

The Northern Way: Transmission and Operationalization of a Nordic Model in Canada

Bakgrund/Frågeställning

On both sides of the Atlantic, one encounters descriptions of the Nordic countries and Canada as sharing progressive values such as equality, social justice, and multiculturalism. To illustrate and explain these commonalities, the identifier “North” has been regularly employed, implying a largely stable geographic connection wherein the Nordic countries and Canada followed similar historical paths, making them buttresses against more aggressive and even backwards ideas from the “South.” Less recognized is how transatlantic contacts have formed through or in spite of the common sense of northernness, as well as how international comparisons between Norden and Canada have affected domestic and international politics alike. Consequently, this paper explores these notions of commonality as themselves historically and politically constructed, in effect providing a transatlantic mirror that both Nordic and Canadian actors have drawn upon to motivate and justify political agendas and social movements. Given the international recognition of a Nordic model in particular, studying representations of the Nordic countries within a country like Canada, itself known for a northern progressive exceptionality, can reveal how a foreign social model operates within another model country. This study of Canada consequently opens a new front in our knowledge Nordic “imaginaries:” first, by unsettling the dynamic of imbalanced power by studying the reputation of Nordic countries in a medium-sized western state, and, second, by allowing comparisons of Anglo and Francophone spaces within the context of a single national context, thus providing an inroad to study language/culture spheres as a variable in the global circulation of ideas. By collecting and tracking Canadian commentary on the Nordic region, we find that notions of northern mutuality and duality are not recent inventions; to the contrary, Nordic models have been discussed and utilized as political tools in Canada for over sixty years. Within that time, the Nordic countries’ international reputation as humanitarian internationalists and administrators of a socially conscious welfare state were employed to both reify and challenge Canada’s own model status, encouraging a revision of previous findings about the supposed unobtainability of the Nordic image as one of its overarching characteristics. Ultimately, the Nordic presence in Canada, and particularly within the sovereignty discourses of Quebec, raises broader questions about the possibility of the small Nordic countries serving as models for “new” small states in the Global North.

Metod och Resultat

Konklusion