

Canadians need to copy Nordic countries by targeting poverty [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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In a comparison with 16 other developed countries, Canada is falling behind on a number of measures, key among them innovation. Complacently living off the fat of our resource wealth, we don't invest enough in people or machinery - a sin for which we shall pay in a lower standard of living, the board warns.

To take just a couple of unflattering examples: Finland, which leads the comparison group in technological advancement, has 16.5 researchers per 1,000 employees, compared with Canada's 7.2. Also, Canada's rate of graduation of doctoral students is next to last in the group.

Innovation, particularly in science, engineering and business, is the driving force behind knowledge-based economies. Without a culture of learning and competition and innovation, Canada risks stagnating.

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The conference board puts forward a number of ways to boost productivity and innovation. But one it promotes quite heavily, foreign direct investment, is a strangely passive instrument in a report that calls for action. Surely the point should be for Canada to start investing seriously in its own knowledge creation. Rather than depend on money from elsewhere, we should be studying why Nordic countries are so successful across so many domains.

These countries create the conditions for their success. They promote values of openness, social justice and learning. They have created societies in which everyone has not just a stake, but a real chance to be creative, to contribute. Poverty, origin, gender ... nothing is allowed to stand in the path of success.

Canada is open, too, but in a utilitarian way. Immigrants are welcome - if they sit quietly, pay their taxes and do the work they were allowed in to do. Social justice is out of favour in Canada as a worthwhile goal.

Yet if we are seriously worried about the future, the poverty rate among Canadian children is alarming. At nearly 14 per cent, it is higher than the average for the 17 comparison countries.

Nordic countries, once again, have the lowest rates of child poverty - along with the most robust support of pay equity, subsidized child care and parental leaves. It is no coincidence an absence of poverty and solid state support go together.

There is more to a culture of learning than a good system of public schools, which, according to the conference board, Canada has. A culture of learning is also a celebration of creativity and achievement. People, especially young people, can be inspired to greatness.

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We have work to do, but going begging for other countries' money, also known as direct foreign investment, should be low on the list.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

Region: Canada ^[2]

Europe ^[3]

Tags: poverty ^[4]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/poverty>