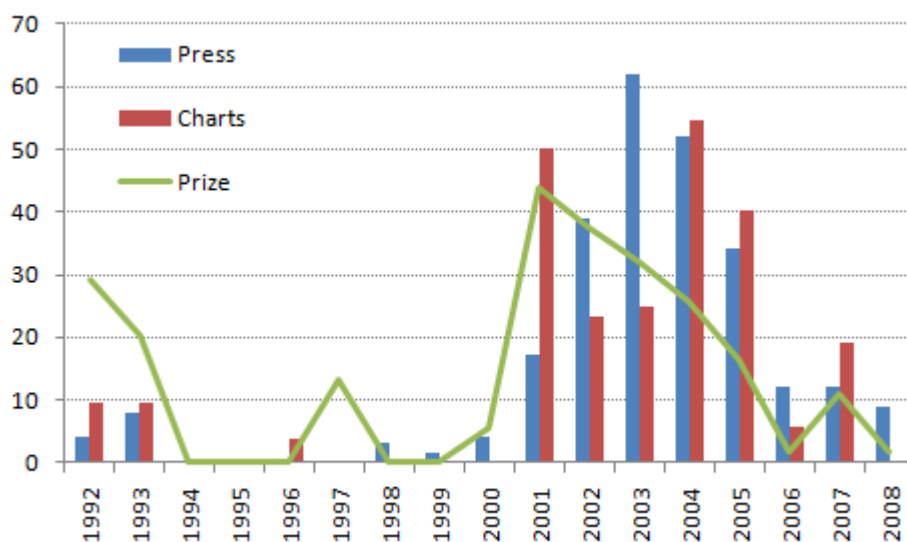
Given that the number of articles is relatively limited, one or two journalists that have *Bergensbølgen* as a pet term, and consciously try to establish the notion of a particular ‘scene’ in the public mind, might explain the use. However, this is not the case. A closer analysis of how the term was used in ‘the formative years’ – the period 1998-2002 – reveals that there is no such ‘scene’-making involved. The fourteen articles printed in national newspapers have nine different authors, and also include two unsigned articles. The 26 different articles published in the local press were written by thirteen different authors, and also included one unsigned article. It is thus highly unlikely that the term *Bergensbølgen* was the result of an attempt by a limited number of journalists who consciously set out to establish ‘scene’ in the manner in which for instance music journalists in the United Kingdom have been famous for.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> This chart has not been adjusted for differences in the type of newspapers across time.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance the amusing account in Maconie (2004:259).

When we combine the data from Figures 2 to 4, the wave pattern becomes relatively clear. Figure 6 shows the impact of Bergen wave artists in the early 1990s, the relative dearth in the period 1994-1999, as well as a critical, commercial and media peak in the first years of the new millennium.

Figure 6. The ebb and flow of the Bergen wave, 1992-2008<sup>24</sup>



Adding up the data in Figure 6, gives us Table 3, which gives an overall impression of the strength of the Bergen wave in the various years in the period 1992-2008.

Table 3. The Bergen wave in aggregate, 1992-2008

Year	Points	Year	Points	Year	Points
1992	43	1998	3	2004	123
1993	38	1999	2	2005	91
1994	0	2000	10	2006	20
1995	0	2001	109	2007	40
1996	4	2002	95	2008	9
1997	13	2003	107		

### III. *Bergensbølgen* and the main artists

The previous analysis showed that there was substantial Bergen presence in the charts that could not

<sup>24</sup> The figure is based on the following data series; *Press*: The use of the term *Bergensbølgen*, adjusted for the number of newspapers. *Charts*: Average number of records by Bergen wave artists in the Top 20, multiplied by a factor of 100. *Prize*: The sum of the percentage of nominations and the percentage of awards won.

be attributed to the artists usually associated with the Bergen waves (the difference between the two lines in Figure 2). The strength of this effect may be measured by analyzing the ‘chart points’ awarded to the albums released by Bergen artists. In Figure 6, ‘chart points’ have been awarded to individual albums, ranging from 20 points for a one-week top spot in the Top 20 to 1 point for a week on the 20<sup>th</sup> position. The analysis reveals that only two releases by Bergen wave artists, records by Røyksopp and Kings of Convenience, are in the top ten of the most successful albums. Indeed, less than a quarter of the 25 commercially most successful albums by Bergen artists in the period 1990-2008 were released by those artists usually associated with the wave.

Figure 7. Chart points of Bergen albums, 1990-2008

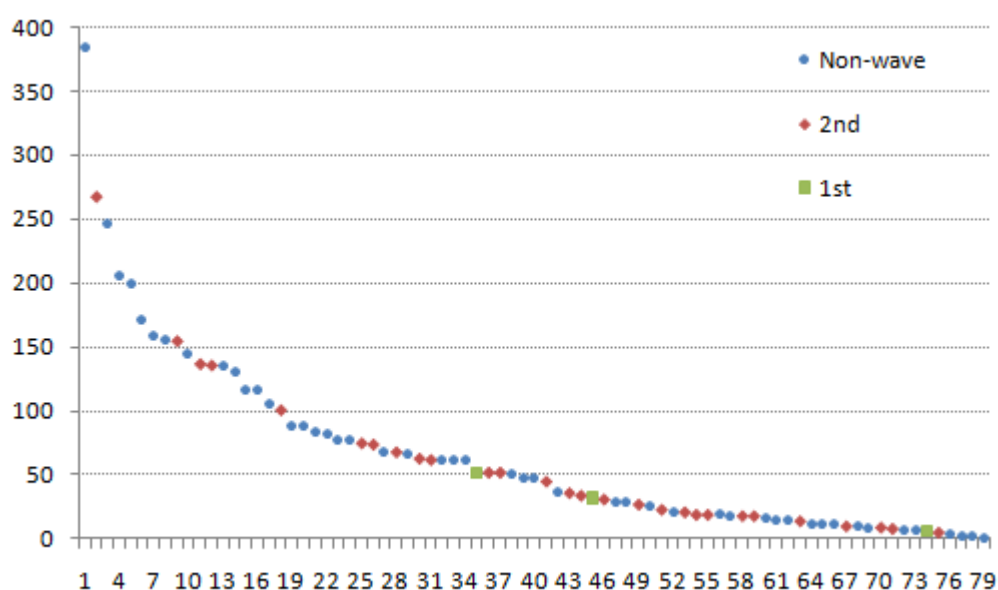


Figure 7 indicates that the *Bergensbølgen*-artists were primarily represented in the lower echelons of the charts. According to the ‘chart points’-measure, two artists stand out, and neither was commonly associated with the Bergen wave. *World Idol*-winner Kurt Nilsen, whose album *Rise to the occasion* earned by far the highest number of points, had four records among the 25 most successful Bergen albums, with a total of more than 800 points.<sup>25</sup> The most successful Bergen artist overall, Sissel Kyrkjebø, who released records aimed at middle-aged and older audiences, gained almost 1,100 points from eleven different albums in the period 1990-2008. Neither of these two artists is commonly linked to the Bergen wave in the newspaper articles. In comparison, Røyksopp, the most successful Bergen wave band, amassed a total of slightly more than 400 points from their two albums.

<sup>25</sup> *World Idol* was the first – and only – international version of the TV-series known in the UK as *Pop Idol*, in the United States as *American Idol* and in Norway as simply *Idol*. The Bergen artist Kurt Nilsen beat the winners of ten other national competitions, including Kelly Clarkson from the US and Will Young from the UK.

The distribution of ‘chart points’ among *Bergensbølgen*-acts and other Bergen acts reveals that artists in the latter category were responsible for more than two thirds of the points over the period 1990-2008.<sup>26</sup> However, if we look only at the heyday of the Bergen wave – the years from 2001 to 2005 – the picture is different. During this period, the *Bergensbølgen*-artists gathered more chart points than the other Bergen artists, though with 1,247 against 1,115 points, the victory is not too impressive.

In the first part of this Working Paper, the use of locality as branding was briefly discussed. However, as the analysis above suggests, artists that were not considered part of the ‘brand’ were just as successful as the artists associated with the Bergen wave. This does of course not imply that being seen as part of *Bergensbølgen* had negative effects. However, it reveals that there are other criteria, in addition to just locality, that determine whether artists are considered part of a particular scene.

How did the artists identify with the term *Bergensbølgen*? Qualitative analysis of the media coverage may give an indication of this. In interview settings, most of the artists that are asked about the role of the Bergen wave emphasize that;

- a) there is no such thing as a Bergen wave, and;
- b) to the extent that such a phenomenon exists, the artist portrayed is not part of this wave.

Some examples should suffice. Røyksopp, for instance, claimed in an interview that the Bergen wave was ‘a media-created thing,’ and as early as in 2002 a newspaper article pointed out that ‘[a]s the musicians have claimed all along, it is artificial to talk about a Bergen wave.’<sup>27</sup> The most explicit denouncement of the phenomenon came from Mikal Telle, head of the label Tellé and sometimes referred to as the ‘father’, or even ‘godfather’, of the Bergen wave.<sup>28</sup> He emphasizes that ‘[...] most people from Bergen find the term “the Bergen wave” ridiculous. No one looks upon it as a wave; it is just something a journalist once wrote’ (Kalsnes, 2004).<sup>29</sup>

This tendency for artists to distance themselves from such a phenomenon has also been observed in the context of other music scenes (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 114-115).<sup>30</sup> Moreover, there are at

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<sup>26</sup> Again, the distribution across the two groups is based on the extent to which the artists were associated with the term *Bergensbølgen* in the media.

<sup>27</sup> Quotes from McNair (2009) and Fossen (2002: 55).

<sup>28</sup> Quotes from Kristiansen (2009) and Johnsen (2010: 18).

<sup>29</sup> If he were an artist Mikal Telle, a record shop owner, promoter, manager and record label boss would in fact have been listed fourth in Table 2, where the acts most frequently mentioned in articles on the Bergen wave were presented. Mosnes (2011) is a recently published book on Mikal Telle and the Bergen music scene.

<sup>30</sup> Famously, Kurt Cobain sported a t-shirted bearing the legend, “Grunge is dead”, in 1992.

least two plausible explanations of this attitude. The first explanation is the desire to overcome the 'temporality' associated with waves; artists that ride the wave as it rises are expected to follow the wave down again as it drops. The second explanation is the artists' need to emphasize individuality and specificity; after having enjoyed the 'branding'-properties of the wave, they need to stand out from the others.

A number of articles make the rhetorical point that the Bergen wave was in fact a 'permanent situation of high tide' (Fossen, 2002) and 'constant spring tide' (Engelstad, 2004). By emphasising stability and permanence, the transitory nature of the phenomenon is downplayed. This would be the preferred choice for artists, who desire longevity, rather than being "flavour of the month". With the use of the term 'wave', there is of course an implied aspect of instability. Indeed, even the other labels used in connection with locality – such as 'scene' or 'sound' – imply a sense of phenomena with clearly defined life cycles when used in connection with music. For instance, those with some knowledge of popular music would automatically think of a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s in connection with terms such as 'the Manchester scene' or 'the Seattle sound'.

The desire to overcome the temporality associated with fashionable trends is most likely the reason that the artists denounce the existence of the Bergen wave. However, even artists that accept that the wave exists are keen to distance themselves from the phenomenon. A likely reason for this is the artists' desire to appear to have made it on their own. They are more comfortable seeing their own success as a result of their talent and hard work, and not the result of the fortuitous circumstances of a bandwagon-effect. When it comes to the focus on individuality, there is a parallel in the early days of the recording industry. As a result of the shift from live performances to recording careers, there was an 'increased demand for orchestras that sounded not only good but unique' (Wald, 2009: 81).

The analysis above indicates that branding, which may be beneficial to attract attention, is something that the artists would like to renounce once the attention is there. However, while the bands dismiss the wave, record companies are keen to enjoy the fruits of the potential success related to such trends.<sup>31</sup> According to one newspaper article, 'Sony does not hide the fact that the company has great belief in [...] Gulbrandsen, who they would like to be seen as a part of the popular so-called Bergen wave.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> An exception here is the smaller independent labels. Tellé was a local equivalent to Factory Records, as the label did not sign any formal long-term contracts with the artists. There are also artists that embrace the local link. According to Hann (2009); "[Casiokids] are happy to place themselves within the 'Bergen scene'".

<sup>32</sup> Tønder (2003: 51).



#### IV. Conclusion

This Working Paper has analyzed the Bergen wave, a locality-based music scene similar to for instance Merseybeat or The Philly Sound. It has been shown that with regard to chart positions, critical acclaim and media attention there is a relatively clear wave-like pattern for those bands most frequently associated with the term. As such, the Working Paper has provided the first quantitative empirical investigation of a phenomenon that is relatively common in the music industry: the use of geographical location as a means of categorization and marketing. The Working Paper has shown that the media played a substantial role in establishing the phenomenon. This is not surprising since: '[the print media] have probably had the most important influence on how people understand and talk about particular genres.'<sup>33</sup> However, the artists themselves were more reluctant to embrace and identify with the term.

Although the focus on the musical output from specific locations may partly be a result of the work of journalists, the exact mechanisms behind the temporary success of such capitals of sound are not known. An accidental pooling of musical talent may be one reason, the role of creative clusters another.<sup>34</sup> The initial success of artists from a certain area might also have self-reinforcing effects. Local record companies may acquire new possibilities as a result of real capital (financial room to manoeuvre as a result of improved revenues) or implied capital (spill-over to other acts on the label as a result of increased credibility and attention). Furthermore, the artists that spearhead the wave may choose to name-check and champion other local artists. When these artists are brought to the attention of a wider audience, their chances of commercial success increase.

There is little doubt that the multinational record companies were fully aware of the fact that it is possible to cash in on the local dimension; 'Røyksopp's fame has turned Bergen into something of a regular destination for music industry scouts keen to tap into a hitherto unnoticed Norwegian music scene' (Petridis, 2005: 8). The relative importance of the elements above is, however, difficult to quantify. Moreover, the analysis of the use of the term in the media in the 'formative' period – when *Bergensbølgen* was truly established as a phenomenon – shows that this was not a phrase that was only used by a small number of journalists trying to 'make a scene'.

One potential avenue for future research is to try to uncover the mechanisms behind phenomena

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<sup>33</sup> Frith (2001: 40).

<sup>34</sup> However, an analysis of employment in the Norwegian music industry actually reveals that with regard to employment, Bergen is underrepresented: '[Bergen] does not have a positive location quotient, despite being known for holding a dynamic music milieu'; see Power (2003), 67.

such as the Bergen wave. What are the roles of – and relations among – specific journalists, producers, record companies and artists in creating and promoting local scenes? To which extent is there a perceived – or indeed real – stylistic aspect to such phenomena, and how do the artists identify with and exploit the potential of beneficial ‘branding’?

Furthermore, there is an aspect that has not been dealt with specifically in this Working Paper: to which extent do consumers let the geographical origin of artists determine their record purchases, concert attendances, etc. A related aspect is scenes whose geographical links are not based on the origin of the artists, but rather the localities in which the music is performed; Northern Soul, Goa trance and Balearic are perhaps the most obvious examples.

This Working Paper has suggested a new quantitative apparatus that can be used to analyze the existence and development of music scenes. A natural extension of this work would be to broaden the analysis to other time periods and other locations. To which extent are the criteria used here – chart success, critical acclaim and media attention – relevant for other ‘scenes’, for instance Detroit techno, Merseybeat or the Dunedin sound?

Connell and Gibson (2003:98) list thirteen different examples of ‘regional sounds’, indicating place, time, genre and artists or labels associated with these ‘sounds’. Applying the measures presented in this Working Paper may nuance our impression of these examples by uncovering variations in the use and understanding of the concept of local scenes. Some scenes might be mainly created by the media, others might relate to critical acclaim, commercial success or both; indeed, the criteria could be used to improve our understanding of the basis for such phenomena. Furthermore, analyses based on the abovementioned criteria could provide the basis for the qualitative approach, evaluating for instance the role of the media or record companies in generating publicity for artists from specific geographic locations.

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## Appendix a.

Newspapers covered in the database:

*Regional (non-Bergen):*

Adresseavisen, Aftenposten, Dagsavisen, Fædrelandsvennen, Nordlys, Stavanger Aftenblad, Trønderavisa

*National:*

Dagbladet, Dagens Næringsliv, Klassekampen, Morgenbladet, NTB, Verdens Gang

*Local (Bergen):*

Bergens Tidende and Bergensavisen

In addition, the internal archive of the newspaper *Bergens Tidende* has been checked for the years 1990 and 1991.

## Appendix b.

Categories of *Spellemannprisen* included in the data:

<i>Blues</i>	Blues	<i>Popsolist – mannlig</i>	Pop artist – solo male
<i>Blues/ Country</i>	Blues/ Country	<i>Popsolist</i>	Pop artist – solo
<i>Country</i>	Country	<i>Rock</i>	Rock
<i>Dance</i>	Dance	<i>Underholdningsmusikk</i>	Soft Contemporary
<i>Elektronika</i>	Electronica	<i>Viser</i>	Folk
<i>Kvinnelig artist</i>	Female artist	<i>Årets hit</i>	Hit of the year
<i>Mannlig artist</i>	Male artist	<i>Årets låt</i>	Record of the year
<i>Metal</i>	Metal	<i>Årets musikkvideo</i>	Music video of the year
<i>Popgruppe</i>	Pop artist - groups	<i>Årets nykommer</i>	New artist
<i>Popsolist – kvinnelig</i>	Pop artist – solo female	<i>Årets Spellemann</i>	Artist of the year

Categories not included in the data:

<i>Barneplate</i>	Children's music	<i>Danseorkester</i>	Adult dance
<i>Åpen klasse</i>	Open category	<i>Hip Hop/ RnB</i>	Hip Hop/ RnB
<i>Klassisk musikk</i>	Classical music	<i>Korplate</i>	Choirs
<i>Samtidsmusikk</i>	Contemporary classical	<i>Kammermusikk</i>	Chamber music
<i>Jazz</i>	Jazz	<i>Orkestermusikk</i>	Orchestral music
<i>Folkemusikk/ gammeldans</i>	Norwegian folk	<i>Orkester- og kormusikk</i>	Orchestras & choirs

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