



Comparing European Alcohol Policies: What to Compare?

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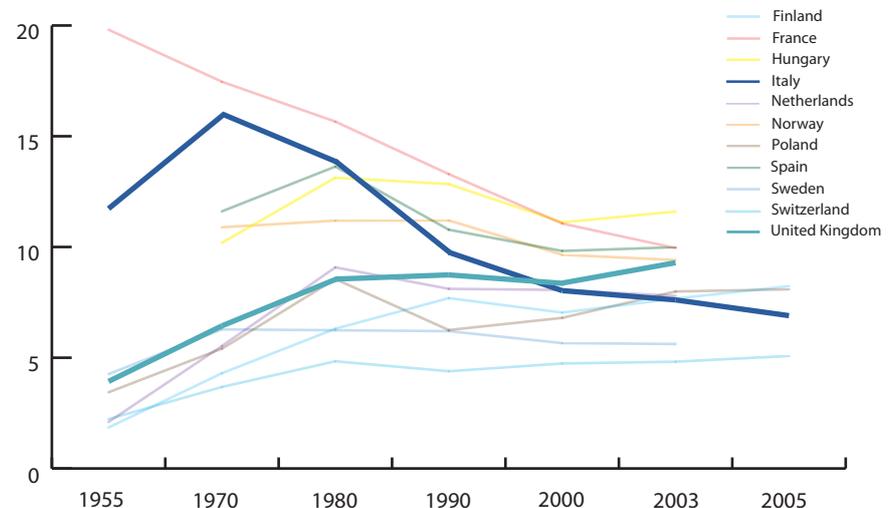
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Introduction

During the last decades alcohol consumption in many European countries has changed remarkably. To quote two prominent examples: in 1955 per capita consumption of pure alcohol in Finland was less than 2 litres and one of the lowest in Europe and far below that of Italy, which with 12 litres was on top of European alcohol consumption. But during the following decades consumption in Italy dropped beyond that of Finland, where consumption increased during the same time. A related development could be observed in the neighbouring countries: decreasing consumption in the traditionally “wet” countries in the South where wine is grown, increasing consumption in the “dry” countries in the North with a tradition of occasional spirit intoxication. Consumption in Central Europe remained comparatively stable. How is this inconsistent development to be understood? What are the factors behind the patchy change?

Figure 1: Recorded alcohol consumption trends in 12 European countries – Litres of pure alcohol per capita

Source: Allamani et al., 2010



On the search for factors changing alcohol consumption ... On the search for factors changing alcohol consumption one quickly comes across preventive activities to reduce alcohol-related problems and/or alcohol consumption mostly taken by the state and occasionally also by other stakeholders such as e.g. the economy or social movements. Looking at them it becomes as quickly clear that the impact of prevention measures on consumption is everything else but simple. To take up the case of Finland and Italy: alcohol-related state interventions aiming at the improvement of health and safety have a long-standing tradition in this Nordic country with its remarkable consumption increase during the last decades. Prevention measures are numerous, diversified, coherent and strict, and focus on the reduction of alcohol consumption by the reduction of availability via e.g. high prices and retail restrictions. In the Mediterranean country with the consumption decrease, preventive state interventions were only established recently, and did neither become strict nor coherent, and do not focus on the reduction of alcohol consumption.

In policy and public debates, alcohol-related interventions motivated by fiscal and economic goals are at least as prominent as preventive ones. States hope to raise their income by alcohol-related taxes or subsidize weak economic branches such as wine production. Gastronomy, tourism and alcohol economy in accordance with prevailing economic dynamics try to increase or at least to maintain their market share, among other things, by sales promotion. And as preventive interventions those motivated by fiscal and economic interests can be classified as “planned” according to a categorization recently presented by Allamani et al. (2010).

As preventive interventions they aim directly at alcohol and alcohol consumption, though at different aspects: In the case of prevention alcohol is seen as a special good endangering public order, public safety, production and/or public health (Mäkelä and Viikari, 1977; Eisenbach-Stangl, 1991); in the case of economic interventions it is addressed as a “common good” (Barbor et al., 2003).

“Planned” and “unplanned” change factors ... The “planned” interventions shaping alcohol consumption are to be distinguished from the numerous and heterogeneous “unplanned” factors, which comprehend “hard factors” – ageing of the population, immigration of people with different drinking patterns – as well as “soft factors” such as changes of gender roles, of life styles and of attitudes towards consumption. But also planned and unplanned factors taken together do not represent all change agents: They for example miss the powerful informal rules and controls of civil society governing drinking and intoxication behaviour.

The search for change agents of alcohol consumption sheds light on their variability and their complex interplay. And it will be of further use for this Policy Brief, which is restricted to the discussion of planned preventive activities by the state, often referred to as “alcohol policies” – a topic given more and more attention in uniting Europe. The great diversity of preventive measures taken in European countries offers inspiration and orientation as well as an excellent occasion to evaluate, reconsider and improve interventions. Unfortunately the rich and interesting research field is underdeveloped and until today misses a common reference frame that allows and facilitates comparisons. The Policy Brief intends to contribute to the development of such a frame.

A workshop at the European Centre in January 2011 This Policy Brief is based on a workshop organized in January 2011 by the author, Allaman Allamani and Andrea Hovenier on behalf of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research and the Region of Tuscany Health Agency. The European Forum for Responsible Drinking (EFRD) on request of the organizers generously subsidized the workshop and support also came from the participants’ own organizations. 14 researchers from 11 European countries and from different disciplines (sociology, political science, economy, psychiatry, criminology) contributed to a lively, stimulating and successful meeting by inputs and by discussion contributions. The sections below are shaped by the main themes discussed and the recommendations emerging from the workshop. But although this Policy Brief would not have been possible without the inputs and discussions of the workshop, the author holds the sole responsibility for its contents.

The background: Recent comparisons of European alcohol policies

During the last three decades – the time when European countries got closer and the EU grew – few attempts have been made to compare alcohol policies across European countries. At the beginning of the new millennium Karlsson and Österberg (2001, 2002) reviewed the main comparisons and adapted some of the indicators for a scale they developed to measure “formal alcohol control policy”. Their instrument was applied in the “European Comparative Alcohol Study” (ECAS) subsidized by the European Union, and then again few years later by Anderson and Baumberg (2006) in a report on “Alcohol in Europe” to the European Commission. Because of its prominent position the current discussion will focus on this scale, but it will also at least touch upon the more recent comparison of Brand et al. (2007). Their approach to analyse “Alcohol Control Policies” not only in Europe but all over the world largely resembles that of the Finnish authors, though they take into account more “modern” – recently established – preventive strategies.

The scale measuring “strict and comprehensive” alcohol control policies ...

As most other authors, Karlsson and Österberg intend “to measure the strictness of alcohol control policies” (2001: 117) taken by European states between 1950 and 2000 by a scale consisting of subgroups of selected “strict” interventions, which are assigned weights according to their “relative importance on alcohol consumption and related problems” (2001: 120). “Strictness” of alcohol policy is a given aim that the authors later complement by “comprehensiveness”. Both aims are considered as virtues in the Nordic countries (where the authors come from), where traditionally men got intoxicated regularly and visibly and where intoxication was linked to violence, but not in Central and Southern European countries where alcohol consumption was integrated in daily life and linked to chronic diseases (Herttua, 2010). Since countries with a tradition of intoxication have mostly established stricter and more comprehensive alcohol control policies, also the evidence base for their effectiveness comes from this part of the world – besides the Nordic countries, also the North-West and North-East of Europe.

At closer sight, “strict” alcohol controls turn out to be mainly physical restrictions of availability for the whole population (60% of the weight of the scale), and additionally few controls targeting the behaviour of societal subgroups such as youth and drivers (30%), whereas other interventions are mostly neglected, among them those aiming at the development of informal and individual controls. Thus, not only the goals but also the interventions selected by the “formal alcohol control policy” scale discriminate against countries with socially integrated drinking patterns,

... neglects informal controls ... where – as for instance in Austria – promotion of individual control is a main aim (Fellöcker and Franke, 2000; Uhl, 2003). The authors of the scale regret the negligence of informal controls (Karlsson and Österberg, 2001: 119) but completely ignore planned alcohol-related interventions with other than preventive aims. Though only at first sight: if reduction of availability was to be expected, also alcohol-related interventions of other than preventive character are counted. Alcohol monopolies or alcohol taxes, which in few countries have a preventive origin but in others a fiscal and/or economic one, were always considered. Measures oscillating between prevention and economy often even got a prominent position in the scale insofar as they were weighted high. But even if interventions motivated by fiscal and economic interests have side-effects on the availability of alcohol beverages and therefore effects on alcohol consumption and harm are to be expected, any concept of alcohol policy – be it a strict or soft one – is blurred.

... as well as “soft” preventive measures The “formal alcohol control policy scale” prefers “strict” restrictions of availability for the whole population and mostly neglects “soft” preventive measures aiming at individual attitudes and behaviour as e.g. public campaigns and treatment. The effects of the “soft” controls on societal level are difficult to measure and they are seldom investigated and evaluated. The few “soft” measures considered in the scale were step-motherly treated: they were poorly defined – as “national alcohol prevention programme or agency”, for instance – and given low weight (one of three points). In the scale of Brand et al. the subgroup “national prevention programmes” was modernized and upgraded and became “community mobilization” with a medium weight, but treatment remained ignored. It should be mentioned that both scales renounce to measure enforcement – again to the regret of Karlsson and Österberg.

It is politically as well as culturally biased ... The scale of Karlsson and Österberg is (alcohol) politically as well as (alcohol) culturally biased, as “strict” controls are favoured in European cultures with less integrated alcohol consumption and – not accidentally – well-established alcohol research. The voice of the countries with integrated consumption patterns was little regarded also in another respect: Although the Finnish authors proved to be aware of cultural differences and collaborated with country experts – mostly researchers –, they kept control of the final interpretation and thus contributed to the cultural bias and cultural gap in alcohol research. Brand et al. did not collaborate with country experts, they only contacted “public health officials or other knowledgeable authorities from the country in question” when official sources of OECD and WHO failed “to provide information about a given policy”.

... and lacks a definition of its topic The political and cultural bias of the scales under discussion links with a blurred definition of alcohol policy: Both scales were constructed to measure one type of alcohol policy – “strict controls” – and both were finally used to rank countries along their “national alcohol policy”. In the course of the construction and application of the scale “the whole wide range of different alcohol policy options” (Karlsson and Österberg, 2001: 120) got lost. Forgotten were questions on other types of preventive alcohol policies and on intelligent indicators acknowledging cultural diversity. And forgotten were the poor and unbalanced database and the moody background of other planned and unplanned change agents of alcohol consumption. One might also conclude: forgotten was research in favour of (strict) policy.

The discussion in the following section will focus on selected indicators and further obstacles to comparative research of alcohol policy. After that, three approaches for the assessment and comparison of national alcohol policies are presented.

Prominent indicators under discussion

The 6 dimensions of the scale and their weight The “scale of formal alcohol control policies” is based on 6 dimensions or “subgroups” as the authors call them, measured by at least one weighted indicator. The six subgroups, their maximum weight (max) and their indicators are (1) “control of production and wholesale” (max 3), indicated by a state monopoly or by licenses; (2) “control of distribution” (max 7), indicated by a monopoly for retail or by various sales restrictions; (3) “personal control” (max 3), measured by age limits for sale; (4) “control of marketing” (max 2), indicated by advertising restrictions; (5) “social and environmental controls” (max 3), measured by BAC limits; (6) “public policy” (max 2), indicated by a “national alcohol prevention and/or education programme or agency. Alcohol taxes considered to be an important change factor with regard to availability and therefore used in most of the former comparisons, had to be omitted from the scale for design reasons: they were studied in another part of ECAS.

The scale of Brand et al. (2007) differs in the names given to the subgroups or dimensions and to some extent also in the choice of respective indicators. Of interest in the present context is that prices were included instead of taxes, an indicator that can be better assessed but which in most European countries is not associated with preventive state interventions. The doubts raised against taxes are further developed in the next paragraph. More indicators are reviewed in the following ones – roughly one per subgroup.

Taxes

Though calculation and comparison are troublesome, most alcohol policy discussions and scales consider alcohol taxes. By taxes states can model the price of alcoholic beverages and thus their availability. Appreciated “strict” alcohol policy is indicated by high taxes and tax increases, “permissive” alcohol policies by low taxes and tax reductions. But taxes at closer sight are a problematic indicator especially in EU countries: The value added tax (VAT) is the same for all beverages in EU with only few exceptions. It is therefore not useful to consider it as a national alcohol preventive measure. Contrary to VAT, excise duty – the “sin tax” – belongs to the Member States as a source of revenue and it is more flexible with regard to special – “moral” – goods as alcoholic beverages. However, harmonization of these taxes also started in the beginning of the 1970s in EU with the definition of minimum tax rates for different types of alcoholic beverages. Tax changes in European countries during the last decades at first sight primarily became an indicator of EU market harmonization than of anything else.

Taxes are used to protect national production, to raise state income, and sometimes also to protect health ...

The aim of tax harmonization was to dismantle protection of national production and to promote circulation of goods including alcoholic beverages. But an analysis of actual excise duties in EU Member States can illustrate that harmonization and protection may be reconciled: the countries with alcohol production keep tax rates to the minimum, those importing alcoholic beverages raise them – some as high as possible. However, harmonization does not only come along with protection of national (alcohol) production, it might also accompanied by fiscal and health motives or by both.

Harmonization only added to the diffusivity of a prominent indicator used to measure strictness of alcohol policy. Already before, health reasons were given to disguise fiscal motives for tax increases and it was difficult if not impossible to distinguish between the multifold interests behind taxation of alcohol beverages even in countries with strict alcohol policies. If taxes are used as indicator for alcohol policy, research such as on the political discourse and political process accompanying tax changes is required to help distinguish between manifest and latent aims of such changes.

Beside troublesome calculations on the basis of incomplete and unreliable data also these problems could have stimulated Brand et al. (2007) to replace taxes by prices. But the main reason presumably has to be looked for in the doubtful impact of taxes on the purchase of alcoholic beverages.

ages. This leads back to the question on how alcohol policy is defined. But taxes in no case seem to be of great use as indicator.

Licensing rules for sale of alcoholic beverages

Licensing rules regulate who may sell alcohol to whom and the conditions of sale. Karlsson and Österberg subsume them under “control of distribution”, Brand et al. under “physical availability”. As with alcohol taxes, licensing rules aim at the governance of availability and they consequently belong to the traditional arsenal of alcohol policy as well as to the toolbox of alcohol policy indicators. And as with alcohol taxes, the question arises if licensing rules can be of use as indicator and if yes, how a sensible and relevant indicator would look like.

Licensing in Switzerland is partly a state task, partly a task of the regional administration and sometimes also a communal task ...

If a study on licensing rules would be carried out, Switzerland would be an attractive candidate for a case-study highlighting difficulties of assessment. In Switzerland licensing is partly a state task, partly a task of regional administration – the cantons – and sometimes also a communal task. The regulations also vary with beverage type. In all cantons the on- as well as off-premise sale of spirits requires a license. With other alcoholic beverages, rules are less strict and therefore more diverse. The cantons also differ in respect to the regulation of conditions of sale: few cantons allow vending machines, others prohibit the sale of spirits before 9 a.m. or the sale of alcoholic beverages in general between 9 p.m. and 7 a.m. respectively. To complicate the picture further, the implementation of national and cantonal rules sometimes takes place at the community/ municipality level. And occasionally communities decide on additional rules for sale such as for instance on prohibition during “high risk” sport events. However, such measures require a legal basis on the national and regional level. In addition, the right to regulate the sale of alcoholic beverages in their territory, besides politically defined units, is given to private organizations (“private Körperschaften”) such as to the National Railway Company in its railway stations.

Considering the almost unlimited possibilities to regulate the sale of alcoholic beverages as outlined by the Swiss example, licensing rules are a very demanding indicator for an alcohol policy scale, especially if changes over a longer period are looked at. There are further factors impairing their use: they have not been established in all countries and when, they serve stakeholders and interests not necessarily linked to health and safety. Indeed, licensing restrictions (if not closing of premises altogether), which were established in the 19th century for bars and taverns, aimed at limiting the possibility for the working class to meet and to get organized.

Most repressive and exclusive restrictions were abolished during the last decades but they seem to come back, mostly associated with preventing youth drinking in selected public places.

A preliminary comparison of patchy data for three Nordic and three Southern wine-growing countries presented at the workshop (Annaheim and Gmel, 2011) illustrates the limitations but also usefulness of licensing rules: It shows that the strict licensing rules of the countries with a strong temperance movement in the North got liberalized in the course of the last decades, whereas the poor regulations in three main wine-producing European countries in the South had remained more or less the same.

Advertising restrictions

A look at existing data raises more questions than insights ...

“Control of marketing” as the Finnish authors call the special subgroup developed to cover advertising restrictions is given relatively low weight as alcohol policy. The low degree of unification among European states might also indicate the low weight given by politicians to this intervention. Or should the variability indicate the weakness of the political system *vis-à-vis* the economic one, “the alcohol industry”? Existing data only allow to conclude that state restrictions are spread, but differ substantially according to (1) their legal character (statutory and non-statutory limits), (2) type of beverage and (3) specification according to type of media. The data and their gaps leave big question marks regarding further differences of regulations (e.g. especially protected groups, responsible political level), “career” of the interventions (when introduced and when changed; content of changes) and their background (stakeholders and interests involved, role of EU), and as regards convergences on European level.

Legal alcohol purchase age and legal age limit for on- and off-premise sales

State interventions restricting the access of alcoholic beverages to youth are defined as “personal control” and distinguished from “distribution control” by Karlsson and Österberg, as an element of “physical availability” by Brand et al. The differentiation of the Finnish authors is important. By “nature”, personal more often than market controls seem to have or to develop an exclusive character. The restrictions often targeted already stigmatized persons, because of e.g. repeated intoxication, violations of other principles of order and conduct and/or alcoholism treatment in the past. Since the last century, personal restrictions increasingly targeted youth, in this case mainly for health reasons.

Limits seem to be lower in countries with integrated drinking patterns and higher in those with disintegrated consumption habits ...

Legal age limits for purchase and/or sale of alcoholic beverages are common in European countries, although different from country to country. The variations are systematic insofar as limits seem to be lower in countries with integrated drinking patterns and higher in those with disintegrated consumption habits (Allaman, Beccaria and Voller, 2010; Beccaria, 2010). Not only the consumption context but also the content differs according to (1) the object of control (either the youth themselves and/or the alcohol servers and sellers); (2) the consumption at public drinking places or elsewhere (on- and off-premise sale); (3) the responsible political level (see licensing rules); (4) the type of alcoholic beverages (spirits are more severely dealt with than “softer” drinks); and (5) the acknowledgement of informal controls by accompanying adults – either in the public and/or at home – or not.

One interesting difference “active” on another level should be added: the speed of changes of the regulations. Whereas the regulations in e.g. the UK and Italy did not change since the time between the Wars, some of the 9 regulations in Austria established on province level were changed few months after a heated public debate on youthful “coma drinking” in 2007. The fast change indicates other motives than the improvement of health and safety, but was this made possible so quickly due to regional responsibility?

Legal blood alcohol limit in traffic (BAC)

In most European countries drunk driving became considered as a severe alcohol-related problem and a limit for legal blood alcohol has been introduced during the last decades, though the limit still differs remarkably in extent and diversification, e.g. for young people. Both scales consider the BAC limit – as e.g. “social and environmental control” – and weight it high. Brand et al. additionally consider enforcement by “random blood testing” and sanctions as “mandatory penalty for exceeding legal limits”, thus shedding light on another neglected side of the indicators of the alcohol policy scale: They do not only hardly reflect the immense cultural variability of respective regulations, but they also neglect enforcement and sanctions of violations. The few indicators added by Brand et al. by far do not cover the complexity of controls: Even if random blood testing is allowed and implemented, questions remain on how it is done on a daily basis: e.g. how it is prioritized by the police, and how police forces and officers select drivers.

The BAC limits are thought to regulate alcohol-related problems that in most countries are documented by special statistics and regularly discussed in public: Alcohol-related accidents and deaths are among the

... alcohol policies as expression of public opinion and attention ...

most “popular” negative consequences of drinking. The continuous aggravation of the respective regulations might be facilitated by public attention but it also might be promoted by it: Alcohol-related traffic accidents drop since decades continuously and they in many countries – e.g. Italy and Austria – have started to do so before regulations were enforced or strengthened. Which raises not only the question on the motives behind the interventions but also on their preventive character.

Alcohol-specific treatment

... neglected treatment ...

In any comparison special treatment for alcohol-related problems was considered, though there are good reasons for its inclusion: Size, extension and character of treatment seem to be a good indicator for a strict and comprehensive alcohol policy not so much because they are determined by treatment needs but by “alcohol cultural and political traditions” (Klingemann, Takala and Hunt, 1992: 298). In other words: the treatment system for alcohol-related problems including self-help, expresses as well as reinforces negative attitudes towards alcohol consumption and therefore functions also as preventive measure. It also has preventive character in countries without strong temperance forces and less alcohol-political restrictions – though its impact is presumably weaker. The impact on the public opinion of the voice of those treated as well as of health professionals “carrying the message” on the dangers of drinking alcohol and its addictive character is not to be underestimated. Treatment should therefore be considered in a scale on alcohol policy.

However, as other indicators discussed, treatment is not easy to assess: It differs not only by size and scope but also by organizational structures delivering treatment (e.g. psychiatric – non-psychiatric; residential – out-patient), by professions involved, by target groups, by treatment programmes as well as modes of admission and financing – only to list selected items.

To summarize

The “set of generic problems” and more ...

The discussion of selected indicators used in comparisons of national alcohol policies reinforces the “set of generic problems” identified by Ritter in reviewing the scale of Brand et al. (2007): “lack of available data, the comparability problems between countries, lack of shared methodology between research groups; and the potential for large differences between regions or states within countries...”. The present discussion additionally sheds light on the ambiguous character of so defined “strict” preventive alcohol policy beside health and safety serving state budgets as

well as economic branches as well as stigmatization and exclusion; on the cultural biases in the present choice of alcohol policy indicators and their weights; on the need of a culturally neutral definition of preventive alcohol policy; and last but not least on the need to assess national alcohol policies in a way that allows for comparisons.

How to define alcohol policy? – Alcohol policy as label, system and/or enforcement

The alcohol control policy scales discussed are composed of interventions considered to be strict and effective irrespective of their official dedication, their enforcement, their structure and their cultural significances. Strict alcohol policy looked at in the light of the selected indicators is a more or less colourful collection of laws, regulations and codes, organizations and agencies, programmes, trainings and campaigns not guided by transparent rules. Three definitions of alcohol policy are proposed, which seem to be suited to respond to the cultural diversity of alcohol prevention policies and to guide a transparent selection of intelligent indicators, though none of them is able to solve alone the whole “set of generic problems”. If the national policies are assessed in a systematic way all approaches allow (qualitative) comparisons and the development of one or more typologies.

Three alternative approaches:

- (I) The “label” counts** *(I) The “label” counts:* alcohol prevention policy is what is officially defined as such within a given country. All organizations, structures and processes/ interventions officially associated with the reduction of alcohol-related problems are taken into account irrespective of their effects on alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm. Measures officially not associated with alcohol-related problems are not considered as alcohol controls even if they reduce harm, but they might be investigated for comparative reasons. This approach allows to map comprehensive and rudimentary control policies geographically and culturally and to prove that comprehensive policies often combine strict and soft measures raising questions on their interplay. In general soft measures will become more prominent, strict measures will lose the top position they gained in the political debate.

To return to the Finnish and the Italian case: On the one hand, in the Nordic country not only the extended activities aiming at reducing availability will become visible, but also the comparatively large investments in the promotion of individual controls – be it within the production, the health, the educational or the penal sector. Italy on the other hand will probably remain a country with poorly developed alcohol controls

with regard to reduction of availability as well as of individual controls, but even if a sector turns out not to be diversified in respect to alcohol-related harm, it might provide appropriate and professional responses to those in need – as e.g. appropriate treatment and care. Finland and Italy are taken here as hypothetical extremes of European alcohol control mixes. But whatever variants of alcohol prevention controls will be discovered by looking at properly defined policy units: this approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of national concepts of state as well as of private (informal) tasks in the field, and of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems. And it allows for extensive (qualitative) comparisons insofar as national concepts are assessed in the same way.

(2) Alcohol policy as system that cuts across a range of policy fields (2) *Alcohol policy as system whose matter cuts across a range of policy fields.* If alcohol policy is looked at as a system, its elements become visible, investigable and comparable, beside organizational structures – e.g. leadership and management –, identity and stakeholders. Elements can be identified by comparable themes, sub-themes, key issues, target group(s), and by their special practice. A system is also characterized by its limits, though they also depend on research questions: If only preventive controls, i.e. health and safety issues, are considered, national alcohol policies often might look consistent and homogeneous, but turn multitudinous if fiscal and economic aspects are included. If in countries with poorly developed alcohol policy systems also “functional equivalents” are considered, i.e. non-specialised elements managing alcohol-related problems, the investigated system becomes even more complex but also appropriate.

The system approach also facilitates the consideration of different control layers – for instance controls on municipal, regional and national level. Where the controls are located is an interesting finding in itself that does not impair but guides and enriches comparisons. To stress again the well-investigated case of Finland compared to a Central European country such as Austria: In such a comparison the Nordic country would become graspable in the mighty Finnish state monopoly on production and retail which to some extent survived liberalization enforced by EU but also got a successor in regular alcohol action plans, which as the annual campaigns are developed by a special committee still imprinted by representatives of the temperance forces. Instead, the “patchy Austrian system” would represent a “mixed” type of alcohol prevention policy, with various but little centralized organizations working in the frame of specialised psychiatric treatment in earlier years, but as independent addiction prevention units at present, mostly established on regional level, not restricted to alcohol but including illicit substances and other addictions such as smoking and gambling and mainly tying with informal controls as well as focussing on

individual (self)controls. In the case of Austria, for comparative reasons also alcohol measures with fiscal and economic aims would have to be considered: The Austrian state traditionally supports agrarian alcohol producers by often changing interventions, mostly small wine-growers in economically less developed parts of the country but also small farmers producing spirits, the latter for decades by a state monopoly. The division of labour between the national state intervening in “small alcohol business” and the health-oriented interventions in consumption patterns on regional level do not only inform on basic construction principles of the Austrian alcohol control system but also on the understanding of state and informal- respectively self-controls and the position of production and consumption in general.

(3) Comparing alcohol policy based on enforcement

(3) Comparing alcohol policy based on enforcement: Enforcement is a complex and laborious matter and therefore mostly disregarded in alcohol policy comparisons. Alcohol policy comparisons as the discussed scales thus only assess their symbolic content and hereby an unknown part of the “control energy” invested. If enforcement is discussed in the frame of alcohol policy analysis it is mostly restricted to the implementation of formal drinking controls, i.e. to laws on and regulations of drunk driving, minimum drinking age and the sale of alcoholic beverages to intoxicated customers. Other alcohol intervention policies are considered to be *implemented* as alcohol education, *delivered* as alcohol treatment, *imposed* as taxes or *self-regulated* as marketing controls even if they are mandatory. Language signifies a main difference between enforcement and other ways of implementation: enforcement is perceived in policy areas where police or other official control agents are responsible to some extent in putting a regulation into effect (Lloyd, 2011). But though this difference is of great interest for comparisons – where is the police responsible for what and how does it proceed in different political, organizational and cultural contexts –, it is as well enlightening to study other types of implementation of alcohol-related measures, the organizations and agencies responsible for it, and to compare them across European countries.

Enforcement research, especially day-to-day enforcement and its changes over time, is of interest for the understanding of the working of alcohol prevention measures in different contexts. Unfortunately scientific attention is mostly attracted by changes in regulations or enforcement practices, i.e. in extraordinary, not typical, unique events that cannot be compared. But only the study of everyday enforcement promotes the understanding of the interplay between the interventions of different state organizations and the informal controls of the civil and private sphere.

The context of alcohol policy – Alcohol policy and culture

The discussion on the comparison of national alcohol control policies in Europe repeatedly knocked against the (cultural) context. A rough comparison of national alcohol policy to national drug policy can shed light on its importance: It immediately shows that national drug policies in Europe are far more uniform and (stronger?) converging. Comparing national drug policies therefore becomes difficult and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) struggles to develop new policy indicators. Also new indicators instead of national differences tend to measure policy changes on European level, i.e. mostly the extent to which countries took up “harm reduction” as a drug-political goal instead of abstinence and war on drugs (Eisenbach-Stangl et al., 2008).

... a comparison of national alcohol policy to national

drug policy ...

Therefore, contrary to alcohol policy, in the case of drug policy it is easier to assess the type of drug policy implemented (the focus today is on “soft” policy), but it is far more difficult to assess national characteristics. The main reasons are well-known: international treaties limit the scope of drug policies, which in Europe is further constricted by additional regulations among other things aiming at the harmonization of enforcement on EU level.

Seen from the other side: national alcohol policies compared to national drug policies are diverse, various, wealthy, complex and flexible. Alcohol policies command of a much wider range of policy options in the field of demand reduction – keywords: controlled and moderate consumption, reduction of alcohol-related risks – as well as of supply reduction: Most market interventions are not applicable by drug policy, be they quality and price controls, licensing rules, trading hours, age limits and advertisement regulations. The variability and wealth of alcohol policies is rooted in its cultural context to which it can and has to resort for formation. Though regional and national traditions are increasingly thinned out by international developments – and though national alcohol policies accordingly are also converging – they still nourish state responses to alcohol-related problems and also alcohol consumption patterns.

The common cultural roots of alcohol policy and alcohol consumption ...

If the cultural context moves in the centre of observation, alcohol policy and alcohol consumption including intoxication patterns become twins, governed by the same societal forces. To take another example from the favourite case countries: If alcoholic beverages are defined as dangerous intoxicants such as in Finland, alcohol consumption will presumably resemble drug consumption and the controls will move in direction of

the international “strict and comprehensive” drug control system dealing with consumption and harm as well as with production and retail. But if as in Italy alcoholic beverages such as wine are defined as nutrition, only a small part of the circuit will be of interest for state governance, most probably the control of the quality of beverages sold on the market and alcohol-related harm. Since harm will probably be conceived as limited side-effect, its management might remain restricted, non-specialised and without (political) label.

The glance at the shared cultural roots of alcohol policy and alcohol consumption stimulates the formulation of questions on their diversification and their interplay: On the situation when the first state controls were formulated and when they got extended; on the stakeholders behind development and changes and on the fate of the informal controls. Did – all or few (which ones?) – informal controls dissociate with extended state policies as probably in Finland, or did they – all or few (which ones?) – become an expression of political disobedience and part of political opposition? Was dissociation linked to enforcement? Etc. etc.

... fashions and sustainable changes ...

How deeply alcohol consumption and policies/controls are rooted in a common culture is also to be read from their part in the formation of identity on national as well as on sub-cultural and personal level. The cultural roots promote resistance and a long life: it is not easy to change consumption patterns and prevailing controls quickly. Fashions develop, of course, but in referring to the common cultural context it becomes possible to distinguish them from sustainable changes. *Vis-à-vis* the cultural context, the separated investigation of selected policy elements and their effects becomes dubious: Taxes on alcoholic beverages, for instance, and their effects have to be looked at as part of an alcohol culture. Not only desired effects would be of interest – i.e. the decrease of consumption with increasing prices – but any consequence, be it nil or negative – such as increased consumption of illicit beverages of low quality. Appropriate research questions consequently can touch other than alcohol-related issues. With regard to the extension of age limits it might be of interest to look at the effects on informal controls of alcohol consumption as well as of brawl.

Policy recommendations

How does the discussion on comparisons of European alcohol policies translate into recommendations for policy? Many links have been established but only few can be further developed. Those developed below mostly focus on recommendations for research policy, only one dares to approach alcohol policy itself.

- (1) *Alcohol policy and alcohol research should be separated as “strict and comprehensive” as possible – love makes blind (as does dependence). Research/policy comparisons should be (alcohol) politically neutral and neither guided by questions raised by policy nor by favourite policies, but by questions raised by “the” material – i.e. by data on alcohol policies in all European countries. Otherwise data gaps are filled and complexity is reduced by preferences and the comparison ends up measuring favourite instead of “real” policies. To decide on favourite interventions and to develop arguments for the respective choice remains the task of politicians who are well advised to make independent use of independent research findings. Although politicians should make extensive use of research findings they should remain aware of the non-scientific ethical dimensions of their decisions and neither hide behind findings nor exert any pressure on research to provide data that legitimate decisions.*
- (2) *The vast gaps of alcohol (policy) research in Europe should be mapped thoroughly and feasible strategies to fill them up should be developed. The knowledge gaps in alcohol research are systematic insofar as it is mostly countries with integrated consumption patterns and “soft” alcohol policy that did not establish respective research. To allow comparative studies of European alcohol policies on the basis of a sound database, not only stimulation of respective research on national and regional level is needed, but also the promotion of continuous collaboration between research centres and researchers: Systematic and comparable collection of data is only possible on the basis of continuous communication of equal partners.*
- (3) *Also in alcohol (policy) research the cultural diversity of European countries should be acknowledged and respected – in research as well as in policy. Culture plays a main role in the formation of identity and in its core consists of emotionally taken knowledge – culture therefore is a delicate matter and has to be dealt with cautiously. Consequently, comparative alcohol studies should be carried out by teams consisting of at least one representative per country, which has the final statement on national issues. The same principles should guide the work*

of bodies discussing transnational alcohol intervention strategies. Findings and (alcohol political) actions disregarding cultural diversity and cultural peculiarities might have undesirable consequences such as lacking impact, active boycott or the reinforcement of xenophobic tendencies on national and regional level.

- (4) *National/regional alcohol policy should be acknowledged as part of national/regional (alcohol) culture, which also determines consumption, and as a complex matter in need of comprehensive and transparent definition.* Alcohol consumption patterns and alcohol policy are shaped by the same culture and respective changes are culturally rooted. Alcohol policy therefore is inadequately conceived if it is taken as more or less accidental bundle of loosely related single measures, and it should better be investigated as the meaningful and complex expression of cultural matters, which manifest themselves in identity, in consumption, in intoxication and transgression, in private and state controls. Alcohol policy conceived as a complex cultural matter consists of various interacting elements and the policy itself interacts with numerous alcohol- and not alcohol-related structures, which are of basic interest for comparison. If the comparison is not restricted to the symbolic level few elements in any case should be taken into account, among them: informal controls, “functional equivalents”, and state controls governing alcohol-related problems without alcohol label, as well as the translation of alcohol regulations in daily controls commonly called “enforcement”. Comparative research on alcohol cultures will inform the development of sensitive and “intelligent” indicators for alcohol policy.
- (5) *Comparisons of alcohol policy would be informed by and profit from comparisons with drug and other addictions policies.* Different substances are submitted to control regimes with different rationales – in European as well as in other countries – and to compare them with alcohol policy would enhance the understanding of both. However, one comparison is of special interest in the present context: “Strict and comprehensive” alcohol policy – the alcohol policy guiding existing European comparisons – mostly consisting of measures restricting availability of alcoholic beverages, i.e. of measures intervening in production. There are far more “strict and comprehensive” illicit drug policies, which are historically based on the same rationale, i.e. on restrictions of availability, and not only in Europe but worldwide. According to existing regulations few substances should not even be produced, production of others is strongly limited and monitored worldwide, third substances should only be available in medical channels. 100 years after their

implementation, critique is not only raised by enforcement professionals but also by politicians and they do not only focus on the exorbitant costs of the control system and ineffectiveness but also on the “drug and drug prevention misery” (Quensel, 1982 and 2010) brought about by the destruction of informal and local/national controls better suited to respond to specific problems. On the search for a drug policy more embedded in the cultural context and more effectively tackling acute problems, European countries developed the “harm reduction” approach – a meanwhile prominent part of drug policy in Europe that nevertheless would be neglected by a scale measuring “strict and comprehensive” policy in the way described above. This rapid comparison reminds of the effects of controls on their subjects and that every comparison indispensably has to develop a way to assess them.

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Presentations

- Allaman Allamani* (Florence Health Agency, Region of Tuscany): Community Interventions as Policy Measure Indicators
- Allaman Allamani*: Treatment as Policy Measure Indicator: Development of Health System Programs Treating Alcohol – Related Problems within the European States
- Beatrice Annaheim, Gerhard Gmel* (Addiction Info Switzerland, Lausanne): Licensing Rules for Different Types of Selling Places
- Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl* (European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna): Prevention and Education
- Zsuzsanna Elekes* (Corvinus University of Budapest, Institute of Sociology and Social Policy): Minimum Age to Buy Alcohol
- Kimmo Herttua* (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and University of Helsinki, Department of Social Research): Taxes on Alcohol Beverages
- Ronald Knibbe* (University of Maastricht,): Advertising Limits: National Laws
- Kai Leichsenring* (European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna): Comments on the Indicators Selected for Comparison and Suggestions



Charlie Lloyd (The University of York, Department of Health Sciences):
Policing Drink: The Enforcement of Alcohol Controls

Stephan Quensel (Institute for Drug Research – BISDRO, University of
Bremen): Alcohol Policy in its Cultural Context

Grazyna Świątkiewicz (Institute for Psychiatry and Neurology, Warsaw)
Prevention and Education. Proposal for Qualitative Analysis)

Frank Zobel (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Research,
Policy, Prevention and Content Coordination, Lisbon): Lessons to Be
Learned from the Comparison of European Drug Policies

Written contributions

Nikki Coghill (University of West England, Alcohol and Health Research
Unit, Bristol): Changes in Legislation for Trading Hours Permitted for
Selling Alcohol in Twelve Countries throughout Europe 1960 – 2009

Thomas Karlsson (National Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki):
How to Operationalize Tax Changes as an Indicator for National
Alcohol Policy?



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