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Understanding Human-Nature Practices for Environmental Management: Examples from Northern Europe

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Understanding Human-Nature Practices for Environmental Management: Examples from Northern Europe is a significant contribution to environmental history that challenges the firmly established natural–cultural dichotomy in modern environmental management. The volume brings together ten scholars from Norway, Sweden and Finland who collectively explore how historically developed practices of human engagement with nature in Fennoscandia complicate – and often outperform – simplistic dichotomies of wilderness versus civilisation, thereby offering valuable insights for contemporary environmental management.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, beginning with an introductory framework and ending with synthesising reflections. Chapters 2–5 explore underlying conceptualisations of human–nature relationships in Northern Europe. In Chapter 2, Brynhild Granås examines the Norwegian ‘right of public access’ (*allemannsretten*) and the cultural tradition of *friluftsliv*, using ethnographic fieldwork in the Reisadalen area to show how outdoor recreation practices represent complex negotiations over the appropriate use of the landscape (p. 15). In Chapter 3, Eivind Junker traces the semantic shift in nature-protection terminology in Norwegian statutory law between 1910 and 2009, demonstrating how the replacement of the term ‘preservation’ (*fredning*) with ‘management’ (*forvaltning*) reflects a changing conceptualisation of the human–nature relationship (pp. 39–40). Chapter 4, by Emmi Salmivuori, examines divergent forest cultures in Finland, with particular emphasis on conflicts between industrial forestry and environmental conservation, as well as the practices of small-scale forest owners. Chapter 5, by Monica Tennberg, develops this argument further by introducing the concept of ‘land culture’ in Finnish Lapland, highlighting the plurality of traditions and practices that underpin relationships between humans and land beyond strictly indigenous frameworks (p. 88).

Chapters 6–8 critically examine specific environmental management interventions and their interactions with existing practices. In Chapter 6, Keskitalo and Andersson offer a critical reflection on ‘rewilding’, arguing that idealised images of nature not only fail to reflect lived human–environment engagement in Sweden but also overlook the historical shaping of Swedish landscapes through human practices (p. 101). Chapters 7 and 8 present contrasting case studies from the Kiiminkijoki River basin in Finland. In Chapter 7, Olli Haanpää critically analyses competing translations of environmental knowledge in the planning of groundwater extraction, contrasting professional management logics with the locally grounded understandings of fishing

associations. In Chapter 8, Hannu I. Heikkinen and colleagues explore peatland restoration, showing how forest owners' assumptions about economic outcomes shape their acceptance of different environmental interventions. Chapters 9 and 10 address external conceptualisations influencing environmental management. Chapter 9, by Dorothee Bohn, critically analyses how the production and curation of 'wilderness' in Arctic resort enclaves aimed at international tourism perpetuate nature–culture dichotomies while aligning local places with global economic circuits (pp. 160–61). Chapter 10, by Iana Nesterova and Jens Rennstam, challenges degrowth principles through an empirical analysis of berry wine production in northern Sweden, thereby foregrounding debates about the economic models that underpin nature-close practices.

The most important theoretical contribution of the volume is its sustained critique of what Keskitalo terms 'frontier thinking', a framework in which nature is conceived either as pristine wilderness awaiting conservation or as a resource reserve awaiting extraction (p. 111). Drawing on Bruno Latour's assertion that 'we have never been modern', the book demonstrates how Nordic legislation, policy and everyday practices have historically integrated human use with nature protection in ways that challenge binary categorisations (p. 4). The Norwegian *allemannsretten* system, for example, provides public access to private land for recreation and foraging, illustrating a markedly different human–nature relationship from those based on exclusionary property regimes.

The empirical strength of the book lies in its methodological heterogeneity, combining ethnographic fieldwork, semantic analysis of legal frameworks, historical research and policy analysis. This interdisciplinary approach effectively demonstrates how abstract governance frameworks interact with practice-based forms of environmental governance. The case studies from northern Norway, Sweden and Finland are particularly valuable, as these regions display highly socialised landscapes in which urban and rural identities continue to intersect through traditions such as second-home ownership, hunting, fishing and gathering.

A notable limitation of the volume is its geographic focus on the Nordic region. While this focus is well justified, it inevitably limits the broader applicability of the findings. Readers seeking comparative insights into regions characterised by different historical trajectories of human–nature interaction may find the analysis less transferable. In addition, some chapters assume a degree of familiarity with Nordic institutional contexts, and although the editors provide contextual guidance, international readers may still find parts of the discussion challenging.

Overall, *Understanding Human–Nature Practices for Environmental Management: Examples from Northern Europe* will be of interest to scholars and graduate students in environmental history, environmental anthropology and environmental policy. Its accessible style and rich empirical detail will

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also appeal to policymakers and practitioners seeking to develop more culturally responsive approaches to environmental governance. The volume offers a compelling set of perspectives on how more sustainable and just environmental systems might be shaped through historically grounded understandings of human–nature relationships.

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