

Communities, grass-roots movements and substance abuse problems: new strategies¹

Substance abuse problems can roughly be classified into two categories. The first category concerns *the size of consumption* in the general population and in specific groups, such as the so-called risk groups. The latter are groups in which the consequences of consumption are especially damaging: for example, drunk driving or occupational injuries under the influence of alcohol. The second category is related to the *treatment* of alcoholics and other substance abusers.

The welfare state is an important social actor in relation to both of these factors. In recent years the structure and functioning of the welfare state in Scandinavia has been highly debated and, in several cases, the public and political debate has pointed to two new — or rather re-invented — forms of solutions to these problems: namely, social movements and community initiatives. Both of these suggested solutions are heavily inspired by previous efforts to solve the two problems.

Based on experience we can conclude that social movements especially can influence the size of the consumption and experience tells us that when the general consumption is reduced there will also be a reduction among the risk groups. One of the effects of the early temperance movement was lower alcohol consumption even though research has shown that consumption in the 19th century was on the decline even before

the movement was founded (Gundelach 1988). However, based on the results of the movement we should discuss the potential of a new contemporary movement.

Also past experience tells us that the effort to solve the social problems related to alcohol and drugs can be successfully carried out in the community. The idea is that the social networks can contribute to solving the problems of even the weakest groups such as the drug users.

In this article I wish to argue that neither of these traditional approaches can solve the current substance abuse problems mainly because they build on an understanding of society which does not sufficiently take into account the character of the present society. The point of departure for this argumentation is a discussion of the concepts of *social movement* and *community*.

Concepts and society

It is customary to expect that social theories and problems in specific social areas require an analy-



¹) This article is a revised version of a paper given at a Nordic Meeting for Social Alcohol and Drug Research in Charlottenslund, Denmark, in August 1992.

sis of the society in which they play a part. It is impossible to study social movements, communities, drugs or for that matter any other social phenomenon without discussing the character of the surrounding society. Unfortunately, in many studies the analysis is seldom made explicit. For instance, there is no doubt that both the concept of *social movement* as well as the concept of *community* (or *Gemeinschaft*) mean something different today than when these concepts first were used more than 100 years ago (cf. Gundelach & Mortensen & Tonboe 1990).

Social movements are created to change society. People organize in one way or the other and they have a project or an objective to accomplish in the organization. The movements are not only against the status quo, they are more than that. They are organizations aimed at self-help and the creation of social institutions which would benefit their supporters as well as other groups in society. The understanding of social movements which is given here refers to the classic understanding of large social movements with a comprehensive societal project (Heberle 1952; Touraine 1988). The concept of social movements, or grass-roots movements as they are often called, can also refer to smaller protest groups.

In the founding period of social science the only liberating social movement which was studied by social scientists was the labor movement. Other 19th century movements such as the women's movement or the temperance movement (for many years the latter had more members than the labor movement) were seldom analyzed by the early social scientists. Without doubt this was due to the fact that the worker-capitalist relationship was the core contradiction in the emerging industrial society. The consequence is that traditional theories do not exist about the temperance movement because it did not have a class-related project. However, later theories about the temperance movement argue that the development of the movement is related to industrialization (Bundgaard & Eriksen 1986; Gundelach 1988) especially the increased demands on self-discipline among the workers (Bundgaard & Eriksen 1986, 59).

Of course, there is no doubt that the temperance movement has been of great importance in all of the Scandinavian countries as well as in many others. However, present Scandinavia looks

very different from the time around the year 1900. Industrialization is completed and the class structure is much more fluid. Thus, the question is whether one can imagine the emergence of a new effective temperance movement in a society where the social conditions are so very different from the time when temperance movements first emerged? This is a central question the article will try to answer.

A second question concerns the concept of community. It is related to the classic term *Gemeinschaft*. The opposite terms are *society* and *Gesellschaft* respectively. These terms are difficult to translate into equivalent terms in the Scandinavian languages. Often the term *lokalsamfund* (Danish) or the equivalent term in Norwegian and Swedish is used. Directly translated this means *local society*, but this is an unsatisfactory translation because it denotes a geographical area and because it is difficult to define an opposite term for *lokalsamfund*.

In Scandinavia the use of the word *lokalsamfund* hides what Tönnies, in his classic theory ((1887) 1963), is concerned with: namely, types of relations and not types of societies. *Gemeinschaft* according to Tönnies concerns expressive relations with a subjective feeling that the partners are closely linked. *Gesellschaft*, on the contrary, indicates social relations characterized by a specific purpose or an intention: the relations are characterized by rationality.

Thus, the present public argumentation about strengthening the communities has little in common with the classic understanding of *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*. In Danish a community (*lokalsamfund*) is defined more or less geographically, for instance as "a small, geographical area where the citizens objectively have — and subjectively feel — a social and functional fellowship" (Sundbo 1972). Community in this sense is similar to the traditional village with close cooperation in work and cultural affairs and a high level of interaction.

Consequently, we have to disengage the discussion about the function of the community in regard to drug problems from the classic sociological discussion about *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* and only consider the concept with the eyes of the modern rational administrator. In this sense community is perceived as a way to solve problems

which cannot be tackled by the traditional welfare system. From this viewpoint we should ask whether local communities (*lokalsamfund*) exist in the present society and whether they are able to solve the problems which are suggested by the administrators or in the public debate.

The analytical task can be formulated as follows: do social movements or communities exist which can solve the two types of substance abuse problems? In the following discussion the article will primarily use alcohol consumption to illustrate the points, but a similar analysis could be made with narcotics.

A new temperance movement?

There is no doubt that the old temperance movement had a major impact in Denmark. However its influence significantly decreased in the first decades of this century mainly due to the decrease in consumption following an enormous tax increase on alcohol in 1917. In the other Scandinavian countries the movement has continued to have importance even today. The creation of and the opportunities for social movements depend on the society in which they function. Without closer analysis it could be argued that since the time of the original temperance movement three social changes have occurred that affect the argument in this article. Compared to the early industrial society the present society is marked by the following:

- 1) a high degree of differentiation
- 2) a high degree of individualization
- 3) hedonistic and self-realization values.

It is plausible that these factors, rather than a social movement, will influence consumption and abuse. The classical sociological argument indicates that the differentiation and fragmentation in society will probably create higher abuse and more deviants: dissolution in society and looser norms lead to more isolated individuals and social problems. Another argument suggests that individualization may lead to lower consumption. The ability and desire to be able to control one's own life, combined with pressures to look fit, may generate a decrease in consumption (Mäkelä 1983). Finally, it can be expected that changes towards more hedonistic values will cause an increase in alcohol consumption. Such value changes

lie behind much of the literature on the emergence of a post-materialist society (Inglehart 1990). The increase in such values is well documented, but a recent Danish survey (Gundelach & Riis 1992) suggests that the development is not quite so unambiguous. In a number of areas, especially in relation to the family the changes are going in a more traditional direction. The same patterns are found in several other countries (Ashford & Timms 1992; Ester & Halman & de Moor 1993).

In sum, these societal changes seem to show that the emergence of a new temperance movement similar to the old movement, which had its glory days in Denmark seventy-five to one hundred years ago, is not to be expected. A study of Danish volunteer associations (Habermann & Parsby 1975) indicates no sign of an emerging modern temperance movement. The vast majority of the associations, which are related to the alcohol and drug areas, are old and small; only a few have been founded after 1960. Habermann and Parsby explain that the new social problem area — drug abuse — has not resulted in the formation of important volunteer organizations because this task, in general, is handled by the welfare state. In addition, it was only with the cooperation of the authorities that the old temperance movement was able to meet the existing needs of treatment.

Although a new comprehensive temperance movement is unlikely it will always be impossible to predict the emergence of social movements in any area. It is notable that there have been significant changes in attitudes in several areas related to consumption and health. Smoking of tobacco is widely considered reprehensible. In the US coffee drinking is heavily criticized and in many other areas there are similar health-oriented attitude changes, for example in relation to meat, medicine and fats. There are even indications of a change in values in relation to drinking alcohol, which has led to stagnant or decreased consumption.

These changes will not result in a new temperance movement. The upper class, which defines societal problems and makes new initiatives, consumes more alcohol than the lower class. Therefore it is not probable that moderate alcohol consumption will be identified as a major problem in

society. If, as research has shown, the participants in the new social movements are more highly educated than the average population, this means that the potential members of a new temperance movement are likely to be recruited from a social group with a higher alcohol consumption level than the rest of the population. This situation is not fertile ground for the emergence of a new temperance movement.

Since the appearance of a new movement or the strengthening of the old movement is not likely, several other factors may contribute to a lower consumption. One possibility is that people want to have greater control over their life and body which leads to life style changes but not social movements. The result is individual and not collective changes. A second explanation is built on an analysis of alcohol consumption over long periods of time (Room 1991) which shows that there are long waves in the levels of consumption of alcohol. Since the 1980s many industrialized societies have witnessed decreasing alcohol consumption. The explanation is that a collective learning process educates the population about the negative consequences of high alcohol consumption. When these negative effects are forgotten, after a period of low consumption with corresponding low level of negative alcohol effects, the consumption increases again. According to Room (1991) these waves have a duration of three generations.

Irrespective of the correctness of either explanation or a combination of both, a decrease in the level of consumption must be expected without the intervention of social movements. One interesting fact is that a stricter personal attitude towards one's own consumption is combined with a greater permissiveness towards other's consumption. Research shows (Room 1991, 156) that at the same time as the population drinks less there is a rising resistance towards legislation which prohibits the sale of alcohol. This contradiction may be understood in the context of the individualization of society and is another indicator that a new temperance movement will hardly occur. Implicit in the above argumentation lies an assumption that the individual becomes more self-centered and pays less attention to social norms. This line of thought continues in a discussion about the possibilities for communities to

foster solidarity between deviants and the rest of the population.

Local initiatives

The concept of social *movement* refers not only to large social movements but is often used to describe small local actions. In order to make a clear terminological distinction between these two, the small local movements will be called *grass-roots movements*. The question, then, is: will local voluntary associations or grass-roots movements be concerned with drug or alcohol problems and in this context will they be able to help drug addicts or alcoholics? Can the local association or movement be used for welfare purposes?

As earlier mentioned the term *community (lokalsamfund)* can be interpreted as a number of persons who live in the same neighborhood with a high level of interaction and identity. Already early social scientists questioned the relevance of a spatial delimitation of community. One of the founding fathers of sociology, Emile Durkheim criticized geographical distinctions being used as a foundation for parliamentary elections in his book on the division of labor in society ((1902) 1964). Instead he suggested, people should be elected to parliament on the basis of their profession. If already 100 years ago Durkheim and other contemporary social philosophers rejected the idea of identifying the community with a certain space, today there is ample reason to question why the spatial definition of the concept is currently so viable.

Perhaps a basic explanation to this question lies in the experiments which have been done to change or modify the Scandinavian welfare model. This model can be differentiated from other European models by its large centralized bureaucratic organizations which offer social benefits to all citizens based on individual rights. This type of large system is easy to criticize as inefficient. One solution to the possible inefficiencies has been to delegate welfare obligations to local groups. The aim is to organize welfare services locally through existing voluntary associations, which would bring local influence to the social welfare benefits at the local level.

One important example of this activity is the Danish government's series of welfare policy experiments in the SUM programme (Social Development Programme) in which one of the objectives is to strengthen locally-anchored innovative welfare services (Folketingets socialudvalg 1988,1). The SUM programme has been evaluated in many studies. A study by Fisker and Møller (1992,47f) concluded that if the vitality of a (local) community is measured by the degree to which it is able to create and preserve solidarity between strong and weak groups, "we cannot in advance expect that such exists in Danish communities" nor that "the more tasks delegated to communities, the more tasks accomplished."

This argument can be strengthened by looking at what the local grass-roots movements mainly concentrate on. Most often they react against public initiatives such as new roads, for fear of too much traffic, bus routes, play grounds. Mainly as a consequence of the increased public involvement in society (the so called *collective consumption*) many small action groups have arisen. These groups are called *community groups* in English (Butcher et al. 1980) and there is hardly any doubt that the number has increased during the last 20 years. They protest against local public initiatives and it is therefore probable and — unfortunately — much more likely that there will be local protests against the location of a therapeutic center for some deviant group rather than local organized support for it.

This can be demonstrated with three arguments concerning the following: (1) the perception of deviants, (2) network and community, and (3) the character of grass-roots movements.

Deviants are perceived negatively

The first point is that few people have sympathy for alcoholics or drug addicts. This may be illustrated with data from the European Values Survey which was carried out in 1981 and 1990. The survey respondents could answer 'yes' or 'no' to questions regarding the kinds of neighbors that they wanted or did not want. The choice of neighbors included: migrant workers, people of a different race, and people with large families and so on. The results indicated that there are a

Table 1. Groups who are perceived as unwanted neighbours in Scandinavia in 1990, %

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Alcoholics	34	35	44
Drug addicts	53	59	65

Source: Data from the European Values Survey (cf. Ester et al. 1993)

number of groups who are not wanted as neighbors. In Scandinavia, the two groups which were most unwanted as neighbors are: "heavy drinkers" and "drug addicts" (Table 1). These conclusions are especially relevant in relation to an analysis of the-community and solidarity within a local area. The table shows that Scandinavians do not, in general, want to associate with substance abusers. There are no large differences in this attitude in the population surveyed but the least negative group towards them was women between thirty and fifty years old. But even this group was dominated by a negative attitude.

Thus, the conclusion is that there is little motivation to help deviants. Maybe this has always been the case even at the time when the old temperance movements were formed, but the old movements included treatment as a part of their programme. It is difficult to imagine today initiatives which concentrate only on treatment. One of the conclusions of the Danish SUM programme was that "it 'happens' more seldom in the local community projects that they want to have direct responsibility for the solution to the more massive social problems as for instance alcohol and drug abuse" (Fisker & Møller 1992, 46). These demanding tasks are probably much too difficult to solve by volunteers. Alcoholics and drug abusers are much more unpleasant and ungrateful persons to deal with than other weak groups and the probability that one can see a positive effect of the endeavour is quite small. Therefore, it is difficult to get volunteers to back these groups.

Weak networks

One major reason why local community programmes do not want to deal with the more massive social problems is that the social

networks are too weak. Earlier networks were related to family, gender, social class or neighborhood. Today, none of these networks are important. It was mainly the women staying at home who kept the local networks alive. But today almost all women are working outside the home; the fulltime housewives have disappeared. The work place has been very important to earlier network building but today there no longer exists these close class-based ties in which the class position and the community were closely linked.

To put it very concretely: people are no longer present in the neighborhood, or the community, during the daytime. They are working somewhere else and going somewhere else during the weekend. Those who are present are the weak groups, which have been studied by Christie (1990), in the therapeutic villages which provide services mainly for the mentally retarded or ill persons. Christie warns that the way we have constructed the Scandinavian welfare societies with long continuous periods of weekends and holidays, on the one hand, and long days of work away from our residence, on the other, has lead to "Neighborhoods [that] are suffering. The adults entrench themselves in their private quarters, disappear to their leisure home or travel on charter tours. The youth, the elderly and the ill stay in the neighborhood without other interaction than fear met with annoyance" (Christie 1987, 18).

Thus, the current social networks are not so strongly related to a spatial environment as they are to work and to leisure activities. To be blunt one could say that the neighborhood, the local community, is not a relevant category in terms of social science; it would be a mistake to think it possible to build strong local networks in them. One also could argue that there are existing local activities and associations. One might believe that some of the existing associations might be changed or modified to take care of deviants. Although one can not reject this possibility, it is not likely. Even the associations are influenced by differentiation and individualization. For example, a Danish study of sports associations (Ibsen 1992) has shown that the associations do not consider themselves as belonging to a certain local area; the local community is not the relevant framework for such activities.

The character of grass-roots movements

The third reason why grass-roots movements cannot or are not likely to help the weak groups is their character. They are organizations which are created to oppose a state action and to create changes. All social science studies, however, show that voluntary associations concerned with alcoholics and drug abusers work closely with the public authorities. In Scandinavia, there has been only minor conflicts between these two actors and in many cases the activities of the movement have been fully financed by the state. Additionally, the treatment personnel are professionals, not volunteers. Often these organizations have a certain philosophical or religious outlook, especially the Christian, but only small conflicts have developed between them and the state as a result.

The research on grass-roots movements has shown that the participants in the movements are primarily young and highly educated (cf. for instance Svensson & Togeby 1986). They are hardly the social group which is the most willing to be active in the local area and to help deviants. Rather this group is more interested in helping themselves and, for that matter, helping others less active but with the same interest. Young highly educated persons may even feel more solidarity with Indians in South America or starving people in Africa than with the alcoholics in their neighborhood.

It should be mentioned, however, that there are a few examples of grass-roots movements which have wanted to help substance abusers and to decrease the consumption of drugs in society. In Denmark a well-known example was a group called "The peoples' movement against drugs." This movement emerged from a social experiment which was located in the free city of Christiania in the center of Copenhagen. With about 1 000 inhabitants, Christiania has existed since the early 1970s and is by-and-large tolerated by the authorities. Hashish is consumed and sold rather freely in Christiania but the inhabitants made a major effort to get the stronger drugs out of Christiania. They succeeded and even put drug abuse problems on the social agenda. This action shows that local grass-roots movements may emerge, but the precondition is that there is some kind of local networks, as in Christiania, which can function as

a base for the movement. Outside the free city such local networks are rare.

Self-help groups

So far I have argued that neither voluntary associations nor grass-roots movements are so strong that the effort against drugs should be left to them. A third possibility is self-help groups, which are well known in the Anglo-Saxon world, and which have been emerging also in Scandinavia in recent years. Mehlbye and Christoffersen (1992) have analyzed the self-help groups existing in Denmark in 1991. They define a self-help group as an autonomous group of persons who know each other and who meet regularly to discuss personal problems which they have in common (p. 112). This definition does not include a criterion for relations with the local community: however, most groups are probably not integrated into a certain geographical area, but rather are connected to other kinds of networks.

The study shows (p. 126) that 5 percent of the groups deal with substance abuse problems. In a separate survey estimating the proportion of the population which felt that they at one time or another would need a self-help group, 3 percent answered positively to this question in relation to alcohol, medicine or drugs. The respondents mention much more often other situations in which they potentially would participate in a self-help group: namely in relation to grief, family problems or illness. According to the researchers, the low figure for substance abuse problems may, however, be underestimated because persons with significant abuse problems probably have not agreed to be interviewed.

Organizations and the social system

Self-help groups and other voluntary associations are characterized by the fact that there are no formal power relations between the members. The relationships can be understood as *Gemeinschaft* relations. In the formal social system there will always be a mixture of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* relations (Gundelach & Schmidt 1991). Therefore, self-help groups and other voluntary

associations can be an important addition to the social welfare system. It is also important for the welfare system to be open to relationships with different groups. These groups alone, however, do not possess the strength or solidarity to replace the professional public effort.

The analysis has shown that neither networks nor voluntary associations in the community of today are a suitable means to carry out major efforts to solve substance abuse problems. New experiments and local initiatives are good, but it would be unfortunate if the development of these groups would mean that the traditional welfare system is given lower priority. Ideology, in that case, would tend to dominate the analysis which could only harm the good cause.

Conclusion

In the early 1990s the public debate in Scandinavia presented social movements, voluntary associations and local communities as new strategies for the social welfare system. Such strategies, it was argued, could be used to solve problems relating to substance abuse. The hidden assumption is that these strategies have earlier been effective. The terms *lokalsamfund* (community) and *social bevægelse* (social movement — especially in the context of peoples' movement) are extremely positive in Scandinavia. In the history of the Scandinavian countries these phenomena have proven to be effective in solving social problems and have been important social forces.

This may be the reason why the public debate and especially politicians have maintained that the community and social movements might be effective ways of renovating the welfare state. In this article the argument has been that the idea of such a renewal does not sufficiently realize that the social conditions have changed. Society today is so individualistic and fragmented that it is hard to imagine that a new, important temperance movement could emerge. The level of alcohol consumption will decrease, it seems, but because of other factors.

There are no longer closely knit local communities. The present communities have underdeveloped networks and little possibility of creating solidarity between the weak and strong groups.

There is no basis for a concerted community effort to deal with the massive and difficult tasks required for solving substance abuse problems. Therefore no one should expect these strategies to replace the public welfare system. The public sector should cooperate with various private and volunteer initiatives but if the responsibility is left to them the weakest groups will be let down.

REFERENCES

- Ashford, S. & Timms, N: What Europe Thinks. A Study of Western European Values. Dartmouth, Aldershot 1992
- Bundsgaard, I. & Eriksen, S.: Hvem disciplinerede hvem? Fortid og Nutid XXXIII (1986)
- Butcher, H. et al.: Community groups in action. Case studies and analysis. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1980
- Christie, N.: "Tidernes orden". In: Forbruger- og administrationsdepartementet: Åpent — eller stengt? Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1987
- Christie, N.: Til forsvar for ghettoen: om landsbyer for usædvanlige mennesker. Munksgaard, København 1990
- Durkheim, D.: The Division of Labor in Society. The Free Press, New York 1964 (Original 2. edition 1902)
- Ester, P. & Halman, L. & de Moor, R.: The Individualizing Society. Value Change in Europe and North America. Tilburg University Press, Tilburg 1993
- Falk, J.: "Fællesskab, selskab og den indre bonde". In: Gundelach, P. & Mortensen, N. & Tonboe, J. C. (red.): Sociologi under forandring. Gyldendal, København 1990
- Fisker, J. & Rechendorff Møller, F.: "Lokalsamfund". In: Kjær Jensen, M. (red.): Marked for nye ideer. Socialforskningsinstituttet, København 1992
- Gundelach, P.: Sociale bevægelser og samfundsændringer. Politica, Århus 1988
- Gundelach, P. & Mortensen, M. & Tonboe, J.C.: Sociologi under forandring. Gyldendal, København 1990
- Gundelach, P. & Riis, O.: Danskernes værdier. Forlaget Sociologi, København 1992
- Gundelach, P. & Schmidt, D.: De professionelle og moderniseringen. Nordisk Socialt Arbejde (1991): 3, 45-62
- Habermann, U. & Parsby, I.: Frivillige organisationers ressourcer: en undersøgelse af fordelingen af tid og penge i 115 frivillige organisationer. Kontaktudvalget til det frivillige sociale arbejde. Socialministeriet, København 1987
- Heberle, R.: Social Movements. An Introduction to Political Sociology. Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York 1951
- Ibsen, B.: Frivilligt arbejde i idrætsforeninger. Danmarks Højskole for Legemsøvelser, København 1992
- Jensen, M. Kjær: Marked for nye ideer. Socialforskningsinstituttet, København 1992
- Mehlbye, J. & Christoffersen, M.N.: Selvhjælpsgrupper — omfang, karakter og erfaringer. AKF-Forlaget, København 1992
- Mäkelä, K.: Alkoholkonsumtionens vågrørelser och alkoholfrågans historiska former. Sociologisk Forskning 20 (1983): 1, 11-19
- Room, R.: Cultural Changes in Drinking and Trends in Alcohol Problems Indicators. In: Clark, W.B. & Hilton, M.E.: Alcohol in America. Drinking Practices and Problems. State University of New York Press, New York 1991
- Svensson P. & Togeby L.: Politisk opbrud. De nye mellem-lags græsrodsdeltagelse: Årsager og konsekvenser belyst ved en ungdomsundersøgelse. Politica, Århus 1986
- Sundbo, J.: Lokalsamfundet i defensiven? Skrifter udgivet af lokalhistorisk afdeling nr. 2, København 1972
- Touraine, A.: Return of the Actor. Social Theory in Post-industrial Society. Minneapolis University Press, Minneapolis 1988
- Tönnies, F.: Community and Association (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft). Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1963 (First edition 1887).

Key words: local action, prevention, temperance movement, way of life