The Media Welfare State

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The Nordic region is the northernmost part of Europe, consisting of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, with a total population of approximately 25 million. It is known for the Nobel Prize, furniture retailer giant IKEA, children’s favorite LEGO, pop groups such as ABBA and A-ha, oil riches, salmon, fjords, saunas, and snowy mountains. But the states of this region are also known throughout the world for their peculiar way of organizing their societies. Taken together, the social and economic systems in these countries have become known as the Nordic Model, a welfare state system that aims at universal rights within societies with comparatively small class, income, and gender differences.

Within the Nordic region, a distinct organization of media and communications has evolved throughout the analogue era. A publicly supported but independent press has boasted the world’s highest readership figures; publicly funded and owned broadcasters have contributed to building national identity and strived for enlightenment while maintaining a mass audience in the face of intense competition, and securing the entire population’s access to high-speed Internet services has been a consensual political goal. Far-reaching state interventions and support schemes have been combined with a strong adherence to the principle of freedom of speech. The outcome is an adaptive public media sector with a high degree of legitimacy existing alongside domestically, and to some extent globally, successful commercial media and communication companies.

The existence of distinct and common features in Nordic media and communications has been pointed out in both academic and industry studies (see, e.g., Hallin and Mancini 2004; World Economic Forum 2012, xiii; Economist Intelligence Unit 2010, 2). Yet, very few studies, and this is particularly true for studies emerging from within the region, take a genuine Nordic perspective. To the degree that studies are concerned with more than one Nordic coun-
try or media sector the emphasis is just as much on national differences as on similarities within the region. Furthermore, since a Nordic perspective is rare, it is seldom asked whether the media and communication systems in the Nordic region develop along a different path than in other countries or regions. There is a tendency to assume that the strong transformative forces that impact on all media systems, such as globalization, marketization, and fragmentation, hit Nordic systems with broadly the same strength as in larger and more dominant countries.

We deny neither that there are great variations within and between Nordic countries, nor that the challenges to traditional media and regulatory models have been massive over the last decades. In several studies we ourselves have detailed how the media sector has been globalized (Mjøs 2010a, 2012), how competition policy and industrial policy have come to play a more important role in the field of media (Syvertsen 2004; Storsul and Syvertsen 2007; Moe 2012c), how the relationship between the state and public service broadcasters is changing due to convergence and competition (Moe 2009, 2010), and how a range of commercial reality formats have invaded Nordic screens (Enli 2008; Enli and McNair 2010). Yet, the main point of this book is not to emphasize how traditional features and principles of regulation are being undermined. Instead, we aim to test the argument that continuity is just as important as change within Nordic media. We hope to show that although both principles and practices of media policy and regulation are modified and changed, such principles and practices are also to a large degree reaffirmed, sustained, and strengthened in the digital age.

The book’s premise is that the Nordic media and communication systems are distinct enough to stand out in the world and that this warrants attention from scholars and practitioners. We argue that the organization of media and communications in the Nordic countries rests on a combination of four principles or pillars, all of which continue to be present in the 21st century. These principles, which are expounded later in the chapter, are universal services, editorial freedom, a cultural policy for the media; and last, but not least, a tendency to choose policy solutions that are consensual and durable, based on consultation with both public and private stakeholders. We argue that these organizational principles support institutions and user patterns that bear resemblance to the socioeconomic and political institutions that usually define the Nordic welfare states. We call this the Media Welfare State.

This book introduces the concept of the Media Welfare State and elaborates on its key components. We trace the Media Welfare State’s historical roots in the 19th and 20th centuries and discuss its evolvement and change in the digital age. Empirically, the book offers an updated scrutiny of major
media institutions, tackling key developments within the sector, including digitalization, the growth of online and social media, digital television, and the establishment of international and in some instances global media and communication brands with Nordic origins, such as Nokia, Schibsted, and Modern Times Group. Theoretically, we argue that an understanding of public communications and the role played by media is crucial for grasping how the welfare state, or any other societal model for that matter, is constructed, interpreted, and sustained. From the beginning, media and communication systems have been vital building blocks of the welfare state, although their importance has increased as information and communication in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have come to permeate most aspects of social life. We aim to illustrate that media studies and welfare state studies would benefit from closer cooperation; while insight from media studies can contribute to a deeper understanding of why and how social systems evolve and change, media studies can benefit from connecting to broader theoretical paradigms and perspectives.

Before discussing the Nordic Model and the accompanying concept of the Media Welfare State, a few introductory words about the Nordic region are in order. The Nordic countries include the states of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland, of which the first three are referred to as Scandinavia. The five countries have common historical roots and were even united in a single monarchy in the 15th and parts of the 16th centuries. Since 1917, the four larger countries have all been sovereign states (Iceland did not achieve full independence until 1944), but sovereign states with strong political, cultural, and economic cooperation, as illustrated by the Nordic Council for interparliamentarian collaboration, established in 1952, and the Council of Ministers, established in 1971. A passport union, a common labor market, and reciprocal social security benefits for Nordic citizens residing outside their home country were all in place in the 1950s, thus allowing Nordic people to move freely across borders decades before the European Union adopted similar policies. The Nordic countries have historically been culturally homogenous, with a border-crossing minority, the Sami people, in the north, and with a number of schemes for cultural and artistic cooperation. Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish are relatively similar Indo-European languages, and people in these three countries can understand each other and read each other’s languages. Icelandic belongs to the same language group but is more difficult for the others to understand, while Sami and Finnish belong to the Finno-Ugric language group. Even if English functions as the lingua franca when representatives of all Nordic countries are present, much Nordic cooperation requires that people only speak their mother tongue.
Although the Nordic countries have much in common with other wealthy Western societies, they have more in common with each other. As noted by Andersen et al. (2007, 14):

The Nordic countries tend to create a cluster of their own along many dimensions. Other European countries (notably the Netherlands and Austria) are often similar in certain respects, but in no important respect do we see an outlier among the Nordics.

The Nordic countries constitute a distinct cultural and geographical entity among the world’s nations, and the countries also share a common political, social, and economic system epitomized in the concept of the Nordic Model.

The Nordic Model

The idea of a Nordic model of society originated in academia, but the concept is also used in other spheres of society, and politicians refer to it frequently. For instance, Halldór Ásgrímsson, the secretary general of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and Jan-Erik Enestam, the director of the Nordic Council, the interparliamentary body for pan-Nordic collaboration, boasted in unison in 2008: “The Nordic Model is a source of pride for the people of the region. We like the fact that it has become a recognizable concept, a ‘brand’ in international political debate” (Ásgrímsson and Enestam 2008, 5).

In such an offhand use, the term has desirable, yet vague, connotations. Although they have not always found what they have been searching for, governments around the world have looked to the Nordic Model as something to emulate and learn from (Da 2008; Alestalo, Hort and Kuhnle 2009, 25). Inside the region, the idea is so popular “that political parties have competed for the ‘ownership’ of the kind of political system and welfare state that the concept is seen to denote” (Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009, 2). Of course, due to its social democratic connotations, controversy erupts around the model from time to time. For example, the leader of the Norwegian populist Progress Party, Siv Jensen, in 2013 denounced the Norwegian variant of the model and claimed that “models must never get in the way of common sense” (VGNett, 2013, authors’ translation). Yet, the Populist Party also supports the basic welfare state elements that define the Nordic Model. Two years earlier, the Swedish Social Democrats sought patent protection on “The Nordic Model”—a move that triggered protest from the political right, as well as from the Nordic Council (Nordic Council 2012).

The Nordic Model (or, alternatively, a Scandinavian model of a specific welfare regime type) emerged from a series of comparative studies in the
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1980s (Alestalo, Hort and Kuhnle 2009, 1). Historically, these studies traced the model to the last decades of the 19th century with the introduction of early social policy schemes, including social insurance laws, old-age pensions, and subsidies to voluntary sickness funds (Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009, 10). Such developments laid the basis for a parallel flourishing of respect for individual liberty and traditions of collectivism and community within an ethnically homogenous population. Particularly since World War II, Nordic societies have stood out in the world through their ability to unite economic growth and competitiveness with a strong public sector, while promoting broad public participation in the economic and social spheres of society.

Different scholars emphasize somewhat different aspects when describing the Nordic Model. Some highlight the ambitious aims to combine an efficient market economy and growth with a stable labor market, equality in the distribution of resources, and a high level of social cohesion (Andersen et al. 2007, 11). The model is aimed at fostering democratic conditions, a high level of civic participation, and equality among its citizens. Andersen et al. (2007, 13–14) point to three cross-regional dimensions: a comprehensive welfare state; major public and private spending on human capital; and labor market institutions with significant labor unions, employer organizations, and considerable wage synchronization. In these descriptions, the development of a welfare state through substantial levels of taxation and an ambitious redistribution of wealth and resources, thereby creating a social safety net, free public education, and universal health services, is the institutional driving force behind the model (Andersen et al. 2007; Hilson 2008; Einhorn and Logue 2004; Vike 1996, 537; Erikson et al. 1987, vii).

The conviction that there is a specific Nordic Model, and that it is beneficial to the well-being of citizens, is also backed up with reference to other types of indicators. In a comparative study of the level of social trust in 60 countries, Delhey and Newton (2005) characterize the trust level in the Nordic countries as “exceptional.” “Norway, Sweden and Denmark have the highest level of trust of any of our 60 nations. Finland and Iceland are not far behind,” state the authors, who indicate several explanatory factors: “All five countries are Protestant, rich and ethnically homogenous, and have high good government scores” (320). In this study, social trust is defined as the belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly harm you if they can avoid it and will look after your interests if possible. While 6 out of 10 in Norway and Sweden believe that people can generally be trusted, less than 1 out of 10 in Turkey and Brazil holds this view (311). Furthermore, the Nordic countries belong to the group of countries classified by the United Nations Development Program as having a “very high human development.” The index is popularly referred to as “The best countries in the world to live in” (BBC 2009). Norway topped the
global list in 2011, as it has done nine times since the index was introduced in 1990, with the other Nordic countries also scoring high (UNDP 2011a, 2011b).

A specific Nordic (or social democratic) type of society also surfaces in broader comparative studies. For example, this is the case in Esping-Andersen’s (1990) typology of welfare state variations, which argues that rather than being linearly distributed, welfare states are clustered by regime type and come in three versions: the liberal, the corporatist, and the social democratic. The first version describes societies that favor a strong free-market ideology, of which the United States is the prime example. Here, the state provides “modest universal social-insurance plans” and has put in place benefits that “cater mainly to a clientele of low-income” (Esping-Andersen 1990, 26). The second, the corporatist model, which is identified in countries such as Austria, France, Germany, and Italy, is more comprehensive, but still preserves social differences. Welfare state rights in these countries are “attached to class and status” (1990, 27).

The third category is the social democratic or universal model. Here, Sweden is the prime example, although the characteristics are present in all Nordic countries. Universalism implies that welfare state provisions include all, independent of class or status, and the welfare state is not seen as a passive safety net for the poor, but as a vehicle for active social transformation.

Rather than tolerate a dualism between state and market, between working class and middle class, the social democrats pursued a welfare state that would promote an equality of the highest standards, not an equality of minimal needs as was pursued elsewhere. (Esping-Andersen 1990, 27)

An equality of the highest standards implies that public schools, health services, and pension schemes are well funded and constitute the main services to the population at large, while private services are more marginal and supplementary.

Hall and Soskice (2001) present an alternative typology of Western societies. Rather than focusing on the level of welfare state provisions, they classify economies on the level of firm structure and how firms interact with the state. In their model, Western economies are split into two main types, liberal market economies and coordinated market economies, in addition to a third more tentative category, which they label “Mediterranean” (8, 19–21). The Nordic countries are placed in the category of coordinated market economies along with Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Japan: countries that also come close to the Nordic countries on several other indicators. In these countries, there is a higher degree of coordination and interdependence between individual firms, as well as more extensive coordi-
nation with the state, than in the liberal market economies. There is a coordinated labor market where trade unions have retained much of their historical importance, and key actors are encouraged “to engage in collective discussion and reach agreements with each other” (Hall and Soskice 2001, 11).

Based on the aforementioned classifications, the Nordic Model appears as either a specific type of society or as a subcategory of a broader corporatist model. In both cases, the Nordic system is often referred to as social democratic, thereby implying a high degree of egalitarianism and universalism. The system has been created with a transformative agenda, in which the ambition has not been to preserve differences of class and status, as in other corporatist countries, but to enroll everybody in the same social security and welfare state provisions, which encourage participation and inclusion of all citizens in the political and cultural public spheres. Within the mixed and open economies, public elements remain strong, and deliberation and coordination are encouraged in both the economy and elsewhere. As pointed out by Hall and Soskice: “Nations with a particular type of coordination in one sphere of the economy (. . .) tend to develop complementary practices in other spheres as well” (18).

The Nordic Model is generally described in rather positive terms and is often held out as an ideal, both inside and outside the region. This raises the issue of glorification: to what degree does the model present a romanticized version of life in the Nordic countries, glossing over difficult questions and internal tensions in order to create a global brand? In 2008, the Nordic Council of Ministers invited five international writers to cast a critical look at the Nordic Model, several of which address the issue of ideals vs. reality. Marie-Laure Le Foulon, a French journalist specializing in Nordic affairs, titles her contribution “Homo Nordicus, A Paradoxical Figure” and observes: “Living among the Nordics is like living with walking guilt complexes” (19). Although fascinated by the Nordic countries, which she sees as “clean” and “green” (25), she notes that life here “can be miserable” and cites “sporadic drinking bouts” and “unfathomable sadness” as features of the Nordic character.

“High suicide rates, binge drinking and a lack of social relations” is also cited as a Nordic characteristic by Spanish journalist Anxo Lamela Conde (2008, 55). Charles Ferro, an American author and journalist, titles his contribution “A Fragile Creature That Needs Care” and refers to the reactions he gets among Americans when he cites the Nordic taxation rate, “madness” and “a nightmare” (47). With a slight ironic twist, German foreign correspondent Siegfried Thielbeer asks: is the Nordic region a cozy and peaceful society? reminding us that for Social Democrats and Socialists in Germany, as elsewhere, the Nordic societies symbolized “the realization of the old dreams of the working class” for many years. People of the Nordic countries were gener-
ally perceived as “peace-loving, rejecting all forms of militarism” (2008, 59), although Thielbeer matter-of-factly notes that this perception “was naturally flawed” (60).

Contributions such as these represent a welcome correction to what is not just conceptualized as a political system, but “a philosophy ingrained in the Nordic soul” (Ferro 2008, 45). The contributions grasp the strong individualism and relatively weaker family, social, and religious ties that tend to characterize people in the North (Vike 1996, 547), as well as the aspects of the Nordic Model, where the image exceeds reality. Still, it is also worth noting that observers who are specifically requested to be critical consider Nordic societies and mentalities to have a distinct character, epitomized in the concept of the Nordic Model.

The Nordic Model—Still Relevant?

The question remains as to whether a model that was detected through comparative analyses in the 1980s continues to be relevant in the 21st century. There is indeed a certain dated feel to some descriptions—for example, the widespread references to how social democrats built the welfare state (see, e.g., Esping-Andersen 1990, 27). Social democracy enjoyed unparalleled strength in the Nordic countries in the decades following World War II, but its hegemony was challenged in the 1980s. Historians point out how the dominant “social-democratic order” gradually gave way to “the era of the market” (Furre 1991, 421). “The three decades from the early 1960s to the end of the 1980s were the golden age of the Nordic welfare state,” admit Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle (2009, 15; see also Christiansen and Markkola 2006, 21). Three more decades have passed since this golden age, and one may ask whether the significant social changes that have taken place have reduced the model’s value as an explanatory tool.

Perhaps the most important question concerns whether the global move toward neoliberalism has undermined the Nordic welfare state. Neoliberal thought surfaced strongly from the late 1970s, influencing the agenda of conservative and right-wing parties worldwide. The result was a move toward a reduced national regulation of industry and labor markets, the privatization of health care and education, and the curbing of public spending. The implications have been profound for individual citizens, as Davis (2009, 3) argues in the US case: “The bonds between employees and firms have loosened, while the economic security of individuals is increasingly tied to the overall health of the stock market.”

Nonetheless, the impact of neoliberalism has not been homogenous across the world (Harvey 2005, 13). Also in the Nordic countries, party politics
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took a turn to the right in the 1980s. The result was a changed state, viewed by some as a radical shift that turned the welfare state toward a “competition state” (Pedersen 2011, on Denmark). Still, outright neoliberalism did not take hold, at least not in the larger countries. The dominant parties on the right committed themselves to supporting the welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s, and since that time, the welfare state has to a large degree been a shared political project (Mjøset 2011, 391). New right-wing parties with a populist agenda surfaced in the region in the 1970s, initially mobilizing against state bureaucracy and high taxes, but these parties also gradually committed themselves to the welfare state, instead making the struggle against immigration their key mobilizing cause (2011, 411). As Kjølsrød (2003) points out in the Norwegian case, shifting governments have felt responsible for the welfare state throughout the entire postwar period. The system has been backed up by “stable political ambitions with broad support across party lines” (Kjølsrød 2003, 184; authors’ translation). The only exception to this rule was in the smallest Nordic country of Iceland, where neoliberal ideology came to have a strong influence from the mid-1990s (Mjøset 2011, 411).

Neoliberalism is not the only force that has been held out as a potential challenge to the Nordic Model. Indeed, if one anchors the Nordic Model in the social democratic era of the early postwar years, all later developments may be perceived as “challenges” to the model. Many articles and books on the welfare state and the Nordic Model are implicitly or explicitly structured in this fashion: first, the core elements of the model are presented, then a number of challenges are discussed, and then comes the question of whether the model can adapt and survive (see, e.g., Andersen 2008a, 2008b; Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009).

In addition to neoliberalism three such challenges are emphasized in the literature, with the first and most important being the force of globalization. For example, “Can the Scandinavian Model Adapt to Globalization?” ask Einhorn and Logue (2004), who discuss the difficulty of upholding a welfare state with specific and tangible characteristics in the face of integration, standardization, and interdependence (Einhorn and Logue 2004, 502; see also Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009, 19). Changing demographics is another much focused on challenge, particularly the rise of the aging population, which implies that the number of dependent people (those receiving benefits) is growing at a faster rate than the proportion of employed (those paying taxes) (Andersen 2008b, 47; Andersen et al. 2007, 20–21). The demographic challenge includes the rise of an immigrant population, which is seen as both a challenge to social equality (most immigrants are working class) and a challenge in the sense that the number of beneficiaries of the welfare system may outnumber the contributors (Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009, 17; Andersen...
2008b, 61). The third challenge is political and concerns the cohesion, legitimacy, and governability of the welfare state. As the population becomes increasingly fragmented and heterogeneous, support for the welfare state may wane. Furthermore, the twin processes of globalization and European integration may lead to difficulties in upholding an ambitious welfare system in one country or region (Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009).

These challenges are real enough and confront political systems worldwide. Indeed, there is a debate in all Nordic countries on how to sustain the welfare state in the face of globalization, aging, immigration, and European integration. The fear that the welfare state may be overstretched, that the demands on it have become too great and the contributors too few, gives rise to numerous public commissions and policy measures. Still, it is not adequate to simply perceive such forces as new challenges imposed on the system from outside. International constraints and possibilities, demographic change, and questions of legitimacy and cohesion have all been part and parcel of the welfare state since its conception and have been dealt with through varying political, social, and economic measures. For example, as Andersen et al. (2007, 12) note, globalization “has been the very basis of the growth in productivity and living standards which the Nordics have achieved.” Within the Nordic welfare states, there has always been a combination of protective policies and defending internal coherence and solidarity, with relatively open economies and a high level of international participation and exchange.

In this light, the Nordic Model should be seen as a dynamic rather than dated construct, in addition to a construct that must be examined anew by historians and social scientists in light of contemporary societal development. As Halldór Ásgrímsson, secretary general of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and Jan-Erik Enestam, the director of the Nordic Council, stated in unison in 2008, the Nordic Model “is and has always been a work in progress” (Ásgrímsson and Enestam 2008, 5). How this work progresses, however, is not only dependent on economic and social features; it is also dependent on the Nordic countries’ organization of their media and communication systems.

The Nordic Model—A Media-Free Society?

The literature on the welfare state is comprehensive and covers many aspects of social and economic life. Yet, one aspect is curiously absent—namely, the role of media and communication systems. As reviewed here, the literature on the Nordic Model lacks references to this central realm of political, cultural, and social life.

This goes for key collected volumes—for example: *Normative Foundations of the Welfare State: The Nordic Experience* (Kildahl and Kuhnle 2005); *The Scan-
dinavian Model: Welfare States and Welfare Research (Erikson et al. 1987); Welfare Trends in the Scandinavian Countries (Hansen et al. 1993); Welfare States in Transition: National Adaptations in Global Economies (Esping-Andersen 1996); Survival of the European Welfare State (Kuhnle 2000); The Nordic Model of Welfare: A Historical Reappraisal (Christiansen et al. 2006). It is also true for articles discussing the conditions for the Nordic Model such as by Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle (2009).

Some contributions made by communication scholars do attempt to bridge the gap, including Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen’s (2002) The Information Society and the Welfare State: The Finnish Model. This country study of Finland introduces the concept of the “informational welfare state” as a way of describing “a welfare state that forms a virtuous circle with the informational economy” (2002, 87). On the one hand, Finland’s information society provides the financial basis of the country’s welfare state. On the other hand, the Finnish welfare state’s public services provide “a sustainable social dimension” (2002, 87–88) to the competitive and globalized information economy (2002, 89). Furthermore, the concept of the “informational welfare state” includes both the social uses (see, e.g., “social hackerism” [2002, 96–100]) and the utilization of information technology to reform and develop the structures and services of the welfare state “through a more dynamic network organization” (2002, 90, 90–102). While this study provides much needed insights into the relationship between media and communications and the welfare state, it is limited to one country and therefore does not include a Nordic perspective. Its main focus is on communications technology as a vehicle to develop and reform the components, organization, and productivity of the welfare state, rather than on the media as a welfare state system.

The absence of references to the role of media and communications in mainstream Nordic welfare state literature is peculiar for several reasons, the first being that media and communication systems by themselves constitute important institutions in modern societies. The main infrastructures of public communication can all be traced back to the 19th and early 20th centuries, the same period when the social policy foundations of the welfare state were established. From the beginning, social democratic movements paid intense attention to communication and media, and both the party press and the public broadcasting institutions were perceived as crucial vehicles to achieve the aims of the welfare state. Moreover, key political figures have occupied positions as newspaper editors or director generals of the broadcasting institutions (Slagstad 1998, 432ff.; Bastiansen and Dahl 2003, 270ff.). From early on, postal systems, which were crucial to the distribution of newspapers, were organized as public services, as were telecommunication networks, which later would play a critical role in turning the Nordic countries into ad-
vanced information societies. In the interwar period, radio was institutionalized as public service monopolies in all Nordic countries, and this was extended to television in the 1950s and 1960s. During the “golden age” of the welfare state, the early postwar years, people in each Nordic country watched and listened to much the same content on very few (state-owned) channels, a feature that contributed to the homogeneity of culture and perspectives. In later decades, the social forces of marketization, globalization, and changing demographics have all impacted on media and communications structures in ways that are also relevant for—and have consequences for—other welfare state institutions. Thus, media and communication constitute essential elements in the historical construction of the welfare state, while also interpreting and reflecting its adaption and change in recent decades.

The second reason why communication should be included in welfare state studies is that communication is vital for legitimacy. As we have seen, social scientists studying the Nordic Model are concerned with the normative foundations of the welfare state, the legitimacy of its social provisions, and the possibility that the values necessary to sustain the model may be in a state of flux (Kildahl and Kuhnle 2005; Andersen 2008b, 47; Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009). Yet, there is little mention in the literature as to how norms and values are sustained, debated, and negotiated—all crucial tasks of the media and communication system. Kjølsrød mentions three theories from welfare state literature as to how a system based on the heavy taxation of every household may be legitimated (2003, 185). The first is that citizens make a rational choice to support welfare state solutions as a form of personal insurance system, the second is that people support the welfare state out of a sense of solidarity with others, and the third is based on self-interest; in a universalist system, a large proportion of the population either benefit directly from the welfare state or work in professions that benefit from, or administer, welfare state provisions. These explanations are of course relevant and valuable, yet it is curious how the support for the welfare state is allegedly based on each citizen making a rational, ideological, or self-interested choice. There is a conspicuous lack of references to public debate or the public sphere, or to how ideologies and rationalities are disseminated, challenged, or sustained.

Some books and articles do refer to agencies of socialization and mobilization, although these are limited to schools, the church, and political parties. Kildahl and Kuhnle (2005, 25) suggest that the broad support for universalism was due to a “long, dynamic argumentative process,” seeing that the political parties are the key actors. This may well be true, but political parties rarely communicate directly and unmediated with the electorate. What political parties have ample opportunities to do, however, is to influence the setup of the media system, safeguarding that diverse voices and viewpoints are pres-
ent, among them voices that may be expected to be broadly in favor of universalism and welfare state solutions. In a publicly regulated system, populism can be kept in check, and the media can to a larger degree be held accountable to society than in a purely market-driven system.

The third reason why media and communication are important for our understanding of the welfare state has to do with social cohesion. The media and public communication systems are frequently understood as a form of “social glue,” cf. Benedict Anderson’s (1992, 25) argument about the nation as “an imagined community.” In his conception, the experience of belonging to a nation is not based on face-to-face interaction between its members, and not even on personal experiences, but on a mental image of affinity in part sustained and upheld by a public communication system. Feelings of solidarity, belonging, inclusion, and exclusion in society are not exclusively or even primarily based on each individual’s experience, but instead on a complex interplay of narratives that, to a large extent, are transmitted through media. Even so, the media may also frame social problems in a way that increases divisions and increases feelings of alienation among social groups. As the social base of society becomes more diverse and fragmented, public communication systems remain important agents of cohesion and social bonding.

The aim of this book is to draw the media and communication systems more firmly into the field of welfare state studies. By this, we do not mean to go into detailed analysis of how various media support or confront central welfare state aims and how media coverage influences the public’s view, even though such studies are clearly valuable (see, e.g., Knudsen 2013). Rather, our argument regards media policy and organization. On a basic level, we argue that studies of the Nordic Model and the welfare state are simply incomplete without an accompanying discussion of its media and communications component. On a higher level of complexity, we contend that it is difficult to understand how the welfare state is legitimated, and how cohesion and trust are sustained, without an understanding of the principles that govern systems of public communications.

Societal Models and Media Models

Within the field of media and communication studies, it is commonplace to analyze media systems as a reflection of the social systems of which they are a part. Early contributions such as Four Theories of the Press (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956) divided media systems into four categories, each reflecting an ideal type of society: Authoritarian, Libertarian, Socially Responsible, and Soviet Communist. Four Theories of the Press remains a classic text within media studies and is frequently referred to, but it has also been widely criticized for
its simplicity, lack of empirical basis, and Cold War defense of liberalism (see Hardy 2008, 11ff.; Nordenstreng 2006; and Hallin and Mancini 2004, 9–10, for recent critiques).

However, similar elements do appear in more solid theoretical constructs. Gerhard Vowe (1999) takes the idealized and recurring themes of freedom, security, and equality from political philosophy and employs them as labels for media policy. Freedom is emblematic for the liberal systems of the United States, Australia, and Britain, whereas the most important value in Austria and Germany is security. These countries are both corporatist democracies focused on protecting more or less fragile social structures from inner and outer threats, while in the Nordic countries, which Vowe labels social democratic, the key value is equality. Although Vowe’s analysis is based on a different principle of classification, the resulting categories are similar to the ones found in Esping-Andersen (1990). Both Vowe and Esping-Andersen distinguish between corporatist systems and social democratic systems, identifying the Nordic countries as the prime example of the latter.

In Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics (2004), Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini also divide media systems into three types. The outcome of their division is more similar to Hall and Soskice (2001), also quoted earlier, in that they place the Nordic countries together with other corporatist countries. Hallin and Mancini distinguish between the North Atlantic or liberal model, the Mediterranean or polarized pluralistic model, and the North/Central European democratic corporatist model, with the latter model including the Nordic countries (excluding Iceland), Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, and Switzerland (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 11, 89ff.).

The third category describes well some of the vital ingredients of the Nordic media systems, most notably the importance of a mass circulation press, the historical shift from party newspapers toward a neutral commercial press, a strong institutionalized professionalism, and wide-ranging, but legally limited, state intervention. The much-cited study is based on empirical research, and one of its advantages is that it shows how significant components have been reinterpreted and modified under changing circumstances.

Hallin and Mancini’s models are considered the most authoritative within comparative media studies. Yet, their model-building has also been widely criticized: the specific labels and categories have been disputed, along with the temporal dimension (Hardy 2012). Their relative disregard of factors that could differentiate systems, ranging from country and market size (e.g., Hardy 2012) to the role of religious institutions (Couldry 2007), has also been duly discussed. Yet others have sought to extend the scope to other parts of the world (e.g., Voltmer 2008; see Hallin and Mancini 2012a) and stressed the need for more in-depth analysis of specific countries, aiming at exposing
differences within generally similar categories (e.g., Humphreys 2012). The comparative efforts of Hallin and Mancini and others have also inspired Nordic scholars (Strömbäck, Ørsten, and Aalberg 2008 on political communication; Nord 2008 on press and broadcast regulation and structures; Kjær and Slaatta 2007 on business journalism).

For a study such as the present one, another limitation is more pressing: Hallin and Mancini’s focus on traditional news media, predominantly the printed press. This limitation has two separate consequences. First, forms of media content that fall outside the news category tend to be ignored. This might not be a problem within the field of political communication, where the contribution arguably has received the most traction. For studies with a wider perspective, however, it makes less sense to make do with news only, as it limits the validity of the models, as well as the richness of the empirical analysis (e.g., Hardy 2008).

Second, by concentrating on the printed press along with traditional broadcast media, the model-building does not reflect the changes in a digital era. Though the importance of new technologies might have been harder to assess in 2004, Hallin called the Internet and digital media in general “a big hole” in the book (in Moe and Sjøvaag 2009, 137). The decade that has passed since the publication, though, has seen contributions retaining a focus on traditional media (e.g., Hardy 2008; also Hallin and Mancini 2012a). This is also the case for recent contributions with a Nordic perspective (Strömbäck, Ørsten and Aalberg 2008).

Any study of media and communication systems today needs to take Internet and digital media into account. Doing so does not invalidate the categories; indeed, more recent attempts at model-building that include digital media point to distinguishing and unifying characteristics of the Nordic countries. In her study of how the Internet has been encouraged and implemented in different countries, Ursula Maier-Rabler (2008) sketches four ideal types of “information cultures”: Catholic-feudalistic, Protestant-enlightened, socialist-centralistic, and socio-democratic. The socio-democratic information culture characterizes the Nordic countries and parts of the Benelux area. The key value distinguishing the social democratic type from the three other cultures is that “information is a precondition for the political emancipation of the individual” (2008, 58). Although parts of the Benelux area are included in the social democratic type, Maier-Rabler allocates the Nordic countries a special place and claims that Scandinavia has the most advanced constitutional framework delineating the free access to information (Maier-Rabler 2008, 58; see also chap. 2).

The main conclusion to be drawn from a review of societal and media models is that the Nordic countries tend to be singled out as a special case—
either placed in a category of their own or treated as a subcategory within a larger type. This is the case whether we look only at traditional media or if we integrate analyses of digital media and genres beyond hardcore news. In our description of the Nordic media systems as a Media Welfare State, we discuss the Internet not as a new, isolated technology, but ask how its expansion, as well as the general trend toward convergence, contributes to transformation of all other aspects of media: the printed press, broadcasting, media use, and operations of media companies. In the same way as the Nordic states cluster on a number of social and economic variables, they cluster on variables related to media and communication—both traditional and newer forms. We clearly acknowledge that there are differences between Nordic countries and that in some respects individual countries are similar to those outside the region. Yet, the clustering is distinct enough so that it is worth testing the idea of a Media Welfare State, a set of organizational principles or pillars that function in much the same way as the more general social and economic provisions of the welfare state.

The Media Welfare State

The model of a Media Welfare State explored in this book is based on a combination of reactive and proactive measures. The principles can in part be understood as a series of responses to historical forces that have been seen to constrain and negatively affect the media system and in part be understood as a battery of proactive public policy measures.

Four social forces in particular have been perceived as threats to a media system based on welfare state principles. The first is authoritarianism, or direct state influence over content. As we see in later chapters, Nordic policymakers explicitly rejected the idea of state-controlled media in the 19th and 20th centuries. The second force is that of marketization, both structurally and in terms of content. In the Nordic countries, unmediated market forces have been perceived to create unequal access, as well as reducing diversity and driving quality downward. The third force is that of international standardization, more recently termed globalization. We will show that there has been a strong desire to protect national and regional culture, identity, and language from international commercial pressures. The fourth force to be counteracted is that of social fragmentation, as Nordic policymakers have not easily accepted cultural and social divisions based on wealth, geography, age, ethnicity, or religious affiliations.

The purpose of identifying these forces is to demonstrate that political intervention in the media system does not appear out of nowhere, but is instituted after a deliberative process in order to deal with perceived problems
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and challenges (Syvertsen 2004, 62). Problems and challenges associated with these forces are recurring and emerge anew in the digital age. In order to handle them, policymakers and media institutions may choose from a catalogue of measures developed in the analogue era and modified throughout media history.

These measures fall into two types: (1) there are specific regulatory instruments, such as press subsidies or the broadcasting monopoly, that are applied to singular media at specific times. Many such instruments are discussed in coming chapters, and we also show how specific regulations are changed and adapted to suit new times; (2) there are general policy solutions and principles that govern different media and communication sectors across historical periods that are more durable and consistent. On the basis of the analysis presented in this book and on literature covering Nordic media systems, we suggest that four such general principles and ways of conducting policy are recurring in Nordic media and communications (see, e.g., Hadenius, Weibull, and Wadbring 2011; Maier-Rabler 2008; Syvertsen 2004; Jensen 1997, 2003; Duelund 2003). We label these the four principles or pillars of the Media Welfare State:

In the same way as a key ideal of the Nordic Model is universal social provisions, the first pillar of the Media Welfare State is universally available communication systems. In the 19th century, educational and communication services were organized as public services in all Nordic countries, hence laying the foundations for both mass democracy and an egalitarian media consumption pattern. The Nordic countries stand out as early proponents of universal education, safeguarding literacy for women as well as men, with both postal and telecommunications systems organized with a view toward achieving equal access. In the 20th century, both radio and television were instituted as public monopolies with the same obligations. Although the broadcasting, telecommunication, and postal monopolies were all abandoned in the 1980s and 1990s, a strong obligation toward universal services remained: In the

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TABLE 1.1. The Four Pillars of the Media Welfare State

1: An organization of vital communication services that underscores their character as public goods, with extensive cross-subsidies and obligations toward universality.

2: A range of measures used to institutionalize freedom from editorial interference and self-governance in day-to-day operations.

3: A cultural policy that extends to the media in the form of content obligations and support schemes that aim to secure diversity and quality.

4: A preference for consensual solutions that are durable and involve cooperation between main stakeholders: the state, media and communication industries and the public.

*See the appendix for an extended version of table 1.1.*
1990s, selected commercial broadcasters were obliged to be universally available, whereas in the 2000s the same principle was applied to digital terrestrial television networks. Universal services are not specific to Nordic societies, though the principle in these states has been applied on a rather grand scale. In the 21st century, both public investment in infrastructures and ambitious universal service obligations are among the explanations for why the Nordic countries have placed themselves in the global lead as far as Internet and broadband coverage is concerned.

The second pillar of the Media Welfare State, institutionalized editorial freedom, is not a trait specific to Nordic societies. However, this principle also has a comparatively stronger position in the Nordic region than in many other countries and regions, as the Nordic countries were among the first to institutionalize press freedom; indeed, Sweden prides itself on having the world’s oldest constitutional provision of freedom of expression, dating back to 1766, 20 years before France and the United States. The editorial freedom in Nordic media shows an uninterrupted history and continuity in peacetime. This long history of press freedom—a freedom that is still being respected—is held out as a key characteristic of the Nordic region based on the comparative analysis by Hallin and Mancini (2004, 145). The early autocratic rulers of the Nordic monarchies introduced strict penalties for public criticism, but parliamentary governments in the last century, whether social democrat, centrist, or conservative, have respected the media’s editorial independence. The Nordic countries continue to distinguish themselves on global press freedom indexes in the 21st century, which is particularly notable since the state is so involved with the media sector.

The third pillar, the presence of an extensive cultural policy for the media, is crucial in order to understand the fundamental setup of the Media Welfare State. Whereas universal service provisions predominantly have to do with infrastructure, and editorial independence is a negative freedom—a freedom from interference—cultural policy measures for the media are set up to positively influence media content. Broadly speaking, the objective of such measures has been to modify the influence of market forces, thus countering the strong influx of standardized and global mass culture in the 20th century. The cultural policy for the media was initially developed for public service radio in the interwar period; from the beginning, the nascent monopolies were conceived as agents of enlightenment and nation-building. The principles were extended to television in the 1950s and 1960s, and three decades later selected commercial broadcasters were obliged to offer cultural, informational, and minority content in return for financial and distributional privileges. Press subsidies, which arrived in the 1950s, are clearly a product of cultural policy, as the state intervened in a free-market structure to safeguard that different
views and opinions should also be published regionally and locally. Cultural policy measures are not exclusive to these media, but also apply to films and books and, to some degree, new media as well, such as the Norwegian support schemes for computer games (St. meld. 14, 2007/2008).

The cultural policy for the media has enjoyed broad support and has also corresponded well with the editorial goals of the mainstream media. Both within the press and broadcasting, there has been strong support for the view that the media should appeal to all and should inform and enlighten the population at large, as neither content nor consumption has shown strong divisions along class and gender lines. Still, the cultural policy for the media has not gone unopposed. For example, the Swedish Modern Times Group, one of the largest international media companies with Nordic origins, has openly confronted public regulation and media support systems and has pursued an aggressively competitive corporate strategy in press, radio, and television. However, their approach has been exceptional in the Nordic context, as most media corporations have had more to gain from a more supportive attitude toward cultural policy aims.

This leads us to the fourth pillar of the Media Welfare State, consensual policy-making and compromises between key stakeholders. A defining characteristic of the welfare state is often seen as “stateness”: a persistent feature in which the relationship between the state and the people is “a close and positive one” (Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009, 2) and where the state is perceived “as an agency through which society can be reformed” (Korpi 1978, 48, cited in Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009, 2). Although the media sector displays the same “stateness” as the Nordic Model at large, we would argue that perhaps a more distinguishing trait is the extent to which private and commercial operators have accepted and taken part in state-regulated schemes and policies and found them beneficial for their own corporate interest. Consensual and pragmatic policy formation is a general feature of the Nordic Model that dates back to the interwar period, reflecting both the compromises between labor and capital and the fact that most governments have been party coalitions (Alestalo, Hort, and Kuhnle 2009, 7). At each crucial moment in media history, we see a preference for consensual and cooperative policies, rather than clean-cut statist or market-led solutions, an observation that underscores Hall and Soskice’s (2001) point about coordinated market economies. Nonetheless, cooperation does not mean that private companies are overly restricted in their operations or that the interests of state and industry merge. As we have noted, the Nordic states have always had relatively open economies, allowing Nordic companies to take advantage of global market opportunities, while at the same time benefitting from protective policies intended to defend domestic media from the twin pressures of marketization and globalization.
These four pillars or principles are general policy solutions that constitute the basis for the Media Welfare State. Following this brief sketch, the pillars are elaborated and discussed in the chapters to come, where we also discuss challenges to Nordic media systems and inherent differences within the Nordic region, as well as the adaptations and modifications in the light of social and media change.

Summary and Plan for the Book

The purpose of this book is twofold. The first main purpose is to introduce the concept of the Media Welfare State and argue for its importance in studies of the Nordic Model. The Media Welfare State is understood as a combination of both reactive and proactive elements and is defined as resting on four key pillars: universal and egalitarian services, freedom from editorial interference, a cultural policy that extends to the media, and a preference for solutions that are durable and involve cooperation between all main stakeholders. We argue that there are profound similarities between the socioeconomic features of the Nordic welfare states on the one hand and the cultural and informational features on the other.

The second main purpose of the book is to discuss how Nordic media and communications adapt and change in the digital age. While it is difficult to identify precisely when the digital era begins, our main focus is on the period from the late 1990s and throughout the first decade of the 21st century. From the late 1990s, digitalization began to affect all media: the Internet took off after the introduction of the first web browser in 1993, mobile telephones were about to become commonplace, and the first digital satellite and cable television channels were launched with the promise of greater choice. As the digital age evolves, new services increase the public’s choice and participation; providers from outside the region target Nordic users, while companies from within the region venture outside their borders. As all parts of media and communications move from analogue to digital technology, both principles and practices of media governance are adapted and modified in various ways. Still, we argue that there are strong signs of continuity as well as change; overall principles and user patterns are to a large degree maintained and fortified. What we have identified as the pillars of the Media Welfare State also retain their position as key shaping forces of Nordic media and communications in the digital era.

Methodologically, the book draws on analyses of institutional, political, and state documents and on national and international statistics, as well as on research-based studies and comparative works. In addition, the book accesses highly updated sources, including news items, corporate and public information, and socioeconomic information available in the public domain.

A methodological note of caution concerns the availability of statistics.
Each Nordic country has high quality and frequently updated media statistics. Since our purpose is in part to describe Nordic characteristics insofar as they differ from other regions and countries, we have based our analysis less on statistics from individual countries and more on comparative studies. The implication is that the data are not always updated and do not always include all Nordic countries. We try to clarify shortcomings as we go along, yet it is important to point out that not all our observations build on equally strong empirical evidence. Reputable studies from international agencies used in the book include Eurostat (2011), Nordicom, the International Telecommunications Union (2011, 2012), the Economist Intelligence Unit (2010), the World Economic Forum (2012), the United Nations Development program (2011a, 2011b), the International Federation of Phonographic Industry (2010), Nordvision (2012), and the World Association of Newspapers (2005). Statistics and other evidence from individual countries are used to illustrate specific cases.

The book contains six chapters.

Chapter 2 deals with media use. Media user patterns are important as an indication of how the principles of the Media Welfare State work on the ground, so to speak. Based on comparative European, and in some cases global, statistics, the chapter identifies similar patterns of media use across the Nordic countries. Nordic users have traditionally been high consumers of newspapers, other print and factual media, and public service broadcasting. Although there are changes, these basic features continue in the 21st century. The chapter further discusses the developments whereby the Nordic countries have turned into some of the world’s most advanced information economies, with early and high penetration of mobile phones, Internet, and broadband. In comparison with others, the people of the Nordic countries are particularly interested in online news; they are among the world’s most active users of Facebook and download and purchase large quantities of cultural and informational material off the Internet. The chapter discusses whether the fragmentation of media output is reflected in an increasing fragmentation of media consumption. Although there are changes, the chapter concludes that there is no strong evidence that information gaps are widening and also concludes that there is a continuation of the commonality and egalitarianism that have traditionally characterized media use in the Nordic region.

Chapter 3 focuses on the press. Historically, the printed press has played a crucial role in the establishment of the Nordic countries as open, democratic societies. Within the newspaper sector there has been strong support for the view that the media should appeal to all and should inform and enlighten the population at large, and consumption of newspapers has been high in all social groups. The number of locally, regionally, and nationally printed newspapers in the region is generally higher than in other regions. Compared with
other countries and regions, the Nordic press has had a long and strong history of editorial freedom and well-functioning self-regulatory institutions. Still, the Nordic region is not unaffected by global transformations and the decline in traditional printed newspapers, and the chapter investigates both the rise of free newspapers and the transformation to online news production. The chapter shows that the rise of global media and increased public involvement pose challenges to the traditional conception of publishing, but also that there is continued commitment, although the strength of the commitment varies, to continue the system of public press support to counteract what is seen as the negative influence of the market.

Chapter 4 deals with public service broadcasting. More than any other media, the public service broadcasters embody the principles of what we have termed the Media Welfare State. We show how public service broadcasters in the Nordic countries were set up as universal services in the interwar period and how their funding systems with no advertising and license fees were intended to protect them against pressures from both the state and the market. The public service broadcasters have served each Nordic nation with high quality and diverse output, and we show how their adaptive approach to enlightenment has ensured that they remain popular even in the face of intense competition. Also in their response to other challenges, the public service broadcasters have been adaptive and flexible, and they have retained a high degree of both public and political legitimacy. In the chapter we pay particular emphasis to the start-up of niche services such as children’s channels and the transformation of the public corporations into multiplatform enterprises. Throughout the chapter we compare the Nordic public service broadcasters with those of other regions and countries and also make comparisons between the individual Nordic institutions.

Chapter 5 explores the role of private media and communications companies. A hallmark of the Nordic welfare states is the successful public-private mix, yet most studies with a welfare state perspective center on state institutions. This chapter focuses on understanding the role of private media and communications companies through the study of three cases, representing different types of corporations: Nokia, the Finnish telecommunications hardware manufacturer, once the world’s largest producer of mobile telephones; Schibsted, the Norwegian internationally expanding publishing house and a global leader in online classifieds; and the Swedish company Modern Times Group, an international player in television, radio, and free newspapers. The chapter maps the development of the three companies within the Nordic region and internationally and discusses their expansion in relation to the policy solutions and regulatory systems of the Media Welfare State. Although the chapter touches on several aspects of the Media Welfare State, the emphasis is on the fourth
pillar, the tendency toward consensual and cooperative solutions that involve all main stakeholders. In doing so, we argue that while the three companies have followed similar strategic paths, their relationship to the Media Welfare State can be used to exemplify different approaches: Nokia is cited as an example of a collaborative approach, and Schibsted has followed an adaptive strategy, while the Modern Times Group is characterized by its confrontational tactic. The cases not only explain the development of these commercial enterprises, but also give insights into the nuances of the practical side of the public-private mix of Nordic media.

Chapter 6 contains a summary and conclusion. This chapter draws together the empirical findings of the studies of the book and discusses the solidity of the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of the Media Welfare State. The concluding discussion is organized around the key themes of the book. The studies show that the Nordic media systems develop and change, while maintaining key features, and the first part points to the strong elements of continuity, both in overarching principles and empirical realities. At the same time, Nordic media and communications are subject to change, as the forces of marketization, globalization, social fragmentation, and authoritarianism challenge institutions and policy regimes that in turn respond and adapt to them also in the digital age. The book applies a Nordic perspective—rather than studying each Nordic society as a separate entity—and this approach is evaluated and discussed. The last part of the conclusion critically discusses the assertion that there is a crisis in traditional media patterns and institutions.