



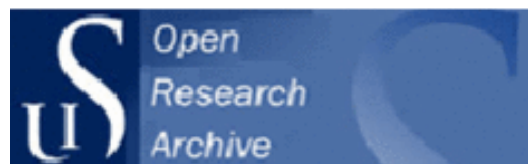
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## Book reviews

**Unique Environmentalism: A Comparative Perspective.** By Gunnar Grendstad, Per Selle, Kristin Strømsnes, and Øystein Bortne. New York: Springer, 2006. vii + 190 pp. Figures, bibliography, and index. Paper \$84.95.

Imagine yourself being a wolf, wandering along the Swedish-Norwegian border. Which side should you choose to keep your track on? If you had read *Unique Environmentalism: A Comparative Perspective*, you would be in no doubt.

In *Unique Environmentalism*, a group of Norwegian political scientists explore Norwegian organized environmentalism. According to the authors, the Norwegian environmental movement is unique and, from a comparative perspective, has some interesting anomalies that explain, for example, the positive Norwegian attitude toward whaling and the lack of a Norwegian green party. The two explanatory perspectives are labelled the *state friendly society* and the *local community perspective*.

The hypothesis is that Norwegian environmentalism, on one hand, is a product of a combination of state structure and civil society, which created a history of harmony and consensus as well as cooperation and mutual dependence between the Norwegian state and the environmental movement. On the other hand the Norwegian variant of environmentalism is deeply rooted in an ideology of protecting man in nature. Norwegians' "adaptation to living in rugged nature and the egalitarian and rural roots" (p. 23) developed—according to the authors—"strong ties to nature" (p. 21). This idea goes back to the right to a self-sufficient local community; "rural inhabitants have balanced between fighting against the seasonal wild forces of nature and harvesting from nature ... and nourished the national ideal of the local self-reliant community" (p. 21). Whaling should be understood, in this context, as symbolizing independence. The same goes with the efforts to eradicate wolf, bear, lynx, and wolverine as they interfered with farmers' living.

What opinions are held by Norwegian environmentalists? And who are they? On the whole they deviate little from the general population. They are middle class, more urbanized, work in the public sector, and hold more cultural and economic capital. They are heavily represented in the Socialist Left Party but weak in the industry-friendly Labor Party. Their view is local and not global. They are more politically active and trust the political system more than the general population. Besides their support for animal rights—protecting whales, bears, and wolves—there are no characteristic beliefs that distinguish the environmentalists from the general population of Norway. Surprisingly enough, the authors do not connect the absence of a green party to these values, but point to the absence of a nuclear issue in the hydropower-rich Norway.

After living in Norway for more than a decade, I can assert that my impressions of the Norwegian environmentalists are verified by this study. The authors could have included some critical views on the discourse of Norwegian otherness and the self-understanding of Norwegians' historical struggle with nature. Is it, for example, reasonable to claim that whaling has a role for the survival of small communities, considering the perspective of Norway as one of the great oil and gas producers in the world? One could maintain that the Norwegian small communities would not have survived without the fortune *under* the sea, rather than *in* the sea. The authors did not focus on the issue of Norway as an oil and gas nation in their questionnaires. Why this contradiction had been left out is not clear. More political science than history, *Unique Environmentalism: A Comparative Perspective* suggests that Norwegian society, with its community values and trust in government, has unintentionally limited the expansion of an environmental movement.

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