

If I were King

Danny Dorling

If I were king for a day I'd want to be king of a country I could boast about. I'd be the Prince-Bishop of Andorra, or Albert, King of Monaco, who both head countries where a majority of the population are immigrants and to which more tourists flock per resident than anywhere else in the world. Alternatively I could be 'Henri' for a day, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, and boast of net immigration swelling my rich country more than any other in Europe, and how I 'performed' the best of all in Europe in terms of tourist receipts (per resident).

Perhaps I should rise above mere riches? Hans (Prince of Liechtenstein to you mere mortals) can boast of how many trees are being planted per person in his little principality: more than anywhere else in Europe. But consider 'proper' countries: Harald of Norway can talk of how more hydroelectric energy is generated by each of his subjects than anywhere else in the world, and given their oil the Norwegians also export more fuel than anywhere other than Brunei (with its Sultan) or Qatar (with its Sheikh). Norway and Sweden (monarch: King Carl) also send the most young people to university in Europe, only Finland (without a monarch) sends more.

Only three countries in Europe have female heads, Britain (Queen Elizabeth), Denmark (Queen Margrethe), and the Netherlands (Queen Beatrix). In comparison with Britain, the poorest fifth of the population are best provided for in Europe in Luxembourg (3.6 times better-off than in Britain), then Norway (2.2), then, Ireland, Denmark (1.6), Finland, Sweden (1.5), Austria, Germany, Belgium (1.4). The poor of Britain fare worse than the poor of all other Western European countries other than Malta, Greece and Portugal.

In Britain Elizabeth is monarch of the country relying more on selling insurance and profiting from its finance industry than any other in the world. Hers is the only monarchy to have nuclear missiles, has been involved in wars for the longest recently, had the highest per capita income in the world in 1900, and now has the highest United Nations calculated human poverty index of any monarchy in the rich world. If I became king of Britain, just for a day, I would ask why I had been put in this situation.

But why stop at king? In Japan Emperor Akihito presides over a country where the poorest fifth live off 1.8 times as much as they do in Britain, a country with the lowest worldwide teenage pregnancy rate, the highest secondary education enrolment rate, where people travel more by train than anywhere else. Japan is the rich country with the fewest people in prison (less than half as many as in Britain). And, of all the countries of the world, it is in Japan that people live the longest lives, followed by the monarchies of Monaco, Andorra and Sweden. Where would you be king, just for one day?

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