

Americans THINK They're free, but Danes ACTUALLY Are
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YQEcxcigak>
Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/el.us.pdf>

What if I told you that one of the freest countries in the world has sky-high taxes, universal health care, and students who choose to delay university? And what if I told you that it's not United States?

In this video, we're diving deep into how Denmark, a small Scandinavian country with more bikes than cars, has quietly redefined the meaning of freedom in ways the United States hasn't even noticed.

We'll unpack how social trust, economic security, and cultural values intersect to create a radically different interpretation of what it means to be free.

We'll also explore how the US might learn or unlearn from Denmark's approach and why most Americans might initially find it deeply uncomfortable.

I'm El. I did my PhD in Denmark and lived there for 5 years. It taught me things no guide book ever could.

I also run another channel where I talk about AI, machine learning, and the weird future that we're all building. So, if you're curious about that side of things, check it out as well. Link is in the description.

Let's start here and bear with me. In the US, freedom often means freedom from from government interference, from taxes, from anyone telling you what to do.

The founding mythology of the country is built on the rugged individual pulling himself up by his bootstrap, distrustful of the state, and suspicious of collective action.

But in Denmark, freedom isn't freedom from, it's freedom to.

Freedom to live without fear of bankruptcy because of a medical emergency. Freedom to quit your job and take six months off without your life collapsing. Freedom to go to university at 25, 30, even 35 and not be burdened by crippling debt.

This is a seismic shift in perspective. The state isn't the enemy of freedom. It's the enabler of freedom.

Now, I get it if you've grown up hearing that taxes equals tyranny. This might sound like a contradiction. I get it.

How can people be free when half their income goes to taxes? Well, stick with me. Here's the wildest part.

Danes actually like paying taxes. Seriously, in surveys, the majority say they feel proud to contribute.

Because in Denmark, paying taxes isn't seen as giving money to a bloated, inefficient bureaucracy. It's seen as paying into a system that works, a system they trust.

And let's just pause that for a bit there. Trust. That is one of the founding differences. The US and Denmark differ enormously in one underappreciated cultural factor, which is of course social trust.

They tend to believe that other people will do the right thing, that institutions are mostly honest. That public servants, while imperfect, are generally just trying to serve.

Meanwhile, in the US, there's a deep-seated assumption that if you give people an inch, they'll take a mile. That the system is rigged. That the government wastes your money or worse, steals your liberty.

So when an American hears 70% tax, they picture government overreach. When a Dane hears it, they picture universal child care, free education, and a health care system that actually answers the phone.

That's not freedom in spite of the system. That is the system delivering freedom.

Let's talk about work for a second. The US has normalized a culture of hustle. Productivity is a moral virtue. Rest is laziness. And if you're not always busy, you're probably doing something wrong.

Now, compare that to Denmark for a second. The average Dane works 37 hours a week, leaves the office around 4 PM, and takes 5 to 6 weeks of paid vacation every year, minimum.

And guess what? Denmark consistently ranks in the top three on global happiness indices. That is not a coincidence. It's the result of a cultural and political decision that people are more than just economic units.

That leisure, family, and rest are not luxuries. They're part of what it means to live a free life.

In other words, in Denmark, your job doesn't own you. That's not anti-capitalist. It's just pro-human.

The kicker is that the productivity per hour in Denmark is actually higher than in the US.

So, all of those 60 hour work weeks, they're not making Americans freer or richer.

Quick break. If this is resonating, hit like and subscribe. If you'd like a culturally infused laugh, take my free quiz that will describe what kind of Dane you are or would be.

And if you'd like to support the channel, you can buy me a coffee. Even a little bit goes a long way towards keeping this project caffeinated and alive. Links to all in the description below.

All right, let's get back into it. One of the most common criticisms Americans have of systems like Denmark is that a strong welfare state makes people lazy.

You've heard it all before. Why work hard if the government pays you for everything?

But the twist is that Denmark has a higher unemployment rate than the US.

Why? Because when people feel secure, they take more risks, not fewer risks.

That might sound backwards, but it's actually just basic human psychology.

If you know that failing won't ruin your life, you're more likely to try something bold. Start a business, retrain in a new field, go freelance, take time off to raise kids.

In the US, failing can mean losing your health, your insurance, your housing, your whole future.

In Denmark, failure is survivable, which makes people oddly braver. So that social safety net, it's not a hammock, it's a trampoline.

And let's talk about one of the most obvious and emotional differences, health care.

In Denmark, health care is not a privilege. It's not even a benefit, it's a given. You don't worry about deductibles. You don't need GoFundMe for your cancer treatment.

And nobody stays in a job they hate just because they need insurance.

The American system, by contrast, ties health coverage to employment. That's not just inefficient, it's a form of economic bondage.

How free are you really if you can't afford to get sick? How free are you if you have to think twice about taking a vacation because one ER trip could wreck your savings completely?

In Denmark, the answer is simple. You don't think about it. You go to the doctor, you get care, you go home, end of story.

It's not perfect. Nothing is. There are wait times. Some services take longer. But the stress, the fear, the bankruptcies, they just aren't there.

And here's another contrast that'll make your wallet cry. Education.

In Denmark, university is free. In fact, most students receive a monthly stipend from the government to study and many take their time taking gap years, traveling, working odd jobs. It's common to start university in your mid 20s.

Compare that to the US where students are often pushed into college at 18, pressured to choose a lifelong path immediately and walk away with a six-figure debt doesn't sound like freedom to me. That is just more of a financial trap.

In Denmark, education is seen as an investment in the collective future, not an individual's expense.

And because people aren't buried in debt, they can choose jobs based on passions or purpose, not just paychecks.

And the ripple effects are huge. Danish students are more likely to switch majors if they discovered something new about themselves.

They're more likely to study arts, social sciences, or education without worrying if those degrees will pay off.

There's less pressure to turn every interest into a side hustle, and more space to actually learn, explore, become a more well-rounded human being.

Meanwhile, in the US, the fear of debt often pushes students into high paying fields they're not really passionate about, or worse, forces them to drop out entirely.

Freedom to learn shouldn't come with an asterisk and a lifetime of loan repayments.

But in the US, for many, education is less of a door opener and more of a debt sentence dressed in a graduation gown.

And now we get to maybe the most important, least tangible piece, social cohesion.

Danes live in one of the most egalitarian societies of Earth.

Income equality is low. Homelessness is rare and even in cities crime is low enough that people leave babies outside in strollers while they grab a coffee. Really.

This kind of trust, this sense that we're all in this together, isn't just a nice idea. It's infrastructure. It's the invisible scaffolding that makes the rest of the system work.

In the US, in contrast, this is deeply individualistic. Freedom is often framed as a zero sum game. If someone else gets something, that just means less for me.

But in Denmark, freedom is collective. If my neighbor is taken care of, then I feel safer, too.

If children are educated, it lifts all of us. If people have health care, we all benefit collectively.

That's a radically different operating system.

But what is the catch? Okay, you're probably wondering, is Denmark a utopia by this point?

And of course, it isn't. There is, of course, problems. Immigration integration remains a challenge.

Housing in Copenhagen is becoming painfully expensive. And like anywhere, bureaucracy can sometimes feel like a slow moving glacier.

And sure, some Danes do grumble about taxes over a cold tub. It's normal.

But the thing is that the Danish model isn't about perfection. It's about priorities.

It's about choosing again and again to center human dignity over market efficiency.

To design a system where people are protected, not punished for being vulnerable.

It's about building a society on the quiet but radical idea that you shouldn't have to earn the right to exist in peace.

Denmark didn't redefine freedom by accident. It did it with intention through generations of policy built on values like equity, trust, and collective well-being.

It created a culture where people look out for each other, not because they have to, but because they believe in the strength of the common good.

Meanwhile, the US, the so-called land of the free, ranks lower in happiness, higher in inequality, and leads the developed world into medical bankruptcies and school shootings.

Doesn't sound like freedom. That's dysfunction wrapped up in a pretty flag.

So, here's a question, especially for the Danes watching. When you look at the American version of freedom, the guns, the debt, the lack of safety nets, what do you think?

Does it feel like liberty or does it feel like chaos? Drop a comment. I really want to know.

The US could make a few different choices as well. But it would mean letting go of the myth that freedom only means being left alone, unbothered, and unsupported.

Sometimes true freedom means being lifted up by a society that believes you matter even when you're not winning. And if that's not freedom, then what is it?

So next time someone says America is the freest country on earth, maybe ask freedom from whom and at what cost?

Cuz Denmark isn't perfect, but it is a living example of how freedom can look radically different, safer, more humane, and yes, maybe even happier.

If this video gave you something to think about, hit subscribe. I've got more deep dives coming, and I'd love for you to be a part of the conversation.

Check the description for sources, books, and a few ways to support the channel if you're feeling generous.

Thank you for watching and as the Danes might say, duck for