

Good comparison of the different societies in spain and norway research paper exa...

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to compare of the two societies of Spain and Norway. The comparison will be based on social and cultural aspects of the two countries. This research is based on a critical review of the existing literature on the subject. Secondary literature is utilised in an effort to fully describe all potential similarities and dissimilarities between the two societies.

The countries of Norway and Spain are both located in the continent of Europe. They have been chosen for comparison based on the assumption that the distance separating them reflects the distance in cultural, political, and governance approaches between them. Though these two societies are regarded as exceptionally dissimilar, there are a number of similarities arising from the fact that both constitute western civilisation nations. Besides, the historical space separating Norway from Spain has been rapidly decreasing since 1994 due to a series of cultural and societal transformations (Smehaugen 15).

SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL COMPARISON

Family Structure

In Norway, the family structure is mainly separated between rural and urban societies. More specifically, the urban family structure is more liberated, while all issues are resolved via discussion and negotiation between the family's different members. It is, thus, highly based on the modern features of family relationships, and is only diluted when the family members consider either the discussions or negotiations as useless. In contrast, the

rural family structure is not commonly characterised by negotiation but is rather considered as patriarchal and authoritarian (Smehaugen 22).

On the other hand, in Spain family structure division is not entirely the result of urban or rural settings. The family structures are also two and are distinguished to those of Spain's northern, southern, and central regions.

More specifically, in the northern regions, the family structure resembles that of Norway's dual structure, while in the southern and central regions families are characterised as egalitarian and nuclear, i. e. they resemble that of Norway's urban family structure (Smehaugen 25).

Trust in Authorities, State and Society Ties

In Spain, the long history of authoritarian forms of governance has negatively impacted the trust of the Spanish citizens' trust in society's institutions. People are more reliant on external direction and hierarchical authority relationships. Additionally, Spanish citizens tend to trust more interpersonal relationships since the integrity of the people involved can be more effectively tested (Gibbs 2).

In contrast, Norwegian citizens generally seem to be more trustful of "neutral" authority that is executed by institutionalised bodies. The only institution where Norway is less trustful than Spain is the church (the other institutions are the trade unions, the media, the legal system, the military, the police, and the government). Finally, Norwegian citizens show more trust to one another than Spanish citizens (Gibbs 13).

On the other hand, both the state and society ties are highly different between Norway and Spain. More specifically, Norway's state ties are

characterised by high levels of collegiality, a case that is not experienced in the Spanish state (low collegiality). Instead, society ties in Norway are characterised by high levels of individualism, while the Spanish society's ties present high levels of collegiality (Smehaugen 25).

Tolerance towards Difference

Spain exhibits higher levels of tolerance towards difference than Norway since Spanish society has in history accepted minorities and that have not been tolerated elsewhere in the world. This has not been the case in Norway where differences are not accepted that easily. Consequently, cultural integration is less required in Spain than in Norway (Gates 21).

Social Power

Norwegian people are known to accept democratic and consultative power relations whereas people in Spain are known to prefer more authoritarian power relations. In Spain, power is mainly characterised by conventionality and individuality, and is at the same time preformed in the form of open disputes. The socialisation of authority has not been neutralised in terms of self-censorship since authority is more openly accepted and defined and due to the fact that shared social organization and reliance are highly recognized. On the other hand, Norway's power is perceived more collectively and neutralised, while people seem to be more independent, since the organisation of their socialisation seems to be to a lesser extent on a personal level understood as the product of authority (Gates 24).

General Comparison

Norway is known for its farm culture that has existed for a long time. This farm culture was adopted as a result of the scarcity in natural resources and the harsh climatic conditions witnessed in the country. A highly notable romantic nationalistic movement was witnessed in the 18th century. This can still be seen in Norwegian media and language. Norway began striving to attain an independent and unique identity in certain areas such as music, art, and literature in the 19th century. This unique identity that was attained can be seen in contemporary Norwegian performing arts. The government has realized this and has undertaken to support artwork, cultural projects and exhibitions that promote the Norwegian culture (Gates 43).

In Spain, cultures are mostly European based but influenced by Iberian and pre-Roman cultures, and also those of ancient Rome. In fact, the ancient Romans greatly influenced religion and language in Spain. Vulgar Latin is said to have given rise to the Spanish language. Spain's heritage is so rich that UNESCO named the country as having the third highest number of world heritage sites globally.

In regard to cuisines, Norway has been influenced by its farming traditions and seafaring ways. That is why sea foods such as cod, trout, herring, and salmon, as well as cheese and dairy products from farms are the most common in Norway. On the other hand, Andalusian, Jewish, and Roman cuisines are said to have had the greatest influence on Spanish cuisines. Pork, potatoes, beans, peppers and tomatoes are among the most favourite meals in Spain. Olive oil is a very special ingredient in any meal prepared in Spain. This is mostly because the country produces 44% of all the olive oil

used in the world.

In regard to sports, football is the most common sport in Spain. In fact, Spain has some of the world's most popular football teams such as Atletico Madrid, Real Madrid, Valencia FC, and FC Barcelona among others. Football is known to bring people together as they gather in various spots to watch their favourite teams compete with other teams. This has been a major social fabric in the Spanish society. Football is also the most popular sport in Norway but there are other common sporting activities such as the Olympic Games, biathlon, and cross-country skiing. Sports are major social events in both countries which are used to promote social cohesion and bring members of society together (Gibbs 11).

COMPARISON OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN SPAIN AND NORWAY

Politics in Norway is conducted in an organized framework of a parliamentary representative democratic constitutional monarchy whereas politics in Spain is conducted under a different framework that was established in 1978 by the constitution. The form of government in Spain can be referred to as a parliamentary monarchy. The monarch in the case of Spain is the head of state, and the Prime Minister is the president of the Government. It is the government that exercises executive powers in Spain (Williamson-Jones 1). In Norway, the King's executive council exercises executive powers and the Prime Minister is in charge of the cabinet. On the other hand, Spain is known to be a democratic and social state where the people of the country have the national sovereignty. This is where the state powers come from (Smehaugen 78).

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In Spain, the government is integrated by the prime minister, his deputies, and other ministers. They are referred to as the Council of Ministers or Cabinet. Legislative powers in Norway are vested in the Storting and the government. These are elected within a multiparty system. In both Spain and Norway, the judiciary is an independent arm on its own and is not part of the executive or the legislature. However, in Spain, the Supreme Court is the highest court in the nation and the judiciary uses magistrates and judges to administer justice on behalf of the King. In Spain, general courts have the powers over the legislature. These consist of the Senate and a Congress of Deputies (Smehaugen 63).

COMPARISON OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS IN SPAIN AND NORWAY

Governance systems in a country refer to the processes of governing and is concerned with the process of decision-making and interaction among the major actors involved in leading a country. In Spain, governance is organized in a decentralized manner because of the fact that it has seventeen different governance regions. The case is not very different in Norway because the system of governance is also organized in a decentralized manner. The only difference is that Norway has nineteen levels of governance compared to the seventeen in Spain. In Spain, the seventeen regions are further subdivided into two cities which govern themselves, as well as fifty two sub-regions or prefectures. However, the case is a bit different in Norway because there are 429 boroughs (Clifton & Alonso 81).

The government of Norway has a total of 18 ministries which are responsible for the major sectors of administration. These ministries represent the

national government in accounting for governmental tasks within specific dossiers. These ministries are headed by ministers who are responsible for the operations of their particular ministries. The ministers are also in charge of all other subordinate organizations and bodies that fall under their particular ministries. This system of governance ensures that there are individuals who are responsible and accountable for the major operations of the government (Gibbs 2). In Spain, there exists a central administration which is responsible for overall governance in the country, a peripheral administration which represents government delegations in various communities at grass-root level, and foreign affairs administration which is responsible for foreign relations between Spain and other countries. In regard to public administration, Spain is organized into the central government, regional authorities, and local authorities at the grass-root level. The central government is the national government that is responsible for the overall administration of the entire country. The regional authorities are responsible for the administration of each of the 17 regions, whereas the local authorities are responsible for the smallest administrative units (Clifton & Alonso 92). It is important to note that both Spain and Norway have been involved in thorough reform efforts of the governance systems. The two countries have been involved in efforts to improve their governance systems so that they can both offer the best services to their citizens. Both countries have been faced by governance challenges which are mostly brought about by difficulties in coordination between the central government and the local governments. These difficulties are also experienced when it comes to coordination between regional and sub-regional governments (Clifton &

Alonso 70). However, both governments are involved in concerted efforts to deal with these challenges in coordination of the different levels of government. Success has not been 100% but there are significant steps that have been made so far.

It also implies that hierarchical coordination within separate sectors towers over network and market-type systems. Specialisation by purpose is a dominant principle, making it difficult to establish coordinative agreements from sector to sector. But, as noted, significant steps are being made in both countries. This ultimately results to sector ministries that are significantly stronger than ministries for the execution of sector-crossing doings and for the synchronisation between the different sector ministries. Consequently, ministries are considered as operating in an isolated manner that restricts their ability to conceive inter-sectoral strategy and guiding principles matters (Lægreid & Rykkja 42).

One notable and distinguishing characteristic of the system of government used in Norway is that local the boroughs are self-governed. Local democratic organization and power are considered as of great importance because they are the ones that interact with people at the lowest level of governance. The local authorities have been provided with the power of providing a variety of services since post-WWII when the welfare state of Norway was expanded. This responsibility increase resulted to a closer coordination between the country's different administration levels (Lægreid & Rykkja 39).

The comparison of the governance systems of Norway and Spain shows that the two countries are facing coordination issues in respect to their

governance. Additionally, both countries have made an effort to combat their coordination problems via a series of reforms that were actually mostly performed during the 1980s. Finally, both made efforts of decentralisation though their success is not yet fully established. Nonetheless, governance coordination inefficiency is not entirely similar between Spain and Norway. More specifically, though both countries face issues of coordination between the central and the local government, Norway also faces issues of coordination in respect to the central government's ministries. The latter coordination inefficiency is not exhibited in Spain (Farrell 115).

WELFARE STATE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Norway's welfare system is fundamentally based on the social-democratic, institutionalised polity interventionism and has managed to provide its welfare provision programs with fiscal independence since the 1960s. The basic social services it covers are summarised below (Smehaugen 67):

- The employment rights are governed by the citizens and not by market forces. Instead the market is regulated in accordance to the citizens' employment rights.
- Health, education, and care services are broadly and completely covered by the state's social services, since equality of welfare providing for all social groups is a major priority of Norway.
- Uniform social insurance is provided to all social groups, protecting society as whole from income loss due to sickness or accidents during work.

Norway's welfare state is more uniform and less prejudice, and more just, generous, and integrated than that of Spain's, which is mainly oriented

towards the ensuring of employment rights and not on citizen rights. The provision of social services highly depends on employment, and consequently, the welfare state rights of families depend on the existence of a wage-earner (Smehaugen 57).

Additionally, and in contrast to Norway where social services are completely a matter of the state, in Spain welfare state is highly dependable on voluntary and non-profitable agencies, which are in most case managed either by the church or non-government organisations. Finally, the social insurance system is not uniform and highly depends on the level by which labour market is organised (Smehaugen 23).

CONCLUSION

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