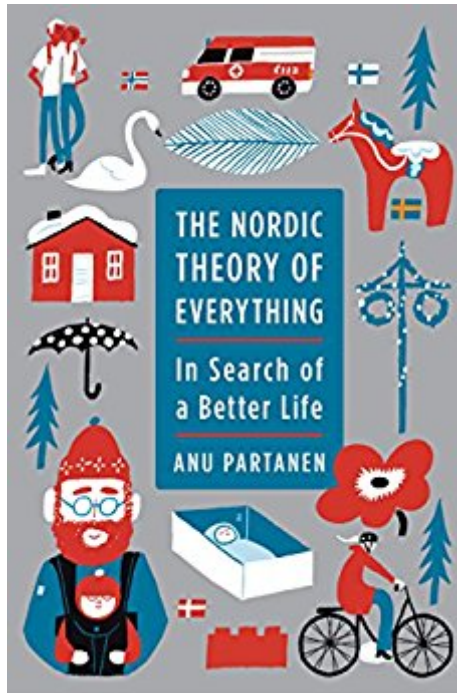


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The Nordic Theory Of Everything: In Search Of A Better Life



Synopsis

A Finnish journalist, now a naturalized American citizen, asks Americans to draw on elements of the Nordic way of life to nurture a fairer, happier, more secure, and less stressful society for themselves and their children. Moving to America in 2008, Finnish journalist Anu Partanen quickly went from confident, successful professional to wary, self-doubting mess. She found that navigating the basics of everyday life—from buying a cell phone and filing taxes to education and childcare—was much more complicated and stressful than anything she encountered in her homeland. At first, she attributed her crippling anxiety to the difficulty of adapting to a freewheeling new culture. But as she got to know Americans better, she discovered they shared her deep apprehension. To understand why life is so different in the U.S. and Finland, Partanen began to look closely at both. In *The Nordic Theory of Everything*, Partanen compares and contrasts life in the United States with life in the Nordic region, focusing on four key relationships—parents and children, men and women, employees and employers, and government and citizens. She debunks criticism that Nordic countries are socialist nanny states, revealing instead that it is we Americans who are far more enmeshed in unhealthy dependencies than we realize. As Partanen explains step by step, the Nordic approach allows citizens to enjoy more individual freedom and independence than we do. Partanen wants to open Americans' eyes to how much better things can be—to show her beloved new country what it can learn from her homeland to reinvigorate and fulfill the promise of the American dream—to provide the opportunity to live a healthy, safe, economically secure, upwardly mobile life for everyone. Offering insights, advice, and solutions, *The Nordic Theory of Everything* makes a convincing argument that we can rebuild our society, rekindle our optimism, and restore true freedom to our relationships and lives.

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Customer Reviews

THE NORDIC THEORY OF EVERYTHING: In Search of a Better Life by Anu Partanen. Reviewed by C J Singh (Berkeley, California). A "Must-Read" Book. Noticing the extraordinary praise by Robert Reich, Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at UC Berkeley, I purchased a copy last week. Yesterday, at the Books Inc Store, Berkeley, I attended the author's lively presentation, followed by audience questions, each answered with precise knowledge, concision, and grace. In my close reading, Anu Partanen's "THE NORDIC THEORY OF EVERYTHING: In Search of a Better Life," written in highly engaging style, is an excellent example of lucid critical analysis, documented with more than 400 research citations. The widely held stereotype in the US of Nordic countries is "nanny states" that discourage individuality. In fact, Nordic countries foster individuality by minimizing dependencies on family members and employers. Just how is convincingly detailed in the book. The subtitle "In Search of a Better Life" accurately describes the author's view-point and tone. An immigrant to the US who arrived from Finland eight years ago, now in love with the country of her adoption, she is also proud of her heritage. Rightly so, the Nordic countries have been consistently top-ranked as the happiest. The US is not even in the top ten. Partanen offers suggestions based on the "The Nordic Theory of Love" (Chapter 2); for better "Family Values for Real" (Chapter 3); for children "Attaining Educational Success" (Chapter 4); for better health care "How Universal Health Care Could Set You Free" (Chapter 5).

As an American immigrant and naturalized citizen of Finnish origin, Partanen is well-positioned to compare the strengths and weaknesses of American and Nordic societies. While she admires the aspirational rhetoric of American individualism and opportunity, and acknowledges the landmark achievements of American democracy in the 18th and 19th centuries, Partanen is perplexed by the failure of American society to modernize its approach to government and social opportunity. People

who are already familiar with the "Nordic system" will not be surprised by Partanen's references to the superior primary and secondary school systems, affordable and high-quality universal healthcare, or the vitality of the Nordic economic systems. However, because Partanen and her social circle have experienced life on both sides of the Nordic/American divide, she can provide insight into how these systems affect the way ordinary people live, love, and work. America does not fare well in this comparison; a recurring theme in Partanen's narratives is the additional stress and anxiety associated with trying to make a secure life in America. Nordic residents don't have to worry about massive unpaid medical bills and a byzantine insurance bureaucracy, or reams of research about local schools, or the difficulty of finding safe and affordable child care. Instead, they can spend more of their time and mental bandwidth on their families and their careers. The result is families that are built on affection, rather than dependency, and a greater freedom for individuals to pursue their personal goals.

This extraordinarily interesting book just published was brought to my attention by a Finnish friend who has lived and worked in the United States for many years, becoming a U.S. citizen in the process. As a retired American Foreign Service Officer for 35 years who in the 1970s and 1980s served twice in the U.S. Embassy in Finland and dealt with Nordic issues in the Department of State in Washington, I had come to admire greatly the Nordic social/political/economic model that to a greater or lesser degree has been followed for several decades by all five of the Nordic countries: Sweden, Finland, Norway Denmark and Iceland. This model has been studied and characterized by social scientists, economists, historians and other academics from many different perspectives and points of view. However, I think the author of this book has performed a unique and extraordinary service by being able to convey the essence and "feel" of what is going on in Nordic societies that those of us who were fortunate to have lived there for some years came to recognize and admire but which is so hard to articulate to an often self-satisfied and self-absorbed American public skeptical of and ill-informed about how foreign countries govern themselves. Perhaps her most important contribution has been to dare to question why most Americans consider that social investment in education, health care and measures to assure decent income opportunities, adequate vacation and leave time and the general "well-being" for all of its citizens should be condemned as "socialism" and as a threat to individual freedom, self-determination and as a disincentive to individual initiative.

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