Introduction

The 2015 INHDR conference: Evaluating the unintended effects of anti-doping

On the 27th and 28th of August 2015 members of the International Network of Humanistic Doping Research assembled in Aarhus, Denmark for the 6th International INHDR conference. Under the conference theme “Evaluating the unintended effects of anti-doping”, seven keynote speakers were invited to present their research, views, and experiences. In the keynote sessions, conference delegates were thus presented with a diverse range of research and presentations with point of departure in philosophy, sociology, law, history, organizational management and lived experience. The keynotes were:

- Professor Torbjörn Tännsjö, Stockholm University, Sweden: “Why the ban on doping is harmful”
- Professor Letizia Paoli, KU Leuven, Belgium: “War on drugs, war on doping? A comparative analysis and some policy recommendations”
- Former professional cyclist, MR Consulting & trading Aps, Michael Rasmussen, Denmark: “Experiences from my cycling career”
- Professor Verner Møller, Aarhus University, Denmark: “The road to hell is paved with good intentions”
- Senior Lecturer Paul Dimeo, University of Sterling, UK: “Policy changes and unintended consequences: how history has shaped the present”
- Chief Executive of the Anti-Doping Authority the Netherlands, Herman Ram: “No intention to cheat: coping with unintentional anti-doping rule violations”
- Lecturer, Martin Hardie, Deakin University, Australia: “Anti-Doping’s New Way of the World – ASADA & the AFL v the Essendon Football Club”

Also, the 2015 conference had a record number of abstract submissions, of which most were of very high quality, proving how vibrant a scholarly environment doping research is 15 years after the formation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). Listening to the presentations at the conference’s parallel sessions (and looking through the abstracts presented below), it also became clear that there is both significant breadth and depth in current doping research. Altogether the papers presented at the conference clearly illustrated what few will dispute, namely that anti-doping efforts have significantly changed sport. Many of these changes, such as increased testing and anti-doping education, were intended and their effects have, for the most part, been examined and evaluated. However, what have received less attention are the many unintended effects of anti-doping. Athletes now live with the stress of managing the whereabouts system and worrying about contaminated supplements and food. Journalists report on events but are aware that it could be months or years until we know who was declared the actual victor. Governments enact laws that criminalize doping and investigate athletes for sporting infractions.

The conference thus had the specific aim to investigate, evaluate, and understand the many ways that anti-doping efforts have unintentionally changed sport. It was debated if and in which ways athletes have benefited from anti-doping efforts or whether their lives are worse. It was discussed if sporting competitions are now fairer or healthier or whether anti-doping has simply driven athletes to more dangerous substances. Also, delegates were presented with examples on what had happened to the athletes that were caught by the system, which led to discussions on whether certain ethical principles have been compromised in order to prevent doping. Many questions were addressed and answered but it also became clear that we still scarcely understand anti-doping’s far reaching impact.

The research that was presented and the discussions that followed at the conference also made it clear that the INHDR does not consist of members with a uniform set of opinions from scholars all going in the same direction. The INHDR does not advocate any single position and its members consist of respected international scholars from across academia. The INHDR is a collection of scholars from across the humanities and social sciences who investigate issues related to doping and anti-doping in sport in their various social, political, and cultural contexts. The approach to the issue and the research presented is often ground-breaking and thought-provoking and has influenced policymakers, sport official as well as the debate in the society at large. This, we believe, was also manifest at the 2015 INHDR conference.

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