

## **Contesting Nordicness**

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## **Volume 2**

# Contesting Nordicness

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From Scandinavianism to the Nordic Brand

Edited by  
Jani Marjanen, Johan Strang and Mary Hilson

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# From the “Middle Way” to *The Nordic Way*: Changing Rhetorics of the Nordic Model in Britain<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

*The Economist's* special report on “Why the world should look at the Nordic countries,” published in February 2013 with a Viking on the front cover, is just one well-known example of references to the Nordic model since 2010.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the “Nordic model” is possibly one of the most widely recognized examples of the rhetorical use of the adjective “Nordic.” At the same time, it is also a highly contested concept, within the region and outside it. There is a well-established field of research on images of the Nordic region and their circulation. Scholars acknowledge that foreign images or xenostereotypes of Nordic practices and policies have been shaped in reflexive interaction with self-images or auto-stereotypes produced in the Nordic countries themselves.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, positive stereotypes of the region have frequently been counter-balanced by more negative ones. The Nordic countries have been described as dystopian warnings against the perils of high taxation and an all-powerful state, sometimes caricatured with references to high levels of drunkenness and suicide.<sup>4</sup>

Although it is possible to trace some continuity in the ways in which the Nordic model has been referred to over time, its meaning has generally been unstable, both internally and externally. International interest in the Nordic region has

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1 Mary Hilson's research is part of the project “Nordic Model(s) in the global circulation of ideas, 1970–2020,” supported by Independent Research Fund Denmark (grant number 8018–00023B). We would like to thank the other members of the project team Andreas Mørkved Hellenes, Carl Marklund and Byron Rom-Jensen for valuable comments on an earlier draft of the chapter.

2 Adrian Wooldridge, “The next supermodel: Why the world should look at the Nordic countries,” *The Economist*, February 2, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2013/02/02/the-next-supermodel>.

3 Kazimierz Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model: Images of Progress in the Era of Modernisation* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2002).

4 For example Roland Huntford, *The New Totalitarians* (London: Allen Lane, 1971); see also Frederick Hale, “Brave New World in Sweden? Roland Huntford's *The New Totalitarians*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 78, no. 2 (2006).

intensified during particular historical periods. One such moment was the 1930s, when the region was famously celebrated as a “middle way” between the extremes of authoritarianism and democracy, capitalism and communism.<sup>5</sup> According to historian Bo Stråth, the earliest references to the “Nordic model” as such date from the 1960s, when the term was used by political scientists referring to Nordic co-operation within the United Nations.<sup>6</sup> As Stråth puts it, the widespread use of the term “Nordic model” from the 1990s should be seen in the context of “the search for new identities, communities and interpretative frames... in order to rescue something perceived to be under threat.”<sup>7</sup>

Studies of different aspects of the Nordic model have proliferated during the 2000s and 2010s, though there have been, as far as we know, few attempts to explore the history of the term and its rhetorical uses, beginning with its emergence in the 1960s and charting its fluctuating meanings through subsequent years.<sup>8</sup> This chapter has two parts. In the first part, we explore how the term “Nordic model” was used by scholars in comparative analyses of the historical development of the Nordic countries during the post-war period, paying attention to the idea of a Nordic political model and the Nordic model of the welfare state. The focus is on English-language scholarship, especially that produced within the UK.

The distinction between the Nordic model as analytical category and as a normative policy model for emulation elsewhere has never been watertight, however. In the second part of the chapter, we consider how the Nordic model concept has been applied to politics and policy programmes, taking recent political debates in the UK as a case study. Despite fundamental similarities in European

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<sup>5</sup> The most famous example of this is Marquis Childs, *Sweden – the Middle Way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936). See Carl Marklund, “The Social Laboratory, the Middle Way and the Swedish Model: Three Frames for the Image of Sweden,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34, no. 3 (2009); Peter Stadius, “Happy Countries: Appraisals of Interwar Nordic Societies,” in *Communicating the North*, ed. Jonas Harvard and Peter Stadius, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Bo Stråth, “Den nordiska modellen. Historisk bakgrund och hur talet om en nordisk modell uppstod,” *Nordisk Tidskrift* (1993); see also Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Stråth, “Den nordiska modellen,” 55.

<sup>8</sup> See however Anu Koivunen, Jari Ojala, and Janne Holmén, “Always in Crisis, Always a Solution? The Nordic Model as a Political and Scholarly Concept,” in *The Nordic Economic, Social and Political Model: Challenges in the 21st Century*, ed. Anu Koivunen, Jari Ojala, and Janne Holmén, 1–19 (New York: Routledge, 2021) doi:10.4324/9780429026690–1; Byrkjeflot, Haldor, Lars Mjøset, Mads Mordhorst and Klaus Petersen, eds. *The Making and Circulation of Nordic Models, Ideals and Images* (London: Routledge, 2021) doi:10.4324/9781003156925. Work in progress by Andreas Mørkved Hellenes, Mary Hilson, Carl Marklund, and Byron Rom-Jensen as part of the IFRD-funded project “Nordic model(s) in the global circulation of ideas, 1970–2020” also tracks the changing meanings of the Nordic model.

approaches to politics and governance, there is nonetheless a pronounced tendency to make the central contradictions of foreign political projects and the antagonisms of other societies intelligible through a process of domestication. In this process, these contradictions and antagonisms are played out through the familiar contradictions of domestic politics and the antagonisms and social conflicts of the “watching” society, rather than the “watched.” In this chapter, the “watching” domesticating society will generally be the UK and the “watched” societies Nordic. The adoption of political ideologies in the Nordic countries and the UK, which were justified in terms of a particular “Nordic” way (or “model”) of doing politics, were heavily dependent on the academic studies discussed in the first part of the chapter.

We argue in this section that the adoption of Third Way political logic *and* strategy by social democrats in Europe created a rhetoric which was easily imitable by liberal and conservative parties in the UK and the Nordic countries, and which was also used to re-articulate the meaning of the “Nordic” in Norden and abroad. This manifested itself concretely in two areas: the broad idea of the “radical centre,”<sup>9</sup> – an approach to politics characterised by the rejection of traditional economic divisions between left and right<sup>10</sup> – and the related attempt to position existing social democratic, and later liberal conservative politics, especially those of the Nordic countries, within the parameters of this “radical centre.” This case study will suggest answers to two questions: Why and how were “radical centrist” political strategies adopted in the UK and Sweden from the late 1990s until the 2010s? And how did this process alter the rhetoric of the “Nordic model”?

The terms “Scandinavian model” and “Nordic model” are treated as synonyms here, though it is our impression that the term “Nordic model” has become more prominent since 2010, at least in English-speaking contexts. Use of the Nordic or Scandinavian model also has to be understood in relation to references to national models, especially the Swedish model. This term was established earlier and until the 1990s at least often stood as a proxy for the region as a whole, though never exclusively.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jenny Andersson, *The Library and the Workshop: Social Democracy in the Knowledge Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Chantal Mouffe, “The Radical Centre: A Politics without Adversary”, *Soundings* no. 9 (Summer 1998), 11–23.

<sup>11</sup> Carl Marklund has traced an early usage of the term “Swedish model,” in an American source from 1941, where it referred to collective bargaining arrangements. See Marklund, “The Social Laboratory,” 272; Andreas Mørkved Hellenes, “Tracing the Nordic Model: French Crea-

## The Nordic model before the 1990s

In his textbook *Scandinavian Politics Today*, first published in 1999, political scientist David Arter identified two ideal-type Nordic models. The Nordic model of government referred to “the political institutions, structures and policy measures in [the Nordic] countries;” while the Nordic welfare model was “in large part the legislative product of the former.”<sup>12</sup> Distinctive features of the Nordic political model included: the strength and dominance of social democratic parties within stable multi-party systems; a consensual approach to policy making involving formal consultation of corporatist interests; centralised collective bargaining; strong state regulation and the importance of personal relations among elites in relatively small states.<sup>13</sup> Arter’s list of features was similar to those found in other formal definitions of the Nordic model, for example in the Danish encyclopaedia *Den Store Danske*, which referred to the universal welfare state, tax-financed and state-run; the influence of social democratic parties within a consensual political culture; and women’s high levels of economic activity.<sup>14</sup>

In defining a Nordic political model Arter was drawing on the established literature in political science that treated the small Nordic countries as a natural unit for comparative analysis. Such comparisons could emphasise similarities – between the Nordic region and other countries or regions – but also internal differences within the region.<sup>15</sup> In an earlier study from 1982, Arter and his three co-

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tions, Swedish Appropriations and Nordic Articulations,” in *Making and Circulation of the Nordic Model*, ed. Haldor Byrkjeflot et al. (London: Routledge, 2021), 83–101.

<sup>12</sup> David Arter, *Scandinavian Politics Today* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 147.

<sup>13</sup> Arter, *Scandinavian Politics Today*, 147–49.

<sup>14</sup> Allan Karker, “Den nordiske model,” *Den Store Danske*, *lex.dk*, Accessed 27 May 2021, [https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/den\\_nordiske\\_model](https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/den_nordiske_model). See also Knut Heidar, “Comparative Perspectives on the Northern Countries,” in *Nordic Politics: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Knut Heidar, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2004); Nicholas Aylott, “A Nordic Model of Democracy? Political Representation in Northern Europe,” in *Models of Democracy in Nordic and Baltic Europe: Political Institutions and Discourse*, ed. Nicholas Aylott (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Mary Hilson, *The Nordic Model: Scandinavia since 1945* (London: Reaktion, 2008). On Nordic gender equality, see Pirjo Markkola’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>15</sup> Examples include: Dankwart A Rustow, “Scandinavia: Working Multi-Party Systems,” in *Modern Political Parties: Approaches to Comparative Politics*, ed. Sigmund Neumann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); Nils Andrén, *Government and Politics in the Nordic Countries. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964); Peter Es-saiasson and Knut Heidar, eds., *Beyond Westminster and Congress: The Nordic Experience* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000).

authors – all academics from British universities – had asked whether the Scandinavian (Nordic) states could be regarded as “a separate species of the West European genus of parliamentary democracies.” If they were, could they be classified as “consensual” democracies, in contrast to other more adversarial or confrontational ways of doing politics?<sup>16</sup> Drawing on Arendt Lijphart’s work on consensual democracies, Elder, Thomas, and Arter defined the term in terms of a) the broad acceptance of the political system and low levels of opposition to its rules; b) low levels of political conflict; c) a process of public policy making based on consensus and compromise.<sup>17</sup> They found that politics in the Nordic countries largely corresponded to the first two criteria, but in the context of the early 1980s they noted that consensus seemed to be waning with the rise of new political issues and parties. They also questioned the distinctiveness of aspects of policy making in the Nordic context, such as the widespread use of commissions of enquiry.<sup>18</sup>

As reviewer John Logue noted, the notion of consensual democracy featured here as an analytical “model,” against which the empirical realities of the Nordic democracies could be studied. The book’s authors also used the term “Nordic political model” to refer to the five-party system of Scandinavian politics. Logue’s own textbook on Scandinavian politics, co-authored with fellow US academic Eric Einhorn, appeared in 1989. Einhorn and Logue were interested in analysing the “central policy areas of the Scandinavian model,” above all the provision of social services as part of a mixed capitalist economy, or in other words the welfare state. They also posed the question, “is there a Scandinavian democratic model?” analysing the evolution of Scandinavian political institutions and democratic culture in three stages: political democracy, social democracy, and economic democracy. As the book’s subtitle suggested, a central thesis was that the “key to the ‘Scandinavian model’” was the expansion of the public sector under the stewardship of strong social democratic parties, although the authors also insisted that it was a fallacy to regard the Scandinavian countries as “socialistic.”<sup>19</sup>

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**16** Neil Elder, Alastair H Thomas, and David Arter, *The Consensual Democracies? The Government and Politics of the Scandinavian States* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982), 8. See also John Logue, review of *The Consensual Democracies?* by Neil Elder et al., *Scandinavian Studies* 55, no. 3 (Summer 1983).

**17** Elder, Thomas, and Arter, *The Consensual Democracies?* 9–11.

**18** Elder, Thomas, and Arter, *The Consensual Democracies?*

**19** Eric Einhorn and John Logue, *Modern Welfare States: Politics and Policies in Social Democratic Scandinavia* (New York: Praeger, 1989). “Scandinavia” in this book referred to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

As with the Nordic political model, the notion of a Nordic welfare model drew on an established tradition of analysing some or all of the Nordic countries as a natural unit in comparative studies, even if such studies were not explicitly theorised as an ideal-type “model.”<sup>20</sup> A particularly influential contribution was Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990), which was to become the standard reference in the field for a generation.<sup>21</sup> Drawing from a comparison of eighteen welfare states, Esping-Andersen characterized the three Scandinavian countries as a distinctive “social democratic regime,” based on the extent to which these countries had de commodified social relations or in other words the extent to which citizens were freed from dependence on the market for their welfare. Through the comprehensive and universal provision of social rights, the welfare state had contributed to forging social relations in Scandinavia that were relatively egalitarian, in contrast to the more stratified systems of the other two “worlds,” the liberal Anglo-Saxon countries or the corporatist welfare states of central Europe. The unique feature of the “peculiarly ‘Scandinavian model,’” according to Esping-Andersen and Walter Korpi, was “the extent to which social policy has become comprehensive and *institutional*.”<sup>22</sup>

As an ideal type, the Nordic model therefore functioned as a heuristic category for testing the empirical realities of Nordic politics and society, both within the region and in broader comparisons with other units. Used in this way, the term was certainly present in English-language scholarship during the 1980s, implying comparative analyses structured around the question “is there a Nordic model?” Often, the conclusion was that there was not. Writing in 2001, Niels Finn Christensen and Klaus Petersen noted how the Nordic model had become a standard concept in comparative welfare state research, but they coined the phrase “one model – five exceptions” to sum up the historical differences between the five Nordic countries.<sup>23</sup> A decade earlier, sociologist Lars Mjøset had

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**20** For example: George R. Nelson, ed., *Freedom and Welfare: Social Patterns in the Northern Countries of Europe* (Copenhagen: Ministries of Social Affairs of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, 1953); Stein Ringen, “Welfare Studies in Scandinavia,” *Scandinavian Political Studies* 9 (1974).

**21** Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). For an assessment of the significance of Esping-Andersen’s study in welfare research see Patrick Emmenegger et al., “*Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*: The Making of a Classic,” *Journal of European Social Policy* 25, no. 1 (February 2015): 3–13, doi:10.1177/0958928714556966.

**22** Gøsta Esping-Andersen and Walter Korpi, “From Poor Relief to Institutional Welfare States: The Development of Scandinavian Social Policy,” in *The Scandinavian Model: Welfare States and Welfare Research*, ed. Robert Erikson et al. (Armonk: M E Sharpe, 1987), 42.

**23** Niels Finn Christiansen and Klaus Petersen, “Preface,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 26, no. 3 (2001); Mikko Kautto, “The Nordic Countries,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare*

concluded that “comparative research has so far only demonstrated a number of Nordic peculiarities... [which] do not, it seems, form a comprehensive and coherent model with common mechanisms.”<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Mjøset also concluded that the Nordic model could form the basis for a renewal of regional identity at a time of considerable uncertainty for the region. This was an assessment which has shown itself, in retrospect, to be a remarkably accurate prophecy. Ideal types never exist in political vacuums, but are always, in J Magnus Ryner’s words, “decisively shaped by pre-understandings and assumptions, that in turn reflect particular social concerns and purposes.”<sup>25</sup> The history of the Nordic model as an analytical category cannot be considered independently from more normative understandings of the region, the shared characteristics of which were exportable and worth emulating.

As Mjøset predicted, this use of the Nordic model was to become widespread from the 1990s, but it was also present before then. In reviewing Elder, Thomas, and Arter’s study of consensual democracy, John Logue noted how this was a “timely theme, particularly in Thatcher’s Britain” of the early 1980s.<sup>26</sup> In 1990, Stein Kuhnle observed that “[t]he so-called ‘Scandinavian model’ now appears to attract attention from all political corners of the world, particularly from representatives of the failed communist systems of Eastern Europe,” for whom Scandinavian social democratic capitalism was more attractive than ‘Western capitalism.’<sup>27</sup> Another reviewer of Einhorn and Logue’s book argued that Scandinavia “may well serve as a model” in changing times, “with a confused world seeking answers to the riddle of economic and political well being.”<sup>28</sup> An early example of a book that referred to “the Nordic model” in its title was an anthology edited by two academics from Scottish universities, which appeared in 1980. Subtitled *Studies in public policy innovation*, the book posed the direct question “What can

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*State*, ed. Francis G. Castles et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). An outline of the characteristics of the Nordic welfare model and a summary of the literature on this topic can be found in Niels Finn Christiansen and Pirjo Markkola, “Introduction,” in *The Nordic Model of Welfare: A Historical Reappraisal*, ed. Niels Finn Christiansen et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006).

**24** Lars Mjøset, “The Nordic Model Never Existed, but Does It Have a Future?,” *Scandinavian Studies* 64, no. 4 (1992): 663.

**25** J. Magnus Ryner, “The Nordic Model: Does It Exist? Can It Survive?,” *New Political Economy* 12, no. 1 (March 2007): 64, doi:10.1080/13563460601068644.

**26** Logue, review of *The Consensual Democracies?*

**27** Stein Kuhnle, review of *Modern Welfare States*, *The Journal of Politics* 52, no. 3 (1990), <https://doi.org/10.2307>.

**28** Charles H Zwicker, review of *Modern Welfare States*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1991), 197–98.

we learn from Scandinavian society?” in its opening line. The policy models presented – on topics including the role of women, land ownership, the use of oil revenues, and state support for the arts and media – were based on national examples from across the region.<sup>29</sup> The volume also included a chapter by Clive Archer on “Nordic co-operation: a model for the British Isles,” which addressed explicitly the possibility that the Nordic Council could function as a model for relations between the nations of the British Isles, following a decade of conflict in Northern Ireland and an upsurge of nationalism in Scotland and Wales.<sup>30</sup> Tom Nairn’s book on the same theme *The Break Up of Britain*, first published in 1977, had also asked rhetorically whether an independent Scotland could be “a candidate for membership of an enlarged Nordic Union?” but argued that it “does not possess the homogeneity of the Scandinavian models.”<sup>31</sup>

## The Nordic model since the 1990s

The term “Nordic/Scandinavian model” was used in English-language academic scholarship during the 1980s. It functioned as an analytical concept for studying the region with a comparative perspective, most notably in the disciplines of history, political science and welfare studies, and it was also used in the normative sense to refer to elements of Scandinavian policies and politics that were seen as attractive and potentially worthy of emulation, at least in the UK. In this context, references to the Scandinavian or Nordic model were often understood – at least implicitly – as synonyms for the Swedish model.<sup>32</sup>

As discussed in the introduction to this volume, the early 1990s was an important watershed for the Nordic region. External shocks – the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Soviet Union, and a new dynamic phase in European integration – combined with significant domestic changes to challenge ideas of Nordic

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**29** Clive Archer and Stephen Maxwell, eds., *The Nordic Model: Studies in Public Policy Innovation* (Farnborough: Gower, 1980).

**30** Clive Archer, “Nordic Co-operation: A Model for the British Isles,” in *The Nordic Model: Studies in Public Policy Innovation*, ed. Clive Archer and Stephen Maxwell (Farnborough: Gower, 1980).

**31** Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, rev. ed. (1977; repr., London: Verso), 182, 193. For a discussion of Nordic models in the context of Scottish devolution debates, see Andrew G. Newby, “‘In Building a Nation Few Better Examples Can Be Found’: Norden and the Scottish Parliament,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34, no. 3 (September 2009): 307–329, doi:10.1080/03468750903134749.

**32** An example of this is found in Archer and Maxwell, *The Nordic Model*, where the literature cited referred exclusively to Sweden. See also Hellenes, “Tracing the Nordic Model.”

exceptionalism. Taking stock of these changed circumstances in 1992, international relations scholar Ole Wæver was not optimistic about the long-term prospects for “Nordicity,” suggesting that the Baltic Sea offered a more dynamic alternative for building a regional identity.<sup>33</sup> For Wæver, “the crisis of the Scandinavian or Swedish model” – “Scandinavian or Swedish model” here refers to the social democratic welfare state – was triggered partly by deeper cultural shifts, meaning that, “the Nordic or Swedish model has been hit by the general questioning of modernity and enlightenment values.” The attractiveness of the Nordic model was also undermined by the end of the ideological conflict between capitalism and communism, which meant that for the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, the “German model of economy and society” was likely to be more attractive.<sup>34</sup>

Wæver’s use of the Nordic model in this context refers to the social democratic welfare state, of which the foremost representative was Sweden. The Social Democratic Party lost the general election of 1991, and the new centre-right coalition government, led by the conservative Moderate Party, explicitly distanced itself from the Nordic model in favour of an agenda of economic reform and European integration. According to Hans Mouritzen, domestic debates focused mainly on the *Swedish* model, while the accompanying rejection of the *Nordic* model was largely a “silent revolution.”<sup>35</sup> Mouritzen himself, like Lars Mjøset, remained more sanguine about the continued possibility for the Nordic countries to build a specific regional identity around the Nordic model within an expanding EU.<sup>36</sup>

A decade later there was little evidence that the vision of a revitalized Norden within the EU materialized, with signs instead that the Nordic governments were becoming more reluctant to promote the idea of regional exceptionalism.<sup>37</sup> But at the same time, the use of the term Nordic model to refer to political or social developments in the region became ever more widely used. In the second part of this chapter, we explore how the rhetorics of the Nordic model was ap-

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**33** Ole Wæver, “Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War,” *International Affairs* 68, no. 1 (January 1992): 77–102, doi:10.2307/2620462.

**34** Wæver, “Nordic Nostalgia,” 86. In this article Wæver used the terms “Scandinavian model” and “Nordic model” as synonyms.

**35** Hans Mouritzen, “The Nordic Model as a Foreign Policy Instrument: Its Rise and Fall,” *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no. 1 (February 1995): 14, doi:10.1177/0022343395032001002.

**36** Mjøset, “The Nordic Model Never Existed;” Mouritzen, “The Nordic Model as a Foreign Policy Instrument.”

**37** Christopher S. Browning, “Branding Njordicity: Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 42, no. 1 (March 2007): 27–51, doi:10.1177/0010836707073475.

plied to politics and policy programmes during the 1990s and after, taking recent debates in the UK as a case study.

## Britain’s “radical centre” and its relationship to the Nordic model

### The Third Way

The late 1990s saw a period of resurgence of social democracy in Europe and the creation of a detailed formal framework, typically glossed as the “Third Way.” The process of transmission and circulation of Third Way ideas is resistant to any simple chronological narrative, and the Third Way should not be considered a homogenous force across Europe, even though some of its implications were homogenising.<sup>38</sup> Here, the focus will be the development of a new social democratic logic by sociologist Anthony Giddens and its propagation by Tony Blair in the United Kingdom, following the latter’s election as leader of the Labour Party in 1994 and the election of the “New Labour” government in 1997.<sup>39</sup> Some of New Labour’s ideas were adopted in Europe, including the idea of “radical centrism,” which we will return to later in this section.

Third Way thinkers presented their ideas as novel, positioning them ideologically between social democracy and neoliberalism rather than capitalism and communism as previous social science and political models had done. However, Anthony Giddens, the chief intellectual force behind the Third Way, fits comfortably into a tradition of gradualist political interest in the Nordic countries stretching back to the 1930s. Early socialist reformers were concerned as much with co-operatives and agricultural reform as the democratic institutions and welfare systems which would come to characterise later incarnations of the Nordic model.<sup>40</sup>

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**38** John Callaghan, ‘Old Social Democracy, New Social Movements and Social Democratic Programmatic Renewal, 1968–2000,’ in *Transitions in Social Democracy: Cultural and Ideological Problems of the Golden Age*, ed. John Callaghan and Ilaria Favretto (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 177–93; Andersson, *The Library and the Workshop*.

**39** Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way and Its Critics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 43; Tony Blair, “Leader’s Speech,” Blackpool, 1996, British Political Speech, <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=202>.

**40** Kazimierz Musiał, *Roots of the Scandinavian Model: Images of Progress in the Era of Modernisation* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2000); Mary Hilson, “Consumer Co-operation and Economic Crisis: The 1936 Roosevelt Inquiry on Co-operative Enterprise and the Emergence of the

In British political terms, Giddens should be seen as the intellectual heir to a revisionist tradition most associated with Tony Crosland, a Labour MP and minister, whose 1956 book *The Future of Socialism* established Sweden, rather than Scandinavia or Norden, as a place which had achieved the basic goals of socialism. Crosland set out the political goals of socialism as follows:

- 1) the amelioration of “material poverty and physical squalor”
- 2) the promotion of general “social welfare” for those oppressed or in need
- 3) belief in equality and the “classless society,” as well as “just” rights for workers, and
- 4) rejection of “competitive antagonism” and its replacement with the ideals of solidarity and collaboration.<sup>41</sup>

According to Crosland, Sweden had achieved the first and fourth of these goals in the 1940s, a full ten years before Britain, and was well on the way to achieving the second and third in consensual fashion through mechanisms like “joint enterprise councils,” public investment, and strict controls on share dividends and reinvestment of profits. This view did not go unchallenged and Crosland’s rather uncritical admiration of Sweden led Perry Anderson, a leading thinker of the British New Left, to state that the country was “not so much a normal object of real knowledge as a didactic political fable.”<sup>42</sup> Broadly speaking, however, it was Crosland’s image of Sweden that prevailed on the Anglophone Left.<sup>43</sup>

While Giddens’ articulation of the Third Way sits within this revisionist tradition, it nonetheless breaks from it in important ways. Notably, while Crosland envisioned *Swedish* society as comprised of social and political institutions which intervened in and regulated markets, Giddens envisaged *Nordic* social policy as ameliorating the excesses of basically unregulated free markets. It is therefore characteristic of the period that the Nordic policies of greatest interest to the Labour Party were those which offered social protection in ways which were consistent with free markets.

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Nordic ‘Middle Way,’” *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 2 (May 2013): 181–98, doi:10.1017/S0960777313000040.

41 C.A.R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), 67.

42 Perry Anderson, “Mr Crosland’s Dreamland,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 7 (1961): 4.

43 Peter Aimer, “The Strategy of Gradualism and the Swedish Wage-earner Funds,” *West European Politics* 8, no. 3 (July 1985): 43–55, doi:10.1080/01402388508424540; Andrew Scott, “Social Democracy in Northern Europe: Its Relevance for Australia,” *Australian Review of Public Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2006): 1–17; Andrew Scott, “Looking to Sweden in Order to Reconstruct Australia,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34, no. 3 (September 2009): 330–352, doi:10.1080/03468750903134756.

This was particularly true of flexicurity: the Danish political economic and labour market reforms of the 1990s and measures to introduce market structures into the British National Health Service (NHS).<sup>44</sup> In his book *The Third Way and Its Critics* Giddens, for example, claimed that:

the Nordic welfare states have long since concentrated upon active labour market policies, now making a delayed appearance in an Anglo-Saxon context under the label of “welfare to work.” Nordic social democracy has been characterised by a willingness to introduce reforms on a pragmatic basis with the aim of finding solutions that are effective.<sup>45</sup>

New Labour’s retrenchment of unemployment payments was, according to Giddens, as much influenced by Swedish and Danish approaches to the labour market as they were by the US Democrats’ attacks on “welfare queens.”<sup>46</sup> Formally, the Nordic states functioned as a place where the problems facing industrial societies had already been solved through innovative political economic and welfare policy. The Nordic “pragmatic” approach to this policy captured the essence of Giddens’ and Ulrich Beck’s shared framework of “reflexive modernization.”

Perhaps the most significant innovation was the gradual association of market ideas with the Nordic countries, especially Sweden. Large portions of New Labour’s policy on health and social care were articulated in terms of Swedish and Danish public health care systems. This was primarily achieved by positioning the Nordic systems as sites of consumer choice. The Department for Health’s 2002 *Delivering the NHS Plan*, for example, noted that “[I]n Sweden and Denmark patients have access to information on waiting times and options for treatment, and patients who have been waiting for treatment have the choice of an alternative provider.”<sup>47</sup> This served the immediate strategic imperative of defending a taxation-funded health care model, which could simultaneously accommodate market structures; its association with Sweden and Denmark made it seem modern and pragmatic.

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<sup>44</sup> Jeremy Laurance, “Bed Blocking the Scandinavian Solution,” *The Independent*, 19 April 2002; Patricia Hewitt, “Investment and Reform: Transforming Health and Healthcare,” Annual health and social care lecture, 13 December, 2005, transcript, The National Archives, [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20100408103750/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/MediaCentre/Speeches/Speecheslist/DH\\_4124484](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20100408103750/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/MediaCentre/Speeches/Speecheslist/DH_4124484).

<sup>45</sup> Giddens, *The Third Way and Its Critics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 17.

<sup>46</sup> Giddens, *The Third Way*, 30–31.

<sup>47</sup> Department of Health, *Delivering the NHS Plan: Next Steps on Investment Next Steps on Reform*, April 2002. [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digital-asset/dh\\_118524.pdf](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digital-asset/dh_118524.pdf).

This association of market-based health reform with the Nordic countries continued into the late 2000s.<sup>48</sup> Patricia Hewitt, Health Secretary during the third Blair government 2005–2007, approvingly quoted the Social Democratic slogan from the Göran Persson era, “proud, but not satisfied,” arguing that this reflected the new natural state of Labour government.<sup>49</sup> Ironically, this slogan was considered unimaginative and complacent in Sweden.<sup>50</sup> However, from the perspective of the Labour government, adopting Nordic political solutions – with reference to well-established social democratic rhetoric about Sweden and Norden – offered a potential means of justifying otherwise controversial policies. By domesticating Swedish marketization policies and subsuming them within British political logics, New Labour had missed the change in public sentiment in Sweden, away from Social Democratic modes of government.

The Nordic countries were thus the “social laboratories” from earlier eras, now considered experiments in the application of market solutions to the problems of “globalised” societies. Of all the Nordic countries, Sweden in particular featured in this rhetoric, despite its relatively late and partial move towards marketization, compared to, say, Norway. Politically, these earlier models had been underwritten by a hegemonic social democracy which could efface the social tensions and antagonisms of Swedish and Nordic societies. In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 1991–92 and the efforts of the Bildt government (in office 1991–94) to contest the meaning of “Swedish” and “Nordic,” these signifiers began to acquire new meanings. The weakening of the social democratic hegemony was an opportunity for new articulations of Sweden and Norden to develop, which were more amenable to free-market policy programmes, both domestically and abroad.

## Liberal conservative centrism

The adoption of “radical centrism” in the early 2000s by the Swedish Moderate Party therefore makes significant sense. The foundational strategic arguments of Blair’s Third Way rested on a calculation that the Conservative Party was the

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<sup>48</sup> Tom Hoxor, “Beveridge or Bismarck? Choosing the Nordic Model in British Healthcare Policy 1997–c.2015,” in *Making and Circulation of the Nordic Model*, ed. Haldor Byrkjeflot et al. (London: Routledge, 2021), 209–228.

<sup>49</sup> Patricia Hewitt, “Creating a Patient-Led NHS: The Next Steps Forward” (speech), 10 January, 2006, transcript, The National Archives, [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/MediaCentre/Speeches/Speecheslist/DH\\_4126499](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/MediaCentre/Speeches/Speecheslist/DH_4126499).

<sup>50</sup> Andersson, *The Library and the Workshop*, 150–51.

dominant force in British politics. Any attempt to win office meant accepting the basic small “c” conservatism of the British electorate. For Fredrik Reinfeldt, leader of the Moderate Party 2003–2015, the same basic situation held, but with social democracy the hegemonic political force. Where Blair embraced the individualism and economic policies of the Thatcher era, Reinfeldt focused on labour market exclusion among Sweden’s young and migrant populations and focused on jobs,<sup>51</sup> even going so far as to brand the Moderates as “the new worker’s party” [*det nya arbetarpartiet*].<sup>52</sup> This was a sharp contrast from some of the positions Reinfeldt had adopted in the early 1990s, during the era of the Bildt government.<sup>53</sup> The liberal conservative Alliance for Sweden [*Alliansen*] won the 2006 election on this platform.

David Cameron became leader of the UK Conservative Party in 2005 and quite explicitly imitated Reinfeldt’s tack to the centre, adopting much of the same strategic logic as New Labour and the Moderates. This included embracing social justice and ecological issues, in his so-called “hug a hoodie” and “hug a huskie” campaigns, much to the chagrin of social democrats and Conservative Thatcherites.<sup>54</sup> This was also the era of “Compassionate Conservatism,” which later became the “Big Society” agenda. Indeed, taking a cue from the Moderates, the Conservatives branded themselves “the worker’s party” from 2014 in the lead-up to the 2015 General Election.<sup>55</sup>

As well as the shared political strategies, there were also emergent links between the two parties during this era. In 2008, Fredrik Reinfeldt gave a speech to

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51 Christine Agius, “Sweden’s 2006 Parliamentary Election and after: Contesting or Consolidating the Swedish Model?,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 60, no. 4 (2007): 585–600, doi:10.1093/pa/gsm041.

52 “Det nya arbetarpartiet är moderat nyspråk,” *Aftonbladet*, 20 July, 2006, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/a/zLANrw/det-nya-arbetarpartiet-ar-moderat-nysprak>; Dimitris Tsarouhas, *Social Democracy in Sweden: The Threat from a Globalized World* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), 176.

53 Fredrik Reinfeldt, *Det sovande folket*, ed. Christer Söderberg and Per Schlingmann (Stockholm: Rätt Blankett & Trycksaksproduktion AB, 1993).

54 Gaby Hinsliff, “Cameron Softens Crime Image in ‘Hug a Hoodie’ Call,” *The Guardian*, 9 July, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/jul/09/conservatives.ukcrime>; George Jones, “Cameron Turns Blue to Prove Green Credentials,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 April, 2006, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1516276/Cameron-turns-blue-to-prove-green-credentials.html>; Ruth Lister and Fran Bennett, “The new ‘champion of progressive ideals’? Cameron’s Conservative Party: poverty, family policy and welfare reform,” *Renewal* 18, no. 1/2 (2010): 84–109.

55 James Frayne, “The Conservatives Are Now the True Worker’s Party,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 May, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/11605411/The-Conservatives-are-now-the-true-workers-party.html>.

the London School of Economics (LSE) for which David Cameron was a discus- sant. This, in particular, made explicit the similarity between the way the two leaders had styled themselves. Reinfeldt set the tone of his speech with a self-deprecating joke: when he was at school, he was taught that Sweden was the only world superpower with just nine million inhabitants.<sup>56</sup> The anecdote though contained a serious kernel since it positioned Reinfeldt to reject the idea of a Swedish model. If there ever were “aspirations of a modelling kind,” he claimed, it was not a Swedish but a Scandinavian model, and, in any case, the relevance of model-building had been undermined by the process of globalisation.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the most that could be achieved was regulatory inspiration, rather than any visionary political or social programme.

This represented a significant departure from the rhetoric of the Social Democrats, who had always maintained the opposite, even during the era of the Third Way. Göran Persson memorably urged those interested in Sweden to study “the flight of the bumblebee, rather than the beating of its wings.”<sup>58</sup> This idea was taken up by other Swedish social democratic politicians in British political networks, notably Pär Nuder, a former Social Democratic Finance Minister and Katrine Kielos, a journalist and commentator.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, argued Reinfeldt, despite its domestic and international reputation, the high era of the Swedish model – the 1950s to the 1970s – was not a time of success, but a “mad quarter of a century.” This shared characteristics with rhetoric used in the 1990s by the Bildt government, but it also staked a claim to a different vision of Sweden as part of a Scandinavian or Nordic model, rather than as a regional leader with a claim to a universalising social democratic discourse. The Moderates could therefore legitimately claim that Sweden was bound by participation in the global economic system and moreover that Sweden’s fundamental success should be located in the pre-social democratic era as a consequence of the rule of law, property rights, and so on. Strategically speaking, this also set a tone for Cameron’s deployment of the idea of the “Broken Society” later the same year.<sup>60</sup>

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56 Fredrik Reinfeldt, “The New Swedish Model: A Reform Agenda for Growth and the Environment.” Speech at London School of Economics, 26 February 2008. Regeringskansliet, <https://www.regeringen.se/49bb53/contentassets/b9cf14e1905b4bc2af652bdfc89e7ae9/tal-2006-2010-fredrik-reinfeldt> (London: London School of Economics, 2008).

57 Reinfeldt, *The New Swedish Model*.

58 Persson quoted in Peter Lindert, “The Welfare State Is the Wrong Target: A Reply to Bergh,” *Econ Journal Watch* 3, no. 2 (2006): 237.

59 Pär Nuder, *Saving the Swedish Model* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2012); Katrine Kielos, “Flight of the Swedish Bumblebee,” *Renewal* 117, no. 2 (2009): 61–66.

60 David Cameron, “Fixing Our Broken Society” (speech), Glasgow, 2008, Conservative Speeches, <https://conservative-speeches.sayit.mysociety.org/speech/599630>.

Perhaps the Moderates' most audacious attempt to re-articulate the Nordic countries was in the *Nordic Way* pamphlet, submitted to the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2011.<sup>61</sup> Despite its Nordic focus, the pamphlet was developed by the Swedish government, further developing the idea of a Nordic region, rather than a Swedish model. The principal economic claims made in the report were twofold. Firstly, that financial crises in the Nordic states had created a collectivity of individual responses which focused on budgetary, fiscal, and monetary discipline.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to earlier articulations of the Swedish model as unaffected by global economic conditions, *The Nordic Way* portrayed the Nordic countries as exposed to the "economic cycle," but capable of ameliorating the consequences of busts by way of orthodox financial measures taken in difficult circumstances. The second claim characterised the Nordic countries as open and flexible, hostile to protectionism, with limited regulations, buttressed by strong public welfare systems which socialise the risks of their flexible labour markets.<sup>63</sup>

This echoed the arguments made by Reinfeldt at the LSE in 2008, but it also masked a highly contested understanding of the Nordic model, which was fiercely disputed by the Social Democrats.<sup>64</sup> Despite this, it was remarkably successful in UK political discourse, partly as a result of the growing association of the Nordic states with markets, but also in its attempt to situate a form of "Nordic capitalism" which possessed "fundamental coherence and vitality."<sup>65</sup> This appealed to liberal conservative figures in the UK who had been trying for some time to create coherent policies which satisfied the need for social solidarity as well as allowing intervention from non-governmental actors. Notably, the "Compassionate Conservatism" and "Big Society" agendas were attempts to achieve this, though both were ultimately failures.<sup>66</sup>

The Conservative Universal Credit and Free Schools policies were explicitly modelled on Nordic ideas. Free Schools ideas had been mooted within the Con-

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61 Klas Eklund, Henrik Berggren, and Lars Trägårdh, *The Nordic Way: Shared Norms for the New Reality* (Davos: World Economic Forum, 2011).

62 Eklund, Berggren, and Trägårdh, *The Nordic Way*, 5–11.

63 Eklund, Berggren, and Trägårdh, *The Nordic Way*, 9–11.

64 Göran Eriksson, "Slaget om Norden," *Svenska Dagbladet*, 9 February 2012, <https://www.svd.se/slaget-om-norden>.

65 Eklund, Berggren, and Trägårdh, *The Nordic Way*, 22.

66 Tom Hoctor, "Coming to Terms with the Market: Accounts of Neoliberal Failure and Rehabilitation on the British Right," *British Politics Online First* (June 2020) 1–16. doi: 10.1057/s41293-020-00141-9.

servative Party and various affiliated and non-affiliated policy organs since the late 1990s.<sup>67</sup> A particular attraction of the policy was the potential for the involvement of independent for-profit school chains such as *Kunskapsskolan AB*, which had been involved in advocating for private for-profit school ownership in the UK since the New Labour era. The adoption of the policy by the Conservatives and its positioning as a centrist policy could be seen, in a sense, as the culmination of a project aligning Cameron’s Conservatives with Reinfeldt’s Moderates in the “radical centre.” It could be considered the most important rhetorical success of the centre-right version of the Nordic model.

## Conclusions

The Nordic model is undoubtedly a key concept in the rhetorics of Nordicness, but the meanings of the model are highly contested. The term became established during the 1980s, at least in English-speaking contexts, when it was used mostly by academics to refer to political systems and welfare policies shaped by the influence of social democracy. The Nordic or Scandinavian model was often synonymous with the Swedish model, based on the electoral dominance of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. The early 1990s was a watershed for the Nordic region and for social democratic parties alike, leading to proclamations of the end of the Nordic model from some quarters. The term did not disappear; rather it has become ever more prevalent in academic and political debates, while at the same time its meanings are ever more contested.

As an analytical term the Nordic model continued to function as an ideal type for comparative analysis. For some, the model could only be referred to in the past tense, as a category which described the social and political structures of previous decades. “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a very distinct Nordic model of party politics no longer exists,” wrote Erik Allardt in 2000, though he assessed the “Nordic model of social and welfare policy” to be weaker but still distinct.<sup>68</sup> For others, this pessimism was unjustified, as analyses of the

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<sup>67</sup> Linda Rönnberg, “Marketization on Export: Representations of the Swedish Free School Model in English Media,” *European Educational Research Journal* 14, no. 6 (November 2015): 549–65, doi:10.1177/1474904115610782.

<sup>68</sup> Erik Allardt, “A Political Sociology of the Nordic Countries,” *European Review* 8, no. 1 (February 2000): 129–141, doi:10.1017/S1062798700004634. Jan-Erik Lane and colleagues wrote in 1993 that, “The Scandinavian model was a regulative notion comprising a set of concepts and ideas about what is good government in a wide sense, as well as about the proper way of structuring the public sector, and connecting the public and private lives of the population” [empha-

Nordic political or welfare model revealed that the impact of the changes of the 1990s remained fairly limited, and that many aspects of the Nordic model remained intact.<sup>69</sup> Since 2000, the impression is of a tendency to emphasize the need for a more nuanced picture of the Nordic region, which highlights the differences between the countries and plays down their exceptionalism in comparison with other regions.<sup>70</sup> But as an ideal type, the “Nordic model” continued to function as a starting point for such comparative analyses.<sup>71</sup>

Even as the model was questioned, there was simultaneously a proliferation in the meanings attached to the term: *the* Nordic model became Nordic *models*. In the third and substantially revised edition of his *Scandinavian Politics Today*, published in 2016, David Arter identified no fewer than six Nordic models: the party system, political representation, government and policy-making, welfare, parliamentarianism, and regional co-operation. Arter concluded that any one of these variants of the Nordic model remained “a useful organising concept” for comparative analyses of the region, but he suggested that the last – regional co-operation – was the most convincing.<sup>72</sup> In other words, as “traditional” Nordic models of the welfare state and social democratic politics were questioned, new ones emerged to take their place. Examples include a Nordic model of gen-

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sis added]. Jan-Erik Lane et al., “Scandinavian Exceptionalism Reconsidered,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 5, no. 2 (April 1993): 197, doi:10.1177/0951692893005002003.

**69** E.g. David Arter, “Party System Change in Scandinavia since 1970: ‘Restricted Change’ or ‘General Change’?,” *West European Politics* 22, no. 3 (1 July 1999): 139–58, doi:10.1080/01402389908425319; Virpi Timonen, *Restructuring the Welfare State: Globalization and Social Policy Reform in Finland and Sweden* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003); Torben M. Andersen, “Challenges to the Scandinavian Welfare Model,” *European Journal of Political Economy* 20, no. 3 (September 2004): 743–54, doi:10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2004.02.007; Mikko Kautto et al., eds., *Nordic Welfare States in the European Context* (London: Routledge, 2001); Stein Kuhnle, “The Scandinavian Welfare State in the 1990s: Challenged but Viable,” *West European Politics* 23, no. 2 (April 2000): 209–228, doi:10.1080/01402380008425373.

**70** Kautto, “The Nordic Countries”; Kasper M. Hansen and Karina Kosiara-Pedersen, “Nordic Voters and Party Systems,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Scandinavian Politics*, ed. Peter Nedergaard and Anders Wivel (New York: Routledge, 2017), 122; Åsa Bengtsson et al., *The Nordic Voter: Myths of Exceptionalism* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2014).

**71** For an example see: Guðmundur Jónsson, “Iceland and the Nordic Model of Consensus Democracy,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39, no. 4 (8 August 2014): 510–28, doi:10.1080/03468755.2014.935473.

**72** Arter, *Scandinavian Politics Today*, 11–12. Arter also noted that these political models had been defined by Nordic political scientists, not outsiders. See also Johan Strang, “Introduction: The Nordic Model of Transnational Cooperation?” in *Nordic Cooperation: A European Region in Transition*, ed. Johan Strang (London: Routledge, 2016), doi:10.4324/9781315755366–1.

der equality or marriage;<sup>73</sup> Nordic models of peace and diplomacy;<sup>74</sup> a Nordic model of citizenship;<sup>75</sup> and a Nordic model of economic management – the latter frequently concerned with the apparent paradox of strong competitiveness in highly regulated economies.<sup>76</sup>

These changing meanings reflect the way in which the Nordic model became decoupled from its associations with the electoral success of social democratic parties. Put another way, where it might once have been common to refer to the Nordic model *as* social democracy, in the 2010s there were examples of the Nordic model *of* social democracy, among other political understandings of the model.<sup>77</sup> This also implied a temporal shift in the understanding of the roots of the model. The Nordic model was now considered the outcome not exclusively of social democratic policies in the post-war era but of a longer historical tradition. In this tradition, the “Nordic model” could refer to a distinctive political culture rooted in the early modern period, influenced especially by the Lutheran Reformation and its legacies for state organisation.<sup>78</sup> For example, historians Pasi Ihalainen and Karin Sennefelt presented their 2011 study of Scandinavian politics in the late eighteenth-century age of revolution as “an alternative story of an incipient transition towards modernity, a ‘Nordic model’ in which radical change takes place within an apparent continuity of the established order, without open revolution.”<sup>79</sup>

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73 Lauri Karvonen and Per Selle, *Women in Nordic Politics: Closing the Gap* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995); Kari Melby et al., “The Nordic Model of Marriage,” *Women’s History Review* 15, no. 4 (September 2006): 651–61, doi:10.1080/09612020500530851.

74 In his introduction to an edited volume on “Nordic Peace,” Clive Archer had a section called “Lessons learned,” suggesting that a “Nordic model” of peace may be relevant to the EU. Clive Archer, “Introduction,” in *The Nordic Peace*, ed. Clive Archer and Pertti Joenniemi (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Martin Marcussen, “Scandinavian Models of Diplomacy,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Scandinavian Politics*, ed. Peter Nedergaard and Anders Wivel (New York: Routledge, 2017).

75 Bengtsson et al. *The Nordic Voter*.

76 Sören Blomquist and Karl Moene, “The Nordic Model,” in “The Nordic Model,” edited by Sören Blomquist and Karl Moene, special issue, *Journal of Public Economics* 127 (1 July 2015): 1–2. doi:10.1016/j.jpubeco.2015.04.007; Darius Ornston, *Good Governance Gone Bad. How Nordic Adaptability Leads to Success* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

77 Nik Brandal, Øivind Bratberg and Dag Einar Thorsen, *The Nordic Model of Social Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

78 See, for example, chapter two of Uffe Østergård, *Hvorhen Europa?* (København: Djøf forlag, 2018).

79 Pasi Ihalainen and Karin Sennefelt, “General Introduction,” in *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures 1740–1820*, ed. Pasi Ihalainen et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 7.

Taken to extremes, this suggested an understanding of the Nordic model as the description of a highly specific regional culture, which was thus not available for emulation elsewhere.<sup>80</sup> The authors of the pamphlet, presented to the World Economic Forum in 2011, referred to the “Nordic way,” and explicitly warned readers that they were not describing “a free-floating Nordic model that can be applied to other countries.”<sup>81</sup> Rather, Nordic exceptionalism was rooted in cultural specificity that meant it was impossible to export.<sup>82</sup> From the mid-2000s centre-right politicians in Sweden began to assert the idea of Nordic distinctiveness and gradually also to adopt the term Nordic model, based on competitiveness, pragmatism and constant reform.<sup>83</sup> Carl Marklund has suggested that for centre-right politicians in Sweden, references to a *Nordic* model were a means to distance themselves from a Swedish model that was too strongly identified with social democracy.<sup>84</sup> In response, the Swedish Social Democratic Party applied in 2012 to the Swedish Patent and Registration office to claim their ownership of the term “Nordic model,” and the Nordic Labour Movement Co-operation Committee (SAMAK) produced its own statement on the Nordic model in 2014.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile in Scotland, campaigners on the “yes” and “no”

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**80** Nina Witoszek and Atle Midttun, “Sustainable Modernity and the Architecture of the ‘Well-Being Society’: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,” in *Sustainable Modernity: The Nordic Model and Beyond*, ed. Nina Witoszek and Atle Midttun (London: Routledge, 2018), 1–17.

**81** Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, “Social trust and radical individualism: The paradox at the heart of Nordic capitalism,” in *The Nordic Way*, 13.

**82** The point about the specific cultural context of the Nordic countries was cited by foreign commentators too: see for example Madeleine Bunting, “We may admire the Nordic way, but don’t try to import it,” *The Guardian*, August 15, 2008. See also Lars Trägårdh, “Swedish Model or Swedish Culture?,” *Critical Review* 4, no. 4 (September 1990): 585, doi:10.1080/08913819008459622. Lars Trägårdh, “Statist Individualism: On the Culturality of the Nordic Welfare State,” in *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, ed. Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997); Lars Trägårdh, “Mellem liberalism og socialisme: Om det særlige ved den nordiske model,” *Kritik* 45, no. 206 (2012).

**83** See also Martin Ågerup, “Hvad er den nordiske model egentlig?,” *Politiken*, October 15, 2011. Ågerup was director of the independent liberal think tank CEPOS.

**84** Carl Marklund, “The Nordic Model on the Global Market of Ideas: The Welfare State as Scandinavia’s Best Brand,” *Geopolitics* 22, no. 3 (July 2017): 623–39, doi:10.1080/14650045.2016.1251906.

**85** SAMAK, *The Sormarka Declaration: We Build the Nordics*, SAMAK, November 2014, [http://www.samak.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Sormarka-declaration\\_English.pdf](http://www.samak.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Sormarka-declaration_English.pdf). See also, Nordiska ministerrådet, *Den nordiska modellen i en ny tid: Program för Sveriges ordförandeskap i Nordiska ministerrådet 2013*, 2013, <http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/9cec796705ac45aba8c5284eb55aab52/den-nordiska-modellen-i-en-ny-tid-program-for-sveriges-ordforandeskap-i-nordiska-ministerradet-2013>. The Social Democratic Party’s application for copyright was challenged by the Nordic Council, which argued that “[t]he Nordic model is a general Nordic posses-

sides of the 2014 independence referendum referred to a social democratic Nordic model, echoing earlier references to the Nordic region in the devolution debates of the late 1970s and after.<sup>86</sup>

These domestic struggles over the meaning of the Nordic model were mirrored in the UK, where the term was debated. While for Blair and Giddens, Nordic policies had served as inspiration for a revitalized “New Labour” party as part of a wider European discussion of the “Third Way” in the 1990s, Conservative politicians including David Cameron cited aspects of the Nordic model as inspirational for their own politics, both in opposition and in government from 2010. This is not to imply of course that the model was simply imported. The relationship between the Swedish Moderates and the British Conservatives did not necessitate the articulation of a political or policy programme which resembled the Nordic countries. Just as the Third Way was a highly decentred force with different responses to the central contradictions of social democracy, the same could also be said of liberal-conservative “radical centrism.” Whereas Reinfeldt’s commitment to a growth agenda was explicitly articulated as a means to achieve full employment – a fundamentally social democratic goal – Cameron’s central agenda was less clearly asserted. However, the logic of the Conservatives’ austerity policy suggests that in practice the goal was counter inflationary. In other words, despite the formal similarities, it would be a mistake to think that there had been a total re-alignment of goals between the Moderates and the Conservatives. Nonetheless, as with the “middle way” debate of the 1930s, this example shows how recent constructions of the Nordic model have been formed in a complicated interaction between auto- and xenostereotypes.

A model is something that can be learned from and possibly transferred. It is one of the ways in which international comparisons are used to shape the search for new ideas and policies.<sup>87</sup> This points to what Pauli Kettunen has highlighted as the paradox of the Nordic model: the model is threatened by the challenges of

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sion... and part of the political heritage for the whole of Norden and its inhabitants.” ”Nordiska Rådet: Vi tänker inte sluta använda ’Nordiska Modellen,’” Nordiska Rådet, accessed November 26, 2020, <https://www.norden.org/no/node/4004>.

**86** On the debates in Scotland see Newby, “In Building a Nation”; Michael Keating and Malcolm Harvey, *Small Nations in a Big World: What Scotland Can Learn* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2014); Malcolm Harvey, “A Social Democratic Future? Political and Institutional Hurdles in Scotland,” *The Political Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (April 2015): 249–56, doi:10.1111/1467–923X.12155.

**87** Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen, “Introduction: Rethinking Welfare State Models” and Pauli Kettunen, “The Transnational Construction of National Challenges: The Ambiguous Nordic Model of Welfare and Competitiveness,” in *Beyond Welfare State Models: Transnational Historical Perspectives on Social Policy*, ed. Pauli Kettunen and Klaus Petersen (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011).

globalization, but it is also a means to respond to those challenges in a competitive international world.<sup>88</sup> During the early part of the 2010s, this could be presented as a conflict between the social democratic interpretation of the Nordic model as something fixed and needing to be defended against external threats, and centre-right claims that the Nordic model was not connected to any fixed ideologies and could therefore serve as inspiration for necessary reforms. References to “threats” were found not only on the political left – expressed, for example, in the trade unions’ fears of attempts to undermine collective wage agreements. The right also claimed that the Nordic model was threatened, by multiculturalism and the undermining of common cultural values.<sup>89</sup>

Understandings of the Nordic model have clearly changed over time, but of course they also vary in different contexts. Despite the overtly political meanings that seem to be attached to the Nordic model, the concept is also still widely used in academic research, though its meanings have become fragmented. There is thus inevitably a danger that we are creating the object of our own research, and unpicking the fluctuating meanings of the Nordic model thus requires considerable critical reflexivity on the part of researchers.

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**88** Pauli Kettunen, “The Power of International Comparison: A Perspective on the Making and Challenging of the Nordic Welfare State,” in *The Nordic Model of Welfare*, ed. Christiansen et al.; Kettunen, “The Transnational Construction.”

**89** See for example, Lars Trier Mogensen, “Fogh frelste den nordiske model,” *Politiken*, September 5, 2009. Asle Toje of the Norwegian Progress Party praised former Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen for “saving” the Nordic model from “cultural radicalism” and multiculturalism.