

## Hüzün or Nordic melancholy

IN ONE OF THE MORE BEAUTIFUL and intriguing chapters of his childhood memoirs, Orhan Pamuk introduces the reader to the special Turkish melancholy – hüzün. Hüzün is a collective feeling in Turkish culture, says Pamuk. It is something that binds the inhabitants of Istanbul together as they regard the glory and decay of their city, as if through a smoky glass. Hüzün is not only the loss and pain one feels over vanished and spent goods and pleasures, but most of all, it is the sadness and anguish over the insight that one has not suffered enough to reach the most gratifying unity of all, that with God. In this way, hüzün is not only the result of the sorrows in life, but a cause, a melancholic vice to nurture, which feeds a passivity in relation to your surroundings. Only by suffering, by dwelling in the melancholy over loss, can the Turk even imagine reaching the ultimate community. “It gives the surrender a nimbus of worthiness, but also explains why they have chosen to accept failures, indecisiveness, defeat and poverty with a philosophical and proud attitude”.

The Nordic welfare state has often been referred to as a secular religion, an organizing higher principle, that binds the citizens together. The erosion of this construction, which emphasised similarity and universalism, is a common theme in today’s welfare research. It is likewise something of a well-worn thread in alcohol policy studies. Globalisation, EU, consumerism, erosion of solidaric thinking all seem to threaten our restrictive policy, where the focus was on the maximum benefit of the collective, the nation.

Research on welfare is easily tempted towards melancholy, as if we walked through a city landscape where certain proud monuments of our blessed, but austere, past remain while others have dissolved into ruins, to be replaced by new and alien structures.

Pamuk remarks that the western European melancholy is not collective, but rather associated with an intensified feeling of individuality and sometimes even a happy loneliness. This implies that the relation between the individual and the greater system, the community, is different than in Pamuk’s country. Individualism is also paradoxi-

cally one of the roots of the welfare structure, as among others Henrik Berggren and Lars Trädgårdh have argued in their book *Är svensken människa? Gemenskap och oberoende i det moderna Sverige* (Is the Swede a human being? **Community** and independence in modern Sweden, Stockholm 2006). Maybe a Nordic and individualistic melancholy partly explains the seemingly inevitable move away from collective solidarity towards individualism during the last few decades? The next question is: will this individualised melancholy also be a starting point for new, collective structures?

This issue of Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs is mainly dedicated to studies on recent changes in alcohol policy and their effects. Øyvind Horverak describes the effects of the introduction of self-service in Norwegian alcohol monopolies, which happened much later than in the other Nordic countries, and how this has been regarded by the general public as a welcome improvement of services although the increased consumption that followed has not really been debated. Thor Norström and Mats Ramstedt study whether it is possible to say that the share of non-registered alcohol per se is associated with higher rates of alcohol-related harm in the population, comparing different regions of Sweden. It is a topical

question in a situation where the opening up of borders is threatening the protection of the population through a high-tax and otherwise restrictive alcohol policy. The findings of the authors are in the negative: it seems that it is the level of consumption more than the source of purchased alcohol that is important. In fact, this can be taken as a sign that the monopoly should intensify its role as a guarantor of restricted alcohol sale, rather than its role as a good and customer friendly distributor.

Jenny Cisneros' and Hildigunnur Ólafsdóttir's article on the changes in the Nordic alcohol monopolies during the last decade and the reasons behind these changes, in terms of international pressure and national policy perceptions gives a summarized picture of the development of the monopoly system towards a more customer friendly and less controlling system.

### **Nordic melancholy**

In the last of the four articles, by Susanna Geidne and Charli Eriksson, we get an example of how the Swedish civil society, this time a young temperate people, react to the increasing liberalisation by taking part in a study that convincingly reveals how sales outside the monopoly system is inefficient if one wants to protect young people from buying alcohol.