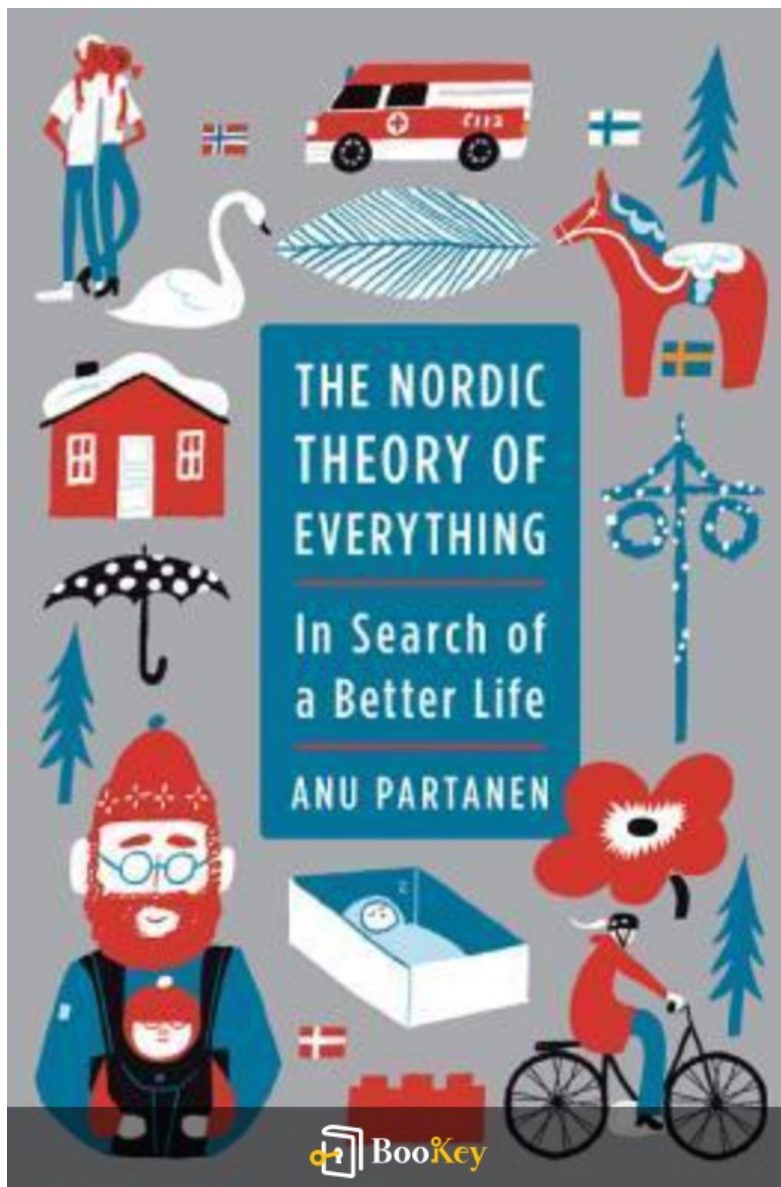


# The Nordic Theory Of Everything PDF

Anu Partanen



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# About the book

Book Overview: "The Nordic Theory of Everything" by Anu Partanen

Anu Partanen's insightful work, "The Nordic Theory of Everything," delves deep into the often-overlooked social policies and cultural values of Nordic countries, presenting them as a roadmap for achieving a more harmonious, joyful, and equitable society.

Key Insights:

- **Personal Journey:** Partanen shares her own transition from Finland to the United States, shedding light on the stark differences in social systems.
- **Benefits of Nordic Systems:** She highlights the advantages of universal healthcare, generous parental leave, and accessible education, demonstrating how these policies foster well-being.
- **Debunking Myths:** The author confronts misconceptions surrounding socialism and state intervention, positioning these systems as practical solutions rather than dogmas.

A Call to Action:

This book invites readers to reconsider their perceptions of the American Dream. By viewing it through a Nordic lens, Partanen encourages us to visualize a future where the principles that support Nordic success could be incorporated into our own lives and communities.

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## Why Read This Book?

If you're interested in exploring viable alternatives to enhance social welfare and community living, "The Nordic Theory of Everything" is not just informative—it's a transformative guide for reimagining societal structures in pursuit of a better quality of life.

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# About the author

Profile: Anu Partanen

- **Background:** Anu Partanen is a distinguished Finnish-American journalist and author, known for her deep dives into social policy analysis and its effects on personal welfare.
- **Early Career:** Hailing from Finland, Partanen built her journalistic credentials at Helsingin Sanomat, the country's largest daily newspaper, where she honed her skills in reporting and storytelling.
- **Move to the US:** In 2008, she relocated to the United States, bringing with her a fresh perspective that blends her Finnish roots with her new American experiences.
- **Notable Work:** Her critically acclaimed book, *\*The Nordic Theory of Everything: In Search of a Better Life\**, offers a thorough comparison of Nordic and American societies. In it, she advocates for social policies that promote equity and personal freedom.
- **Writing Style:** Partanen's work is distinguished by comprehensive research, engaging prose, and a passionate drive to explore solutions for building a fairer and more equitable society.

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# The Nordic Theory Of Everything Summary

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# The Nordic Theory Of Everything Summary

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# 1. Introduction: Understanding the Nordic Model and its Global Relevance

In recent years, the Nordic countries have garnered attention for their unique socio-economic model, often referred to as the Nordic Model. This term encompasses a combination of welfare state characteristics, strong public sector involvement, egalitarian social policies, and a commitment to collective well-being. Comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, these nations consistently rank high in global happiness indices and quality of life measures, prompting growing interest in whether their strategies can be replicated elsewhere.

The Nordic Model is grounded in the principle that prosperity should be shared and that every citizen deserves access to quality services and opportunities. Central to this approach is the belief in providing a social safety net that supports individuals throughout their lives—from education and healthcare to unemployment insurance and retirement benefits. This model advocates for a society where success is not solely based on individual effort but is also a reflection of external systems that promote equality and provide necessary support.

One of the key features of the Nordic Model is its emphasis on universal access to essential services. For instance, Nordic countries prioritize public healthcare systems that ensure all citizens receive medical treatment without

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the burden of exorbitant costs. This approach not only enhances individual health outcomes but also promotes societal productivity by ensuring a healthier workforce. This philosophy can be contrasted with countries that rely heavily on private healthcare systems, where access can be uneven and tied to economic status, leading to disparities in health among citizens.

The education systems in Nordic countries are similarly foundational to their societal structure. They emphasize equal education opportunities for all children, regardless of their background. By investing in free education, including higher education and vocational training, these countries cultivate a well-educated workforce, ready to adapt to the changing global economy. Finland's educational reforms, for example, have drawn international interest, particularly their focus on student well-being, teacher autonomy, and the reduction of standardized testing.

Furthermore, the work-life balance achieved in Nordic countries raises provocative questions in a world that often prioritizes economic output over the well-being of individuals. By promoting policies that regard the importance of family, mental health, and social interaction, they have created work environments where productivity is high yet employees are happier and healthier. The flexible working hours enjoyed in many Nordic workplaces stand out in contrast to more rigid structures in other regions.

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This balance is further strengthened by a robust social safety net that prevents individuals from falling into extreme poverty or hardship due to unemployment, illness, or other life events. The underlying principle here is that a secure society is one where people can thrive, work productively, and contribute positively to their communities, fostering a sense of mutual responsibility and trust.

Now, as global challenges such as income inequality, climate change, and public health crises emerge, the relevance of the Nordic Model becomes increasingly pronounced. Policymakers and citizens in countries grappling with these issues look toward the Nordic countries as examples of how to create societies that prioritize not just economic growth, but the well-being and happiness of all citizens.

In conclusion, the Nordic Model is more than a set of policies; it represents a holistic way of structuring society that places value on equality, access to public services, and community well-being. Its global relevance serves as a beacon for those seeking to address contemporary social issues, offering a framework that acknowledges the interconnectedness of individual success and collective welfare.

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## 2. Chapter 1: The Benefits of Universal Healthcare in Nordic Countries

In the exploration of the Nordic model, one of the most striking features that stands out is the universal healthcare system implemented across Nordic countries, such as Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. This system is not merely an aspect of their social policies but a profound expression of their collective values and priorities concerning health and well-being. Anu Partanen effectively lays out the manifold benefits of this universal healthcare approach, providing a compelling case for its relevance not only within these countries but as a viable model for others around the globe.

To begin, universal healthcare in the Nordic context ensures that all citizens have access to medical services regardless of their financial situation. It is built on the core principle of equity, meaning that healthcare is seen as a fundamental right rather than a privilege. This access is not limited to primary care; it encompasses everything from preventive measures to specialized treatments and emergency care. For instance, in Sweden, the government fund covers about 80% of healthcare costs, with a maximum out-of-pocket expense cap for patients, ensuring that no one is faced with exorbitant medical bills or dissuaded from seeking care due to financial constraints.

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Moreover, the efficiency of the healthcare system in Nordic countries is notable. Unlike many privatized alternatives elsewhere, which often lead to administrative bloat and complexity, the Nordic system streamlines care delivery. By reducing overhead costs associated with multiple insurance providers, the system can allocate more resources directly to patient care. An example of this efficiency can be seen in Norway's healthcare model, where the doctor-patient ratio is optimized to ensure timely consultations and reduced wait times for treatments, leading to higher patient satisfaction and better health outcomes.

The outcomes associated with universal healthcare in the Nordics are impressive, further illustrating the model's effectiveness. Statistics reveal that countries like Finland enjoy some of the highest life expectancies in the world, which can be directly correlated with their equitable access to comprehensive healthcare services. Additionally, maternal and infant mortality rates in these countries are among the lowest globally, indicating not just the availability of healthcare but its quality and effectiveness. For instance, in Denmark, comprehensive prenatal care has significantly reduced risks and complications during pregnancy, ensuring healthier mothers and babies.

Preventive care also plays a crucial role within the Nordic model. The emphasis on early intervention and regular check-ups prevents the escalation

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of minor health issues into severe ones. Vaccination programs, cancer screenings, and mental health services are widely accessible, contributing to a more informed and healthier public. For example, Finland's national cancer screening program aims to detect breast cancer at its earliest stages, which has resulted in significantly lower mortality rates for this disease.

Furthermore, mental health services are systematically integrated into the healthcare framework. This initiative recognizes mental health as a critical component of overall health and wellbeing. In Sweden, for example, the public health system provides robust resources for mental health care, reflecting a progressive understanding of health that extends beyond the physical. This focus on mental health not only improves individual quality of life but also enhances workplace productivity and social cohesion.

Lastly, the universal healthcare approach in the Nordics fosters a sense of community and collective responsibility. Because citizens know that they contribute to a system that supports everyone, there is a pervasive culture of trust in the public institutions. This social cohesion translates into a more engaged and healthier population overall, where individuals are more likely to take care of their health and that of their neighbors.

In summary, the benefits of universal healthcare in Nordic countries serve as a powerful testament to the strengths of the Nordic model. Not only does

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this system guarantee equitable access to care, but it also promotes efficiency, preventive health measures, and a culture of collective responsibility. As Anu Partanen elucidates, the successes seen in these countries provide invaluable lessons for other nations considering reforms to their healthcare systems. The Nordic approach, rooted in the belief that health is a collective asset, challenges the conventional narratives around healthcare and highlights the potential for creating healthier societies through the embrace of universal care.

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### 3. Chapter 2: Education Systems that Empower: Lessons from the North

Education systems are pivotal in shaping not only individual destinies but also the social fabric of nations. In her book "The Nordic Theory of Everything," Anu Partanen delves into how the education systems in Nordic countries, particularly Finland, serve as exemplary models of empowerment and inclusivity, offering valuable lessons for the rest of the world.

Central to the Nordic educational philosophy is the concept of equality. In Finland, for instance, education is viewed as a universal right, accessible to all children regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. This principle underpins a system that strives not only to impart knowledge but also to cultivate the inherent potential within every student. There are no tuition fees for primary or secondary education, and even higher education is largely subsidized by the government. This approach drastically reduces barriers to access and ensures that education is not a privilege reserved for the affluent but a foundation available to everyone.

One of the standout features of the Nordic education system is its emphasis on inclusivity and support for all students. Special attention is given to children with learning difficulties, with additional resources readily available for those who need them. For example, schools often employ special education professionals who work closely with teachers to identify and

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support students at risk of falling behind. This early intervention not only helps to forge a path for academic success but also instills a sense of belonging and confidence in all learners.

The structure of the curriculum in Nordic countries exemplifies a holistic approach to education, integrating creativity, critical thinking, and practical skills with academic learning. In Finland, for example, there is a strong focus on fostering a love for learning rather than rote memorization. Students are encouraged to explore topics of interest, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and develop projects that reflect their passions. This model promotes engagement and deep understanding, teaching students how to think rather than what to think. Such an approach prepares students for the complexities of modern life and work, equipping them with the tools needed to adapt to an ever-changing world.

Moreover, teachers in Nordic countries are afforded high levels of professional respect and autonomy, which stands in stark contrast to many other countries. In Finland, teaching is a highly regarded profession, and educators are required to hold master's degrees. This ensures that teachers possess not only a strong knowledge base but also the pedagogical skills needed to foster an effective learning environment. Once in the classroom, teachers have considerable freedom to design their lessons and determine the best methods to reach their students. This autonomy is believed to enhance

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job satisfaction and ultimately contributes to better educational outcomes for students.

The assessment system in Nordic countries also reflects a commitment to empowering students. Rather than relying heavily on standardized tests, which can create pressure and discourage learning, Finnish schools assess students through a combination of teacher evaluations and formative assessments. This more holistic approach provides a well-rounded picture of a student's development and fosters a growth mindset, encouraging learners to embrace challenges and view mistakes as opportunities for learning.

A pivotal element of the Nordic educational paradigm is the collaborative nature of learning. Students are often placed in group settings where they work together to solve problems and complete projects. This not only enhances their social skills but also prepares them for future teamwork in the workplace. In addition, the emphasis on cooperation over competition nurtures an environment where every student feels valued and empowered to contribute, regardless of their level of ability.

To illustrate the success of this system, we can look at the impressive international assessments where Finnish students consistently perform at or near the top in reading, math, and science, as indicated by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. Despite this high

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performance, Finnish students spend less time in formal schooling compared to their peers in other countries, demonstrating that quality rather than quantity is paramount.

In conclusion, the education systems in Nordic countries offer seminal lessons that can inspire reforms globally. By prioritizing equity, inclusivity, creative learning, teacher autonomy, and a focus on holistic development, these nations have crafted a model that empowers not just students but the society as a whole. As countries around the world grapple with educational disparities and the need for a workforce ready to navigate the complexities of today's economy, the Nordic approach exemplifies a viable pathway toward building an empowered, knowledgeable, and resilient future generation.

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## 4. Chapter 3: Work-Life Balance: Rethinking Time and Productivity

In "The Nordic Theory of Everything," Anu Partanen presents a compelling case for re-examining the way we conceptualize work, productivity, and ultimately, our lives. Chapter 3 emphasizes the importance of work-life balance as a cornerstone of the Nordic model—a sociocultural framework deeply embedded in the values and practices of Nordic countries like Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland.

To begin with, the Nordic model posits that work is not merely for earning money, but also plays a critical role in individual fulfillment and well-being. Partanen advocates for a rethinking of how we allocate our time, arguing that the emphasis on productivity should not overshadow the need for personal time, family engagement, and leisure activities. The Nordic countries have embraced policies that seek to harmonize work and life, giving prime importance to the needs of the individual and their families.

One of the core elements of this work-life balance is the concept of flexible work arrangements. In Sweden, for example, it's common for employees to negotiate flexible hours and work-from-home options, allowing them to customize their schedules according to personal and family demands. Such practices lead to enhanced productivity, as individuals feel less pressured and are better equipped to manage both their professional obligations and



personal lives. As a case in point, a study in Sweden revealed that companies offering flexible working conditions saw a 25% increase in employee productivity, demonstrating that happy, well-balanced individuals are often the most productive.

Partanen highlights the importance of parental leave policies as another significant aspect of achieving work-life balance. In Nordic countries, both parents are encouraged to share childcare responsibilities, facilitated by generous parental leave policies. For instance, Sweden offers parents up to 480 days of paid parental leave that can be split between them. This approach not only promotes gender equality in the workforce but also strengthens family bonds. As a result, children benefit from the nurturing and presence of both parents during their critical formative years.

Moreover, the distributed parental leave incentivizes fathers to take an active role in child-rearing, helping to dismantle traditional gender roles that often confine women to primary caregiving duties. The consequence is twofold: women are more likely to return to work after having children, contributing to economic productivity, while men develop closer relationships with their children—creating a more equitable and supportive home environment.

Partanen's analysis of the work-life balance in the Nordic model extends beyond parental leave, delving into the cultural perceptions surrounding

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productivity and overtime work. In contrast to the American work ethic, which often glorifies long hours and relentless hustle, Nordic societies prioritize efficiency over the sheer volume of hours worked. They advocate for ‘smart work,’ which is about accomplishing tasks effectively within reasonable hours rather than sacrificing personal time for the sake of productivity. For example, the Finnish concept of ‘sisu’ encourages individuals to approach work with determination and focus during set hours, fueling motivation without leading to burnout.

The repercussions of these values are profound. Studies consistently show that Nordic workers enjoy better mental health and lower rates of burnout compared to their counterparts in countries where long hours are the norm. In Finland, mental health issues associated with workplace stress have provoked conversations around creating ‘healthier’ work environments, prompting companies to adopt policies that prioritize worker well-being, such as mental health days and mandatory vacation time.

Partanen also refers to the cultural mindset that supports short work weeks, finding balance through prioritization of personal life. Countries like Iceland have explored the feasibility of a four-day workweek, testing it within various sectors. The trials marked significant successes, with workers reporting increased satisfaction, less stress, and maintained productivity levels, leading to renewed interest in re-evaluating the traditional five-day

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model. Engagement with work becomes a choice rather than an obligation, allowing individuals to thrive personally and professionally.

In conclusion, Chapter 3 of "The Nordic Theory of Everything" illustrates the transformative potential of adopting Nordic ideals of work-life balance. By rethinking time and productivity through the lens of individual needs and quality of life, societies can foster environments that support wellbeing, enhance productivity, and ultimately nurture happier citizens. Partanen's insights prompt a necessary dialogue about how globally adopted practices surrounding work can evolve to reflect contemporary understandings of personal fulfillment, mental health, and a balanced life.

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## 5. Chapter 4: Social Safety Nets: Building a Foundation for Equality

Social safety nets are essential components of the Nordic model, acting as a crucial foundation for promoting equality and ensuring that all individuals have access to basic resources necessary for a dignified life. In this chapter, we delve into the ways in which these safety nets are structured in Nordic countries and how they serve not only to support the most vulnerable segments of society but also to foster a more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities.

The Nordic approach to social safety nets is characterized by a universal and comprehensive framework that encompasses various aspects of social insurance, welfare, and public services. This model assures that basic human needs such as food, housing, healthcare, and education are met for everyone, thus mitigating poverty and insecurity. By providing all citizens with a solid safety net, Nordic countries empower individuals to pursue their aspirations without the fear of losing life's necessities in times of hardship.

One hallmark of the Nordic social safety net is the robust unemployment insurance system. In these countries, when individuals find themselves out of work, they are supported by a well-structured unemployment insurance scheme that typically covers a significant portion of their previous income. This system not only helps maintain economic stability for families during



periods of unemployment but also enables individuals to seek new job opportunities without the immediate desperation that comes from financial instability. For instance, in Sweden, the unemployment benefit can replace up to 80% of a worker's salary for up to 300 days, which provides considerable financial cushioning during job transitions.

In addition to unemployment benefits, Nordic countries implement various social programs aimed at supporting families, such as parental leave and child allowances. These programmes are designed to promote gender equality and ensure that the burden of childcare does not disproportionately fall on women. For example, in Finland, both parents are entitled to share parental leave, allowing families to make informed choices about child-rearing, employment, and income rather than feeling constrained by traditional roles. In this way, the social safety net not only supports children and families but also encourages a more equitable workplace culture.

Furthermore, free and accessible education plays a pivotal role in the Nordic social safety net. Education is a fundamental right in these countries, and students are provided with resources that enable them to pursue their studies regardless of their socio-economic background. For instance, universities in countries like Denmark and Norway do not charge tuition fees for both domestic and EU students, allowing young individuals to attain higher education without accruing significant debt. This significant investment in

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education enhances social mobility and reduces educational inequality, ensuring that each person has an equal opportunity to succeed.

The provision of healthcare services also illustrates the strength of Nordic social safety nets. Universal healthcare systems ensure that all citizens have access to medical services without the burden of excessive costs. By eliminating financial barriers to healthcare, Nordic countries prevent individuals from falling into poverty due to medical expenses and create a healthier population. This not only reduces long-term healthcare costs for the state but promotes a more productive workforce by ensuring that individuals remain healthy and able to work.

Moreover, the Nordic model embraces a proactive approach to social welfare, focusing on prevention rather than just reaction. This is evident in the way homelessness is addressed. By implementing a 'Housing First' policy, which provides homeless individuals with stable housing without preconditions, Nordic countries have successfully reduced homelessness rates. This policy facilitates the integration of individuals into society and allows them the stability needed to address other issues such as substance abuse or mental health challenges.

Ultimately, the Nordic social safety nets are more than just a collection of welfare programs; they embody the collective belief in the importance of

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equality and solidarity within society. By investing in the well-being of all citizens, irrespective of their circumstances, Nordic countries establish a framework that encourages social cohesion and trust in public institutions. In a world where socio-economic disparities are increasingly pronounced, these principles of the Nordic model offer a compelling framework that other nations can learn from in building their own social safety nets, fostering an environment where every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

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## 6. Conclusion: Applying the Nordic Principles to Create a Better Future

In the face of increasingly complex global challenges, the Nordic principles provide a compelling framework for creating a more equitable and sustainable future. The essence of the Nordic model lies not just in its policies, but in its values: trust, equality, and collective responsibility. Expanding on these principles can offer valuable insights for societies striving to amend their socio-economic structures.

To begin with, the Nordic approach to universal healthcare demonstrates how prioritizing public health leads to a more productive society. By ensuring that every citizen has access to essential health services, regardless of income, the Nordic countries have achieved lower overall healthcare costs and better health outcomes compared to countries with privatized systems. The United States, for example, spends significantly more on healthcare while still facing crucial gaps in access and outcomes. Adopting a similar model elsewhere could alleviate unnecessary expenditures and ensure that health is viewed as a right rather than a commodity.

Moreover, the Nordic education systems exemplify how investments in education not only empower individuals but also strengthen societal cohesion. The focus on providing equal opportunities for all children, regardless of background, fosters a sense of belonging and collective



progress. In Finland, where education is seen as a communal investment rather than an individual consumer choice, students consistently outperform their peers in OECD assessments. Following this example, other nations could reform their educational practices, moving away from high-stakes testing and towards holistic learning approaches that cultivate creativity and critical thinking.

Work-life balance, a principle deeply ingrained in Nordic culture, serves as a reminder that productivity is not merely a function of hours worked but rather of overall well-being. Countries like Sweden explore innovative policies such as parental leave and flexible working hours, allowing individuals to thrive both professionally and personally. These initiatives not only enhance employee satisfaction but also lead to increased retention and productivity. As other regions grapple with issues like burnout and mental health crises, integrating the Nordic approach to work-life balance could transform workplaces into healthier and more attractive environments.

Additionally, the Nordic model's comprehensive social safety nets are crucial in fostering equality and reducing poverty. By providing robust support systems—including unemployment benefits, housing assistance, and inclusive welfare programs—Nordic nations have created a society where individuals are empowered to pursue education and employment without the constant threat of financial instability. Such systems promote social mobility

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and improve overall quality of life, illustrating the importance of investing in human capital.

To apply Nordic principles effectively, countries must start adopting policies that aspire toward these ideals, tailoring them to local contexts. For instance, Canada's expansion of publicly funded healthcare, inspired by Nordic models, illustrates a shift towards broader accessibility in North America. Similarly, various cities are experimenting with universal basic income initiatives, aiming to ensure a safety net for all citizens while reducing poverty and inequality.

However, applying these principles may not be devoid of challenges. Cultural differences, political resistance, and economic constraints may impede the adoption of such models. Nonetheless, as global interconnectedness increases and awareness of inequalities grows, the successes of the Nordic model become even more relevant. By advocating for policies that enhance social welfare, equity, and community trust, we can pave the way for a more inclusive future.

In summary, the Nordic principles offer valuable lessons in creating healthier, more equitable societies. By fostering a culture of trust, investing in individuals through education and healthcare, ensuring work-life balance, and providing robust social safety nets, countries can work toward a more





just future. The path forward may require courageous leadership and a willingness to embrace systemic change, but the Nordic experience confirms that an equitable society is indeed achievable and can lead to a prosperous community for all.

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