

## The Relevance of Ultrasociality to Understanding Norway's Economic Evolution

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When we look at the system of globalized capitalism, we observe a highly interconnected, self-referential system with an underlying dynamic of expansion. This system is now beginning to falter – especially in countries where social welfare institutions have been marginalized and prerogatives of private enterprise have not been contained. Economic growth is not fulfilling its promise as the path to prosperity for all. In the industrialized countries in the past decades, almost all income growth has accrued to the top 1%. In the developing countries of India and China, the poster children of free market liberalization, economic growth has favored the elite over the average citizen. In India, over half of households lack toilets and 30% of the population lives below the (extremely low) poverty level. The global economy is also running up against serious biophysical limits – climate change, degradation of the oceans, destructions of the rainforests, disruption of the nitrogen cycle, ocean acidification, and mass extinction of other species. We do not appear to be able to change the direction of this massive system.

Humans are not the only species to dominate ecosystems, nor are they the only species to be caught up in a large, interdependent system that subordinates the individual to the needs of the expansionary system. Our observation is that there are disturbing similarities between the global economic system and social insects, particularly ant and termite populations that become superorganisms. Our research asks the question: Are there similar evolutionary forces at work? By using the framework of evolution and, in particular, multi-level and group selection, we argue that both insects and humans made the transition to ultrasociality when they began to practice agriculture. The argument we make is that with the transition to agriculture, a fundamentally different social order was configured in these species, and this reconfiguration is primarily explained as an economic matter. The key economic features are a complex division of labor, a rigid co-dependence in the colony in surplus production, an altered energy configuration that includes tapping into energy stocks, and an imperative of expansion. The results are the same: explosive population growth, domination of ecosystems in which they occur, intensive and extensive mobilization of natural resources, and hierarchical organization with the subjugation of individuals to promote the success of the group. For humans, globalized capitalism is simply an iteration of an altered evolutionary path that began with agriculture.

Our work on ultrasociality adds a unique and cautionary perspective with which to interpret Norway's success. We hold that while there may be culturally unique and specific factors that have determined the success of Norway, there is a broader economic context – forged through multi-level selection and the evolution of ultrasociality, which is equally important in understanding Norway's present historical moment. Our work adds to the discussion of

Norway's cultural evolution by providing a more expansive framework in which to interpret what might be unique, and what may not be unique, about Norway.