

Mail fra Michael Booth til Detektor

Sorry I can not be in the studio to chat with you. I am on a business trip on another continent.

After about 15 years of writing positive articles and guide books about Denmark in the international press, I felt it was time to shake Guardian readers out of their Scandinavian trance, and explain that the Nordic countries are not the utopias they are often portrayed as.

Unlike my book, which contains a far more balanced description of the Nordic societies and was well received when it was published in Danish back in October (available in all good bookshops!), the article was clearly intended to be humourous, provocative and opinionated. Many of the less perceptive commenters on the Guardian website mistook this for a UK vs DK article. It was no such thing. I much prefer living in Denmark and I think there is a great deal that Britain could learn from the Danes.

However, the facts were supported by links to sources which most independent observers would accept as authoritative, such as the UN, OECD, PISA, Worldwide Fund for Nature, etc. The article was rigorously fact-checked by the Guardian.

Denmark does indeed rank below the UK if you average out the admittedly controversial (to the countries who perform badly in them) PISA results. The WWF did indeed rank Denmark 4th in terms of its per capita eco-footprint - and it remains in that position on the report to this day. Denmark's poor productivity growth has indeed been a major cause for concern in recent years. The Danes do have the largest gross private debt in the world. DSB has been through massive economic problems which, were it a private company, would have resulted in bankruptcy. Danish economic inequality has indeed increased fairly consistently for the last two decades and the proportion of people over the poverty line has doubled (I made no comparisons with other countries). In fact, increasing economic inequality is probably Denmark's single greatest challenge.

Now, whether Denmark is 4th or 2nd in its consumption of antidepressants, or whether it is 4th or 8th in terms of its pollution, is a bit like an alcoholic arguing that he only drinks 200 beers a week rather than 300. For a country claiming to be the 'happiest' in the world, the former is an interesting paradox; for a country which brands itself internationally as one of the greenest - if not the greenest - countries on earth, even an 8th place ranking on a list of the worst polluters in the world is quite shocking.

Statistics and reports are always open to some degree of interpretation, and Detektor clearly has its own agenda for interpreting these ones differently from me, but there was actually nothing radical in the conclusions I drew.