

# Thirty-three years later: Still a new-old journal

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The first issue of the new scientific journal *Alkoholpolitik – Tidskrift för nordisk alkoholforskning (Alcohol Policy – Journal for Nordic Alcohol Research)* appeared in 1984. It was a rather bold initiative by the Finnish alcohol monopoly ALKO to cooperate with the Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research on a journal with an explicitly Nordic agenda. However, ALKO had already an established orientation towards Nordic cooperation, and the new journal could be seen as a natural continuation of the Swedish-language version of ALKO's Finnish journal *Alkoholipolitiikka (Alcohol Policy)*. Consequently, editor-in-chief Kerstin Stenius chose to caption her first editorial "A new-old journal" ("En nygammal tidskrift") (Stenius, 1984).

Most scholars familiar with the Nordic Welfare Centre or *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, as the journal is now called, would agree that there is a type of research into questions of alcohol, drugs, substance use and addiction that is very Nordic in its character. It is not only its social scientific emphasis or its focus on the Nordic countries. It is also something else. The classic explanations of its speciality pertain of

course to the similarities between the societal and political systems of the Nordic countries – our distinct welfare model – and the easiness by which we understand each other culturally, finding differences and similarities in comparisons. It is indeed profitable and interesting to see how certain common general ideals, such as inclusion and universalism, are upheld in different societies. Research on alcohol and drugs contains many elements of ambivalence and contradictions that tend to make the studied questions both intriguing and complex. And when similar collective efforts confront similar challenges, it is even more important to study different strategies and their consequences.

And yet, risking great generalisation, I feel there is something else than this system-related similarity that marks the Nordicness in Nordic alcohol and drug research. There is something in the fine-tuning, or "habitus", of Nordic research that makes it more of a tradition than merely a research field. While I figure out a more valid and theoretically precise way of characterising it, I can at this point only describe it as being invested with certain

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elements that, for example, mark our papers in international conferences or inform our ontologies in EU projects. And I think most readers of *NAD* would agree.

I recall the many times I have witnessed a tiredness in the eyes of European colleagues when we ask for the floor just to start our sentences with “*In the Nordic countries . . .*”. But I like to think that we are not egocentric agitators, but rather that we are eager. This eagerness, I think, has been nourished by our internal cooperation. We take interest in each other and see the added value of doing things together. And the eagerness feeds more eagerness and breeds an extrovert interest in other parts of the world as well.

The caption of the 1984 editorial could very well also serve as a *NAD* editorial caption in 2017. With support from institutions in four Nordic countries, the journal is still a product of an organisation which continues the Nordic cooperation in the field of alcohol and drug research, namely the Nordic Welfare Centre. But as of January 2017, the publisher is Sage and there is a new editor-in-chief. Thus, the journal is old, but also new.

Likewise, Nordic cooperation and the Nordic focus in this area of research take place in both old and new circumstances. The journal’s focus is still situated in the social sciences and social medicine, while traditional medicine, psy sciences and certain other epistemologies continue to grow and dominate this scholarly field on the international agenda, both in terms of politics and science publishing. In comparison with 1984, I imagine that the English language and concepts such as “public health” and “addiction” have come to receive more attention in our production. The absence or infrequent use of these words in previous times is, by the way, a clue to the Nordic distinctiveness.

In her 1984 editorial, Stenius points out that it would be “artificial” not to involve illicit and licit drugs as areas of investigation in the material for the Nordic journal of

alcohol policy. Today, many journals in this area of research have broadened their focus to include not only classic intoxicants and tobacco, but also gambling, eating disorders, online activities and all sorts of problematic lifestyle- and health-related behaviours. *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* will continue to broaden its focus also in this sense, and see possible commonalities between fields when it comes to societal and political challenges and their solutions.

Today, Kerstin Stenius describes her 1984 editorial voice as that of “a young social worker”. Today, Stenius is known internationally as a visionary and productive scholar, who has long been engaged in the international arena of addiction science publishing. She has built a great legacy for the editorship of *NAD*.

In her editorial 33 years ago, Stenius identifies the venture of the new Nordic journal as “unique and exciting”. In a world where ideas and adherent science, culture and policy travel fast, one might imagine a Nordic platform today as outdated. Still, in comparison with 1984, I feel that the Nordic research in this area may today be even more special, strong and important. This journal is still a unique and exciting venture!

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