



## **Fjellbygd eller feriefjell? [Inhabited or Recreational Mountains?]**

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**Fjellbygd eller feriefjell?****[Inhabited or Recreational Mountains?]**

Edited by Terje Skjeggedal and Kjell Overvåg, Bergen, Norway:  
Fagbokforlaget Vigmostad & Bjørke AS, 2015. 253 pp. NOK 369.00.  
ISBN 978-82-450-1905-6.

This book is about the development of “mountain policy” in Norway from the 19th century onwards. Although mountain areas comprise a large part of rural districts in Norway, there is no specific “mountain policy.” Instead, mountain policy has developed through elements in other policy sectors such as rural policy, tourism policy, and nature conservation policy. However, like many other mountain communities worldwide, Norwegian mountain municipalities face great challenges due to population decrease, economic decline, and external demands for nature conservation and recreation. This book provides detailed examples of how these challenges play out in Norway, and offers interesting thoughts on how policy changes could support better ways of dealing with such challenges. The book comprises 9 independent chapters written by different authors, ranging from historical accounts of mountain policy through economic perspectives to national planning policy. The authors have all participated in a specific research project on the challenges of developing a Norwegian mountain policy, and have thus used the same set of case studies.

The historical overview in Chapter 2 shows the development of 2 central conflicts in mountain policy, which are well known, at least from a Swedish perspective. Urbanization and industrialization have diminished the importance of production based on natural resource extraction in remote mountain areas, whereas recreation has grown more and more

important as the mountains have become a refuge, to nature, from the city. The first conflict is thus about whether the mountains should be used for production or for recreation. Recreation is mainly the focus of “incomers” from the cities, whereas mountain inhabitants need to use the mountain resources for production and economic development. This means that there is a second, strongly related, dimension of conflict regarding the extent to which the mountains should be governed nationally or locally. Since the mid-1900s, the national level has tightened its grip on the mountains; this is most clearly expressed in the establishment of protected areas.

Chapter 6 states that a large proportion—70%—of Norway’s protected areas are in the mountains. The reason given is that Norwegian nature conservation has its roots in the so-called Yellowstone model, which emphasizes “untouched wilderness,” and that this type of nature is found in the mountains. In combination with limited political will to allocate resources to the development and management of protected areas, this preservation focus has created distrust between national/regional authorities and local authorities, inhabitants, and users. Chapter 5 shows that, at the rhetorical level, the national authorities have adopted the international win-win discourse, which gives the impression that economic development and nature conservation can be combined. This has led many municipalities to invest large sums of money in tourism development, but the results have not been very encouraging. The benefits of tourism are unevenly distributed, and do not create many jobs—particularly not in “nature-based tourism,” which is usually seen as the approach to combine with national parks and other protected areas.

Alongside this rhetorical emphasis on win-win through tourism

development, Chapter 8 discusses the “decentralization reform” initiated to smooth over the conflicts. However, the reform does not constitute real decentralization, as accountability is still directed upwards to the Ministry of Climate and Environment. As such, the desired effects have not materialized; instead, actors at the local level still feel that the central level is tightening its grip. Overall, these claims are supported by the research presented in the book. A larger number of protected areas to be governed under a sectoral law, strong and detailed sectoral policies, and the push for tourism development imply that central governance has grown stronger. Tourism development actually reinforces this tendency, as it increases the importance of environmental and land use policies. As shown in Chapter 7, the emphasis on tourism also constitutes increased pressure on the indigenous reindeer husbandry, which is already under great stress. As an example, reindeer husbandry has been allowed in protected areas but is only the third priority behind both conservation and recreation.

In practice, there is thus a lot of conservation and no integrated mountain policy to balance this and to counteract the negative population trends in the mountain municipalities. The national policy is dual, taking forward both environmental concerns and regional development without any clear prioritizations. The last chapter concludes that—compared to Sweden, Austria, and Scotland—Norway is by far the least advanced country in terms of an ecosystem-based approach. The authors state that Norway could learn from Scotland and Austria when it comes to advancing the degree of integration between policy sectors by giving development and conservation parity. This suggests that the authors have bought the win-win discourse themselves, even though much of the empirical evidence in the book shows

that win-win is difficult to realize. No policy implications are given concerning the other 2 dimensions of the comparison, namely decentralization and inclusion, although these are central in many of the preceding chapters.

It is particularly unfortunate that the concluding discussion is not more informed by the analysis presented in Chapter 6 on how conservation policy muddles through with planning policy in practice. This is the chapter I appreciated the most, as it brings together several of the book's different threads. However, it does not integrate the interesting empirical analysis in Chapter 5, which shows how the number of second homes has increased very

significantly, to the extent that the authors use the terms "multi-house home" and "recreational commuting." This development creates a new class of people in the countryside—besides local inhabitants and tourists—who own houses and spend a lot of their recreational time there. What this presence means to the conflicts described above still remains to be investigated.

The perspectives put forward in this book are rather well-known points of departure regarding the challenges faced by mountain municipalities (at least to a Swedish reader like myself), but the authors nevertheless manage to highlight thought-provoking, much-less-known

aspects. The book is well knit together, as the authors have used the same case studies while providing different disciplinary focuses.

However, I would have liked to see some consideration of the current and future implications of climate change.

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