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**Trine Syvertsen, Gunn Enli, Ole J. Mjøs & Hallvard Moe.
The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Age.
Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 2014**

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The central premise of the book is that, like Nordic education, health, belief and welfare systems, Nordic media and communications systems “are distinct enough to stand out in the world and that this warrants attention from scholars and practitioners” (p. 2).

The scientific point of departure is the so-called Nordic *exceptionalism* (or the Nordic Model), which is based on the way that the Nordic countries (i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) tend to cluster together in comparative statistics on everything from their welfare states and health systems to their inhabitants’ beliefs and trust levels. According to the authors of this book, this is also true of media and communication, and it is the particularities of the region’s media and communications systems that they term *the media welfare state*.

In Chapter 1, the authors describe their methodology and introduce the Nordic model more generally, showing that the media welfare state is based on four pillars – *universal services, editorial freedom, a cultural policy for the media*, and a tendency towards *consensual and durable policy solutions involving both public and private stakeholders*. Together, these characteristics distinguish the Nordic countries from other regions, and it is these four pillars that are investigated in more depth in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 deals with the distinguishing characteristics of media use within the region, and the authors demonstrate how similar patterns of media use emerge across the Nordic countries. These patterns have traditionally been characterized by a *high use of print media and news and information content, egalitarian use* (i.e. small differences between people

with different education, class and gender), and *commonality* within media usage (i.e. overlaps between media consumption between different groups of citizens, making the media a *social glue* contributing to cohesion within the Nordic societies). The chapter also demonstrates how these traditional patterns have largely been brought into the current digital era, insofar as Nordic media users have maintained high levels in their usage of the 'old' media in their new digital versions and in their consumption of online-only news and information, social media and online spending.

Chapter 3 focuses on the press in general and in particular on the crucial role of the printed press in the formation of the modern Nordic welfare state societies through a history of strong political and financial support, editorial freedom and self-regulatory institutions. Public service broadcasting is the theme of Chapter 4, which demonstrates how *universality* has remained a key ideal for Nordic public service broadcasters and how the same broadcasters have opted for strategies of *adaptability* in the face of challenges from recent marketization, fragmentation and globalization, without losing the distinct public service characteristics of their output and services.

In Chapter 5, the particularities of the Nordic media company are under scrutiny through case studies of Norwegian *Schibsted*, Swedish *The Modern Times Group*, and Finnish *Nokia*. The authors argue that one of the hallmarks of the media welfare state is the successful public-private mix, and that private and public media and communications institutions should therefore not be seen as opposites but rather as complements. The authors argue that the three companies share similar expansion strategies and show how their international expansion was based on the experience gained from launching businesses in their home markets. On the other hand, the three companies also represent three different strategies when it comes to relations with the media welfare state: according to the authors, *Schibsted* has chosen an *adaptive* strategy and *Nokia* a *collaborative* strategy, whereas *The Modern Times Group* has opted for a more *confrontational* strategy. In Chapter 6, the authors synthesize their findings and discuss the applicability and validity of the media welfare state as a theoretical framework.

Generally, the book is convincingly argued throughout and, as a result, the theoretical framework of the media welfare state is persuasive. I found the chapter on media use within the region particularly interesting because it convincingly demonstrates that the media welfare state is not just a political and industrial structure affecting or affected by public and private media institutions: the media welfare state is also something that seems to *happen* in our everyday media consumption. A further aspect worth mentioning is the concluding discussion of the extent to which the media welfare state is specifically Nordic. Here, the authors usefully consider various other countries such as The Netherlands, Japan and Switzerland which have similar traits to the Nordic countries.

It is also commendable that the authors attempt to describe the particularities of the Nordic media companies, which, to my knowledge, has not been done previously, although this is also the least convincing part of the book. Here, I would have liked the authors to

have adapted a more comparative approach to media companies in other regions, thus providing more solid evidence that the strategies of the so-called 'Nordic media company' differ from the strategies of media companies in other parts of the world.

However, this does not detract from the fact that as a sound and timely contribution to media scholarship, this book will be valuable to Nordic and international media scholars or students looking for an in-depth introduction to the particularities of Nordic media.

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