

Rand Scholarship Proposal 2020

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Sustainability in Norwegian Political and Civil Life

Introduction

Former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland played a crucial role in developing the global movement towards environmental sustainability. As chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development, she oversaw the development of the groundbreaking *Our Common Future* report, published by the United Nations in 1987. This report outlined a number of strategic steps necessary to achieving widespread sustainability: conserving and enhancing the resource base, reorienting technology and managing risk, and merging environment and economics in decision making.¹ But her efforts were not only evident in the international arena; as prime minister of Norway, she worked hard to establish “sustainability as a general policy premise”² within the political institutions of her home country.

In our contemporary age defined by constant reminders of the climate crisis, Norway has expressed its continued commitment to leading the fight against climate change through sustainability. Under the leadership of Erna Solberg, prime minister since 2013, Norway was one of the first countries to ratify the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, and she publicly committed to aggressively working towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by 2050 (compared to 1990 levels).³ Likewise, many Norwegian businesses have vowed to adopt new and more sustainable practices—Avinor, the public operator of Norwegian airports, for instance, has set a goal of reaching 100 percent electric domestic air transport by

¹ World Commission on Environment and Development. “Our Common Future.” United Nations, 1987. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>.

² Dryzek, ed. 140.

³ Erna Solberg, “Norway: Statement 2016 UN Climate Change high-level event,” filmed Sep 21, 2016, United Nations, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9OqFgxADKU>; and Erna Solberg. “Statement at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP25).” Taleartikkel. Government.no, December 2, 2019. <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/cop25/id2680662/>.

2040,⁴ becoming one of the first aviation companies to announce such a goal. Even among everyday Norwegian citizens, consumption patterns have shifted to reflect the adoption of more sustainable practices; electric vehicles accounted for nearly 50 percent of total automobile sales in 2019, and the streets of Oslo are littered with electric scooters, which many residents use to commute.

Not all is perfect, however. The Norwegian government continues to rely on the oil and energy sector for economic income (raw materials accounted for 62 percent of total export revenue in 2017),⁵ the country is well-known for its vibrant shipping industry, and while individuals may be willing to forgo a gasoline-powered ride to work, the suggestion of removing wood stoves from Norwegian households (which have accounted for over 60 percent of total particulate emissions in Norway in the past)⁶ would be considered preposterous. As a result, Norway's greenhouse gas emission levels in 2018 were reported to be 52 million tons, a 24 percent increase from 1990 levels.⁷

This project seeks to explore the identified discrepancies between the public commitment to the principles outlined by Brundtland and their inconsistent implementation. Specifically, as this proposal will outline, I will explore the role the Norwegian government in influencing societal behaviors, whether or not the shift towards sustainability reflects a genuine commitment to Brundtland's principles, and the often strained relationship between maintaining economic prosperity and promoting sustainable practices.

⁴ AmCham Norway. "Norway Aims for All Short-Haul Flights 100 Percent Electric by 2040," January 24, 2018. <https://amcham.no/norway-aims-short-haul-flights-100-percent-electric-2040/>; and AmCham Norway. "Elektrek: Tesla Becomes Best-Selling Brand in Norway, Pushing Electric Car Market Share to Almost 50%," July 8, 2019. <https://amcham.no/elektrek-tesla-becomes-best-selling-brand-in-norway-pushing-electric-car-market-share-to-almost-50/>.

⁵ OECD. "Norway Economic Snapshot - OECD." December 2019. <https://www.oecd.org/economy/norway-economic-snapshot/>.

⁶ Folkehelseinstituttet. "Vedfyring." Accessed April 5, 2020. <https://www.fhi.no/ml/miljo/luftforurensninger/vedfyring/>; and Statistic sentralbyrå. "Stadig flere anskaffer varmpumpe." July 14, 2014. <https://www.ssb.no/energi-og-industri/statistikker/husenergi/hvert-3-aar>

⁷ Statistic sentralbyrå. "Utslipp til luft, 1990-2018." November 1, 2019. <https://www.ssb.no/natur-og-miljo/statistikker/klimagassn/aar/2019-11-01>.

Research Question and Methodology

The central questions driving this project are: To what extent are the civil and corporate attitudes towards sustainability in Norway influenced by governmental policy, and do these attitudes reflect a genuine commitment to sustainable practice?

I plan to approach this project primarily as a qualitative case study, employing two main strategies throughout the research process. First and foremost, I will read work by leading scholars of political environmentalism such as Roy Nersesian, Catherine Mitchell, David Elliot, and John S. Dryzek in order to solidify my understanding of the theories of political sustainability and the extent to which government policy has historically altered the behavior of citizens. Furthermore, in order to contextualize the society in which Gro Harlem Brundtland first outlined her principles of political environmentalism and provide background on contemporary Norwegian political thought, I will also read work by Norwegian scholars such as Frode Gundersen, Bernt Aardal, and Alf-Inge Jansen. These sources are included in the bibliography of this document.

The second part of this project will examine current attitudes towards sustainability in Norway. I will continue referencing secondary sources—such as government and business websites, reports, and academic journals—to track recent development and policy changes, but interviews with political and civil leaders in Norway will prove more valuable in answering my overarching research question. I plan to leverage both my professional and my personal network in Norway (further elaborated on below) to speak with representatives from Norwegian NGOs, political parties, businesses, environmental organizations (such as Bellona, ZERO, and the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature), and ordinary citizens to determine the degree to which government policies have impacted their attitude towards and behavior regarding sustainability. After completing the IRB approval process, I will utilize

the generous stipend of the Rand Scholarship to travel to Norway and conduct these interviews in person.

Interview questions could include:

1. What has your organization/party done to implement a more sustainable model of business/agenda setting?
 - a. How much of this is a result of government encouragement/legislation?
 - b. How have such developments changed the goals of your business/party?
2. How important would you say sustainability is to your organization/party/life?
3. What do you think Norway does well in regards to sustainability? How could the country improve?
4. What should someone looking in from the outside (someone not from Norway) know about the Norwegian movement to sustainability?
5. Some scholars and policy makers have argued that a complete shift in the Norwegian political paradigm of Norway is needed to effectively pursue widespread sustainability. Do you personally believe that such a shift has happened in Norwegian society, your life, and/or within your organization/party?
 - a. If yes, please explain.
 - b. If not, what do you think such an effort would entail?

In the event that global developments render international travel impossible, I would plan to conduct these interviews and develop my networking using video technology and email.

Personal Connections

My vision for this project was inspired by my time working at the American Chamber of Commerce in Oslo, Norway, this past January on the Oslo Internship Reflection Seminar program. A month immersed in Norwegian culture and life gave me a front row seat to Norway's acceptance of sustainable energy, which has taken remarkable strides since I lived there from 2006 to 2009. Every day on the walk to work, I would encounter residents utilizing sustainable technology for their commute, including the aforementioned electric scooters and vehicles. In the office, I would read about the many initiatives member companies were adopting to fit a more sustainable business model. I also had the opportunity to attend presentations by both Siv Jensen (leader of Norway's Progress Party and former finance minister) and Hadja Tajik (deputy leader of the Norwegian Labor Party). Although members of different parties, they each emphasized the importance of environmentalism to their political agendas. I was intrigued as to

why Norwegians seemed to have so enthusiastically embraced a more sustainable lifestyle (compared to attitudes in the United States), and why, despite an evident commitment to sustainability, Norway's emissions levels had risen. As a political science and Norwegian double major, I feel there is no better arena than Norwegian sustainability in which to examine the interplay between three fascinating phenomena: (1) attitudes towards sustainability, (2) the role of government policy in individual behavior, and (3) Norwegian political identity and culture.

Moreover, I have many valuable connections in Norway that will enable me to successfully complete this project, both from my time in Oslo this January and from my time previously living in Norway. Two of my former colleagues at the American Chamber of Commerce, Tyler Barrott and Katja Dahl Murphy, have enthusiastically agreed to assist me in researching for this project. Tyler completed his master's research on arctic environmental policy and Katja has experience working at EFTA and the European Parliament in Brussels, and both have extensive contacts within Norwegian political and business circles. I also had the privilege of meeting Tord Bergersen, senior manager of public affairs at Coca-Cola Norway, this January. He formerly worked with my father at the US Embassy in Oslo and also has experience representing Norway's Conservative Party (Høyre). His experience in both politics and business will undoubtedly be of great assistance in my examination of environmental policy within Norwegian politics and corporations. Lastly, I have many former classmates and family friends living in the Oslo area whom I plan to contact and interview about the role of sustainability in everyday life.

Concluding Remarks

The relevance of this project to the contemporary global political climate cannot be overstated. In an age in which addressing the climate crisis becomes increasingly more important, a critical examination of the policies of countries claiming to do so must be undertaken. Only by engaging in such investigative scholarship as outlined here can we learn how to best meet the challenges of the climate crisis.

Academically, I am uniquely prepared to undertake this research. Through living in Norway for three years and taking many courses at St. Olaf, my Norwegian has reached a level of fluency sufficient both to read advanced Norwegian literature and to conduct interviews in Norwegian. This will not only enhance my understanding of the documents I read and the individuals I interview, but also lead to further research opportunities in Norway. Additionally, last semester, I completed a political science research methods course, which introduced me to advanced political science methodology and taught me to apply both qualitative and quantitative methods to a specific project outline. This has prepared me to effectively complete the research outlined in this proposal.

But this research will hopefully not merely be an academic endeavour. Indeed, it is my hope that completing this research will be the start of a career in international relations and global policy. My experiences growing up abroad as the son of a US Foreign Service Officer have cultivated my deep passion for global politics and enhanced my awareness of international developments, and I fear the global trend of insufficient political action addressing climate change. After graduating from St. Olaf, I plan on pursuing further education and a career in international relations, and I firmly believe the need for widespread sustainable practices will be at the forefront of future international policy decisions. This research would mark a personal beginning to the process of critically examining the extent to which sustainability has impacted one country I hope to work with in the future, Norway, and exploring how sustainability might be implemented in the country I hope to represent, the United States.

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