



# Norway

## Society and Culture

2nd ed.

Eva Maagerø • Birte Simonsen Editors



**Norway:  
Society and Culture**

Editors  
Eva Maagerø and Birte Simonsen

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2. edition



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# Our Views on Norway

What does the word Norway make us think of? A wealthy oil nation, midnight sun and skiing, polar bears in the streets, a lot of languages and dialects and the noisiest students in the world – what is myth, and what is true?

In this book different authors with different backgrounds take you on a tour through Norwegian society and culture: history, literature, language, economy, politics, art, music, religion, and education. The aim is to present Norway through multiple voices and let the reader add his or her own knowledge, experiences and perspectives. One word in particular seems to link the authors texts together: equality. The concept of equality functions as a platform for understanding social and political conditions in Norway, and the different chapters try to explain how and why. The book consists of one opening chapter and then four parts: History, Society, Culture and Facts about Norway.

In the opening chapter *Andreas Aase* reflects on what it means to be a Norwegian. Does a Norwegian value system in fact exist? What environmental and historical factors have influenced our culture? How may egalitarian values be traced and explained? In addition to equality, Aase elaborates on two other values; moderation and nearness to nature.

The first part about Norwegian history starts with a chapter presenting an overview of the history of Norway, written by Silje-Linn and Lars Aase. This chapter provides the background for understanding all the other chapters in the book, and presents the reader with the most important historical lines and developments in Norwegian society.

*Olav Arild Abrahamsen* in his chapter asks why Norway is a wealthy nation. Is it because we have oil in the North Sea? Or would Norway have been a wealthy nation also without the oil? He takes us through 200 years

of Norwegian history, discussing the economic modernization of the country in a long-term perspective.

Helje Kringlebotn Sødal and Levi Geir Eidhamar in the next chapter explore the significance of Christianity in Norway, from both a historical and a present-day perspective. Are people in Norway still religious, or has Norway become a secularized society, like many European societies?

The 17<sup>th</sup> of May is Norway's national day. It attracts much interest from all kind of visitors to Norway, especially in the way it is celebrated. It is a symbol both of freedom and democracy and of happiness and the future represented by children in processions all over the country. Knut Mykland gives a presentation of the 17<sup>th</sup> of May in a historical and national perspective.

The first article of part 2, Society, is about Norway as a welfare state. The notion of "a welfare state" is often connected to the Scandinavian region. Olav Helge Angell presents the structure of the welfare state in a Norwegian context, its formal organisation, its financing and its future challenges.

Compulsory, equal education has been a pillar of Norwegian society. Arvid Hansen in his chapter describes the development of the Norwegian school system through reflections about its organisation, curriculum, values, aims and the teacher's role. He relates school development and the school system to the values of equality and nature.

In the next two chapters Kjetil Børhaug presents important features of Norwegian politics in a national and a global context. Both national and international issues are discussed, and the reader obtains a better understanding of the domestic political life in Norway, of values which have been crucial in the development of Norway as a modern state, and of the role Norway plays in Europe and the world.

What is meant by the concept of equality? To what extent is Norwegian society "impregnated" by this value? Pål Repstad in his chapter discusses the concept of equality from different perspectives. He explicitly argues in favour of egalitarian values, and he asks whether equality has come to an end in modern Norway.

Eva Maagerø and Birte Simonsen present in their chapter the situation of minorities in Norway. In spite of its small population, our country has experienced the need to integrate both different national minorities and immigrants from all over the world. The Sámi population, one of the

world's indigenous peoples, has a special status in Norwegian society with their own parliament and school curriculum in addition to their own language and culture.

Some people suggest that equality between adults and children has developed to an extreme extent, while others argue that Norwegian educational institutions train children for democracy. *Ann Christin E. Nilsen* describes in the last chapter of part 2 what Norwegian parents and society think about the upbringing of children.

The first chapter of the third part; culture, is about language. Norway's rather small population has two official Norwegian languages. Is it possible to look at this situation too from the viewpoint of equality? *Eva Maagerø* introduces the language situation and presents its historical and political background. She also discusses the status of dialects in Norway and the lack of an oral standard language.

Ibsen and Hamsun are well known all over the world. What about other Norwegian authors and other stories and poems? *Elise Seip Tønnessen* presents central Norwegian literature, and shows how literature plays a role in the building of a Norwegian identity. In a chapter about myths and tales she also takes us back to the stories of the Nordic gods and other mythological stories which have been, and still are, of great importance in Norwegian culture.

Norwegian children's literature has received much attention both in the Nordic countries and in Europe in recent decades. In the next chapter *Elise Seip Tønnessen* gives an overview of the most important literature for children. Some of the titles which are mentioned are translated into English, German or other languages.

*Lisbet Skregelid* in her chapter provides a brief overview of Norwegian art. She takes us back in history and presents a selection of works by Norwegian artists. She also describes trends in contemporary art, and presents modern works, which can be studied in museums and galleries today.

The last chapter of part 4 is about Norwegian music and is written by *Arvid Vollnes*. It gives a broad introduction to different kinds of music in Norway, classical music, jazz, folk music and popular music. In the presentation, the development of music is closely related to the general development of Norwegian history and culture.

In the last part of the book, part 4, Silje-Linn and Lars Aase present facts about Norway: its geography, population and culture. Statistics and comparisons are used in order to illustrate differences and similarities between Norway and other countries of the world.

We hope readers will enjoy this textual journey through Norwegian history, society and culture that offers insights into our past and dreams about the future.

Eva Maagerø

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