

to know how the AA has been described by the media.

The 19th century was a period of national renewal that was aimed at the ultimate goal of independence and sovereignty. Ólafsdóttir points out that the nationalist movement had an extremely strong following and performed many of the social and cultural roles that in other Nordic countries were performed by the emerging religious movements. The strong sense of national identity that was the main engine in the drive for independence was still there long after the Second World War and influenced the attitudes of both the AA and the Pentecostal Movement towards Icelandic society. Ólafsdóttir identifies many similarities between these movements. Both focused on an inner life-world and on personal change which are typical of new social movements, but closely followed the local circumstances when it came to forms of organisation and values, for example. The founding members of the AA were reluctant to bring in very many new ideas. Both the Pentecostal and the AA movement and the women's movement, Ólafsdóttir stresses,

are characterised by anti-institutionalism. However, it remains unclear whether there is anything decisively new or old about these social movements. It is not possible to draw a sharp line of distinction between new movements and older organisations.

From the outset the members of the Icelandic AA movement have had two roles and two goals: first, that of anonymous alcoholics who are active in the organisation and in self-help (internal), and second, that of members of society struggling for political change (external). In organisational terms, the establishment of the S.Á.Á. meant the movement took on two separate functions. During its latent period the Icelandic AA movement began to spread as a grassroots movement. Through the new alcoholism movement that was based upon the 12-step treatment programme, the Icelandic AA managed to incorporate itself with state power, which then paved the way to strong growth. In this way the AA has become an integral part of the official treatment system in which the AA has a crucial role in after care. On the one hand these close links to the treat-

ment system have been crucial to the Icelandic AA's survival strategy, on the other hand the close contacts between the AA and the S.Á.Á. have made it difficult to make a clear distinction between the AA's and the treatment institutions' tasks. This may become something of a problem for the Icelandic AA in the future if it wants to remain a self-help movement with a genuine grassroots character.

Translation: David Kivinen

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Swedish and Dutch drug policy

Dolf Tops: A Society with or without Drugs. Continuity and Change in Drug Policies in Sweden and the Netherlands. Lund Dissertations in Social Work 5, Lund 2001.

Dutch and Swedish drug policies differ from each other in important respects. Whereas in Sweden the objective has been to create a drug-free society, Holland has

adopted a policy aimed at reducing drug-related risks and the harm caused to individuals and society. For a researcher born in Holland but now living in Swe-

den, these differences certainly present an interesting research challenge. What exactly lies behind these two different approaches to drugs: this is the question that Dolf Tops sets out to tackle in his thesis *A Society with or without Drugs*.

The theoretical introduction to the thesis begins with the observation that questions of drug policy belong to the state: in this work the focus is on the aspects of criminal justice, care and treatment as well as prevention. How-

ever even at this early stage one would really have wanted to see a firmer and clearer expression of the theoretical commitments of the study: The three-page review of earlier research is little more than an exercise in name-dropping, leaving the reader somewhat at a loss as to Tops's own theoretical stance.

Tops sets out in his analysis to try and explain the development of drug policy by way of understanding what he calls its 'institutional models' and the emergence of a 'new social problem'. The decisive institutional factors (although the concepts are not defined with any great accuracy) are those of policy and legislation, the systems of formal control and law and order as well as the organisation of care for substance abusers. Tops emphasises the 'resilience' of these institutional models, which he says has very much hampered efforts of change towards a 'freer' drug policy.

The national trends in Sweden and the Netherlands are also compared with the international situation. The latter, Tops points out, has important implications for the way that the problem is defined in these two countries.

The method employed in the study to explore the developments and processes that have led to a number of similarities but mainly differences in how the drug problem has been seen and tackled in Sweden and the Netherlands, is that of direct comparison. Tops provides a good account of why Sweden and the Netherlands are well-suited to such a comparative exercise, emphasising not only the structural similarities and differences between the countries but also the fact that the necessary data are readily available. The discussion

on methodology might have benefited from a review of comparative historical studies – not least because Tops himself places considerable weight on the historical context and because his own comparison spans almost a quarter of a century.

The main focus in the study is on the period from the mid-1960s through to the mid-1980s. This seems both a logical and well justified choice inasmuch as it was during this period that drug use was first defined as a social problem. Tops also argues that during this period there coincided two 'generations of problem definition' – something he goes on to demonstrate in the empirical part of the study with a relatively detailed account of the development of drug policy in both countries. However, there are several reasons why the study period could have and should have been extended by one further decade. This would have allowed an analysis of drug policy against the sweeping tendencies of liberalisation that characterised this period, not least in Sweden. These trends were even to affect the field of alcohol policy.

The empirical part of the thesis (chapters 5–9) is a solid piece of work that is based upon national documents: commission and committee reports, government decisions, parliamentary debates. As was pointed out above, the author stresses that drug policy is state policy, which explains his choice of source material. Having said that, there is no question that Tops ought to have discussed the problems concerned at the level of principles, using source materials of a more normative character at the national political level. Politics is ultimately a matter of will, which means there are bound to

be discrepancies between national, state rhetorics and practice – so the question one has to ask is, how did local practice influence the formation of national drug policy?

In the 1960s, as the problem of illegal drug use began to unfold, government committees were appointed both in Sweden and in the Netherlands. In Sweden, every form of drug use was defined as abuse; the Netherlands by contrast opted for a strategy of differentiation according to the type of drug in question as well as how it was used. These differing views on illegal drug use were to constitute the foundation for these two countries' drug policies, which took them in different directions. They even defined the problem in different ways. In the Netherlands, illegal drug use was regarded as one among various other social problems; in Sweden there was talk about a crisis, about drugs presenting a threat to the whole nation.

In his attempt to understand and explain the development of drug policy, Tops attaches special importance to the historical context: he starts out by exploring the ways in which the formal mechanisms of alcohol control have evolved in the respective countries. This is an interesting starting-point that gives us an insight into how an existing control system and state alcohol policy are transferred and adapted to a new realm of social problems, in this case the drug problem. However, in his description of the historical context of social control, Tops resorts to the concept of 'traditions', which is far too ambiguous for purposes of rigorous analysis. He should have made better use of the stage he set up for himself.

Tops's argumentation with regard to the significance of the historical context to the formation of drug policy refers chiefly to state power and its legitimacy in relation to citizens. In Sweden, the state has played an active role in the field of social policy, whereas in the Netherlands the state has taken a more cautious and reserved stance towards formal social control.

A more implicit hypothesis in the thesis (and somewhat confusing when considered against the main research questions) suggests that the traditions of formal control are reproduced when a new social problem is established, and that these traditions also influence the definition of the problem as well as the action programme. Given the importance that Tops attaches to the historical context and to the role of state power, it is hard to see why he has bothered with this hypothesis that smacks of a self-fulfilling assumption. This is not to suggest that the historical context and state power have been irrelevant. Quite the contrary, I very much agree with Tops on the need for an historical perspective in the effort to understand and explain social control and role of state power in the field of drug policy.

A key precondition for any national comparison such as that represented by Tops's thesis is the

ability to construct a national context, i.e. to identify the relevant explanatory variables upon which the comparison shall be based. In this respect a definite shortcoming in the work is the absence of a more in-depth discussion that incorporates in the analysis such factors as religion and a more liberal urban culture versus rural cultures. I also thought the work should have included a discussion of what may be termed the 'contemporary spirit' in both ideological and political aspects. This, to me, is absolutely essential for any contextual analysis.

Tops suggests that his thesis lends support to the validity of reproduction theory. This, to me, raises the question as to how forms of formal social control are in fact created and reproduced? Is what we are seeing in Sweden simply a long line of continuity from alcohol policy to drug policy? Are there any key formative events that have been decisive to this development? Unfortunately, Dolf Tops fails to elaborate on these issues.

Another difficulty I have with Tops's thesis has to do with the discussion around the process of problem definition. In this regard his work lacks a discussion on the question as to which actors are involved in this process as well as on the relations between those occu-

pying privileged positions in problem formulation at the international level, at the national level, within the political sphere, in legislation and within abuser care. The choice of source material is heavily slanted towards the political level, but the question still remains as to whether it is indeed at this level or within this sphere that the problems are formulated. And there is of course also the question as to whether this situation changes over time.

Finally, it needs to be stressed that the work Tops has done in an attempt to understand and explain the differential development of drug policy in Sweden and the Netherlands by emphasising the significance of the historical context and the interests of state authority in forms of social control, has produced many interesting results. Having said that, his excessive emphasis on the validity of reproduction theory is conducive to an overly deterministic view, which knocks the bottom out of many other possible explanations.

Clearly, then, it is important that work is continued in the field of comparative research into drug policies in the EU. Dolf Tops's thesis is a useful opening in this regard.

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