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978-1-108-49731-2 — Dreamworld or Dystopia?  
Michael A. Livingston  
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## DREAMWORLD OR DYSTOPIA?

The Nordic Model was originally understood as a compromise between Western and Soviet systems. The Soviet Union has been gone for a generation, but the Nordic Model survives. Much of this has to do with the model's change from an economic to a largely cultural model. In particular, the model has come to emphasize human (especially women's) rights, environmental consciousness, and cultural innovation. While these each contain an element of fantasy, they retain sufficient substance to provide encouragement to "progressive" circles in the USA, United Kingdom, and other countries. Important in its own right, the Nordic Model provides a fascinating case study of the transmission of goods and ideas between different regions, and the ability of a small and out-of-the-way region to maintain its own identity in a globalized world.

Michael A. Livingston is Professor of Law at Rutgers University, where he teaches courses on taxation, comparative law, and other subjects. He has previously written the books *Tax and Culture* (2019) and *The Fascists and the Jews of Italy* (2014), together with articles in numerous legal publications. He is currently working on a project involving cultural issues in the COVID and climate change problems.

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THE NORDIC MODEL AND ITS INFLUENCE  
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

MICHAEL A. LIVINGSTON

Rutgers University, New Jersey



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## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.  
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of  
education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108497312](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108497312)  
DOI: 10.1017/9781108667432

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First published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

### *Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Livingston, Michael A., author.  
TITLE: Dreamworld or dystopia? : the Nordic model and its influence in the  
21st century / Michael A. Livingston.  
DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University  
Press, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references.  
IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2021044721 (print) | LCCN 2021044722 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108497312  
(hardback) | ISBN 9781108667432 (ebook)  
SUBJECTS: LCSH: Nordic model. | Scandinavia – Social conditions – 21st century. |  
Scandinavia – Environmental conditions. | Lifestyles – Scandinavia. | BISAC:  
POLITICAL SCIENCE / General  
CLASSIFICATION: LCC HN540.A8 L55 2022 (print) | LCC HN540.A8 (ebook) | DDC  
306.0948/0905–dc23/eng/20211027  
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021044721>  
LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021044722>

ISBN 978-1-108-49731-2 Hardback

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## Preface and Dedication

This book is proof of the adage that the best things in life are unanticipated. I had written a book about Italy, which led a professor in Norway to invite me to a conference. On the way to Norway, I stopped in Denmark, and while in Denmark, I spent a cold, rainy afternoon in Sweden. I never made it more than a couple of hundred yards from Lund Station, but something about it fascinated me. Perhaps it was the immigrant storekeeper selling magazines with pictures of the Swedish Royal Family, of whose existence I was barely aware previously. Perhaps it was the contrast between Sweden and Denmark, which I had always assumed to be more or less the same but were obviously so different in temperament. Perhaps it was the contrast between a nominally progressive, even radical, society and a traditional, conservative society: a contrast that the storekeeper and the magazines hinted at but didn't completely capture. Perhaps it was just that it was so different from anyplace I had been before. Maybe the eighteen hours of darkness – who schedules a conference in Oslo in December? – had simply addled my brain.

I have been back to Sweden and its neighbors at least a half dozen times since then, and inevitably some of the early enchantment has faded. I've learned that Swedes can be racists as well as idealists. I've learned that Norway deported Jews, and that Denmark often acts cruelly toward Muslims. Even Iceland has its ugly suburbs and its mediocre coffee bars. Still something about the region and its inherent tensions continues to fascinate me. There aren't that many places in the world that one can put in front of the word "model" and not have people laugh. No one speaks seriously about the Italian Model, or the Russian Model, or even the Chinese Model of development. Even the American Model is something of a bad joke. The Nordic Model is still with us.

There are two principal types of books about the Nordic countries. The first, written primarily by outsiders, are essentially celebrations. The second, written mostly by insiders – albeit typically in English – are critiques of specific aspects of public policy: welfare, environmental policy, the treatment of women, and so forth. This book is an effort to bridge the gap between them. It is an academic work, in the sense that it is footnoted, aspires to originality, and (of course) is being published by an academic publisher. But there is something of the travelogue to it, as well: the wondrous outsider trying to make sense of a place that is superficially so familiar and yet so alien. The question that I ask – What is the future of the Nordic Model, especially in the English-speaking countries? – is of interest to outsiders but also to those in the region itself. It is a question with no definite answer, but one that many people have an interest in addressing.

Every book reflects its author as well as its subject. There is a bias toward Sweden, the country I know best, although I deal with the others (especially Norway) rather extensively. There is probably more attention to religious minorities, especially Jews, than would be justified by numbers alone. Coffee seems to come up in every other chapter, which probably reflects the author's favorite pastime (I do most of my writing in coffee shops, or did before COVID-19) no less than the subject's importance. I try to tie these subjects to broader themes – the tension between diversity and social trust, the innovation that characterizes “New Nordic” food and coffee – but perhaps I do not always succeed. Even computers have their biases, as we are now learning – and not all biases are wrong.

This book is dedicated to my wife, Anne Weiss, who accompanied me on only one of my trips to Norden, where she actually made me smile, a relatively rare occurrence. My children are too old to care. I would also like to thank Hans Petter Graver, the professor at Oslo who was responsible for my initial trip; Ami Böhlander-Asplund, who hosted me on my various trips to Stockholm and environs; Mary Hilson, who taught me that there are places in Denmark other than Copenhagen; and the staff of the Riksarkivet in Stockholm and equivalent archives in other Nordic countries, who were unfailingly polite and helpful despite my not-always-convincing efforts to speak the local languages. Special thanks to Drop Coffee in Stockholm, the Coffee Collective in Copenhagen, and Tim Wendelboe in Oslo for keeping me going. And, of course, Arabelis Brito, my research assistant for three full years (!), who was tireless in chasing down names, citations, and anything else that I needed, although perhaps wondering why I didn't choose a more conventional research topic. The many others whose work I cited are mentioned in footnotes and don't require further adoration here.



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*Preface and Dedication*

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There is a Monty Python joke that, if you enjoyed our work half as much as we did, that means we enjoyed it twice as much as you did. (They also have some jokes about Scandinavia, but we'll let that go.) Suffice it to say that it was a labor of love for me and I hope that it is for you as well. At a minimum, you will learn something about Nordic geography, a bit of history, and perhaps something about the Nordic coffee industry, as well. And, when somebody tells you "We ought to be more like the Nordic Countries," you can look them right in the eye and say: "Which one?"

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