

# Testing new models in Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish alcohol policies

## Introduction

Major changes in recent Nordic alcohol policy have been extensively documented (Holder et al. 1998; Sulkunen et al. 2000; Tigerstedt 2001; Ugland 2002). These texts have analysed the collision between a powerful and protective Nordic alcohol policy model, on the one hand, and the free trade policy endorsed by the European Union (EU) and the agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA), on the other.

It is our impression, however, that the wide scope of the ongoing transformation in Finland, Norway and Sweden is only partly covered in this research literature. Until now, little has been said about important choices that have been made after the principal shift in the mid-1990s. For example, new policy concepts and operational models have been tried out. Some of them are already disqualified, others seem to be more durable (Tigerstedt & Karlsson 2003).

In this text we describe strategic prioritisations and organisational solutions in the alcohol policy field in each of the three countries. To begin with we take a look at Finland and Swe-

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## ABSTRACT

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Testing new models in Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish alcohol policies.

In the last ten years major changes have taken place in Nordic alcohol policy. Until now, however, research has said little about the important policy choices that have been made in the new situation. In this text we describe strategic prioritisations and organisational solutions in the alcohol policy field in Finland, Norway and Sweden. First, we take a look at Finland and Sweden, two EU countries acting quite differently at the current time. We examine the new policy strategies which the countries have decided to invest in at a moment when measures affecting prices on alcohol and availability have become significantly weaker. Next we look at organisational solutions that have been implemented in order to handle the new situation. Adding Norway, a non-EU country, to this analysis allows us to comment on whether Finland's and Sweden's membership in

the EU has brought about more extensive changes than in Norway. As an appetizer, we offer a perspective on how the displacement of the alcohol field is reflected in everyday terminology in each country.

■ KEY WORDS

alcohol policy, alcohol programme, public administration, Finland, Norway, Sweden.

den, two EU countries acting quite differently for the moment. In this section we examine new policy strategies which the countries have decided to invest in at a time when measures affecting prices on alcohol and availability have become significantly weaker. Next we look at the organisational solutions that have been implemented in order to handle the new situation. Adding Norway, a non-EU country, to this analysis allows us to comment on whether Finland's and Sweden's membership of the EU has brought about more extensive changes than in Norway.

As an appetizer we serve a perspective on how the displacement of the alcohol field is reflected in everyday terminology in each country.

### Wobbling terminology

One way of summarising the radical changes is to claim that a shift is taking place in the key terminology of the policy field. This observation is based in our reading of recent official documents on alcohol policy and prevention, supplemented with Internet searches of alcohol policy and related terms. In short, the traditional terms *alkoholpolitiikka* (Finnish), *alkoholpolitikk* (Norwegian) and *alkoholpolitik* (Swedish) – approximately equivalent to the English expressions “alcohol policy” or “alcohol politics” – are changing semantically.

For an Anglo-Saxon audience it is important to note that the term and the very idea of “alcohol policy” are of Nordic origin (Room 1999, 10). Alcohol policy signifies a control discourse based firstly on a broad and administratively integrated concern of the negative effects of alcohol consumption on social and health problems. Secondly, alcohol policy builds on a broad governmental engagement in the sales and consumption of alcohol. That is, alcohol policy has been connected to strong governmental and institutional interests.

The term alcohol policy came into English in the late 1970s and 1980s, “more or less as an import from the Nordic languages” (ibid. 11) and, it should be added, as a fairly diluted version of the Nordic original. Contrary to Finland, Norway and Sweden, in English-speaking countries alcohol policy is a term used by a dedicated expertise rather than an everyday expression employed by the man in the street. In the political discourse applied by the European Union the term is only occasionally operative. We may now ask whether the term, due to

social transformation, is losing hold in the cultural region from which it originated.

As high taxes and the restricted availability of alcohol have been challenged or slackened in Finland, Norway and Sweden, two things seem to happen. Firstly, the meaning of “alcohol policy” shrinks and tends to become less robust. Presently the term seems to focus more on specific contexts and situations. Accordingly, in Sweden one fresh definition of alcohol policy covers the so called four alcohol-free zones: alcohol should not be present at all during adolescence, in motor vehicle operation, at workplaces and during pregnancy. Secondly, since the 1990s the traditional term *alkoholpolitik* is paralleled by complementing and competing terms. Ultimately, these new terms lean on a different view of how people can and should be governed.

These shifts can be noticed in all three countries studied. However, the three languages – Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish – demonstrate some peculiarities. In *Finland* professionals and volunteers have largely adopted the diffuse term *ehkäisevä päihdetyö*, which might be unidiomatically translated into preventive substance work (cf. social work). Compared to the customary term alcohol policy, “preventive substance work” brings with it several new nuances: the distinction between alcohol and other substances is removed, and the image of prevention is more local in character and less oriented towards the regulation of (national) economic markets.

In *Sweden* the term *alkoholpolitik* is still very dominating, but the adjectives *alkoholförebyggande* (alcohol preventive), *drogförebyggande* (drug preventive), as well as the combination *alkohol- och drogförebyggande* (alcohol and drug pre-

ventive) are mushrooming. In addition, two completely new terms have been introduced lately. The historical paradox is that this time both terms are more or less direct imports from the Anglo-Saxon world. The first one, *alkoholpolicy* (alcohol policy), might actually be termed “Swenglish” and refers to a concrete policy approach, an action plan, or the like. The second one, *alkoholprevention* (alcohol prevention), is associated with preventive activities limited in time and space (for example, the STAD community action project in Stockholm, see Wallin 2004).

In *Norway*, as in Sweden, the term *alkoholpolitikk* is still strongly preferred. However, since the early 1990s Norwegians have increasingly put alcohol and drugs under the same roof, thus using the term *rusmiddelpolitikk* (substance policy/politics, or alcohol and drug policy/politics). Correspondingly, the adjective *rusmiddelforebyggende* (substance preventive, or alcohol and drug preventive) is widely used in brochures, journals and official documents, either replacing or completing the traditional term *alkoholpolitikk*.

Such terminological wobbling shows that the new reality we are confronted with in regulating alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm is hard to capture using conventional nation- and state-oriented vocabulary.

## Finland and Sweden

In the further analysis it seems convenient first to single out the two EU member states Finland and Sweden. This may be justified in two ways. Firstly, Finland and Sweden are directly subordinated to EU regulations, while Norway is not. Consequently, some recent EU events have played a deci-

sive role in moulding the alcohol policy system in Finland and Sweden. For example, there was the EC legal issue in 1997, the so called Franzén case, concerning the legality of the retail monopoly in Sweden (with consequences for the rest of the EU, read: Finland) (Ugland 2002, 128–130). Another major example was the abolition 1 January 2004 of restrictions on travellers' imports of alcoholic beverages for personal use within the EU (Österberg & Karlsson 2002a, 62-63). Also the enlargement of the EU especially in the Baltic Sea region affects Finland and Sweden differently compared to Norway. We ask, therefore, what are the Finnish and Swedish responses to this new operational environment.

Secondly, separating Norway from Finland and Sweden allows us to discuss in some detail to what extent changes in Finland and Sweden may be attributed to their EU membership. What if Norwegian alcohol policies behave more or less in the same way as its Finnish and Swedish counterparts? Would this be due to European economic integration put into effect by the European Economic Area agreement (EEA) – the stripped-down economic alternative to EU membership – signed by the Norwegian state? Or has Norway, by staying outside the EU, succeeded in maintaining autonomy in its alcohol political decision-making?

### ■ Strategic prioritisations

Finland has been more favourable than Sweden towards international demands concerning the re-orientation of their national alcohol policies. In the EU-negotiations in the early 1990s Finland saw the adjustment of its alcohol policy system to the

challenges posed by the European integration mainly as a technical and judicial task (Alkoholilain ... 1992; Alkoholilain ...1993). During the process of re-organising the Finnish alcohol policy system the state made no attempts at trying to argue either on behalf of or against the old alcohol policy system. When the justification for the reigning alcohol policy had worn thin, the institutional memory of the alcohol policy system, which previously had been strong, also became distorted and withered away. The major changes that occurred in the alcohol policy field in the mid-1990s should have deserved a more profound reflection over the justification and self-consciousness of the whole alcohol policy system. This was, however, never done and the effect of this neglect has become painfully apparent during the past decade (Tigerstedt & Karlsson 2003).

Sweden on the other hand has tried to prevent this “amnesia” from happening. Both before and after becoming a member of the EU, the Swedish state has continuously, almost exhaustively, reflected upon the justification of its alcohol policy and its national ethos (e.g. Alkoholpolitiska kommissionen ... 1994; OAS i framtiden 1998).

In the mid-1990s Finland slimmed down its previously comprehensive alcohol policy system to better fit European standards, whereas Sweden tried to retain the sovereignty of its alcohol policy system and even made attempts to raise the priority of alcohol policy issues on the EU agenda. A concrete example of this is the European Comparative Alcohol Study (ECAS) (cf. e.g. Norström 2002; Österberg & Karlsson 2002b), which started as a Swedish initiative. Another initiative primarily instigated by Sweden was the WHO European

Ministerial Conference on Young People and Alcohol in Stockholm in February 2001, which can be seen as part of a process that resulted in the adoption of the European Council Recommendation on adolescent drinking (Council Recommendation 2001/458/EC).

Finland has not been as active as Sweden in trying to influence the formation of alcohol policies on the international arena. Instead Finland has been quite receptive to international influences in the alcohol policy field. This has especially been true in the case of the World Health Organization, and in particular its European office (WHO-EURO), which has played a significant role in the formation of Finnish alcohol policy ever since 1995. WHO:s European alcohol action plans have served as models for the first two national alcohol programmes that, at least formally, have steered the formation of the national alcohol strategy. In Finland these fixed-term national alcohol programmes have, more or less, all advocated a shift in the focus of alcohol policies from the national to the local level (Tigerstedt & Karlsson 2003).

A trend of decentralisation of power and

responsibilities is also present in Sweden, and even there periodic alcohol action plans are used in order to implement the goals of national alcohol policy strategies. A clear shift in focus can be detected in the 1995 national action plan for alcohol and drugs (Nationell ... 1995) that strongly emphasised the importance of alcohol policies on the local level.

The main reason for this change in focus can be credited to the countries' EU-membership in 1995. This also becomes apparent when looking at the timetable in which alcohol policy documents have been prepared in both countries. In Figure 1 we can clearly see how the EU-membership has influenced the appearance of alcohol policy documents. Corresponding official documents in Finland and Sweden have emerged almost simultaneously (Figure 1).

After joining the EU, a general conception in both Finland and Sweden was that the conditions for a national alcohol policy based on restricting alcohol availability and maintaining high alcohol taxes were severely restricted, whereas more possibilities and opportunities were created for the development of regional and local al-



**Figure 1.** Alcohol policy committees, working groups and alcohol action plans and programmes in Finland and Sweden, 1992–2004

cohol policy activities. Both countries have also put more emphasis on promoting situational sobriety, for instance promoting abstinence for women during pregnancies or total abstinence in motor vehicle operation.

Since the mid-1990s Sweden also began to develop and evaluate local prevention measures, as for instance responsible beverage serving (RBS) efforts and also other community mobilisation measures. A good example of an extensive community action project performed in Sweden is the STAD project, which has been implemented and evaluated in Stockholm since 1996 (cf. e.g. Wallin 2004).

In 1997 a close co-operation called the Independent Alcohol co-operation (OAS), was started in the alcohol policy field between public sector authorities, insurance agencies and the alcohol industry. The temperance movement was not included nor did they want to be a part of this coalition. The co-operation was, however, plagued with conflicts and stranded prematurely, already in autumn 2000. The main legacy of the co-operation was an active media campaign targeting illegal alcohol that was carried out in the late 1990s. Since 2001 the so called Alcohol committee has been responsible for implementing the Swedish alcohol strategy outlined in the 2001 Alcohol action plan. The Alcohol action plan has, besides active information and education campaigns on different alcohol-related issues, been focused on professionalising alcohol prevention especially on the municipal level (Tigerstedt & Karlsson 2003).

In Finland the emphasis since the mid-1990s up until 2004 has mainly been on promoting the importance of general so-

cial and health care services in the prevention of alcohol problems rather than alcohol-specific measures. The new Alcohol programme published in April 2004 (Alkoholihjelma ... 2004) does, however, more directly focus on the prevention as well as reduction of alcohol-related problems. The programme emphasises the importance of co-operation and voluntary partnerships between the public sector, NGOs and industry organisations in the alcohol field. The local level is still the focus of prevention, and the programme also includes a large quasi-experimental research project for the development and evaluation of local alcohol prevention measures in two Finnish regions (Local Alcohol Policy "PAKKA"-project). The programme is not as rigidly steered as the Swedish alcohol action plan nor does it have nearly the same financial resources. Despite this, the programme can be perceived as the first serious attempt the Finnish government has made in tackling alcohol problems since 1995.

Finally, it should be noted that neither Finland nor Sweden anymore relies on the long tradition of Nordic co-operation that prior to 1995 was perceived as an integral part of national policy-making in the alcohol policy field.

#### ■ Organisational and administrative solutions in the alcohol policy field

The organisational and administrative changes that have occurred in the alcohol policy field in Finland during the past ten years have been extensive. In 1995 the alcohol monopolies on production, import, export, and wholesale were abolished, leaving only the monopoly on off-premise retail sales of alcoholic beverages intact

(Holder et al. 1998). At this time also the alcohol monopoly's (Alko) vast tasks and responsibilities in the field of alcohol policy were dismantled and its position as the main alcohol policy authority was lost. Due to Alko's sovereign position in the Finnish alcohol administration prior to 1995, there were no clearly designated successors to take over its alcohol policy responsibilities at this time (Karlsson & Törrönen 2002). Instead these tasks were transferred, in what in hindsight seems to have been quite random, to less experienced, politically weak or newly established public sector agencies, and to NGO's in the public health field.

In Sweden the administrative changes have not been as radical. This is because no alcohol policy actor has been as dominant as the Finnish alcohol monopoly previously was. However, also in Sweden the alcohol monopolies, except for the retail monopoly, were abolished and many tasks in the alcohol policy administration were redistributed.

Despite these somewhat unequal starting points, both countries have shown a tendency to change their administrative focus from the national to the local level. The ways the countries have tried to get about this change in focus, however, differ significantly from each other (Tigerstedt & Karlsson 2003).

For instance, in Sweden the alcohol action plan that is currently steering the alcohol policy can be perceived as a serious effort in educating and creating a new profession of local level "prevention workers" (cf. social workers) within the public health field. If, and to what extent this effort will be a success, however, is too early to predict. Much depends on how alcohol

prevention succeeds in competing with other prevention tasks in the local public health field that in the future undoubtedly will be added on these co called prevention co-ordinators agenda (e.g. drugs, obesity).

In Finland, on the other hand, the alcohol policy experts in charge have been characterised by a firm belief in the strength of network building. Networks are built horizontally, vertically and between professions. In this respect the development in Finland resembles that in Sweden, at least on the surface. What is altogether lacking, however, from the Finnish activities is the strong ambition that exists in Sweden to educate prevention workers with the ultimate goal of formalizing local alcohol prevention as a profession. Examples of attempts to educate and support the contact persons of the Finnish network of prevention have been mainly concentrated on a web portal being set up to support them in their work as well as giving them the possibility to attend occasional expert seminars in the field of alcohol policy and prevention (Warpenius 2002).

Also regarding the political importance of alcohol issues, the situation in Finland is significantly different from that in Sweden. In Sweden alcohol-related questions have throughout the past decade had a fairly high political status. Action plans are regularly adopted by the parliament and/or the government. By contrast, alcohol issues in Finnish politics have been of second-class importance. A good example of this is the low status the national alcohol programmes have had in the state machinery until recently. Between 1995 and 2003, the national programmes were only propositions for programmes and they were never properly processed or adopted by

the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health or by the government (cf. e.g. Figure 1; Tigerstedt & Karlsson 2003, 411). In this respect the new Alcohol programme (2004–2007) is a clear exception, as it is initiated and confirmed by the government.

### ■ Economic resources

Sweden has during the past ten years invested substantially more money on the implementation of its alcohol action plans compared to Finland. For instance, in 2001 Sweden invested over 75 million euro on the implementation of its alcohol action plan over a four year period, whereas the corresponding figure for the Finnish equivalent was only 0,3 million euro for a three year period (Tigerstedt & Karlsson 2003).

In 2003 the Finnish government granted a sum of EUR 1 million for the implementation of the new Alcohol programme 2004–2007. To ensure a successful implementation of the programme the government has also promised some additional financing for actions directed to furthering the goals of the programme. Although it now seems that the Finnish government is determined to increase its financing of the national alcohol programmes, the financing is still, compared to the corresponding Swedish action plans, on a very modest level.

Based on our comparison of the two countries, we can conclude that after becoming members of the EU, Finland and Sweden have chosen different paths in reorganising their previously closely related alcohol policy systems.

## Norway

### ■ Does the non-EU status matter?

In the negotiations about EU membership, Norway even more than Sweden defended

its sovereignty concerning national alcohol policy arrangements. One could therefore expect that Norway's decision to stay outside the EU would have decelerated the liberal trend that had occurred some years earlier in Finland and Sweden (Sulkunen et al. 2000).

It turns out, however, that Norway – without any formal pressure from EU bodies – has slackened its alcohol policies in a surprisingly similar way to Finland and Sweden. The only exception is that the Norwegian liberalisations have occurred somewhat later and less gradually. For almost 20 years (1980–1997) the amount of alcohol monopoly stores increased by roughly one store per year. Since 1998 the speed has been on average 10 additional stores per year. Contrary to Finland and Sweden, self-service stores for alcohol sales were firmly rejected in Norway up to the late 1990s. The first self-service stores, introduced in 1999, were a genuine surprise for many consumers, but five years later almost half of Norway's 200 liquor stores work according to this principle. Also opening hours have been considerably extended during the last few years.

While Norway does not belong to the EU, it has not been affected by (the gradual adjustment to) the abolishment of restrictions on travellers' imports of alcohol for personal use from one EU country to another. Free trade in this domain came into force 1 January 2004. Nevertheless, Norway's very high prices on alcoholic beverages are certainly sensitive particularly to the somewhat lower prices in neighbouring Sweden. In order to meet expanding border trade Norway lowered its taxes on spirits in 2001 and 2002 all in all by 25 per cent.

Through its membership in the EEA Norway has also been forced to defend the sovereignty of its alcohol policy against international influences, and in some cases not so successfully. For instance, for years Norway has been struggling to defend its strict bans on alcohol advertising (see Karlsson 2001). Moreover, Norway was forced to surrender and allow sales of alcopops in ordinary grocery stores since 1 October 2003 which may, in turn, be a precedent for Finland and Sweden. In this context, it should be noted that both through the government and NGOs Norway has played an active role on the international alcohol policy arena.

Consequently, the overall situation with regard to the gradual liberalisation of the Norwegian alcohol policy shows many similarities with the Finnish and Swedish ones. Next question is, then, whether Norway has also felt a strong need to reorganise its policy administration and to search for new policy concepts during the last ten years. Our impression is that this is indeed the case.

### ■ Strategic prioritisations and organisational solutions

Several Norwegian governmental documents correspond to the Finnish and Swedish ones presented in Figure 1 (see Figure 2). In 1994 an alcohol commission was appointed “due to increasing international relations, among others Norway’s inclusion in the EEA and its possible membership in the EU” (NOU 1995). Although heavily concerned with the changing international conditions, the commission report might be called a scholarly apologia of traditional alcohol policy. However, already in 1996 new policy practices were

announced in a Parliamentary proposition. After years of quiet waters in the Norwegian alcohol sales system at the national level, this document suggests that the distribution network should be improved, the amount of retail shops raised and opening hours extended (Om lov ... 1996). In subsequent years all these intentions and more, have been carried out.

Gradually, the role of local communities also seems to be subject to a redefinition. This includes a paradox, because local alcohol policies based on municipal referendums used to be a major pillar in Norwegian alcohol control up to the 1950s and 1960s. As voters favoured liberal solutions in subsequent decades, this arrangement lost its “temperance effect”, and in 1989 it was abolished (Andersen 2000, 161–162; Nordlund 1998). In 2001 local alcohol policies are resolutely backed up in a Government strategy followed by an action plan. However, now the context is different. Referendums, abolished a decade earlier, are ‘replaced’ by knowledge and professional skills. A new phase is started: “As a professional field alcohol and drug prevention is a new phenomenon and a considerable part of prevention is still in an experimental stage” (Regjeringens... 2002, 17). According to the action plan this tendency should be promoted.

How, then, should these strategic considerations be put into practice? Two primary channels have figured when discussing the operative responsibility of alcohol policy measures. First, similar to Finland and Sweden the slackened Norwegian alcohol policy system is complemented with alcohol (and drug) action plans, released by each government separately. With the rapidly alternating Norwegian governments,

1995	1996	1998	2001	2002
Alcohol policy in motion? NOU 1995:24 – committee report	Parliamentary proposition Ot prp nr 7 (1996–1997)	Action plan for reduction of alcohol and drug use St prp nr 58 (1998–2000)	Government strategy for work against alcohol and drug problems 2002–2005	Government action plan against alcohol and drug problems 2003–2005
		Council for alcohol and drug policy		

**Figure 2.** Alcohol policy committees, working groups and alcohol action plans and programmes in Norway, 1995–2002

this practice has produced three action plans in five years.

Second, in recent years the Norwegian regional “Competence centres for alcohol and drug issues” are assigned a key role in the emerging strategy based on professional skills. This is noteworthy because these seven regional centres, established since the early 1990s, were primarily aimed at working with the treatment of alcohol and drug problems. Nevertheless, since the late 1990s the Competence centres have gradually been endowed with a whole range of preventive tasks. These tasks include:

- supervision of pupils and students in schools and the education of personnel in the prevention field
- production of educational material
- funding preventive measures in the municipalities
- supporting municipalities in their efforts to achieve their political alcohol and drug goals
- advising the government in the development of national alcohol and drug policy.

Moreover, presently the Competence centres are more strictly tied to the Norwegian Directorate of Social and Health (*Sosial- og helsedirektoratet*). This suggests that the originally regional and substantially different centres are being profiled as centrally directed national instruments

with a varied regional mandate. In principle, this solution should enable the National Directorate to conduct a centralised distribution of financial resources within the alcohol policy field.

We can now summarise our findings concerning strategic prioritisations, organisational solutions and economic resources in all three countries in Table 1.

## Discussion

The *Finnish* Alcohol programme 2004–2007 is the first serious attempt since 1995 to back up alcohol matters on a national scale. In particular, it is authorised by the government, it is better prepared than its predecessors, and – albeit abstract – it contains a vision of large-scale co-operation between sectors, administrative levels, industry organisations and NGOs. Considering the acute external pressure brought about by the year 2004, this make-over is easy to understand. But strictly speaking the Finnish government woke up very late, only half a year before it had to decide how to tackle the fact that, first, the EU would abolish national derogations on travellers’ rights to bring in alcohol for personal use 1 January 2004, and, second, Estonia would join the EU on 1st May 2004.

If Finland acted with a sleepy head, on the surface *Sweden* seems to have been

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the present alcohol policy field in Finland, Sweden, and Norway

	Finland	Sweden	Norway
<b>Strategic solutions</b>	Internationally reactive Local prevention Governing by networks and partnerships Situational sobriety	Internationally active Local prevention Governing by professionalisation and education Situational sobriety	Internationally active Local prevention Governing by professionalisation and education Situational sobriety
<b>Organisational &amp; administrative solutions</b>	National alcohol programme 2004–2007 (adopted by government)  Local contact persons (network building) Web portal by state authorities (Stakes)	National alcohol action plan 2001–2005 (adopted by government and parliament) Alcohol committee Local prevention coordinators Monthly e-mail newsletter by Alcohol committee Professionalisation	National action plan for alcohol and drug problems 2003–2005 (adopted by government and parliament)  Regional competence centres National bulletin by Competence centres (AproposRus) Professionalisation
<b>Economic resources</b>	Poor	Excellent	Good

more far-sighted. In 2000 Sweden realised that something robust had to be done in order to prevent the situation that the country was to face in 2004. This offered Sweden some time to initiate the creation of a professional nationwide organisation three years before the major alcohol policy changes. It is true, however, that Sweden also acted under acute external pressure. This was because the Swedish government, still in the beginning of 2000, stubbornly believed that it would manage to prolong its derogations from the EU free trade practice beyond 2004. Not only did the EU Commission reject this requirement, it also forced Sweden to extend personal import quotas at a more rapid pace than originally planned.

In terms of protecting fiscal borders and thereby defending national autonomous decision-making Norway, being outside the EU, has had more leeway. Thus, Norway's action plans have followed internal

timetables and considerations. However, it should not be forgotten that price reductions on alcohol in neighbouring countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) will result in increased private import and smuggling, which will probably lead to problems with customs control in Norway. The conclusion is, therefore, that in alcohol policy Norway's status as a non-EU country works only as a partial buffer against EU and other commercial influences.

Sometimes far-reaching, viable decisions are stimulated by compelling situations. Is this the case now in Finland and Sweden?

What is new in Finland is that the fresh Alcohol programme is backed up by the government. On paper the programme makes a serious attempt to commit public, voluntary and market agencies within partnerships crossing horizontal sectors and hierarchical levels. This cooperative model indicates a strikingly loose organi-

sational structure, implying that the government takes the shape of an utterly dispersed network. This may be seen as a continuation and strengthening of the previous, much poorer, alcohol programmes in Finland (1997–2000 and 2001–2003).

In the Swedish case the introduction of prevention workers, including formal education, is purposely planned as an organisational structure to operate for years to come. It is easy to imagine that this professional structure may persist in one form or another in subsequent government programmes.

In Norway the new administrative model for national alcohol policy is only now under construction. The financially relatively well-equipped action plan (2003–2005) is still in its initial phase and the coordinating role of the newly established Norwegian Directorate of Social and Health Care has been subjected to intense discussion. Shortly the position of the regional Competence centres will also be clearer.

Finally we note that researchers have been conspicuously indifferent to the often fumbling attempts to reorganise national alcohol policy since the mid-1990s. However, the fact that alcohol policy has become more fragmented and lost most of its national aura does not necessarily mean that the prevailing plans, organisational models and financial solutions would not be interesting when pondering how alcohol consumption and related problems will be governed in the years to come.

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