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Following the Nordic Model?

Envisioning an Independent Scotland

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1. Introduction

In January, 2012, a consultation paper was published by the Scottish Government called *Your Scotland, Your Referendum*, outlining the different mechanics of the upcoming Independence referendum which has been proposed to take place in 2014. A questionnaire¹ was also included in the consultation paper, with the purpose of hearing the Scottish people's views on Scotland's constitutional future, together with a possible ballot question; "Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?" (The Scottish Government 2012). There has been much controversy following the announcement of this date, particularly after *The Scottish Sun's* quite astonishing headline "Day of Destiny 18 October" which was published on 26 February (cf. Nicoll 2012). It was later suggested that this article had derived from a conversation between First Minister Alex Salmond and *The Sun* owner and media mogul Rupert Murdoch. The latter's support for the SNP and their cause has been publicly displayed on multiple occasions, as well as Murdoch's favouring of independence (cf. BBC News 2012a). However, the consultation process is still ongoing and the Scottish Parliament is not yet settled on this issue, hence the mounting debates surrounding this particular date. Secretary of State for Scotland Michael Moore commented on the Scottish Government's acknowledgment of the possibility of this being the date for the referendum, saying that such a declaration "shows what the rest of Scotland already knows – that [the SNP] are simply stalling for time without explaining why," and added that "many people in Scotland will also be disappointed to see the Scottish Government's proposed date being revealed to a newspaper before the public" (BBC News 2012b). Another highly controversial matter concerns the proposed phrasing of the very question itself, and the Electoral Commission's response to the Scottish Independence referendum consultation has been said to "raise serious concerns" (Ferguson 2012), alerting the SNP to the fact that their question would not be rigorous enough, and that it could appear ambiguous, suggestive and unintelligible (Electoral Commission Report 2012: 27).

Yet it appears as if though it is neither, to such a great extent, the process, the date nor the ballot question which leave the Scottish people indecisive and uncertain

¹ See appendix 1.

concerning possible Scottish Independence. Their uncertainty is rather due to the inadequate definition that has been presented by the SNP up until now, and the disillusionments associated with the envisioning of an independent Scottish state. Naturally, there are a number of papers published by the Scottish Government which outline different possibilities and scenarios, such as the white paper *Your Scotland, Your Voice* published in 2009. This “national conversation”² attempts to summarise how defence and foreign affairs could be structured and how the national debt would be divided between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, to mention a few aspects. Similar questions have also arisen not only from the public but from the oppositional parties in the Scottish Parliament, such as from where Scotland would gain its primary incomes if the UK Government subsidies would be withdrawn after secession, paying particular interest to the division of the revenues from North Sea oil and gas production. Presently, the debate seems to engage questions touching more on the very process surrounding the Independence referendum, rather than substance, which could be considered as quite frustrating to some extent. Undeniably, the most important question, which certainly would settle the mind of most Scots, is simply whether or not an independent Scotland would indeed become a better, fairer and greener country.

There appears to be a paradox in Scotland at present. On the one hand, the SNP Government is assuring the Scottish people that an independent Scotland would become a realm of radical and progressive politics. Alex Salmond announced during his Hugo Young lecture in London on 24 January, 2012, that Scotland would move forward into a future where social justice and equality would be highly prioritised on the political agenda, and the economy would be green and fair, not only to the Scottish people, but also to the Scottish environment through the development of the renewable energy scheme and “Zero Waste Plan” (Scottish Government 2010). On the other hand, during the same lecture the First Minister simultaneously promised the Scottish voters that little would actually change if Scotland were to secede from the United Kingdom; for example, there would still be strong ties to Britain, maintained through a “social union” with the Queen as head of state and the pound sterling as currency, and cross-border institutions would still retain their status,

² Author's citation

among other things (cf. Salmond 2012). This is a fascinating argument since these are concessions which would make an independent Scotland still appear quite dependent of Britain, so it would seem that the SNP do not have a coherent answer to how they actually envision independence in Scotland, beyond the obvious constitutional changes that independence generates.

This study will explore the paradox outlined above and attempt to unravel the vast topic that is Scottish Independence. Through a comparative analysis and a critical contemplation of contemporary critics' and observers' comments in relation to this theme, the thesis further aims to investigate the SNP's view of what kind of country Scotland is today and what it could become in the future, should it separate from the United Kingdom. The initial argument of this thesis is prompted by a notion which suggests that there could be a sense of divergence in Scotland, distinguishing Scottish society from the rest of the United Kingdom, particularly in terms of social policy-making both before and after devolution was introduced. With an origin deeply-rooted in history, the notion of a distinctively different and unique Scottish society has been described by Gerry Hassan in his 2011 article "Scottish Politics and the Politics of Change after Social Democracy:"

Scotland likes to see itself as a radical nation. An egalitarian country. A country of socialism and more latterly social democratic and progressive values. A nation which never voted for the Tories in large numbers in recent decades, didn't like Mrs. Thatcher and didn't buy into Thatcherism. A political community which has stood for timeless Scottish values of caring for the vulnerable, compassion and not buying into the certainties of the last few decades which have obsessed Westminster and Washington.

The essential phrase in this statement is how "Scotland *likes* to see itself," since the actual reality of Scottish society and the general mentality of the Scottish people are yet to be established. Through a comparison of different key stakeholders' personal accounts, such as Members of the Scottish Parliament and civil servants, as well as an analysis of the extensive studies already made on this topic, this theory will be carefully explored and evaluated throughout the progression of this thesis. The initial chapter will thus question the idea of there being a certain sense of "distinctiveness" in Scotland and conclude whether Scottish policy-making is, in fact, significantly different from the Westminster agenda. Furthermore, the first chapter will analyse

the notion of Scotland becoming a “beacon of progressive opinion” (Salmond 2012), and consider whether this expression has any bearing in contemporary Scottish society. Finally, the outlook of an independent Scotland will be contemplated, and how Scottish society may or may not improve by leaving the Union. Since the topic of Independence is a highly controversial and politicised issue, this thesis will strive to keep as neutral a standpoint as possible at all times and attempt to scrutinise all views concerning said issue.

The SNP’s motivations to driving the independence question forward have thus been presented as purely benevolent, yet it could equally be argued that one of the Party’s main driving forces is inspired by aspirations of recreating Scotland into more than merely a fair and socially just country with equal opportunities for all, but also a nation “open for business” which can compete on the global market and be more appealing to investors – a “Scotland plc” (Hassan 2012b). Some critics, such as Michael Keating, claim that the SNP do indeed intend to establish a new social order which is in the Scottish people’s best interest, as struggles for independence generally do not arise for “purely opportunistic reasons or to secure short-term economic advantages, since mobilizing for secession is a difficult and costly business” (2009: 80).

Following Alex Salmond’s statement of making Scotland a “beacon of progressive opinion,” there is also the possibility of the First Minister wanting to create an alternative Scottish *utopia*,³ which in turn suggests that the SNP’s ambitions extend beyond being beneficial to the Scottish people alone, but also representing an example for other jurisdictions to imitate, much as it has been claimed that Sweden constituted a standard for the other Nordic countries during the interwar period (cf. Mouritzen 1999: 9). Not only do leading Scottish politicians such as Angus Robertson, an SNP MP for Moray, wish to drive Scotland forward by following Scandinavian standards, it could equally be argued that Scotland could in fact consecutively become a model of its own. Accordingly, it has been argued that, from the late 1990s onwards, Scottish nationalists have been using the Nordic model in

³ Here referring to the definition of a utopia being an ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects. See <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/utopia>.

their pursuit of envisioning an independent Scotland, and in so doing, they are trying to make the idea of secession from the United Kingdom more palatable and comprehensible to the Scottish people. Therefore, the second chapter of this study will comprise of a succinct analysis of this model and its well-known “cradle to grave”⁴ system, along with a conclusion whether this is, in fact, a suitable model for Scotland to follow or, rather, if it has become an outdated and non-exportable policy-archetype.

As a concluding thought, the final chapter will explore the scenario of an independent Scotland indeed following the Nordic model, weighing the positive and the negative aspects respectively, and what the result of this *mélange* might be. Conversely, some issues that this paper will refrain from discussing, however, are whether Scottish independence is viable at all, or if the Scottish people should vote in favour of independence or rather opt for extended fiscal autonomy in form of devolution *max*. Neither will the scope of Scottish national identity or the complexity of Scottish history be analysed, since for apparent reasons, these are all highly complex and vast notions, and therefore demand much contemplation and research. Hence, the focus of this essay will mainly be on Scottish and Scandinavian social policy and social justice, and how these two are interlinked in contemporary society, in the light of the impending Scottish Independence referendum.

⁴ The welfare system in the Scandinavian countries has been described as nurturing the individual throughout their whole life, from cradle to grave. See *Svenskt Näringsliv* website, “The Swedish Model: Adjusting to a Changing World.” www.svensktnaringsliv.se/english/about-sweden_46257

2. Scotland – A Distinctively Fairer Nation?

In the wake of the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, there was a strong sense of hope and expectation, especially stemming from New Labour under Tony Blair, who finally saw their constitutional experiment devolution come to life. The ambiance was vibrant with the proclamation of a new consensus in Scottish politics, and a promise of a distinct disconnection to the confrontational politics in the chamber of Westminster (cf. Pittock 2008: 155). The idea of a new Parliament, entirely Scottish and able to cater to the Scottish people's specific needs, did indeed suggest that there would be a different way of dealing with Scotland's business. To a large extent this has been claimed to be true, particularly through the indication that, with the introduction of devolution, the dealings of Scottish politics have been different from Westminster, more informal and inclusive. The reason for this is arguably that Members of the Scottish Parliament are in touch with the realities of Scottish society (cf. Carmichael 2012), and therefore said to enable a diverging attitude towards policy-making north of the border, especially in relation to social policy and social justice.

The ultimate goal of devolution was said to be to quench surging nationalist advancements, however, the reality of the Scottish Parliament turned out to be quite different from what New Labour had envisioned. Scottish Independence had never been on the political agenda in the first place, and the Scottish Nationalist Party had only been included in the campaign if they vowed to exclude this particular question of secession in their own prospectus. The very idea of devolution had been to keep the waves of separatist movements at bay and impede the progress towards independence (cf. Pittock 2008: 155). Nevertheless, the years to follow saw Scottish politics move towards a more nationalistic trend, and the support for the SNP rose surprisingly fast, and the Party's ambition with it. Not unexpectedly so, since Independence has been claimed to be more attainable now than ever before in the party's seventy-five-year history (cf. Gallagher 2009: 147). Yet, Scotland did not only see different party politics arising after 1999, but it was equally suggested that the whole mechanism of Scottish policy-making and legislation diverged steadily from the British version.

This deviating move in policy-making could arguably be detected immediately after devolution. In 2002, Hassan and Warhurst wrote in their book, *Tomorrow's Scotland*, that "Scotland is slowly becoming a different place from the rest of the UK: a society and body politic with a different set of priorities, debates and policies" (5). Post-devolution, there was a promise of a more "Scottish" way of making policy, which would cohere to "Scottish needs" and produce a "more confident, diverse and pluralist society" in Scotland (Scott and Mooney 2005: 2). This was indeed believed to be true and possible at this time, since the Scots were thought to be more "collaborative by nature," as Robert McIndoe reported for *The Guardian* in 2003, saying that the Scottish people would "perform better in a structure that suits them." Further to these comments regarding there being a distinct difference of quality of society between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, this study will now take a closer look at different aspects of this argument and resolve to what extent it could be considered as reality.

The contested idea of Scottish distinctiveness is a compelling notion, yet it is somewhat of an undiscovered realm. When the riots broke out in southern England in August, 2011, First Minister Salmond made a comment on BBC Radio Scotland, strongly disagreeing with the media's description of the urban unrest as "UK riots" (Carrell 2011). Furthermore, he continued by stating that Scotland is "a different society" and that such antisocial behaviour would be unlikely north of the border (cf. *ibid*). It is somewhat unclear what Alex Salmond is exactly pointing at in this instance, and in what sense the SNP consider Scotland to be so very unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, especially in terms of disorderly and violent behaviour. The First Minister's comments met extensive criticism from the Scottish opposition, and the former Leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Iain Gray, said that Salmond's reaction was "small-minded and embarrassing" (*ibid*). The Scottish Liberal Democrats' Leader Willie Rennie agreed with Gray's comment, adding that "Scotland is not free from social tensions and community disorder, and instead of gloating about riots in another part of the UK, the First Minister's effort would be better spent addressing those deep-rooted issues here" (*ibid*). It could be considered rather careless of a leading politician to make such a statement, since it appears as if the very roots to the problems which caused the riots are being completely

overlooked. In fact, it has been stated that there were instigators even in Scotland who did call for action, on a number of social networks, yet who did not follow through. The persons involved were accordingly incarcerated for their actions, and even if riots did not immediately break out in Scotland, the propensity of violent behaviour is still very much present throughout the nation (cf. Baillie 2012). Notwithstanding, a statement such as Salmond's could be argued to chime with the very philosophy of the SNP, namely attempting to drive a wedge between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom and systematically finding deviating features among these two entities, even where there are none to be found. Therefore, a certain assertion could be made that the First Minister was, in fact, tactically acting according to his administration's agenda by claiming that Scotland's society is different from south of the border.

Nonetheless, it has still been contended that Scotland and the Scottish people have been perceived as more apt for change and perhaps even more intent on working towards a fairer society, even before devolution was ever introduced, as is stated in the article published in 2004 "A Land of Milk and Honey"? Social Policy in Scotland after Devolution" by Gerry Mooney and Lynne Poole. They take a closer look at this old perception, and explore Scottish post-devolution social policy, whilst at the same time also questioning the assumption of Scotland being famously distinctive from the rest of the United Kingdom by investigating the institutional differences and the notion "that 'the Scots' are more committed to social democracy" than, for instance, the English (459). This assumption of "Scottish distinctiveness" has sprung from various interconnected statements, including the idea that social welfare is organised and delivered differently in Scotland on an institutional level (cf. *ibid*). The distinctive nature of Scottish social policy-making was particularly notable in terms of the resistance to Thatcherite politics as well as "Anglocentric" welfare policy, and this notion in turn implies that the political tradition in Scotland could be deemed distinctive in its being more collectivist than the rest of the United Kingdom (cf. Mooney and Poole 2004: 461).

The conclusions made by Mooney and Poole show that some conceptions of Scottish distinctiveness, both before and after the introduction of devolution, could however be considered rather inadequate and limited. The question whether there is such a

thing as a separate *Scottish* welfare state, different from the British post-war model, could thus in turn be answered with a simple negative answer. Mooney and Poole explain this as “disillusionment with the Scottish Executive, with the Parliament and, indeed, with Devolution itself” (2004: 477). Scotland is still a society characterised by a huge gulf between the very rich and the very poor, and this image contradicts the notion of Scotland being at all fairer than the rest of the United Kingdom. Furthermore, it is also believed that not as much change has been seen in Scotland after the introduction of devolution as had been hoped for and perhaps expected, even though the possibility to implement radical and distinctive policies increased dramatically after 1999 with many policy areas being completely devolved to the Scottish Government (Law and Mooney 2012: 169).

In terms of diverging Scottish party politics, there have been a number of reasons for the past decade’s surge of nationalism in Scotland, one argument for which is pure economic disadvantage, in the sense it has been suggested that the Scottish people feel that they are worse off and not gaining as much from the Union as are the English (cf. Keating 2009: 5). This argument could be considered as rather inadequate however, since the reality of UK subsidies to the Scottish Government is regulation by the Barnett Formula which determines the budget and makes equivalent adjustments between all nations of the United Kingdom (cf. Twigger 1998: 5). This in turn arguably could be seen as a system rather leaving the English with a smaller share of their appointed budget.

In spite of the mechanisms of this formula, Alex Salmond claimed in 2007, immediately following the elections, that “Scotland’s economy had suffered from decades of mediocrity” (qtd. in Keating 2009: 103), and thus implying that Scotland had not, in fact, flourished economically in the post-devolution era. The ruling SNP adapted an economic model in 2007 which could be compared to New Labour’s “third-way” approach, yet with a more tartan perspective which was intended to fuse economic growth with social inclusion and therefore increasingly promote social justice (cf. Mooney and Scott, 2011: 11). Additionally, the increased support for nationalism in Scotland in general, and within the SNP in particular, could be explained by the party’s compelling rhetoric which has been consistently blended with ideas of a more egalitarian society driven forward by progressive policies,

fairness and social justice (cf. Mooney and Scott 2011:12). Further to this it has also been suggested that, on a more general level, MSPs in Scotland are increasingly focused on a particularly inclusive agenda with the priority of improving life and living conditions for the Scottish *people*, rather than prioritising specific departments' positions and needs within the United Kingdom. This can be explained by the various professional experiences of a number of MSPs who have a background of working as teachers, police officers and civil servants, often acting in deprived areas with high demands of reform and improvement. Compared to some Westminster MPs, these politicians thus arguably have an informed view of the people's actual needs, and could be described as more in-touch with society and more understanding of social injustices than, for example, MPs with a legal background, living in the more affluent areas of south-east England (cf. Carmichael 2012).

Another difference between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom is the steady advancement of the equality movement towards legalising same-sex marriages north of the border. At the moment, all the countries across the United Kingdom prohibit same-sex marriage, as well as civil partnership between opposite-sex couples, which is legal for same-sex couples (cf. Travis 2011). However, in September, 2011, a consultation on this issue was launched by Scottish ministers, with the intention of introducing same-sex marriage within a foreseeable future (cf. BBC News Online 2011). Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, and Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced that a Scottish Social Attitudes survey showed 60% among the people of Scotland supporting same-sex marriage, and merely 19% who were against, upon which she commented that the Scottish Government "tends towards the view that same-sex marriage should be introduced" (ibid). Nevertheless, there are many religious groups in Scotland, especially within the Catholic Church, who are strongly against this legislation. Cardinal Keith O'Brien, leader of the Scottish Catholic Church stated in the beginning of March, 2012, that the government's plans were "madness" and a "grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right" (The Guardian 2012). Regardless of the Cardinal's views, the Scottish people continue to show strong support for the passing of this legislation, which could prove to some extent the existence of a more

egalitarian view among the Scots. The UK Government has yet to launch their consultation for same-sex marriage, but the equalities minister Lynne Featherstone MP announced that the endeavour of making civil marriage available to same-sex couples is scheduled to begin at the end of March, 2012 (cf. Georghiou 2012). The influence of religious movements in Scotland has weakened of late, yet it is still quite potent. In spite of the hold of the church, accompanied by strong opposing voices within the SNP itself, a large number of MSPs have now shown their support for the Equal Marriage campaign and signed the pledge (cf. www.equalmarriage.org.uk, 2012). This shows that regardless of the significant authority of faith groups in Scotland, there is still an overall public sense that equal opportunities should be available to all groups throughout society.

After having looked at different aspects of Scottish society, there is still an issue concerning the scenario of social policy-making in relation to nation-building becoming overly politicised and biased, and thus the true outlook of a society could become tactically ignored. This is somewhat to do with the alleged problematic of nationalism, and the fervent inclination of the SNP to drive a wedge between Scotland and the Union. Envisioning Scotland as a different society than the rest of the United Kingdom could be undeniably true to a certain extent, however research has shown that differences in attitude and political aspects only diverge marginally north and south of the border (cf. Scott and Mooney 2005: 6). It has been suggested that, as much as the Scottish people would like to regard themselves as different – more socially just, more liberal in their views and more tolerant – in reality there is further proof of what actually joins the different nations of United Kingdom together rather than what separates them. The divide could arguably be made between the north of the United Kingdom and the south-east of England, with the latter being extremely affluent compared to the rest of the country, or even between income and class, rather than which side of the border a person lives, yet even this divide has been subject to extensive debate. Challenges faced by the people in Newcastle or Manchester have been indicated to be very similar to the problems that the Scottish are experiencing as well, in terms of poverty and ill health to mention a few (cf. Baillie 2012).

Out of the 25 richest countries in the world, the United Kingdom has been ranked as the fourth most unequal country in the world, with levels of income inequality even higher than in countries such as Japan and Israel (cf. Dorling 2011: 67). In addition to this, there is still a strong sense of alienation and dysfunctional and violent behaviour in Scotland, as there is in some parts of the rest of the United Kingdom as well, especially in the urban areas (cf. Gallagher 2009: 7). At the moment, there is an on-going pilot project in the Scottish Parliament with the aim to tackle sectarianism and antisocial behaviour in Scotland, which proves just to what extent these problems are present in Scottish society (cf. Kelly 2012). Judging by the accounts stated above, the question thus arises as to what image of Scotland actually captures the truth. This essay will consequently move on to a more close examination of the SNP's view, and further explore from where the Party draws its conclusions.

2.1 Scotland as a “Beacon for Progressive Opinion”

Alex Salmond proclaimed in his Hugo Young lecture on 24 January, 2012, that if Scotland would gain independence, the country could become a “beacon for progressive opinion” and set an example of social justice for the rest of the United Kingdom, as well as the rest of the world. Even though his intention may have been to break new ground and appear progressive in his approach, this concept is neither novel nor innovative as could be read in the article by Mooney and Poole in the preceding chapter, which was published before the SNP came to power in Scotland. Therefore, it appears as if Salmond's administration is now spurred by the enablement which comes with a majority government and the possibility of making some radical changes, and the SNP are taking this opportunity to extend this old notion of Scottish distinctiveness further. In light of the First Minister's statements on 24 January, it could be argued that Salmond is building on this old belief of Scotland being a special place, a chosen country for him to shape and recreate at his own bidding, fuelled by his “burning ambition and formidable self-belief [and] willingness to take risks” (Gallagher 2009: 147). Undeniably, it could equally be argued that Alex Salmond's tactics are somewhat questionable in this aspect – yet not entirely surprising, in the sense that he is merely using the nationalist rhetoric in order to sell the idea of Independence to the Scottish people and appeal to their emotive side by evoking national pride.

The First Minister's speech during the Hugo Young lecture was carried out with the intention to outline "Scotland's place in the world." Other than uttering the famous phrase stated above, which instantly became subject to much discussion; that "an independent Scotland could be a beacon for progressive opinion" (ibid), the First Minister also pointed out that the current constitutional arrangements are unsustainable and unfair, and therefore, independence for Scotland would produce a stronger relationship between the different nations of the United Kingdom as "clear and equal partners" (ibid). Furthermore, Salmond expressed his wishes for Scotland to gain its "rightful place as a responsible member of the world community; and by which the Scottish people can best fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations" (ibid). Salmond's choice of words is particularly striking, since it could be argued that he is indisputably maintaining the central SNP claim that the Scottish people are suppressed and unable to reach their full potential in the current situation, which is in a union with Britain. Moreover, in regards to the notion that the welfare state "became 'the real anchor of the union state,'" (ibid) Salmond claimed that he is unsure whether the welfare state ever was "a direct consequence of the union" (ibid). In order to put emphasis on this statement, he mentions the Nordic countries as an example of how "common aims in social policy do not require a common state" (ibid), and making a comparison to how an independent Scotland could interact with the rest of the United Kingdom in a similar way, in the sense that the different countries are depending and supporting each other, but not ruling over each other.

Further in his speech, Salmond conceded to the fact that there is still much to do in order to tackle inequality in Scotland, and that "[t]he disparities in life expectancy between different parts of Scotland" are one example of a problematic area which has to be addressed before the Scottish people can see any radical improvement. This is something which has been confirmed by many, for example by Professor Mike Danson of the University of the West of Scotland when comparing Scotland and Scandinavia in a lecture in the Scottish Parliament on 7 February, 2012, further noting that "the biggest difference between Scotland and the Nordic countries is *inequality*." Salmond additionally pointed out during his Hugo Young speech that policies which might in turn promote inequality "are always likely to encounter fierce opposition in Scotland". By this, he is trying to put forward that Scotland is

more opposed to injustices, but this could indeed be true to many countries not willing to suffer under suppression. The riots which broke out in August in England are proof of the fact that the public will openly show its discontent if they consider it being necessary, of which general strikes and mass-demonstrations are examples as well. Furthermore, the First Minister put forward the fact that his administration consciously introduced “certain core universal services, rights or benefits, some of which are no longer prioritised by political leaders elsewhere” (Salmond 2012), implying that this thus applies to political leaders south of the border, and quite frankly openly accused the Westminster government for not taking heed to policies such as free prescriptions or free personal care for the elderly. However, what he fails to mention are the circumstances under which these policies and legislations came to be, and the fact that some of these notably ground-breaking and progressive reforms of which the SNP administration is so proud and swears to protect, actually were introduced by Salmond’s Labour-Liberal Democrat predecessors. Concurrently, The First Minister omitted to mention the cuts to the health care budget and staff numbers which still affect the National Health Service in Scotland today, a policy move that his administration implemented after the May elections as a result of the UK coalition’s austerity plan (cf. Baillie 2012).

As a conclusion to his lecture, Salmond mentioned his aspiration to “provide a secure, stable and inclusive society, [and that] Scotland will be a place where people want to visit, invest, work and live.” However, it still remains unclear how this is to be achieved, and Salmond’s proposed course of action is questionable to some extent. His ambition to make an independent Scotland “a beacon for progressive opinion” might be considered valiant and noble, but also shows proof of a nationalist leader’s desire to recreate a country according to his own objectives. If the First Minister is indeed trying to make a “Sweden in Scotland”⁵ then this is a concept which calls for further exploration and analysis. This study will indeed conclude upon said concept in the following chapter, and undertake a comparison between Scotland and the Nordic countries in order to achieve a coherent image of what it is that Salmond is trying to accomplish.

⁵ Author’s citation

When contemplating the SNP's success throughout the last decade, certain aspects need to be taken into account. According to Tom Gallagher, as he writes in his work *The Illusion of Freedom: Scotland under Nationalism*, "the inexorable rise of the Scottish National Party (SNP) has been occurring at a time when the authority of British institutions has perhaps never been as brittle" (2009: 2). With this Gallagher is meaning to point out that, at the time of the emergence of devolution, the British people had lost faith in such establishments as the civil service, the police and the judiciary among others and a vacuum had been created which the SNP could fill. Incessant incompetence and semi-authoritarian behaviour had caused these services and agencies to lose their credibility, yet as of 2007, the Nationalists have ruled Scotland showing, as Gallagher puts it, "skill and vigour in exercising the powers of office" (2009: 3). Alex Salmond has been First Minister since 2007, and has shown nothing but great confidence in his post, unlike his Labour predecessors, which Gallagher refers to as being daunted by their responsibilities (cf. *ibid*). Gerry Hassan agrees with this opinion, as he writes in his 2011 article "The Twilight of the British State: Alex Salmond, Scottish Independence and the European Question", claiming that the SNP has ruled with much self-reliance and conviction throughout the party's first four years of government, and has proven to be quite successful, "much to the surprise of [their] opponents." Nevertheless, it has additionally been suggested that by obtaining this position of considerable majority over the opposition, the SNP have become rather remiss in their education of the Scottish people on the mechanisms and structures of independence (cf. Gourtsoyannis 2012: 7). A party that has as its ultimate goal to break away completely from the present constitutional and economic establishment needs to venture further in terms of defining said goal. It should contribute to the debate with extensively researched answers to the questions around this issue, rather than providing the constant rebuttal of crying "'scaremongering' or off the cuff replies" (*ibid*).

Moreover, regardless of their success rate, critics still accede to the fact that the SNP have, as of yet, failed to be radical in their policy-making. Hassan, for example, claims that the SNP as policy makers have adhered too fastidiously to the "institutional Scottish consensus" (2011), which in turn has led to the party falling short of being as radical and different for the Scottish people as they could be.

Furthermore, Hassan evokes the speeches held during the SNP party conference, which took place in Inverness in October, 2011, and mentions how Alex Salmond then used the image of Scotland as a “‘community of the realm’ stretching back into medieval times, and a Scottish ‘common weal’,” attempting to point out “the distinctiveness of a Scottish public and civic territory separate from the rest of the United Kingdom” (ibid). Nevertheless, it should not be disregarded that the form of national identity which exists in Scotland has been interlinked with the ideals of social justice first and foremost, with the Scottish nation seen as a democratic and tolerant country encompassing all social groups. This has been contrasted with other forms of nationalism, which are more frequently founded on the basis of racism and sectarianism (cf. Law and Mooney 2012: 167).

Based on the comments above, there is undoubtedly a strong will within the SNP to turn Scotland into a “beacon” of social justice and equality, and set an example for other nations and policy-makers to follow. However, the problematic of this rhetoric is that the substance of a political will easily evaporates through discourse and loses bearing, especially if the underlying tone is nationalist. It has been mentioned above that nationalism has been seen as problematic to some extent, partly since many voters might not feel compelled to adhere to such an ideology and do not fully support all of the nationalists’ claims. Notwithstanding, the general SNP argument that the nationalists “do not spend [their] whole life fighting for something [such as Independence] so folk can be poorer” (Gibson 2012) does indeed show a strong intention to improve the living conditions for all Scots, yet this has equally been considered as an inadequate reason for favouring independence. A number of journalists and leading politicians of the oppositional parties have expressed not only their frustration of the inadequacy of the SNP rhetoric but also their general disagreement. This paper will thus further explore these opposing voices in order to gain a broader perspective.

2.1.1 Contesting Commentaries

Severin Carrell wrote in *The Guardian* on 23 January, 2012, that Alex Salmond was challenging his opponents in London in a quite provocative way when claiming that “an independent Scotland would champion the welfare state and health service.” In his Hugo Young lecture, Salmond pointed towards the reforms that had been put

through in Scotland, such as the smoking ban, the introduction of free university tuition and prescriptions, as well as the SNP's intention to set a minimum price for alcohol, as an attempt of the First Minister to pinpoint the most progressive policies in his time. Meanwhile, many critics have expressed their disagreement with this image of Salmond being a progressive and radical politician. On the day of the Hugo Young lecture, Willie Bain articulated quite a different view in *The Guardian*, claiming that Salmond's political record has been ridden with profoundly regressive policies and opinions. Bain agrees, however, with the fact that devolution has indeed enabled Scotland to introduce different legislation, which has proven to be progressive to some extent, yet he dismisses this as being ground for current SNP liberal politics, since most of the policies mentioned above in fact were introduced on the initiative of the former Labour-Liberal Democrat administration.

According to Willie Bain, two issues that are highly susceptible to progressive reforms are child poverty and unemployment. Being able to tackle these problems and keeping levels of unemployment or income inequality down shows real proof of progressive politics, and Bain points out that child poverty actually decreased under the former Labour administration in Scotland (cf. *ibid*). However, ever since 2007, the numbers have gone up and are now stalling, yet there seems to be little the SNP are doing at the moment to address this issue. The same thing could be considered true concerning unemployment, and especially youth employment, which used to be lower in Scotland than the rest of the UK, however as soon as Salmond came into office, unemployment has now reached soaring levels. Bain even goes as far as claiming that nationalism, at its very core, is "a deeply negative and regressive politics." The statistics do show some rather poor results for the SNP administration in terms of reaching its incentive in tackling poverty, yet the impacts of the global financial crisis must not be ignored in this context, and the rhetoric question remains what a Labour or Conservative government could have done differently in such a situation.

Further to Bain's argument, a senior Labour shadow cabinet member stated in *The Guardian* on 24 January, 2012, that "Salmond had worsened the outlook for Scotland's poorest and most disadvantaged" (Carrell 2012b). This was affirmed by Margaret Curran, the shadow Scottish secretary, who stated that the SNP

government's policies were harmful to society's most vulnerable citizens since college budgets were being cut and investment in childcare and redistribution of resources to the most needy were failing. Curran claimed that this is an example of inadequate targeting of benefits, and suggested that it showed the most significant flaw in the SNP's politics. Furthermore, Curran agrees with Willie Bain's statements about child poverty being the highest under the SNP administration than ever before, and according to the shadow Scottish secretary, it is simply due to poor investment in childcare and nursery education. "Alex Salmond wants to tell people what they can get for free but he doesn't tell people what the real costs are," Curran contented, and further, "the test for anyone truly progressive is not whether you get rich kids to university, it's whether you get everyone to university. That's the purest test of progressive politics" (ibid). Even though Margaret Curran's comments could be considered truthful to some extent, the intimation indicated in the preceding chapter that the Labour Party itself did not always advocate for the very poor, especially throughout New Labour's "Third-way approach" which increasingly favoured the middle class (cf. Dickson 1999), should not be ignored when considering this criticism.

Brian Wilson also agrees with the claim that Salmond's government does not stand for or advocate progressive opinions. The commentator, known for his acrimony towards the SNP, wrote for *The Scotsman* on 1 February, 2012, that this idea of Scotland becoming a beacon for progressive opinion is "simply a myth," and called out for more radical approaches. Nevertheless, Wilson did concur with the fact that Scotland enjoyed separate and progressive legislation long before devolution, yet inferred that these advancements depended on there being a Labour government in office, thus joining his fellow journalist colleagues in their view. He even pointed out an exception of a Conservative initiative, the introduction of a humane policy by Alick Buchanan-Smith on the treatment of long-term prisoners, which could be considered as a more radical policy than any other attempted by Holyrood (cf. Wilson, 1 February, 2012).

Months before the Hugo Young lecture, on 8 September, 2011, Jackie Baillie MSP, the shadow Cabinet Secretary of Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy, addressed the chamber at Holyrood saying that the Scottish people "live in interesting times.

For the first time in [their] history, [they] have a majority Parliament with the power to reshape [the] country, to create change and to be bold and radical for the Scottish people.” However, the Scottish opposition, as well as the Scottish voters and the rest of the United Kingdom remain unsure and undecided as to how radical these changes would be. As a response to Salmond’s statements during his Hugo Young lecture, Ed Miliband made a speech in Glasgow on 30 January, 2012, commenting on the First Minister’s claim of progressive politics by saying that the most important contributions by Scots to progressive and radical reform throughout time have been through institutions that involved the whole of Britain. UK Labour Leader Miliband even went as far as calling Salmond’s politics “reactionary and divisive” (Carrell 2012c).

As much as can be said about the SNP’s rhetoric, the same could be argued to be true about the oppositional parties such as Labour and the Conservatives. If the nationalists are to be accused of lacking substance in their discourse, then to some extent the contesting views are equally questionable since they fluctuate and vary with time, and shift between parties. The unionists appear to have failed to achieve a unified front against the SNP and this could arguably be explained as deficiency of incentive. Simply enumerating the policy-making which the SNP have gotten wrong could be considered as being equally inadequate a tactics to maintaining the Union, and the Scottish Labour Party in particular would be advised to review their approach and rather work towards a more coherent agenda. It could even be suggested that the Party should take the possibility of an independent Scotland into consideration by outlining the consequences that such a scenario would have for a unionist party.

Nationalist politics can indeed be seen as problematic, and to some extent even be considered a distraction from real existing sociological battles for justice and equality. It has been argued that the independence question should not, in fact, be placed so high up on the political agenda, with all the social issues of inequality, poverty and delinquency currently topping other parties’ priorities. Certain polls made in 2007 showed that the popularity of the SNP held strong, yet critics have claimed that this support was not based on the party’s ability of controlling the economy or keeping the Scottish streets safe, but rather due to an emotional criteria and seeing the SNP as “vigilant defenders of the national cause” (Gallagher 2009:

131). Johann Lamont, Leader of the Scottish Labour Party, addressed her colleagues during the Labour Party conference in Dundee on 3 March, 2012, pointing out the many injustices in Scotland today under the rule of the SNP administration. She mentioned child poverty in particular, and how unemployment has gone up substantially since 2007, however these occurrences could also be considered as unfortunate consequences of the global economic recession and following the UK Government's austerity plan, as was mentioned above.

In her speech, Lamont pointed out some of the views already mentioned, such as the main issue of the Scottish Nationalists getting lost in their rhetoric of independence and overseeing the real problems in Scotland, even though they claim to be a progressive and fair party. She remarked that it was, in fact, when Labour was in power that concessionary travel, free personal care and reformed land ownership was introduced, together with new schools, hospitals and housing – all the “progressive” policies of which the SNP are so proud (cf. Lamont 2012). However, Labour in Scotland has long been accused of lacking the potential to show an ambitious policy-making agenda, even though one of the party's goals has been to bring poverty to an end (cf. Gallagher 2009: 94).

Taking all of these comments stated above into consideration, it appears as if there is one common thread which unifies them and that is a distinct obsession with stigmatising the SNP, especially coming from Scottish Labour, which has been described as “an unhealthy one destabilising and disorientating the party's view of the world” (Hassan 2012b). Even though these two parties are relatively similar in their lines of politics, the hostile attitudes which pass between them are destructive and detrimental to Scotland's future welfare. According to Gerry Hassan, as he stated in his article “Breaking the Grip of ‘Fantasy Island Britain’: Social Justice, Scotland and the UK published in 2012, if Labour is to reclaim some of its past position in Scotland, the Party needs to cease the constant scaremongering and stereotyping of the SNP. The Party needs to rather turn its gaze inwards, and come to terms with the existence of the Nationalists, something they yet appear to have failed in doing, in spite of the SNP's forty years as active players on the Scottish political stage (cf. *ibid*). Furthermore, when Labour turn their attention to other matters than Alex

Salmond and “separatism”⁶, and fully adopt a political agenda which concentrates primarily on social justice, only then would the party be able to regain some of its former glory and truly develop a Scottish debate with a focus on substance rather than process (cf. *ibid*). Such cooperation would indeed create a political agenda with the potency and possibility to truly improve Scottish society, and it has even been argued that a move towards an extended cross-party involvement would make the reality of Scottish self-government more subtle yet viable and possibly even more attractive to the people (cf. *ibid*). Hence, it could be considered insufficient for Labour as an opposing party to merely point out what the Scottish Government under the SNP have failed to achieve in terms of attaining their pledged goals, and simply pointing out mistakes yet omitting to recognise the number of mishaps which occurred both in Scotland and in the United Kingdom during the latest Labour regimes.

This thesis has looked at both pro-independence and opposing commentators’ views regarding Scotland’s characteristics in relation to becoming a “beacon of progressive opinion,” and it has been concluded that reality appears to be somewhat different from discourse, which undeniably is the case when it comes to such controversial matters. Yet, the burning questions still remains – whether an independent Scotland would become fairer – and this paper will consequently attempt to closer examine this issue.

2.2 Could Independence Produce a More Just Scottish Society?

As mentioned in the introduction, whether or not Scotland could gain or lose from becoming independent is a highly controversial issue for obvious reasons, and naturally the verdict would fall according to the judge’s own political agenda, together with this individual’s estimation of how well Scotland has done under the Union (cf. Keating 2009: 103). The Nationalists would argue that the Union has impeded Scotland to show its full potential, yet the interpretation of the Scottish economic performance over the years is sharply politicised, which makes it difficult to evaluate to what extent either side is more correct (cf. *ibid*). The question whether Scotland would become a more tolerant and socially just society after seceding from

⁶ Author’s citation

the United Kingdom also implies that contemporary society is ridden with inequality. This is undeniably true, only the evidence proving that independence would immediately solve these inequalities is vague. In addition to this, the claim that the Scottish people yet are undetermined as to what a “yes-vote”⁷ in 2014 would imply, similarly stated in the introduction above, has been asserted by former SNP deputy leader Jim Sillars. Calling leading figures of the Party “‘intellectually lazy’,” he further contented that the SNP “has failed to prepare detailed policy on post-independence Scotland and educate the Scottish public on what independence would mean” (Gourtsoyannis 2012: 7).

In terms of political priority and core ideological values, it has been contended that social policy and social justice undoubtedly have been the primary focal points and interests for nationalists, not only in Scotland but also worldwide, especially in their struggle for independence. By prioritising these two policy fields on their political agenda, nationalist movements are attempting to promote their beliefs and convince their nation’s citizens that breaking free from the current order and establishing a new state is the best way to improve the possibility of “collective solidarity and territorial justice” (Law and Mooney 2012: 161). This is certainly true in the case of Scotland and the SNP, whose main agenda has been to use social programmes in order to establish a closer bond to the people and generate a more cohesive population. It has been frequently argued that social policy indeed is an effective instrument in the workings of nation-building, since it outlines people’s daily life in a comprehensive manner (cf. Law and Mooney 2012: 162). In their article from 2012, Gill Scott and Sharon Wright claim that it is of popular belief that independence could indeed lead to a more just and fair society, however that this idea is ridden with shortcomings and controversy. They mention the key notion which has prevailed throughout the thirteen years of the Scottish Parliament, worded in 1999 by the very first First Minister of Scotland, Donald Dewar, who announced that:

We are committed to promoting social justice and equality of opportunity for everyone in Scotland, [and we] can build on the commitment to social justice which lies at the heart of political and civic life in Scotland. [...] We cannot right the wrongs of the past overnight. We know many of Scotland’s injustices are complex and deep-rooted. But our aim is to achieve real and lasting change in people’s lives that can be seen and felt. Above all we

⁷ Author’s citation

wish to make child poverty a thing of the past within a generation. (The Scottish Executive, 1999).

As was mentioned in the chapter above, and is clearly stated here through the words of Mr Dewar, social justice and equality are thus quite obviously far from being new concepts in the context of Scotland. Presently, Alex Salmond and the SNP are only articulating the dictions of previous administrations, and it would be incorrect of the current government to maintain this position as being uniquely theirs. After winning the May elections in 2011, Alex Salmond proclaimed in his First Minister's statement that "[the Scottish Government's] vision is of a nation that is fair and just, a nation that is fertile for ambition and talent, [...] and we will build a secure society. A place of equality, fairness and justice." This proves that the current administration simply maintains what already had been promised; a better, more socially just society, a notion that had been reinforced by both Labour-Liberal governments years before the SNP.

It must not be forgotten that devolution sprung out of a time marked by two decades of increased income and wealth inequalities all over the United Kingdom, which enhanced the social segregation between rich and poor (cf. Mooney and Scott 2011: 5). This in turn led to greater challenges for the newly instated Scottish Government to tackle. However, this can be seen as somewhat of an advantage to the SNP, especially after 2007, when they formed a minority administration in Scotland. It could crudely be suggested that had there been no injustices present in Scotland at the time, the SNP's somewhat antagonistic politics would in turn be futile. Using social programmes and social policy as a nation-building tool has been a common practice all over the world, since governments can use these schemes to create solid bonds with their nations' citizens, and the SNP in particular use social policy in their attempt to connect with the Scottish voters (cf. Scott and Wright 2012). In May 2011, the SNP gained even more seats in the Scottish Parliament, enabling the party to construct an even more "Scottish" political agenda, which in turn leads to the question of whether Scotland has presently produced a solid, distinct and able welfare state that offers improved and Scottish solutions to injustices, in contrary to the arrangements seen on an UK level (cf. *ibid*).

2.2.1 Shifting Scottish Social Democratic Divergences

Considering another aspect of the new political landscape in Scotland, the question whether social democracy has flourished or perished thus arises, accompanied with the very definition and understanding of the word *social democracy*. It arguably appears as if though the traditional definition of a social democratic party has shifted of late, away from the conventional custom of a strong welfare state to a more corporatist frame of mind. The two largest parties in Scotland, the SNP and Labour, both claim to follow a centre-left practice, with a potent social democratic vision of their political agenda (cf. Scott and Wright 2012). Furthermore, both parties wish to display a distinctly different direction away from New Labour's diluted form of social democracy, and present more progressive political language and policy options in terms of social wage, living standards and distribution of wealth (cf. *ibid*).

However, it is not widely accepted that the Scottish National Party should be presented as entirely social democratic. When former Scottish Labour party leader Iain Gray held his informal farewell speech in the Scottish Parliament on 13 December, 2011, he claimed that the Scottish voters had been "misled" in May, having been convinced by the SNP that they had two social democratic parties from which they could choose. Even though the two opposing parties shared the same commitments of a greener and fairer future for Scotland at the time of the election 2011, however it later became clear that one of the parties only saw this being accomplished if Scotland was to gain independence. Questioning the SNP's level of social democracy could equally be applied to the Labour Party, whose social democratic credentials indeed seem to have become significantly diluted of late. This could in particular be considered true south of the border, where New Labour have been described as "a betrayal of everything the party's founders stood for and [it is], to all intents and purposes, a different party merely using the same name, [where] the left-wing of the party has become marginalised and ignored" (Assinder 2000).

The claim that the two leading Scottish political parties both are seen as decreasingly social democratic has been contented by Gerry Hassan in his article "The Coming Scottish Revolution," which was published in January, 2011. Hassan claimed that the social democratic tradition "is in tatters and retreat across the Western world, bent

and compromised out of shape by voter expectations and the assault of market fundamentalism,” and further suggested that both Labour and the SNP alike have little to take from the practices of social democracy, since “Scotland isn’t the social democratic nirvana of our dreams, or a social democratic country in any real sense.” Hassan further pointed out that the image of a social democratic Scotland prevails in the institutional welfarism from the 1950s; a status quo which no longer remains intact. This could be seen as a universal trend, expanding all over Western Europe in particular, which this thesis will examine more closely in the third chapter of this study.

2.2.2 Putting the SNP’s Pledges to the Test

As a first instance, it would be practical to scrutinise the Scottish Nationalist Party’s pledges more closely in order to gain a broader understanding of their objectives, as they are stated in their party manifesto of 2011. The first promise made to the Scottish people is to make the country *wealthier* and *fairer* by, for example, introducing the Small Business Bonus scheme in 2010, giving over 60,000 small Scottish firms the option of not paying any business rates, as well as freezing the Council Tax for four years, which is claimed to save over £300 a year for an average Scottish family. Moreover, the party pledges to improve Scots’ health and make Scotland *healthier* by improving the National Health Service (NHS) treatment and protecting the healthcare budget, with a specific focus on cancer diagnosis. The SNP is particularly concerned with keeping the NHS firmly within the public sector, in contrary to English methods. It has been additionally promised that Scotland’s electricity would turn 100% *greener* by 2020, and the SNP pledges to protect the Climate Challenge Fund by improving the renewable energy systems throughout the country, as well as opposing the UK plans for new nuclear power stations. In terms of criminal justice, one attempt by the SNP to make Scotland’s communities *safer* is to introduce more police, claiming that Scotland in 2011 had the lowest crime rates for 32 years, “including a 30% fall in knife crime.” All these pledges, listed in the SNP manifesto, were said to be steps in order to move towards a *better* Scotland. Unfortunately, as will be established throughout this paper, many of these pledges are very vague and have not been entirely fulfilled, as severe cuts to both the health and public service budgets have been made by the SNP, despite their sincere

commitment to protect these services. Since health is an area entirely devolved to the Scottish government, there is no excuse for the SNP not to be radical within this field of policy, and there is no need to wait for an Independence referendum in order to make sound decisions.

Furthermore, there are a number of benefits within the welfare system that also are devolved to the Scottish government, such as Council Tax benefits, housing benefits, Community Care grants and crisis loans, however it could be argued that the SNP have been remarkably silent about what will happen to these benefits if Scotland would become independent. Certainly, the party now has an opportunity to show exactly what kind of welfare state they would like to build for themselves and for Scotland, yet it has been suggested that, at this point, the Scottish government is simply passing on the UK coalition's cuts instead of choosing to take their own route or using their imagination concerning how they can make the system more robust for the Scottish people. The SNP's excuse that their hands are tied would therefore not apply to this area since these benefits are entirely devolved and not depending on the UK government's decisions (cf. Baillie 2012).

On 4 March, 2012, *The Sunday Times* reported that the SNP had made a pledge to raise minimum wage after Independence, a decision which was spurred by a recent Panelbase poll for *The Sunday Times* and *Real Radio Scotland* showing that a majority of the Scottish people actually believe that seceding from the United Kingdom would leave them worse off than before (cf. Allardyce 2012). Other than cutting corporation tax to attract firms to expand and invest more in Scotland, the SNP proposed to raise the hourly wage from £6,08 up to £7,20, and in so doing, matching the minimum living wage. This move could leave 500,000 Scottish employees in a remarkably better financial situation (cf. *ibid*). However, in contrast to this, it was further reported by Iain McMillian, director of CBI Scotland, that even though this might seem fruitful for many Scottish low-income families, and that it could thus encourage increased spending, it could also have a radical and deteriorating effect on businesses which in turn would have a negative impact on employment (cf. *ibid*). The question of the minimum wage can consequently be considered a highly contested area of policy-making, especially since it appears to be in conflict with the SNP's incentives to make Scottish businesses more successful

and decrease unemployment. Yet simultaneously it also demonstrates a coherent and clear example of a policy which could indeed leave some Scots better off in an independent Scotland; a sought-after example of substance in the discourse currently considered wanting.

By pointing to some examples of how Scottish policy innovation has differed since 1999 to the rest of the United Kingdom, such as the smoking ban which was introduced with the Smoking, Health and Social Care Act of 2005 in Scotland, it is arguably clear that a number of policies indeed have led to creating a more distinctive Scottish social policy model, such as the introduction of free personal care for the elderly and concessionary transport fees for seniors (cf. *ibid*). With the gaps between rich and poor ever widening, poverty and inequality have accordingly risen to the top of the political agenda, both in Edinburgh and London alike, yet there is a recent trend in the Scottish government to simply make Westminster the scapegoat for failing to address these problem areas (cf. *ibid*). As an alternative to this “repression” by the coalition government, the SNP offer independence as the only way to achieve full potential for Scotland to tackle these problems, since Westminster shows obvious lack of political will to provide “better” solutions (cf. *ibid*).

As mentioned above, there is a strong commitment within the SNP of turning Scotland into a “greener” nation, both in relation to economics but particularly in terms of energy policy. The ambition of making Scotland an “energy powerhouse of Europe” and a leading nation within renewable energy has been the topic of many debates, and this is an area which indeed seems to be improving rapidly, especially within the field of wind power where Scotland is ranked as the world’s leading nation (cf. Gibson 2012). This has particularly been confirmed by the successful continuation of the Climate Challenge Fund which has spurred innovative community-driven carbon reduction projects across Scotland and the worldwide reactions to the advancement of Scottish initiatives within renewable energy which puts the nation in the lead of this industry (cf. *ibid*). Another aspect is the Zero Waste Plan scheme introduced in 2010 which is part of the Scottish Government’s vision of a greener and healthier Scotland, aspiring to minimise all waste and turn it into a resource rather than a nuisance, in addition to increasing recycling up to 70 per cent

by 2025 (cf. Scottish Government 2010). The SNP pledge of improving Scotland's environment could thus be considered fulfilled to a large extent, in contrast to many oppositional commentators' view that the Party does not follow through on most its commitments.

In the previous subchapter, one clear example was given of an area which has been completely devolved to the Scottish Government, namely the health portfolio. Hence, it would be easier to detect radical and diverging progressions within this area, and obtain an idea of how an independent Scotland would therefore stand out from the United Kingdom. The Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities, Nicola Sturgeon, is thus alone responsible for the general organisation of health and community care services and health policy in Scotland, yet it is remarkable how little radical change and progressiveness have been seen of late in this area (cf. *ibid*). The life expectancy report for Scotland, conducted by the Office for National Statistics for 2008-10, shows that Scotland has the lowest life expectancy for males (75.8) compared to the rest of the United Kingdom (cf. www.gro-scotland.gov.uk, 2011), which contradicts with the notion of the Scottish health service being distinctively better. Sturgeon has repeatedly emphasised the Scottish Government's commitment to protecting the National Health Service from private sector involvement, and that the health budget would be kept intact to ensure that the best service would continuously be provided (cf. Scott and Wright 2012). Yet, numerous cuts have indeed been made to both staff numbers and to the health budget alike, a move which has been reported and opposed by the Labour opposition in Scotland. During the Labour party conference in Dundee, Jackie Baillie MSP claimed that the cuts made by the SNP to the health budget had reached £319 million, together with a decrease in nursing jobs by 2,000 during the last three years (cf. BBC News Online 2012c). Judging by these numbers, which are evidence enough to show that the National Health Service is creaking at the seams even though the SNP pledged in their manifesto to protect this service, it therefore could be concluded that health policy in Scotland has, as of yet, not seen the improvements or progressiveness as was promised in the Party's manifesto, and the question remains whether this would indeed change in an independent Scotland.

In terms of the Scottish public sector's future, as policy is moving increasingly towards nationalism, the outlook is starting to seem more brittle (cf. Scott and Wright 2012). For example, the introduction of the Universal Credit policy which will be implemented in 2013, is to drastically change and decrease eligibility for social security, seeing the harshest ever sanctions for non-compliance (cf. *ibid*). These changes to social policy should not be overlooked nor should they be taken out of context, however they prove that the Scottish Government is implementing deep cuts and reforms which hit the very core of what is meant by a welfare state. Allegedly, the Scottish Government's motivation for implementing these cuts has been to "end welfare dependency" (*ibid*), yet it appears as if though there has been little if any engagement from the SNP in terms of offering an alternative prospectus of social citizenship if the Scottish voters choose to leave the United Kingdom (cf. *ibid*).

To some extent it could be argued that social security in Britain has seen an unwavering tradition of stable and steady control, and in order to move away from these well-established practices, there need to be radical changes made to the core institutions of welfare in Scotland. A number of critics, such as Gill Scott and Sharon Wright in their article "Devolution, Social Democratic Visions and Policy Reality in Scotland" published in 2012, have suggested that, in practice, independence along with decentralisation could actually create more tensions rather than solve them, as examples of other countries have shown. Nevertheless, despite the Scottish Government's reluctance or inability to disclose the entire picture of what Independence would mean for Scotland, the nation still has a fair prospect of being a "policy laboratory" (*ibid*), as long as the SNP manage to move towards actual confrontation with the most problematic issues, and to some extent abandon a portion of the independence rhetoric, before the Scottish electorate loses faith in their government. It cannot be ignored that to some extent, nationalism could be considered problematic in terms of social policy in a country like Scotland. There are still groups of individuals in the Scottish society who endure various inequalities and injustices, and arguably the contradictory politics of nationalism and nation-building might further the gap and enhance social exclusion even more (Law and Mooney 2012: 172).

The SNP government's overall strategy to meet its objectives, both on a financial as well as a social level, is to maintain a liberal, low tax in order to turn Scotland into a "wealthier and fairer, and more equitable" nation (SNP Manifesto 2011). However, as obvious and natural it might seem to include these terms, in relation to nation-building in particular, these are still extremely abstract notions in terms of definition, and even more complicated to actually implement. Attempting to keep a balance between a competitive and strong economy, and a society which initially promotes social justice, equity and fairness, is not something which automatically falls into place (cf. Mooney and Scott 2011: 15). Undoubtedly, the SNP's commitment to tackling severe and profound social issues, such as poverty, is genuine to some extent. The question is merely what will have to be sacrificed in order to achieve these goals, since the SNP's initial methodology is based on an idea that Scotland would become a prosperous nation in the world (cf. Mooney and Scott 2011:17). Consequently, not only politicians of both parties agree with the notion that poverty and social injustices should be of high priority on the political agenda, and call for more action, but also journalists and key observers emphasise the importance of tackling these problems in order to create a better society. Gerry Hassan wrote for *The Scotsman* on 25 February, 2012, that it is time to put reports and consultative documents aside and take action. He agrees with the notion mentioned above that social justice is the very core of any relevant constitutional debate about Scotland's future. He predicts that the increasing levels of hardship will continue, since he considers the SNP's effort to some extent be well-intended but unfortunately quite insufficient.

Meanwhile, it should not be ignored that much of the SNP's progress has been due to the strong character of Alex Salmond, and the fact that the current opposition has not yet found a leader who could match his political advancements. Some critics have even claimed that "Scotland has never seen a politician quite like him, [being] a restless and driven figure whose natural chemistry seems to draw him to revel in dispute" (Gallagher 2009: 148). He has been accused of contradictory dualism, in that he is suggested to maintain an egalitarian yet defensive standpoint; representing national resurrection only at the same time not allowing enough room for conversation (cf. *ibid*). Furthermore, Salmond's approach to lowering the inhibitions

that people may experience towards independence has increasingly been to soothe these concerns by ensuring the Scots of the maintenance of the “social union” between Scotland and the United Kingdom. In 2007, he stated that “when Scotland becomes independent, England will lose a surly lodger and gain a good neighbour” (Gallagher 2009: 149,) and thus attempted to put people’s mind at ease by guaranteeing that much of the status quo will be kept as it is. The race to independence has even been called “the great seduction” (Gallagher 2009: 147), which is a very revealing and interesting concept. Consequently, by putting a kilt on most discourse and flaying those who talk down the nation, Alex Salmond’s party’s initiatives have been able to avoid closer scrutiny, let alone criticism (cf. Gallagher 2009: 150).

To conclude, the SNP’s national project to make Scotland, a modern, competitive country with a fairer society should be scrutinised both in terms of rhetoric and reality. As was mentioned above, it has been suggested that the fusion between an egalitarian society and a neo-liberal competitive financial market does not equate, and thus is cause for further contradiction associated with the SNP’s ambitions, and the question arises whether it is fair of the SNP to decide upon the definition of fairness. The Scottish government wishes to promote a Scottish distinctiveness, yet the radical changes that were promised are still lacking, and neither the SNP nor Labour have shown an apparent tendency to abandon neo-liberal models and policies of the past (cf. Law and Mooney 2012: 175). It has also been claimed that there is little space for objective thinking within the SNP, which is a party allegedly requiring “independence-minded people who are not independent-minded in their approach to power and basic issues of governance” (Gallagher 2009: 5). This in turn could lead to an impaired vision of Scotland, which fails to see beyond the mere question of Independence. Undoubtedly, there is a need for substantial “re-conceptualisation and a re-imagining of Scotland” if this national project is to succeed (Law and Mooney 2012: 175), and the discourse of social integration, fairness and solidarity is imperative in order to enable this project to be accepted by the Scottish electorate. However, as was mentioned above, these are concepts which are highly problematic and difficult to envision in practice. Therefore, it is helpful to

both the administration in the process of building a nation, as well as the people, to look at other countries' models, and use these as a blueprint.

Being somewhat of a pioneer within the fields of social justice and welfare, the Nordic model has been used frequently by policy makers worldwide, both as a model to follow, or indeed to reject (cf. Mouritzen 1999: 12). Scottish politicians have evoked the many positive aspects of this example as well, however it could simultaneously be argued that they have failed to acknowledge the negative or less appealing aspects that there are to the Nordic model. Scholars have suggested that, in order to achieve sound governance and policy formation as well as implementation, there is a pertinent need among governments to look beyond the own nation's borders and learn from other countries' history and geography alike. Professor Mike Danson argued during a parliamentary lecture on 7 February, 2012, that in Scotland, this has indeed been a common practice and will continue to be so in the future, regardless of the country's constitutional form and appearance. Nevertheless, Danson pointed out the importance of resisting "cherry-picking" among policies, and emphasised that it is crucial to base policy on stark evidence. He further claimed that the SNP, with the intention of breaking the British tradition of following North American policies, have now rested their gaze on their northern European neighbours in the search for alternative policy innovations and ideas, a claim which has been affirmed by a number of SNP MSPs such as Kenneth Gibson and Alex Neil. Therefore, this study will consequently explore the Nordic model further by isolating some distinguishing features, and attempt to shed some light on the more obscure aspects of this particular policy prototype. Furthermore, it will be established whether this model still could be considered modern in contemporary society, or if it in fact has become outdated and replaced by other, more progressive models.

3. Identifying the Nordic Model

In 2008, the Scottish Government published the paper *Achieving Our Potential – A Framework to Tackle Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland* as an attempt to outline a “fresh approach” to strategies, and illustrate successful examples of “good practice”⁸ in relation to tackling social injustices (cf. 3). On numerous occasions, the Nordic countries Finland and Norway are mentioned as countries which “have combined high levels of economic growth with significantly lower levels of income inequality than Scotland. They have shown that greater Solidarity (sic) is not just an outcome of economic growth, but a driver of that growth” (ibid). This framework paper, which was initiated by a consultation resulting in 138 individual responses (cf. 2008: 6), demonstrates one clear instance when the SNP government has explicitly used the Nordic countries as a model to learn from and to follow. It has already been mentioned above that the most appealing aspects of the Nordic model to the Party are the high levels of “equality of income and significantly lower rates of poverty” (ibid), and this study will consequently explore the origins of this model further, and establish a coherent outline of its distinguishing features in order to acquire a full understanding of the SNP’s Nordic fascination.

The Scandinavian countries from which the Nordic model originates include Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, however the latter is at times less prominent due to its relatively small size and remoteness from the other Nordic nations. In order to come to terms with what this model actually signifies, it is crucial to examine what the term Scandinavia in itself stands for and outline its surrounding myths and counter-myths. Is it pictured by the outside world as “socialist utopia or over-regulated nightmare, as haven of sexual libertarianism or stifled by collective conformity, as societies of exceptionally high standards of living or exceptionally high rates of suicide” (Hilson 2008: 12)? It is this paradox between “cool” and “cold” which could be considered particularly intriguing, but also which simultaneously puts the Nordic model to the test. It has been argued that the model was at its peak after the Second World War up until 1991, when it started to decline

⁸ Author’s citation

(cf. Hilson 2008: 7), and this paper will initially look at the background and foundations of the Nordic model.

3.1 Historical Aspects

The Nordic model has commonly been known as the *social democratic* model due to its ideological nature. The Social Democratic parties seized power in Sweden and Norway in the 1930s, and thereby marking the advent of social democratic domination in these countries for a long period to come. Progressively, these parties had managed to deviate from the Marxist movement, and at the beginning of their rise to the top, they had taken over the modernisation project from the oppositional parties and made it their own. The outcome of this project is what is known today as the “Scandinavian model”, or simply put, the Swedish/Nordic model, which reached its peak in the 1960s only to lose popularity and momentum during the time following the 1990s economic recession (cf. Sejersted 2011: 1).

During the seventeenth century, Sweden was considered to be one of the great powers of Europe, an image which resounded through the centuries and shaped the ambitious vision of “a new, forward-looking and benign great power dream: the vision of Sweden as a cutting-edge industrial and economic world power” (Sejersted 2011:1). This “power dream” was to be achieved through liberalisation, by creating a free and ground-breaking society, and through modernisation in particular. However, the idea of modernisation does create a moral predicament in that the ambitious drive to build the ideal society in turn can threaten the idea of freedom; there needs to be a balance between all the different policies in order to find a structure which is democratic, socially just and inclusive, otherwise the society might be driven to totalitarianism, of which Germany under Hitler’s rule is an example (cf. Sejersted 2011: 2).

It could equally be argued that, in order for the modernisation projects to be successful, there is a need for “a consolidation of the nation-state,” which in turn implies that modernisation often is accompanied by nationalism and a focus on extending civil rights (ibid). The question thus arises as to what became of the modernisation project in the Nordic countries after it became implemented. In fact, it has been argued that the Scandinavian model warded off threatening ideologies, such

as fascism and communism, by proposing a more attractive and less radical solution (cf. Sejersted 2011: 4). This is an interesting theory, especially in relation to the SNP, since it chimes with the assumption that the traditional totalitarian values of nationalism have eroded through a more egalitarian and socially inclusive agenda, which the nationalists in Scotland have embraced and thus avoided the stigmatisation of other totalitarian ideologies, a notion which will be further explored in the subsequent chapter.

As mentioned above, it was Sweden which became the prototype that shaped the Nordic model. The reasons for this occurrence are the considerable larger size of Sweden than the other Scandinavian states, which in turn meant that the country was more apt to adapt costly reforms. Secondly, the exceptionally strong political role which the Swedish Social Democratic Party played led to the Party feeling self-confident enough to take on an initiator role and leading by the principle that “there are no societal problems so grave that they cannot be solved by rational or scientific means” (Mouritzen 1999: 12). Other scholars agree to Sweden’s prominent position in Scandinavia, or “Norden” as it is also commonly called, especially in terms of international political discourse, with the country being identified as one of the most modern nations in the world (cf. Andersson and Hilson 2009: 220). Sweden has been seen as a “social laboratory,” with an “ultra-modern” view of society and an idea of the Swedes as a particularly modern people more prone to innovation than others (cf. *ibid*). It could thus be argued that, to some extent, the progress and success of the Swedish, or Nordic model, initially was not entirely due to constructional and socio-economic changes on a governmental level, but rather an instinctive sense of reformism and pragmatism adherent to the Swedish people. This positive image of the Swedes as a peaceful folk, with a strong trust in their government and a close tie to both solidarity and individualism, has indeed also been suggested by scholars to be one of the greatest aspirations for other countries to follow, such as Scotland (cf. Andersson and Hilson 2009: 222).

The strong historical bonds that the Nordic countries share are what unifies them on a superficial level, yet their very exceptionalism springs from “the successful reconciliation of the apparently oppositional Enlightenment traditions of equality and liberty” (Hilson 2008: 16). Through a unique combination of liberal respect for

individual freedom together with community, the move towards modernity in the Nordic countries was rather tranquil and void of conflict, and in contrary to the rest of Europe in the early eighteenth century, Scandinavia was “non-Catholic, non-colonial and non-imperial” (ibid). However, it was particularly after the First World War, as demonstrated above, that the modern Nordic model took shape, the features of which this thesis will now outline and discuss.

3.2 Scandinavia’s Uniting Features

The Nordic countries make up a distinct unit of widely similar nations, sharing uniting traits in terms of geography, religion, history, language, economics and politics. Even though it may be simultaneously argued that, on closer analysis, these states still differ on many accounts, critics have largely agreed on certain substances which signify the Nordic model (cf. Hauotto 1999: 1). The most prominent feature is *peacefulness*, not only in relation to other countries but also within, with low levels of urban unrest and disarmament initiatives on a governmental level (cf. Mouritzen 1995: 10). Furthermore, the *egalitarian* society makes up one of the pillars of the Nordic countries, alongside the emancipation of women, equality, low levels of poverty and the pioneering penal system which focuses on rehabilitation rather than punishment (cf. ibid). Just as important are *solidarity* with the Third World countries, and *hospitality* towards immigrants and asylum-seekers, as well as *environmentalism*; the Nordic countries are known for their continuous progress within renewable energy schemes and first-rate recycling systems (cf. ibid). Being among the most prosperous industrialised countries in the 1980s, the Nordic countries had good records of economic development and their main concerns were “the comprehensiveness of social security systems, institutionalised social rights and, [...] solidarity accompanied by universalism” (Hauotto 1999: 12). As is mentioned above, the model has also been called *social democratic*, with a clear support for a mixed economy that combines private and public ownership, and the preconditions for such a model to occur are a strong and organised working class along with mobilised trade unions cooperating with the social-democratic parties and a high level of public support, to mention a few (cf. ibid).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the so-called Nordic welfare model has primarily been the focus of policy makers and academics, and the devotion to social

welfare is another stereotypical feature among the Scandinavian states (cf. Hilson 2008: 87). Known as a “public service” system, the Nordic welfare model is ruled by the principle of universalism which allows a considerable large percentage of the population to access health and social care services since these are publicly funded from tax revenues, a system which arguably promotes higher levels of social equality (cf. *ibid*). Nevertheless, having a strong social insurance system was not what made the Nordic model stand out in the post-war era, but rather the ambitious vision that the Nordic countries had for their welfare states, and the governments’ conviction that they were capable of creating a better society (cf. Hilson 2008: 88). Furthermore, proficiency and professionalism have always been high priorities within the Nordic welfare state, an extension of which throughout the health care, social services and education fields have been an essential policy goal in these countries (Hauotto 1999: 54).

The argument of there being a positive and uniform Nordic model is thus rather strong, yet there is still a prominent issue as to what extent the Nordic model is considered problematic in its adaption. Even though many, on the social democratic left in particular, look at the Nordic countries as a blueprint for reform, at the same time it has been argued that the Nordic model is a utopia, serving as an objective which in truth is unfeasible and inapplicable. Extended criticism to the model claims that these countries are associated with nothing but “melancholy, conformity and control” (Hilson 2008: 179), thus presenting a dystopia; an undesirable model for others to follow. Regardless of its qualifications, historical accounts have shown that the Nordic model has served as a “transitional” tool for newly independent countries, especially in the Baltic region, aiding these countries to reintegrate into Western Europe and providing a means to distance them from the former Soviet Union (cf. Hilson 2008: 182).

Naturally, there are many structural differences and divergences between these five Nordic countries, and their economic positions and transformations have differed significantly over the years. For example, Norway experiences a contrasting economic situation to the other countries due to enhanced state revenues from oil production which enabled the country to distance itself from the rest of Europe in terms of international economic dependency (Hauotto 1999: 154). Unfortunately, the

scope of this paper is not large enough to explore all divergences in full, but will now focus rather on the downfall of the Nordic model and conclude whether the model has become outdated in today's society.

3.3 The Decline of the Nordic Model and the Crisis of Social Democracy

The years 1989-91 saw an upheaval in the Nordic countries, both on a political and an economic level, which served as a turning point, subverting the image of Scandinavia as an established, consistent region (cf. Hilson 2008: 186). Sweden went through its deepest recession since the Depression, and the public debt doubled together with rising unemployment during the following three years (cf. Mouritzen 1999: 15). It could even be argued that the welfare state was declining itself, with middle-class life styles growing together with individualism, which in turn eroded the popular status of the welfare state (Hauotto 1999: 23). While Sweden was seen by some as a utopia, the dystopian qualities simultaneously stood out, creating an image of a "new totalitarian" state with people living "in a state of willing servitude" (Andersson 2009: 223). After functioning as a preferred model to follow, with a pertinent peak during the 1970s, the Nordic model began to be questioned and challenged, both politically and socially, by policies of liberalisation and deregulation (cf. *ibid*). The most recurring topic of debate was, and still is today, how to sustain the generous welfare system yet still decrease the ever-rising income taxes, and combining yet preserving these two practices (cf. www.svensktnaringsliv.se, 2012).

With the changing constitutional establishments of the Baltic countries, the very meanings of "Norden" could be seen as altered during the 1990s, as well as seeing the Scandinavian countries' relations with each other shifting and acquiring new spectres of meaning, in particular in regards to the rise of the European Union as a change of direction for political focal points (cf. Andersson and Hilson 2009: 224). In terms of using the Nordic bastion as a useful foreign policy instrument, this practice was subtly abandoned from 1991, since the Nordic countries began to adapt themselves more to the EU. The Prime Minister of Sweden and leader of the liberal conservative Moderate Party, Carl Bildt, pronounced in 1991 that the "time for the Nordic Model [has] passed... It created societies that were too monopolised, too expensive and didn't give people the freedom of choice they wanted; societies that

lacked flexibility and dynamism” (Mouritzen 1999: 18). The “Moderates” in Sweden maintained with persistence that the social democratic model was not sufficiently “European,” and deemed the Swedish model as outdated and dead. Meanwhile, the Social Democratic opposition still withheld that “Sweden is unique” and that the model could prosper, increasing the Nordic countries collective international influence and vanquishing the threat of being perceived as too small and insignificant entities in the European Union (cf. *ibid*).

Furthermore, it could be argued that, presently, social democracy in the Nordic countries is in some kind of crisis, especially in Sweden. The long-reigning Swedish Social Democratic Party faced defeat against their Conservative “Moderates” opponents in 2006, a shift which has been said to be due to “the growing concern over the direction and the heavy-handed management of the country” (www.svensktnarinsliv.se, 2012). Furthermore, as *The Economist* reported on 7 September, 2006, despite a strong economy and a steady annual growth rate, the sense of discontent in Sweden increased leading up to the general election. The Swedish Social Democrats had been questioned in their authority, partly because of general lack of respect for the party leader and prime minister at the time, Göran Persson, which was a result of a string of scandals and an overall feeling of incompetence. It could even to some extent be suggested that the Swedish people had lost that strong faith in the perfection of their society; a feature which had characterised the Swedes throughout the decades and which now could be considered in crisis.

Regardless of how the Nordic model in itself has been contested or to what extent it is declining, the concept of “Norden” appears to remain stable and resilient to external pressure. The five independent countries still cooperate internationally today, constructing a framework which remains unchallenged, possibly due to the Nordic countries shared culture and identity which is maintained intact despite internal structure fluctuations and political disruption (cf. Hilson 2008: 186). The Nordic countries’ autonomy is a force to be reckoned with, especially on an intellectual and academic level, and with the creation of the Nordic Council after the Second World War, this autonomy was displayed as a model to follow in terms of international cooperation (cf. Hilson 2008: 187). In present day, the challenges which

the Nordic countries face have been argued to mainly include a decrease in export and an increasingly global market in a shifting economy (cf. www.svensktnaringsliv.se, 2012).

It could therefore be concluded that, even though a number of contemporary Nordic politicians have expressed their intention to be dissociated with the Nordic model, some elements of the model do prevail, in particular in the eyes of policy makers and nation-builders outside the region. As was mentioned above, the Scottish Nationalist Party has been using the Nordic model in their campaign for independence, and increasingly so as the party has gained more popularity. This is interesting not only because some politicians already have claimed that the model is dead, but also because Scotland arguably does not have all of the prerequisites required for the implementation of the Nordic model. Thirdly, it has simultaneously been claimed by scholars that the Scandinavian system of welfare and social justice, in fact, is not exportable at all (cf. Andersson and Hilson 2009: 226), which impedes the ability of the Scottish government to follow this “northern perspective”⁹ on social policy. Firstly, this paper will compare Scotland with the Nordic countries in order to estimate just how similar these different regions are, mainly by exploring various links that Scotland share with Scandinavia. Secondly, an analysis will be made as to what Scotland actually could gain from enhanced Nordic cooperation, and thirdly, a conclusion will be made concerning this issue.

⁹ Author's citation

4. “How Scandinavian is Scotland?”¹⁰

Looking beyond the very obvious similar features which Scotland shares with the Nordic countries – the purity of the landscape, the deep historical links to the Vikings and the harsh climate – the question of what actually adjoins these nations together has intrigued researchers, politicians and journalists alike. Jon Kelly, writing for the *BBC* on 8 December, 2011, questioned this bluntly after Hamish MacDonnell had reported in the *Independent* three days earlier that the SNP was planning to establish closer ties with the Nordic countries if Independence was achieved in 2014. Furthermore, MacDonnell disclosed that SNP strategists are working on a “prospectus for independence” which is due to be published during 2012, in the hope that the Scottish Government will be able to make the idea of Independence more palatable to the Scottish voters. Parts of this prospectus have been revealed, showing that a number of SNP politicians mean for an independent Scotland to turn north and east for partnerships and trade, as an alternative to following the United Kingdom’s lead and focus on the Commonwealth and Western Europe (cf. MacDonnell 2011).

Contemporary policy-making in Scotland has recently been associated with notions such as “consensus, cohesion and integration,” keywords frequently correlated with the Nordic model and the continuous superior status of the Scandinavian countries, particularly in relation to structures of local government and governance (cf. Danson 2012). An egalitarian view and the importance of fairness are two rather strong aspects which Scotland does indeed share with the Nordic countries, perhaps not entirely in practice as has been stated above, but there is certainly a collective consensus in Scotland that social injustices should be dealt with as a high priority, and the same could be said in regards to Scandinavia. Furthermore, there is a strong sentiment and will to break the problematic cycle of welfare dependency, even though the Scandinavian welfare system is based on universalism, its very core is constructed around the enablement and rehabilitation of people, a tendency which has been seen in Scotland as well. It has even been argued that there is a feeling of certain resentment among lower-middle class people earning £15-20,000 a year towards people receiving the same amount of money when not working, further

¹⁰ This chapter’s title refers to a *BBC* article written by Jon Kelly on 8 December, 2011; “How Scandinavian is Scotland?”

agreeing with the fact that welfare dependency needs to be decreased and that everyone should be contributing to the economy and provide for their families in order to create a better and fairer society (cf. Gibson 2012).

4.1 Scottish-Scandinavian Correlations

The Nordic model has functioned on two levels as inspiration for Scottish politicians, namely first as a mere source of ideas to find innovative means of establishing new institutions, and second as a rhetoric tool for the SNP's pro-independence agenda (Hilson 2008: 183). In terms of inspiration, even the early Scottish Parliaments followed Scandinavian examples, as can be seen in the report of the *Consultative Steering Group* "Shaping Scotland's Parliament," published in 1998, where it is suggested that some provisions for the future Scottish Parliament should follow certain characteristics to the Nordic countries' parliaments. There was a need during this time to create a "new politics", and the Nordic model with its "consensual democracy" was used as a prototype (cf. *ibid*). However, when it comes to using the Nordic model as a campaigning tool, the SNP's preferred country of choice has always been Norway due to the many similarities this particular nation shares with Scotland; small size of population (near 5 million inhabitants), the historical bonds with the Vikings and the fishery and oil industries (cf. *ibid*). Furthermore, Norway and its little over one hundred years of independence has been described by Scottish politicians as "one of the most successful social democracies in Europe, if not the world, whilst Scotland lags behind economically and socially" (Neil 2005).

First Minister Alex Salmond is another great supporter of the comparisons with Norway, and he frequently uses this Nordic country in his discourses to draw parallels to an independent Scotland. For instance, he stated during his Hugo Young lecture in January this year that it would be "absurd to suggest that an independent Scotland would struggle to make its own way economically. [...] As Norway, Sweden and New Zealand demonstrate, many small nations are coping better with the financial crisis than many larger ones, such as the UK, Italy or Spain." Norway's achievements in terms of high life expectancy, superior educational system, stable GDP per capita and gender equality are all favoured topics, but most preferred of all is the matter of North Sea oil resources and how this has enabled Norway to prosper despite of its size (Hilson 2008: 184).

However, in 2008, the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre was reported to have responded negatively to Salmond's use of Norway in the SNP Independence campaign (cf. Robertson 2008). Allegedly, the Minister had declared that he "would be upset to think Norway's experience has become a source of division or strife between friends in other countries" (ibid). Concerning the asserted oil revenues that Norway has, Mr Støre said that the Norwegians "don't consume any of [their] gas, [they] export almost all of [their] production. The money is in a pension fund that will be used for [their] children and grandchildren" (ibid). Meanwhile, the Norwegian ambassador in the United Kingdom, Bjarne Lindstrøm, clarified Mr Støre's comments to Alex Salmond, saying that the Foreign Minister did not intend to criticise the Scottish First Minister in any way, only he did not wish for Norway to be used as a wedge driven between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom (cf. ibid). Nevertheless, Støre's remarks seem not to have impeded current SNP MSPs to use the "special relationship" between Scotland and Norway, as could be read on 24 October, 2011 in the Scottish Parliament's Business Bulletin where Kenneth Gibson MSP lodged a motion, pointing out "the special economic and cultural relationship that exists between Scotland and Norway, both historically and currently, and the importance of this relationship to the people and governments of each nation, [furthermore] this Nordic relationship should be fostered using cultural ties and building on mutual economic interests to work toward achieving increased prosperity."

Beyond the politicised chamber of Holyrood, other groups have adopted the idea of a more Scandinavian Scotland. *Nordic Horizons* is an "informal group of Scottish professionals who want to plug that gap and raise the standard of knowledge and debate about specific Nordic policies" (www.nordichorizons.org, 2011), put together on an initiative by journalist Lesley Riddoch, among others. Looking at Scandinavian peculiarities such as free schools, outdoor kindergartens, renewable energy production and recycling, to mention a few, this group attempts to bring forth the discussion of the Nordic model in a Scottish context (cf. ibid). During one of their parliamentary meetings on 27 October, 2011, titled "The Revolution Will Be Nordic," questions such as whether there are any strong parallels between Scotland and the Nordic countries could be discerned, and whether Scotland in fact has a

prospect of adopting the Nordic model. Dr Mary Hilson, Senior Lecturer in Scandinavian History at University College in London, responded to some of these questions by pointing out the many more fundamental differences between Scotland and Scandinavia, although she remarked that Scotland indeed has a lot to learn from these countries. A strong similarity may be detected in terms of community cohesion, as well as investment in education especially at an early age. This has always been of high priority in Scandinavia, which in turn also led to high literacy in these countries, as well as educating people about democratic practices. Another striking fact is that the Scandinavian peoples seem to have a strong sense of trust in their state, and confidence that the governments will act in their best interest and take care of them, all through their lives – which has produced the expression “from cradle to grave” (www.nordichorizons.org, 2011). It could be argued that this trust and confidence in the state seem to be lacking to some extent within the United Kingdom.

Nevertheless, the reason why the Nordic countries can invest four times as much in their education is, naturally, due to the high tax rates within the Nordic countries, both in terms of income and VAT. This has been considered by many as a major issue in terms of adopting the Nordic model in Scotland, pointed out by for example Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, to the Scotsman on 6 December, 2011:

If the SNP want us to look to the Scandinavian example then they have to look at all the facts. The tax rates there are much higher than the current situation in the UK. Would they be recommending that we move to that sort of tax regime? Are they saying that Scots should be paying anything up to 60 per cent in income tax and 12 or 14 per cent VAT on food where they currently pay none?

Furthermore, Dr Mary Hilson also conceded to the fact that the Nordic countries should by no means be seen as some form of utopia completely void of social exclusion, poverty, inequality or poor health, in fact she pointed out that these problems are very much present and acute in Scandinavia, much as they are in the United Kingdom, and politicians would be wrong to overlook this (cf. www.nordichorizons.org, 2011).

In contrast to this, not only politicians in Scotland are working towards an enhanced Northern cooperation and peppering their policies with Scandinavian seasoning;

concurrently UK PM David Cameron has been meeting with the Swedish prime minister and fellow Conservative leader, Fredrik Reinfeldt, with whom he has established a close friendship on both a personal and political level (cf. Tragardh 2012). Paradoxically, Cameron has shown growing interest in the Swedish model, despite its supposedly socialist welfare system, a tendency which has puzzled observers to a certain degree, since the very core values of said model indeed contradicts the traditional Conservative political agenda (cf. *ibid*). The reason for the PM's increasing attention towards Sweden has been said mainly to be due to the country's current top position on the international ranking in terms of its successful dealings with Sweden's economy during the financial recession, which inspired talks of a Swedish "economy as strong as Pippi Longstocking" (*ibid*). However, as was pointed out above, the very core of the Swedish, or Nordic, model is made up of a close relationship between the individual and the state, which is in sharp conflict with the Anglo-Saxon distrust of the state and preferred family- and civil society-based welfare system (cf. *ibid*). Another aspect of the Swedish model which has been patterned in the United Kingdom is the establishment of 24 free schools in 2011, operated according to the same principles as the Swedish school system (cf. Carlsson 2011).

Furthermore, in contrast to the belief that Sweden is the paradigm of collectivist social-democratic society, the World Values Survey has published data, proving that Sweden in fact is one of the most individualistic societies in the world (cf. www.worldvaluessurvey.org, 2012). Arguably, it is these features of Sweden which attract politicians the most; the promotion of female labour participation, universal daycare and universal student loans along with a strong emphasis on children's rights, creating a "harmony between the Swedish model and the principles of the market – that the basic unit of society is the individual and a central purpose of policy should be to invest in human capital and maximise individual autonomy" (Tragardh 2012).

Based on the comments from different observers stated above, the question still remains as to how implementing the Nordic model in an independent Scotland, if it is all possible, would improve the Scottish society. It has been contended that Scotland's many differences from the Scandinavian countries may actually hinder

such an implementation to be executed, since one of the prerequisites for the Nordic model to work is high taxation. To some extent it could be argued that such a system therefore might not be viable in contemporary Scotland, whose current financial objectives are based on a low-tax economy. This paper will now look at further outlooks regarding the positive prospects for a future Scotland, if the country would continue to enhance its Scandinavian input.

4.2 Following the Nordic Model – What Is There to Gain?

There is little doubt that the Nordic welfare model is exceptional; the concept of caring for people from “cradle to grave” is one of the marble pillars which has fostered the strong trust that the Scandinavian people have in their governments. This model of care could definitely be argued to be progressive, and many policy-makers are envious of its success. The trouble is to implement it in a society such as the Scottish one, where the people have been promised by governments for decades that their taxes will be kept at a low rate. As much as the SNP might wish to adopt a more Scandinavian model to their welfare system, yet still keeping corporation and personal income taxes low, the Party will soon find that there is no way of paying for this particular practice (cf. Baillie 2012).

It has been suggested that Norway, with its 100-year-old Parliament, is an impeccable example of how Scotland could benefit from seceding from the United Kingdom, especially in terms of how successful Norway has proven to be as a nation, following the country’s peaceful separation from Sweden (cf. Neil 2005). Relying on a mixed economy which is structured through both government intervention and free market activity combined, Norway has enjoyed a sustained economic expansion since the 1990s. The petroleum industry is the most significant contributor to Norway’s wealth, and the country is the third largest exporter of oil, which is the reason why the Norwegian Government founded the Petroleum Fund in 1990 (cf. *ibid*). The fund works on an investment basis, with the oil and gas revenues being paid into the fund and later invested internationally – a mechanism designed to act as a buffer for the economic fluctuations which frequently occur within this industry, as well as enabling future generations to benefit from reserves which soon might be spent (cf. *ibid*). There have been reports of the SNP planning to set up a similar oil fund, and follow the Norwegian example, if Scotland does become

independent and is allowed full autonomy over North Sea oil and gas production (cf. MacDonnell 2011). On a more general note, the quality of life in Norway is reported to be remarkably high, gaining a top position ranking in the UN Human Development Index of 2004, where measures such as life expectancy, educational attainment, income etc. are calculated and evaluated, followed by Sweden on second place, however with the United Kingdom falling behind, ranking 12th (cf. Neil 2005). Judging by these figures and statements, the SNP's motivations appear quite clear as to why they would want to learn more from these countries, and draw parallels between Scotland and Scandinavia.

Further to the discussion of what the Nordic model could bring to the table as a basis for nation-building is the concept of a small nation keeping its independence yet avoiding the image of small-state irrelevance (cf. Hilson 2008:19). Alex Salmond repeatedly announces in his speeches how he wishes for Scotland to assume its rightful place in the world, and for the Scottish people to be able to reach their full potential, yet a country with a population of barely over five million might find its rightful place rather disappointing. The First Minister wishes for Scotland "as an independent nation [to] play an active and responsible role in the international community – contributing on issues where it could, such as climate change, but without delusions of grandeur" (Salmond, 2012). Achieving this role could turn out to be complicated, since the ever-looming presence of the United Kingdom arguably would impair Scotland to prove its worth. Therefore, by following the initiative of the Nordic Council and enhance diplomatic cooperation between neighbours, Scotland would arguably do better by continuing in a "social union" with the United Kingdom, as Alex Salmond proclaims the nation would (cf. *ibid*). Another important aspect of the Nordic model is the educational systems in the Scandinavian countries, and how they work on a quite universal and egalitarian level, from which Scotland can draw essential conclusions on how to improve the Scottish school system on a more extensive scale (cf. Gibson 2012).

Regardless of the many similarities in terms of history, geography and to some extent demography, comparing the Nordic countries and Scotland is confusing to the point where it becomes almost impossible, since there is, in fact, no single uniform economic or social model for other countries to adopt and follow (cf. *The Economist*

Online 2006). The perfect recipe for a Nordic model which would suit most nations would be the one proposed by the Swedish Conservative Foreign Minister Carl Bildt: “Finland’s education, Estonia’s progressive tax policy, Denmark’s labour market, Iceland’s entrepreneurship, Sweden’s management of big companies and Norway’s oil” (ibid). Furthermore, by invoking these countries and comparing the Nordic model with Scotland, it is possible that the attention is drawn away from deeper issues, and the true image is that the Nordic countries have, in fact, had decades of building and collaboration to achieve their current status, bringing together conflicting issues such as business, labour and welfare, and successfully coming to terms with best how to cope with these problems (cf. Hassan 2012b).

Scandinavia has frequented the SNP’s political discourse perhaps more than any other part of the world, yet naturally there are other models that have influenced the Party greatly. For example, the Scottish Government has recently contemplated the Dutch example in terms of early intervention and how families are assisted in the Netherlands (cf. Gibson 2012), so it could therefore be argued that no fixed and given model, or part of the world, are earmarked in terms of influencing the SNP’s policy-making. In conclusion, when asking the question of what Scotland has to gain in adopting a more Scandinavian approach in relation to nation-building and envisioning an independent Scotland, the question of what is simultaneously lost when ignoring other aspects and models should equally be considered in order to reach a sound evaluation. The SNP undeniably has the unique opportunity of contemplating all of these prototypes and examples, and learning from their mistakes and good practices, in order to consequently outline a feasible Scottish solution.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored a number of different aspects of contemporary Scottish society in light of the impending Scottish Independence referendum, with a particular focus on social justice and social policy. Throughout the progression of the thesis, various key claims and arguments have been established surrounding said topic, with the initial claim being that the Scottish voters appear to maintain an unwavering indecisiveness concerning the very definition of Scottish Independence. It has been concluded in this study that the Scots' indeterminacy is mainly due to a prominent lack of substance in the SNP government's discourse surrounding the Independence scenario and the Party's considerable inadequate education of the Scottish people on this matter, despite having published several white papers with the intention of clarifying their incentives.

Secondly, a tendency has been identified among the Scots with them considering themselves as more egalitarian, more socially just and tolerant and more centre-left than the rest of the United Kingdom. This sentiment was enhanced with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, which indeed was an initiative promising fundamental change in Scotland, especially in terms of certain legislation that was passed, however, deeply lodged social issues such as sectarianism and "the longstanding concern with alleged Scottish defeatism" (Pittock 2008: 176) are still widely discussed in both the media and in the Holyrood debating chamber. After 1999, the demand from the public for more feasible solutions to problems such as deprivation, child poverty and poor health increased, since Scottish society now appeared to display a higher opinion of what it was capable and able to achieve (cf. Pittock 2008: 177). Simultaneously, the many institutional differences from England surfaced, and the possibility of renewal in Scotland became even more apparent with the growing self-confidence that devolution created. Nonetheless, it would be naïve to consider this a complete image, since many in Scotland still remain pessimistic about the outlooks for their country's future, as well as their own.

Thirdly, the claim – recently made legendary by First Minister Alex Salmond during his Hugo Young lecture in January, 2012 – that an independent Scotland could serve as an exemplary model demonstrating ideal approaches to social justice has been evaluated extensively throughout this thesis. By weighing contesting views against

each other and contrasting them with popular belief and the reality of Scottish society to some extent, it has been concluded through this thesis's research that the SNP's intentions to create a "beacon of progressive opinion" out of Scotland are indeed genuine, and the Party shows sincere commitment to fulfilling this role. However, the problematic with such a claim is once again reflected in the SNP's rhetoric and lack of clarity and substance, which leaves a lot of room for the oppositional parties to attack the weaker points of such a statement.

Some of the different points discussed above in the preceding chapter do suggest that Scottish independence indeed could be viable and that a newly independent Scottish nation would thrive in world markets, but it has also been suggested that a radical internal restructuring is then required in order to accompany Scotland's altered external relationships (cf. Keating 2009: 124). There would further be a need for the Scottish Government to be responsive and flexible, and Independence in itself would call for a unique kind of nation-building, focusing on a collective project in order to place Scotland as a "viable entity in the new European and global order" (ibid). However, it could equally be argued that this need for transformation is fundamentally ambiguous, since there is a continuous sense in Scotland that, even though everything needs to be changed, change is met with great reluctance (cf. Gallagher 2009: 4). Hence, the greatest paradox is ultimately between the well-established tradition of continuity in Scotland and the more acute need for radical reform.

The most significant question which has been discussed and touched upon throughout the whole extent of this study, is the momentous matter of whether an independent Scotland indeed would become a "better" country; fairer and more socially just, and whether quality of life for Scots would improve. This issue has been carefully explored and evaluated, in particular through a meticulous scrutiny of some of the many pledges which the SNP have stated in their 2011 manifesto. These commitments included the promise to make Scotland a "wealthier, fairer, healthier, greener and safer" country through a set of policy changes; however after some consideration it was concluded in this study that many of these pledges turned out to be vague and unfulfilled. One area of policy which has seen particular deviance from the manifesto is the health portfolio, which has been considered a surprising

tendency since this is a power which has been entirely devolved to the Scottish Government. Notwithstanding, there are still some incentives which the SNP arguably have met in terms of bringing their manifesto to fruition. The “greener” perspective of the SNP agenda seems to be the most successful, especially in terms of renewable energy and the enhancing of the Climate Change Fund.

Yet the issue still remains that the SNP could be considered to have failed in their endeavours to deliver; both in a sense of explaining their intentions fully to the public as well as fulfilling their many promises which they stated in 2011. Meanwhile, the alternative to the SNP equally remains unconvincing, with the Scottish Labour Party lacking a coherent agenda and losing popularity with the public. This thesis has attempted to scrutinise both parties’ strengths and weaknesses in order to reach a comprehensible assessment of what shape an independent Scotland might take. Unfortunately, since this has meant venturing into an abstract realm of future possible scenarios, this study must resort to speculation and draw conclusions based on pure interpretation. Hence, the tendencies within the SNP and the Labour Party alike of not achieving a common goal, and the incapacity that these parties have shown to a certain extent of changing from discourse to substance, leaves the assumption that little would change in terms of social policy if Scotland would gain independence, since none of the political powers at work today is able to make the radical adjustments necessary to make a difference.

Further to the final claim in this study, which concerns the increasing use by SNP politicians, as well as other policy-makers and scholars throughout the country, of the Scandinavian countries as models and tools in relation to nation-building, and the theory that this usage has been proven to be not only a source of inspiration but also a means for the SNP to make Scottish Independence become more comprehensible for the Scottish people. This study has extensively explored the Nordic model and its many distinguishing features, which include senses such as “egalitarianism, social democracy, solidarity, hospitality and environmentalism,” to mention a few. These features were outlined by Dr Mary Hilson, who argues in her book *The Nordic Model: Scandinavia Since the Sixties* that the Nordic model subsists merely from an outward perspective, for academics, social policy-makers and journalists to either approve of or admire, characterising the Nordic countries as “norm entrepreneurs” or

“the social democratic welfare state” (2008: 23). She is thus implying that the model exists only for other countries to simulate and imitate. The idea that Scandinavia is merely a utopia, and thus not entirely real or true to form, is indeed a compelling notion, however the many dystopian features have also been emphasised, pointing towards some of the more inconsistent aspects of the model. It could be concluded that the differences between the Nordic countries, especially after the 1990s, are too significant in order for a uniform model to form, and this thesis has paid particular interest to the Nordic model’s decline which occurred simultaneously as the Scandinavian countries experienced the deepest economic recession since the 1930s. It was further argued that the model had become outdate and not in tune with the changing economic and global environment, yet this thesis has found that the model – particularly in regards to Sweden – has adapted its approach and is said to still be viable in contemporary society.

Yet, in spite of the many controversies surrounding the Nordic model, the SNP still continues to make fervent use of this example. The scenario of an independent Scotland turning into a new Sweden entirely indeed seems highly unlikely, since the many differences between these two parts of the world still make a complete transition rather implausible. Nevertheless, many examples of “good practice” can be found within the Scandinavian countries, and Scotland would arguably benefit greatly from learning from these different policies, especially in terms of education and universalist benefit systems.

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Appendix 1. Scottish Independence Referendum Consultation Questionnaire¹¹

QUESTION 1:

What are your views on the referendum question and the design of the ballot paper?

QUESTION 2:

What are your views on the proposed timetable and voting arrangements?

QUESTION 3:

What are your views on the inclusion of a second question in the referendum and the voting system that could be used?

QUESTION 4:

What are your views on the proposal to give the Electoral Management Board and its Convener responsibility for the operational management of the referendum?

QUESTION 5:

What are your views on the proposed division of roles between the Electoral Management Board and the Electoral Commission?

QUESTION 6:

What are your views on the idea that the referendum could be held on a Saturday or on other ways (sic) which would make voting easier?

QUESTION 7:

What are your views on extending the franchise to those aged 16 and 17 years who are eligible to be registered on the electoral register?

QUESTION 8:

What are your views on the proposed spending limits?

QUESTION 9:

Do you have any other comments about the proposals in the draft Referendum (Scotland) Bill?

¹¹ Retrieved from the Scottish Government's white paper *Your Scotland, Your Referendum* published in 2012.