

NORDIC MODEL: WHAT MAKES SCANDINAVIA SO SPECIAL

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ABSTRACT

The paper studies the peculiarities of the socio-economic development of Scandinavian countries. Authors briefly outline country profiles of all five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and concentrate on characteristics that distinguish them from other Western countries. These characteristics include good educational systems, hi-tech economies, effective healthcare, a high level of social protection, and stable political systems. The paper highlights two important cultural peculiarities of Scandinavian countries, which include egalitarianism and a high level of social trust in Nordic countries. Authors specifically analyze the role and history of gender equality and emphasize the active and positive role of local labor unions. The paper concludes that the so-called Nordic way of life successfully combines the main positive features of capitalistic and socialistic socio-economic models and proposes a right balance between free-market economic effectiveness and human equality principle.

Keywords: *Scandinavia, Nordic model, welfare state, social policy, social democracy, social equality*

1. INTRODUCTION

Scandinavia is the name of one of the most famous groups of countries, located in the North of Europe and that has a long history. Strictly speaking, the term “Scandinavia” is applied only to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, while the term “Nordic countries” usually covers in addition Finland and Iceland. We will use both terms like synonyms as many others do for all five countries that have so much in common culturally and historically.

Scandinavian countries have been in the spotlight of scholars, politicians, and the broad public for a long time. In the absolute majority of cases, Scandinavian countries are highly praised for the way they organize their public life. Highly opposite political leaders like the U.S. President Donald Trump and Senator Bernie Sanders both envy many aspects of their ways of life. Being a part of the Western world, they have often been considered to be a bit different which allowed speaking about the so-called “Nordic model” while describing their socio-economic development.

One more popular name, applying to Scandinavian countries, is “social democracy” emphasizing their social peculiarities in comparison with other market-based economies. In this paper, we analyze what makes these countries different, why it is common to call them welfare or even wrongfully socialist states, and what makes them attractive to many people with different political views or cultural backgrounds.

The paper starts with a very short historical overview of five countries, followed by their economic profiles. Next, we analyze the main social peculiarities of Scandinavian countries that makes them “different”. They include their high-quality education, very accessible healthcare, labor relations based on strong and influential trade unions, and also gender and other cultural differences, which contribute to their overall success and to our mind substantially reinforce the positive image of these countries worldwide.

In the discussion and conclusion sections, we summarize the main distinctions of the Nordic countries and conclude that likely one of the most important elements of the Nordic model is an effective government and public administration organization, determined by high political culture and high social involvement and responsibility of their citizens.