

Opinions on alcohol policy in Sweden

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journals.sagepub.com/home/nad**Thomas Karlsson** 

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In the Nordic countries, probably more than anywhere in the world, people's views on alcohol policy issues have been thoroughly studied and documented. A good example on this research tradition is the article "Solidarity or self-interest? Public opinion in relation to alcohol policies in Sweden" by Karlsson et al. (2020). The article focuses on people's acceptance of public policies, that in a narrow sense, could be in conflict with their own self-interest.

In a global perspective, alcohol policy in the Nordic countries, Denmark excluded, is relatively strictly regulated and has been for a long time. Still, various studies that have been conducted on people's views on alcohol policy paint a picture of wide popular support for regulating the markets for alcoholic beverages. This has especially been the case in Sweden. According to a study of the population's trust in different institutions, the alcohol monopoly Systembolaget has for many years now been the institution Swedes trust the most, surpassing in popularity institutions such as the police force, the higher education system, and even Ikea.

Although not focusing on the alcohol monopoly per se, the article by Karlsson digs deeper into the motives that lie behind this support of the Swedish alcohol policy system.

The article provides an interesting insight into the complex relationship between public opinion on alcohol policies and the policies themselves, and extends our understanding of why people in the Nordic countries, and Sweden particularly, show such a broad support for a policy which in many other parts of the world would be perceived as highly intrusive. The question of why people widely accept restrictive alcohol policies has more seldom been asked in surveys like this, and in that sense this article deepens the analyses that were made in the 2013 thematic issue of *NAD* focusing on trends and developments in public opinion and alcohol policy in the Nordic countries (Karlsson & Rehn-Mendoza, 2013).

The results presented in the article convey an interesting and striking picture of Swedish people's views and knowledge of alcohol policy. It becomes clear that in Sweden alcohol policy is

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perceived as a societal question in the highest degree whereas alcohol use/abuse is perceived as a social problem. It is also considered acceptable by the majority of the population that quite intrusive measures are applied in order to solve the problem. Although the results might be somewhat similar in, for instance, Norway and Finland regarding alcohol policy, Sweden is probably in a league of its own in this respect.

The article manifests what we already know from previous studies, i.e., that people's self-interest does matter, and that people who drink more are less likely to support restrictive policies. What is, however, remarkable and surprising is the importance of ideological values and norms that are far more important in explaining Swedes' public opinion on alcohol policy. It is also noteworthy that the study shows that there is an overwhelming consensus that the consequences of alcohol for society are mostly negative, although the consequences of alcohol consumption on a personal level would be neutral or even positive. Solidarity, accurate knowledge and sharp problem analysis explain more than egoism and personal experience.

Finally, as a reassuring result of this study, it seems that alcohol education and information work; if not on a personal level, then at least

on a societal level. This is also, in my opinion, the most important take-home message from this article, especially for policy makers and professionals.


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