

The future of the digital media welfare state

PETER JAKOBSSON,^I JOHAN LINDELL,^I & FREDRIK STIERNSTEDT^{II}

^I DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATICS AND MEDIA, UPPSALA UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

^{II} SCHOOL OF CULTURE AND EDUCATION, SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

ABSTRACT

For decades, comparative media studies have classified and compared different media systems around the world. Analyses suggest that the media systems of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) share certain traits, rendering them media welfare states. In this introductory chapter, we discuss the constituents of the Nordic media model and its contemporary status and challenges. We then introduce the 14 chapters included in this volume. The chapters are written by Nordic scholars and deal with a range of aspects connected to the transformation or stability of the Nordic media system in the digital era.

KEYWORDS: Nordic media, media welfare state, media system, media policy

Introduction

Every country has its own unique media landscape, mixing global, regional, and national digital platforms, newspapers, radio and television channels, public service media, so-called alternative media outlets, social media influencers, and so on. Furthermore, countries also differ in terms of how the media is governed and regulated through laws, policies, and institutional frameworks. Some research suggests that among this wide variety there are countries whose media governance and media landscapes produce better social and cultural outcomes than those of other countries (Neff & Pickard, 2021). What “better social and cultural outcomes” means is, of course, a normative and political question, but the gold standard in contemporary comparative media research is the pluralist liberal democratic model. This book concerns the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), which are five countries that are usually featured in the top-10 in global rankings measuring the state of democracy (Martela et al., 2020: 130). From the perspective of comparative media research, the media in the Nordic countries function and are organised in a similar way, with long traditions of press freedom, strong public service media, high levels of news circulation and media trust, and generous subsidies (Brüggemann et al., 2014). This similarity is traced back to the political systems and the political cultures of the Nordic countries (Syvertsen et al., 2014). The strong democratic cultures of the Nordics are reflected in the functioning and organisation of the media. At the same time, the media systems in the Nordic countries contribute to upholding and reproducing their democracies. The way that democracy and the media function in these societies is sometimes even hailed as a role model for other countries (Neff & Pickard, 2023; Nord et al., 2021: 393).

For some, this might seem too idealised a picture. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, critics have claimed that the consensus-oriented political culture in Sweden led to a situation where politicians and the media colluded during the pandemic, stifling voices that were critical of how politicians and health authorities handled the public health crisis (Lindström, 2021). Others might object that there is in fact nothing distinctive about how the media function and are organised in the Nordic countries: Globalisation, digitalisation, and de-regulation have made the media landscapes and their regulation in the Nordic countries increasingly similar to other Western democratic countries (Ohlsson, 2015). There are also voices who argue that the Nordic media model is nothing to strive for, and one should instead value more market liberal (or illiberal) forms of media policy. Elements of such media policy ambitions have had some success even in the Nordics, challenging and transforming the media landscapes in these countries (see, e.g., Holtz-Bacha, 2021; Jakobsson et al., 2021).

In any comparative book on media and politics in the Nordic countries, there are questions that need to be asked: Is there something distinct about

the media's function and organisation in the region? What are the components of the Nordic media model, and how do they relate to their political systems and political cultures? In what ways do the media in these countries produce desirable social and cultural outcomes, and how are such outcomes defined and measured? The contributors to this edited volume ask and answer questions like these throughout the book, albeit from different perspectives and sometimes with different and conflicting answers. The main purpose of this book is to discuss contemporary developments and the future of the media systems in the Nordic region. What are the main developments that will likely impact the future of Nordic media? What are the theoretical and methodological frameworks needed to study the ongoing changes and development? Furthermore, from a normative standpoint, what is needed to keep and develop those aspects of how the media and media policy function in the Nordic countries, which has proven to have positive social and cultural outcomes?

The last question is perhaps one that the Nordic countries should solve together. Regardless of whether one subscribes to the idea of Nordic exceptionalism, there is undoubtedly a long history of Nordic unity and collaboration across national borders. This is also true for Nordic media and communications research, evidenced by the Nordic conferences for media and communications research and Nordicom, a hub for Nordic media research since the 1970s. This collaborative spirit is reflected in this book, which gathers researchers from across the Nordics who together take on the question of contemporary developments and the future of media in the Nordic region.

In this introductory chapter, we provide a background for the following chapters of this edited volume. Starting in existing research, we discuss the claimed commonalities between the Nordic countries. Do they in fact have similar media systems, and is that indeed a useful concept (Flew & Waisbord, 2015)? Or in any case, are they governed in similar ways when it comes to the media, and has this governance produced similar results? In this section, we draw from comparative media systems research in order to provide an overview of the media landscapes in the Nordic region. Following this, we discuss the media welfare state (Syvertsen et al., 2014). In their influential study, Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) described the Nordic countries as media welfare states, indicating a relationship between the Nordic social welfare states and the Nordic media systems. We discuss what the Nordic media welfare state means and what it entails. This concept has by now generated a substantial body of literature, which we touch on briefly here. One question that we address is what “welfare” might mean in relation to media. Another question is whether media welfare *societies* might be a better concept than the media welfare *state*, since many of the things associated with the original concept are only tangentially related to the state. The last section of the introduction provides an overview of the contributions to the book.

The Nordic countries in comparative media research

There are many examples of comparative media research that groups the Nordic countries together – on their own or together with a few other countries. In this context, the concept of a media system is often used to denote how the media in a single country can be characterised as a system of “complex coexistence of media operating according to different principles” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 12) or “typical patterns of how journalism cultures, media policy, media markets, and media use are connected in a given society” (Brüggemann et al., 2014: 1038). A media system can thus be described as constituted by the totality of media outlets, media infrastructures, patterns of media use and media policy, and the interrelation between these components in a given country or region. In the vast literature on media systems, there are differences in how this concept is understood and used, including “thin” and “thick” uses and definitions. Thinner versions pinpoint factors such as media policy and media organisations, whereas thicker versions of the concept tend to include wider concepts such as patterns of media use, public trust of media and journalism, and the public’s opinions, understandings, and interpretations concerning the media landscape. There are also variations in the degree to which discussions of media systems include historical and cultural factors, such as religion, political history, or the development of literacy in specific regions, or whether they mainly focus on structural and contemporary elements.

Noting similarities in the constitution and development of media systems in certain countries, comparative media research claims media systems can be grouped together by different idealised models that describe their central and important characteristics. Following this line of argument, Hallin and Mancini claimed in their 2004 book *Comparing Media Systems* that the media systems of the Nordic countries can be described as belonging to the democratic corporatist model (together with, e.g., Germany and the Netherlands). Building on this, Brüggemann and colleagues’ (2014) analysis identified a Northern model consisting of the three Scandinavian countries – Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – together with Finland. In a similar vein, Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) – discussed more extensively in the next section – claimed that the five Nordic countries have media systems that share a number of distinguishing features, making them media welfare states.

Although most researchers share the basic premise that there are several similarities regarding the organisation and functioning of the media in the Nordic countries, it has been difficult to reach a consensus as to which similarities these are, how strong they are, and whether they add up to a single “uniform” media model (Lund, 2007: 31). Furthermore, different researchers concentrate on different systemic features when constructing their models. For example, Hallin and Mancini (2004) mainly focused on journalism and the news media. This limits the reach of their model in today’s fragmented

media landscapes, and many have pointed to the necessity of including new forms of digital communication outside the narrow realm of traditional news production in comparative analyses (e.g., Hardy, 2013).

As mentioned above, Brüggemann and colleagues (2014) empirically identified a fourth type of media system alongside the three ideal types discussed by Hallin and Mancini. This fourth type is what they label a Northern media system, which corresponds with a comparably healthy press market, strong public service media, and high journalistic professionalism. The Northern model, they argue, sets itself apart from the democratic corporatist model in terms of its more generous press subsidies and lower levels of ownership regulation.

The Nordic (media) welfare state

In 2014, Syvertsen and colleagues published the book *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Era*. The book extended the argument made by Hallin and Mancini (2004) while also criticising their analysis of the Nordics for not taking the countries' specific political histories and conditions into consideration. They argued that the history of the Nordic countries as social welfare states – which has been discussed extensively in other disciplines (Edling, 2019) – has shaped how the media systems in these countries developed, making them distinct from other media systems.

Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) identified four policy pillars that relate to the social welfare state and characterise media policy in the Nordic countries: 1) universal access to information and communication infrastructure, 2) a strong tradition of editorial freedom and freedom of the press, 3) links between media and cultural policy, and 4) a culture of cooperation and consensus-based approach to media policymaking. Even though the book has been well-received, the model has had its fair share of critics, who claim it underestimates the development of the Nordic media systems in a liberal and market-oriented direction (Picard, 2015) and comes across as a picture in the rear-view mirror (Ala-Fossi, 2020). Nevertheless, since the concept of the media welfare state has become a way to describe a distinct Nordic model of media policy, we have decided to borrow the concept for the title of this edited volume. This does not mean that all authors and contributions to this volume fully agree with the concept. Our position, as editors, is that the notion of the media welfare state is a useful concept to think with. Besides the empirical questions of what characterises the media systems in the Nordic countries, their developments, and their similarities and differences, the concept evokes important political and normative questions about the desirability of different media policies and their outcomes. It also connects media policy to the institutions of the social welfare state, which gives the concept a useful rhetorical force in media policy debates due to the value these institutions still have in political debates in the Nordics.

Social welfare programmes are not unique to the Nordic countries; however, the development of the social welfare state in the Nordic countries followed its own unique trajectory (Esping-Andersen, 1990). While this development took off in the nineteenth century, the majority of the reforms associated with the Nordic welfare state were introduced after World War II (Kildal & Kuhnle, 2005). The policy model reached its high point in the 1970s, after which the economic crises of the decade were instrumentalised by political and market actors to restructure the welfare state through deregulation and privatisation (Greve, 2018). It is worth stressing that the social democratic welfare state of the Nordic countries did not develop as the result of a unified ideological programme, and that the welfare state has always been a dynamic concept, changing and adapting in relation to the political and social context (Kuhlmann, 2018). Nevertheless, the welfare state in the Nordics must be understood as the result not only of adaptations to a changing reality but also of political struggles – that is, struggles for equality, community, and redistribution that permeated much of the post-war development in the Nordic countries and in which the strong social democratic parties and labour unions were key actors.

Behind the many faces of the Nordic welfare state, it is possible to identify certain political and normative ideas that have remained relatively stable (Kildal & Kuhnle, 2005). We (Jakobsson et al., 2022b) have argued that these normative principles (such as equality, de-commodification, community building, risk minimisation, and human dignity) are relevant for both contemporary and historical discussions on media policy. The four pillars of the Nordic media welfare state provided by Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) are conceptualised in a broad and encompassing way, but, unlike the normative ideals discussed above, are tightly connected to the existing institutions of the Nordic media systems, including public service media, press subsidies, and journalistic professionalism. In a situation where the concept of the media as such is becoming increasingly unstable – through, for example, processes of digitalisation – it is necessary to revisit the idea of welfare in relation to media and communication. What is needed is to seek new ways in which the political history and culture of the Nordic countries can be leveraged in research concerning the future of the Nordic media welfare state (Jakobsson et al., 2022b). This book is an attempt to move the scholarly conversation in that direction.

Conceptual issues

One critical response to the idea of a Nordic media welfare state concerns its continued relevance in the contemporary and future media landscape. Several authors (e.g., Ala-Fossi, 2020) have argued that many of the traits specific to the Nordic media system are transforming. One key argument here is that

media policy development has become increasingly transnational. This manifests in the ongoing digitalisation of media and communications and increased reliance on transnational digital infrastructures owned by private companies. The nature and extent of this change is a multi-layered question, and how it is estimated depends on how we define the media welfare state. For example, infrastructures for media distribution, as several chapters in this volume show, have changed substantially, and competition for audiences in many respects has strengthened, particularly with regard to streaming platforms. Furthermore, the increased dependency on foreign companies, particularly global Big Tech companies, has created new conditions for the relations between the state and the private media sector. While legacy media like the press still hold a strong standing, market concentration has increased, particularly due to a restructured advertising market. All of these developments can be understood as consequences not only of digitalisation but the increasingly transnational media landscape, which is a potential challenge to the Nordic media welfare state. These international trends play out differently in the different Nordic countries; for example, Sweden and Denmark have been more affected by infrastructure restructuring than Norway. On the other hand, there are quite a few continuities within the Nordic media system. Public service media has strong support among the population, high audience shares, and is generally well-funded in the Nordic countries. Public news consumption is still high and fairly equally distributed among the population. Nordic media users read the written press and use online social networks and the Internet to a higher degree than Europeans on average, and they are more willing to pay for online news. They watch television (on a physical set or online) to the same degree as other Europeans (Nordicom, 2023; Schröder et al., 2020). The Nordics remain at the top of global indexing of press freedom and democracy. To assess the extent of change and whether the media welfare state model is essentially an “image in the rear-view mirror”, as suggested by Ala-Fossi (2020), is dependent on what one considers the most important feature of the Nordic media model. It is furthermore at its core an empirical question, and the chapters in this book take us part of the way towards assessing the changes and continuities in a digital media welfare state.

Other international developments are potential challenges to the Nordic media model. Scholars have noted how media policy in Nordic countries is becoming more “liberal” and similar to media systems in the UK and the US, manifesting in media deregulation and a weakened press (Ala-Fossi, 2020; Jakobsson et al., 2021; Nord, 2008; Ohlsson, 2015). This might also be interpreted in the light of international developments that include a general trend of neoliberal policies during the last 30 years, putting increasing weight on competition policy and deregulation. It also connects to policy transfers in which harmonisation of policies takes place, for example, within and through the push from transnational organisations. Three of the five Nordic countries

are members of the European Union, through which an increasingly market-oriented view of public service has also become influential. This manifests through so-called public value tests (Donders & Moe, 2011), which are state assessments of “significant new services” developed by the public service companies, weighed against their potential “damaging effects” on the paid media market (Swedish Parliament, 2018). It also manifests in increasingly market-oriented governance within public service companies, through “new public management” (Coppens & Sayes, 2006). These developments are all international trends, but they play out in specific ways within the Nordic context, and potentially in different ways within the Nordic countries. Therefore, this volume’s empirical work is necessary.

Yet another international trend is the increasing politicisation of media policy, including right-wing mobilisation against journalism and public service media, which constitutes a challenge to the Nordic media model (Jakobsson et al., 2022a). Right-wing radical parties tend to name journalists and the media as opponents and enemies (Medin, 2019) and portray them as part of a “left-liberal establishment”, and thus “enemies of the people” (quotes from Linus Bylund and Jimmie Åkesson, leading politicians within the Swedish radical right-wing party, The Sweden Democrats). This has led right-wing radical movements to construct alternative media to fight what they perceive as an ideological dominance, as well as to discredit and attack established media (Heft et al., 2020). This is an international development, and the Nordics have not been unaffected by it. This mistrust of the legacy media also means that radical conservative parties try to change media policy through parliamentary measures. Radical conservative parties want to change fundamentally the media while at the same time preserving what they perceive as “traditional”, “eternal”, or “natural” values, such as the nation, culture, and hierarchies of society (cf. Enocksson, 2018).

Until very recently, reports from organisations such as Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders highlighted authoritarian regimes and dictatorships as the main threats to freedom of the press and expression. But more recently, reports have noted a negative development for press and freedom of expression even in countries that have traditionally been considered stable democracies (Holtz-Bacha, 2021). In Europe, the political successes of right-wing radical parties have brought concrete changes in several national media systems and political pressure for many others. This pressure and changes in laws and regulations have mainly been directed at public service organisations, but the commercial media have also been affected (Sehl et al., 2020). In Poland, Hungary, and Italy, the government usurped direct influence over public service media. In other countries, including the UK, Germany, Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland, right-wing radical voices have questioned the legitimacy of public service funding or even cut off funding. In this pursuit, the right-wing radicals have allied themselves with established

neoliberal forces and other forces in society that want to avoid public scrutiny and democratic control (Holtz-Bacha, 2021; Sehl et al., 2020). In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where right-wing radicals have achieved great success, domestic oligarchs have also bought up media houses to protect their own interests and discourage critical scrutiny (Surowiec & Štětka, 2020). While the Nordics have not been unaffected by international developments, it is too early to say what impact these political ideas will have on Nordic media systems. Within the realm of media politics, the strong consensus around many of the policies of the Nordic system (such as public service broadcasting and press subsidies) have broken down. However, as our own research from Sweden suggests, the support for the Nordic media model is still strong among the general population, and there are grounds to speak of a widespread “media welfare state of mind” among citizens (Lindell et al., 2022). The international trend of right-wing media critique and questioning of the media as an institution will most certainly play out differently in the Nordics than in many other countries in Europe, due to the form and shape of existing institutions, the structure of the media markets, as well as the specific histories and trajectories of the Nordic media landscapes.

Another critique of the idea of a Nordic media welfare state concerns the question of what is meant by the Nordics. It is worth noting that in Brüggemann and colleagues’ (2014) support for a specific Nordic media system, Iceland is not included. There are substantial differences between the media systems in the Nordic countries that might be obscured through over-emphasising the similarities within the region. For example, while Denmark, Norway, and Sweden have substantial press subsidies, Finland and Iceland do not. Iceland also stands out with a much lower rate of public funding for its public service broadcaster (64%, compared to 90%+ in the other Nordic countries) (Nordicom, 2023). Ravn-Højgaard and colleagues (2021) discussed the relation between the “West-Nordic” countries – the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland – and the other Nordic countries. They concluded that while there are many similarities in policymakers’ perceptions of media as cultural institutions, as well as the central role of public service media, the “micro-size” of the media systems within these countries leads to specific characteristics. For example, journalistic professionalism is harder to uphold in small settings, and they are more susceptible to clientelism (Ravn-Højgaard et al., 2021). Moreover, in a similar study, Guðmundsson (2021) showed that political parallelism is still strong in Iceland.

The issue of whether it is reasonable to speak of the Nordic media system as including all five Nordic countries will not be settled in this book; many of the chapters focus specifically on one of the five countries and are not comparative per se. Others more directly tackle the question of differences and similarities. The book as a whole, however, heuristically holds on to the concept of the Nordic media welfare state, implying that there are substantial

similarities between the societies in the Nordic region and in how their media systems are organised and operate. Iceland, while included in the definition of the Nordic media system and in the contributions in this book, is an outlier in this respect, and as the chapter by Guðmundsson and Jóhannsdóttir (Chapter 7) shows, support for the Nordic media welfare state is fragile in Iceland, and its prospects remain uncertain. Another interesting question is to what extent international developments, such as digital infrastructures and platforms, will push the Nordics in different directions and decrease or strengthen the similarities between the countries. The contributions in this volume give mixed answers to these questions.

Although the media welfare state is a concept used throughout this book, media welfare *society* could be a more precise term. For one thing, including “state” in the concept may be misleading. Naturally, state media is a problematic concept in liberal democracies, and is mainly used as a pejorative term by critics of public service broadcasting. The wide scope of the media welfare state makes the phrasing somewhat confusing. Regarding issues such as press subsidies and regulation of the media industry, there is of course a relation between the state and the media, but the concept also includes wider behavioural and attitudinal sentiments such as media use, public trust in the media, and welfarist states of mind (Lindell et al., 2022), which are not necessarily directly connected to the state. Nevertheless, the media welfare state is now a well-established concept, due to its several conceptual advantages.

Yet another issue in relation to the concept of the media welfare state concerns its implied political and normative dimensions. In discussions of Nordic exceptionalism, there is always the threat of chauvinism and flag-waving, and implicitly or explicitly overstating the positive dimensions of “Nordicness” or essentialising and mystifying the specificities of the Nordics. The concept can be used in a strictly descriptive sense, but authors have also suggested that the Nordic media model is desirable and that the media policy regimes of the Nordic countries have distinctively positive outcomes (Benson et al., 2017; Neff & Pickard, 2021). On this front, we believe there is need for caution. It is true that the Nordics generally perform well in international comparisons of press freedom, journalistic professionalism, and trust in the media. These might be understood as positive outcomes, and they might have something to do with the ways in which media are organised in the Nordic countries – but the relationship between media policy and such outcomes are by no means straightforward and simple. While Nordic countries rank high in most indexes of democracy, their media systems are not necessarily the reason for this – it is probably the other way around. And most importantly, there is a need to be cautious in smuggling normative claims into discussions and analyses of Nordic media welfare. The Nordic media system(s) may have good and productive features well worth defending, but in that case, such normative claims must be clearly defined. In what sense is the media welfare state a good thing? For whom? How? And when?

The contributions of this book

As we have seen, the notion of the media welfare state has sparked many debates. These have revolved around normative questions regarding which kind of media system is desirable, the extent to which a unified Nordic media system actually exists, and how it compares to other media systems. Importantly, a key contemporary debate regards the contemporary challenges and future direction of Nordic media policy. How much has changed in the wake of commercialisation, globalisation, datafication, and platformisation, and how much of the seemingly new are actually examples of continuity under the guise of innovation and change? This book is an attempt to tackle such questions. It gathers 14 chapters from authors in all the Nordic countries who in different ways address these questions.

Part I of the book is called “The media welfare state and media policy in the Nordics” and gathers seven chapters that in different ways assess the Nordic media model as it exists today and how it deals with contemporary challenges. Kim Schrøder, Mark Blach-Ørsten, and Mads Kæmgaard Eberholst (Chapter 1) deal with the challenge posed by audience fragmentation and polarisation in the digital media landscape providing an abundance of news sources. Their longitudinal analyses of generational differences between news media practices and attitudes, via survey data from the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*, suggest Nordic media audiences are less polarised, more likely to encounter quality news, and more willing to pay for news than their European counterparts. In Chapter 2, Randa Romanova and Mats Bergman take a different perspective and analyse different models of media accountability systems in the Nordic countries. Through qualitative analyses of journalistic self-regulation, they explore the significant differences in media accountability between the Nordic countries, thus challenging the notion of a coherent Nordic media model. Reeta Pöyhtäri (Chapter 3) analyses how the Nordic countries deal with the issue of online hate speech. Surveying policy responses to hate speech in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, Pöyhtäri finds that, although digital media platforms are identified as central in disseminating hate speech online by policymakers, concrete policy measures are scarce. Pöyhtäri also highlights that when this issue is discussed in policy circles, many of the discussions concern threats to politicians rather than hate speech directed towards minority groups. The chapter is thus one of several contributions to the book that identifies a lack of policy responses from the Nordic countries in relation to contemporary challenges in the digital media landscape. With Minna Horowitz and Hannu Nieminen’s Chapter 4, we turn to how the Nordic countries have responded to the existing “information disorder”. Focus is placed on how a set of communication rights is reflected in citizens’ media practices and levels of trust in the media. While the Nordic citizenries seem well-equipped to manoeuvre in the current information disorder, Horowitz and Nieminen argue that a rights-based approach to

communication is key to maintaining distinct digital media welfare states. At this stage, it is worth highlighting that, while most of the contributions in this book deal with key issues and debates tied to the future of the Nordic media model, most chapters do not tackle the question of public service media, which is a key institution in this media system (see, e.g., Puppis & Ali, 2023). Marko Ala-Fossi, Katja Lehtisaari, and Riku Neuvonen (Chapter 5) turn to precisely this institution as they discuss the future of public service broadcasting, namely whether public service organisations will decide, or be forced, to make the switch to online delivery instead of through terrestrial broadcasting. More specifically, they discuss the Finnish public service broadcaster Yle and its attempts to deal with this issue. Although the switch to online delivery has already been carried out in other European countries, it is not clear that the Finnish online delivery network is robust enough to manage this switch, posing serious questions for the future of public service in Finland and potentially the other Nordics when their time comes to make the switch. In Chapter 6, Lars Julius Halvorsen and Paul Bjerke turn to Norway and the question regarding the relation between the state, or politics, and two media fields: print news media and book publishing. Through the analyses of rich empirical material, the chapter shows that a key feature in the Nordic media model – the consensual relations and meso-level autonomy on the media market – remains relatively intact, indicating the ability of the Nordic media model to persist in the midst of changes not only in the media landscape but also in the political field. In Chapter 7, Birgir Guðmundsson and Valgerður Jóhannsdóttir turn to Iceland, an outlier in the Nordic media welfare state model. Analyses of legislative parliamentary debates on media subsidies lead Guðmundsson and Jóhannsdóttir to conclude that support for the Nordic media welfare state is fragile in Iceland, and its prospects there remain uncertain.

Part II of the book is called “Beyond the Nordic model”. This title is understood in two different ways: On the one hand, some of the chapters discuss how the digital media landscape transforms the Nordic media landscape in a way that makes it more and more removed from the Nordic model as it once existed and on the other, some of the chapters operate on a more conceptual and theoretical level, discussing ways in which the concept of the Nordic media welfare state should be expanded to include other aspects. These chapters also discuss the consequences of those expansions for the concept. Sofie Flensburg and Signe Sophus Lai (Chapter 8) analyse the future of the Nordic welfare state in light of an increasingly globalised and commercial communication system, with a focus on digital infrastructures and digital platforms in the Nordic countries. The analysis reveals that the control over digital infrastructures in the Nordics is increasingly in the hands of a few global companies. This means, according to the authors, that the efficacy of existing political frameworks is diminishing, and the pillars of

the media welfare state, such as universal access and editorial freedom, are becoming reliant on the benevolence of commercial global media companies. Helle Sjøvaag and Raul Ferrer-Conill similarly analyse digital infrastructures in Chapter 9, but they focus primarily on Norway. Their analysis highlights that the Internet infrastructure in Norway is largely unregulated and increasingly controlled by foreign and non-media companies. This, Sjøvaag and Ferrer-Conill conclude, has consequences for how Norwegian legislators can regulate these infrastructures and safeguard communication rights for citizens. Together, these two chapters show how the digital communication environment is increasingly controlled by stakeholders operating outside of the consensual relations between politics and industry that were a characteristic feature of the Nordic media welfare state. The next chapter, by Nina Kvalheim (Chapter 10), is also focused on Norway, but Kvalheim instead analyses ownership patterns in the Norwegian media market. The chapter is framed by a central question in the tradition of political economy research: Who are the owners behind Norwegian media companies? The novelty of the analysis comes from the author's analysis of not only the direct owners of media companies, but the owners *behind* the owners, including foundations and investment companies. Kvalheim also analyses the potential consequences of these ownership patterns, including decreased content diversity and changes in editorial principles due to foreign ownership.

The final four chapters in the book explore a possible expansion of the concept of the media welfare state, as such. This includes empirical re-orientations, such as incorporating the library sector into the understanding of media welfare (Chapter 14 by Terje Colbjørnsen, Håkon Larsen, Kim Tallerås, & Maciej Liguzinski) and including new forms of automated (mediated) surveillance and systems of tracking and data-processing within discussions of media welfare (Chapter 12 by Anne Kaun & Helena Löfgren). This naturally also opens for a renewed theoretical and conceptual discussion, for example, regarding the definition of “media” in terms of the media welfare state. Chapters 11–13 extend the discussion of the media welfare state through analysing materials not so often used in the field. Linus Andersson, Martin Danielsson, Malin Hallén, and Ebba Sundin (Chapter 13) turn to the genre system of Nordic television and ask if there is a specific genre or cultural form of the media welfare state. Anne Kaun and Helen Löfgren (Chapter 12) develop the idea of a *data* welfare state and compare it to the media welfare state in order to explore roads ahead for policy discussion in datafied media societies. Another conceptual development comes from Hallvard Moe, Gunn Enli, and Trine Syvertsen (Chapter 11), who revisit some important policy discussions relating to Norwegian media. They argue that previous understandings of media welfare have been somewhat blind to issues of environmental sustainability, an issue that contemporary realities have forced on the agenda. Our contemporary moment, in which issues of sustainability are

pressing and urgent, also allows us to see how these dimensions have been discussed (and silenced) in previous policy debates, for example, regarding television in the 1960s and 1970s, but the chapter also urges us to develop this aspect of welfare more clearly, as it must be a key aspect of a media welfare state for the future.

References

- Ala-Fossi, M. (2020). Finland: Media welfare state in the digital era? *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 11(2), 133–150. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp_00020_1
- Benson R., Powers M., & Neff, T. (2017). Public media autonomy and accountability: Best and worst policy practices in 12 leading democracies. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 1–22. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/4779>
- Brüggemann, M., Engesser, S., Büchel, F., Humprecht, E., & Castro, L. (2014). Hallin and Mancini revisited: Four empirical types of Western media systems. *Journal of Communication*, 64(6), 1037–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12127>
- Coppens, T., & Sayes, F. (2006). Enforcing performance: New Approaches to govern public service broadcasting. *Media, Culture & Society*, 28(2), 261–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443706061684>
- Donders, K., & Moe, H. (Eds.). (2011). *Exporting the public value test: The regulation of public broadcasters' new media services across Europe*. Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-10044>
- Edling, N. (Ed.). (2019). *The changing meanings of the welfare state: Histories of a key concept in the Nordic countries*. Berghahn. <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781789201246>
- Enocksson, M. (2018). *Radikalkonservatismen: en ideologis pånyttfödelse* [Radical conservatism: The rebirth of an ideology]. Tankesmedjan Tiden. <https://tankesmedjantiden.se/rapport/radikalkonservatismen-en-ideologis-panyttfodelse/>
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Polity.
- Flew T., & Waisbord, S. (2015). The ongoing significance of national media systems in the context of media globalization. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(4), 620–636. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714566903>
- Greve, B. (2018). Future of the welfare state? In B. Greve (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of the welfare state*, (pp. 525–533). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315207049>
- Guðmundsson, B. (2021). Political parallelism in Iceland: Perceived media-politics relations. *Nordicom Review*, 42(2), 53–69. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2021-0017>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hardy, J. (2013). Comparing media systems. In F. Esser, & T. Hannitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of comparative communication research* (pp. 207–228). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203149102>
- Heft, A., Mayerhöffer, E., Reinhardt, S., & Knüpfer, C. (2020). Beyond Breitbart: Comparing right-wing digital news infrastructures in six western democracies. *Policy & Internet*, 12(1), 20–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.219>
- Holtz-Bacha, C. (2021). The kiss of death: Public service media under right-wing populist attack. *European Journal of Communication*, 36(3), 221–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323121991334>
- Jakobsson, P., Lindell, J., & Stiernstedt, F. (2021). A neoliberal media welfare state? The Swedish media system in transformation. *Javnost – The Public*, 28(4), 375–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2021.1969506>
- Jakobsson, P., Lindell, J., & Stiernstedt, F. (2022a). Media policy attitudes and political attitudes: The politicization of media policy and the support for the ‘media welfare state’. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 29(4), 431–448. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2022.2086234>

- Jakobsson, P., Lindell, J., & Stiernstedt, F. (2022b). Normative foundations of media welfare: Perspectives from the Nordic countries. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(2), 305–322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221111914>
- Kildal, N., & Kuhnle, S. (2005). The Nordic welfare model and the idea of universalism. In N. Kildal, & S. Kuhnle (Eds.), *Normative foundations of the welfare state: The Nordic experience* (pp. 13–34). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203695241>
- Kuhlmann, J. (2018). What is a welfare state? In B. Greve (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of the welfare state* (pp. 13–22). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315207049>
- Lindell, J., Jakobsson, P., & Stiernstedt, F. (2022). The media welfare state: A citizen perspective. *European Journal of Communication*, 37(3), 330–349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231211046792>
- Lindström, M. (2021). The new totalitarians: The Swedish COVID-19 strategy and the implications of consensus culture and media policy for public health. *SSM-Population Health*, 14, 100788. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100788>
- Lund, A. B. (2007). Media markets in Scandinavia: Political economy aspects of convergence and divergence. *Nordicom Review*, 28(Jubilee Issue), 121–134. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-12238>
- Martela, F., Greve, B., Rothstein, B., & Saari, J. (2020). The Nordic exceptionalism: What explains why the Nordic countries are constantly among the happiest in the world. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard, J. Sachs, & J.-E. De Neve (Eds.), *World happiness report 2020* (pp. 129–146). Sustainable Development Solutions Network. <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2020/the-nordic-exceptionalism-what-explains-why-the-nordic-countries-are-constantly-among-the-happiest-in-the-world/>
- Medin, J. (2019). *Högerradikalerna vid makten i Europa: angrepp mot demokratin och på arbetares rättigheter i Ungern, Polen, Österrike, Italien och Danmark* [European right-wing radicals in power: An attack against democracy and workers' rights in Hungary, Poland, Austria, Italy, and Denmark]. Tankesmedjan Tiden.
- Neff, T., & Pickard, V. (2021). Funding democracy: Public media and democratic health in 33 countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*. OnlineFirst. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211060255>
- Neff, T., & Pickard, V. (2023). Building better local media systems: A comparative policy discourse analysis of initiatives to renew journalism around the world. *Journalism Studies*, 24(15), 1877–1897. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2253928>
- Nord, L. (2008). *Medier utan politik: En studie av de svenska riksdagspartiernas syn på press, radio och TV* [Media without politics: A study of the views of the Swedish parliamentary parties on press, radio and TV]. Santérus Förlag.
- Nord, L., Skogerbø, E., & Kristensen, N. N. (2021). Nordic political communication between change and continuity. In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. N. Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries* (pp. 385–396). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299-19>
- Nordicom. (2023). <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/statistics-facts/media-statistics>
- Ohlsson, J. (2015). *The Nordic media market 2015*. Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-9834>
- Picard, R. (2015). Book review: The media welfare state. *The Journal of Media Innovations*, 2(1), 141–142. <https://doi.org/10.5617/jmi.v2i1.1283>
- Puppis, M., & Ali, C. (Eds.). (2023). *Public service media's contribution to society: RIPE@2021*. Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855756>
- Ravn-Højgaard, S., Jóhannsdóttir, V., Karlsson, R., Olavson, R., & í Skorini, H. (2021). Particularities of media systems in the West Nordic countries. *Nordicom Review*, 42(2), 102–123. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2021-0020>
- Schröder, K. C., Blach-Ørsten, M., & Eberholst, M. K. (2020). Is there a Nordic news media system? A descriptive comparative analysis of Nordic news audiences. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, 2(1), 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2020-0003>
- Sehl, A., Fletcher, R., & Picard, R. G. (2020). Crowding out: Is there evidence that public service media harm markets? A cross-national comparative analysis of commercial television and online news providers. *European Journal of Communication*, 35(4), 389–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323120903688>

- Surowiec, P., & Štětka, V. (2020). Introduction: Media and illiberal democracy in central and eastern Europe. *East European Politics*, 36(1), 1–8.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2019.1692822>
- Swedish Parliament. (2018). *SOU 2018:50. Ett oberoende public service för alla – nya möjligheter och ökat ansvar* [SOU 2018:50. *Independent public service for everyone – new possibilities and increased responsibility*]. Swedish Government Official Reports.
<https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/39873FAF-9942-4E31-ACC1-DECBE136C7F7>
- Syvvertsen, T., Mjøs, O., Moe, H., & Enli, G. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>