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The structural configurations of alcohol in Denmark: Policy, culture, and industry

BY JAKOB DEMANT AND TROELS MAGELUND KRARUP

This article analyzes recent developments in Danish alcohol policy, culture, and industry. It reveals cross-sector dynamics and complexities that are often downplayed in existing literature. It traces how a stable “structural configuration” emerged in the 1960s-1980s between the three domains, based on liberalization. A particular adolescent alcohol culture of intoxication, however, emerged in the 1990s, raising public awareness and calls for policy intervention. Contrary to what may have been expected, this did not represent a break with the liberal alcohol configuration in policy, culture, and industry, but an increased segregation of adolescent consumption from adult consumption, exposing the former to severe legal and moral regulation. This analysis of historic-structural dynamics helps explain why adolescent drinking is dependent on more than isolated causal links such as between policy events and consumption.

KEY WORDS: *Alcohol, adolescents, industry, Denmark, culture, policy.*

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Introduction

Policy interventions on alcohol have been unusually frequent in Denmark in recent years. The first age restriction (15 years) on buying alcohol from retail outlets was imposed in 1998 (1997 LSF/1 LSF 186). This was raised to 16 years in 2004 (Lov nr. 213 af 31/03/2004) and again to 18 years for drinks stronger than 16.5% vol. in 2010 (LOV nr 707 af 25/06/2010, § 2, stk. 2). The national action plan for public health 2002-2010 (Regeringen [the Government], 2002) furthermore set the goals of achieving a major reduction in heavy drinking, a reduction in young drinking, and the elimination of child drinking. Finally, the government imposed heavy excise on alcopops.¹

These initiatives are often interpreted as being indicators of strong public health concern and of the will to regulate consumption in Danish policy, which follows academic recommendations and confirms the underlying assertion of a causal relationship between regulation and consumption (e.g., Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunders, & Monteiro, 2010; Gordon & Anderson, 2011). Indeed, alcohol consumption and adolescent binge drinking has declined during this period (1998-2010), and the age of first intoxication has increased.² However, this article suggests that a much more complex interplay between policy, culture, and industry are at work, and that studies restricted to the impact of policy (which are many in this field) will inevitably overlook a thorough understanding of these dynamics.

There is, in international research on alcohol consumption, a tradition of studying the effects of various policy changes as isolated “events” (Mäkelä, Bloomfield, Gustafsson, Huhtanen, & Room, 2008; Gustafsson 2010; Grittner, Gustafsson, & Bloomfield, 2009; Bloomfield, Rossow, & Norström, 2009; Møller, 2002; Jørgensen, Riegel, Hesse, & Grønbæk, 2006). These studies have often given ambiguous results.

This article employs an alternative approach to the relationships between alcohol policy, culture, media coverage, and industry. Rather than isolating policy events to measure their

statistical impact on consumption patterns, this article attempts to reveal the codevelopment of these domains in a more dynamic structure-oriented perspective. For this purpose, we conduct a historical and interpretative meta-analysis of existing studies on alcohol in Denmark across cultural, political, and market domains, including systematic analyses of legislation, media coverage, and other aspects (for a related study of Britain, see Measham, 2008). Far from abandoning the use of statistical data, we draw attention to what we see as the confusion of quantitative relationships with the effects of structural, historical, and qualitative elaboration upon these quantitative relationships.

Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT) provides us with an interesting conceptual framework: We can consider the case of Denmark as being a "black box" that needs to be opened up. This is opened by following the central "actant," alcohol, to determine how it is mediated in policies, cultures, and markets, and how it changes form and substance as it forms a network of sociomaterial hybrids (see also Demant, 2009). Inspired by Latour's (1993) analysis of the 19th Century "pasteurization of France" in which he follows the "invisible" microbes as they traverse boundaries between farms, laboratories, newspapers, hygienist social movements, etc., we reveal how alcohol is enrolled in various networks (policy, culture, industry) and how these networks have developed under mutual stimulation in recent decades. The ANT perspective, contrary to the social ontology of events and effects that underlies much research in alcohol policy, is employed to reveal the sociomaterial changes in the Danish alcohol networks and as a way of understanding present consumption patterns in a larger societal framework.

The traditional ANT approach considers all large-scale social entities to always be black boxes of sociomaterial networks that simply need to be "re-opened" by the social scientist (cf. Callon & Latour, 1981). We, however, are particularly interested in the changing structural configurations between the

three network domains (policy, culture, and industry) and, more importantly, how such configurations of networks come to produce what has been labeled “quasi-actants.” In other words, we are interested in how certain moral categories and institutions emerge as large-scale social entities that “act” in the social context, giving the “transparent” social ontology of traditional ANT a more “virtual” bent (Krarup & Blok 2011).³

This article is particularly concerned with how the increased regulation of alcohol in Danish policy is in fact not so much due to an emerging public health perspective, but to a historical split between two alcohol consuming quasi-actants across social domains (policy, culture, and industry), the quasi-actants being the (responsible) adult consumer and the (irresponsible) adolescent one. In adopting this approach, we come close to the historico-systemic analyses of power described in governmentality literature (Foucault, 2009; Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999). However, we prefer to stick to the slightly different social ontology and theoretical language of ANT. An important ontological difference between Foucauldian “power” and ANT quasi-actants is the active and even reflexive employment of ANT quasi-actants by the social actants themselves. This implies a methodological need to empirically point out the (quasi) acting bodies, rather than simply tracing their genealogy: “By contrast to typological approaches to social theory—which seek to define general social essences and their causal connections—virtual theory entails an analytical commitment to remain sensitive to the dynamic, non-causal, and intensive patterns of relational social life” (Krarup & Blok, 2011, p. 58).

It should be clear that our theoretical departure from mainstream research in alcohol policy does not simply reiterate the traditional quantitative-qualitative debate in social science. In fact, quantitative data plays a crucial role in revealing large-scale networks and structural configurations between social domains. The difference is not in the choice of data but in its use. Statistical data, rather than being used to attempt to iso-

late policy events and to assess their impact, should be used with qualitative data (observation, interviews, documents, etc.) to reveal the changing structural configurations of network domains and the emergence of important quasi-actants such as the “adolescent binge drinker.” This will promote an understanding of the complex relations between policy and consumption in a wider social perspective.

At the concrete discursive level of social science, this means that the word “because” should be employed, not to profess the work of some objective effect, but to sum up the local position of certain actants in the network and hence to understand their complex motives of action in a concrete socio-material setting. Tracing the historical developments in the structural configurations between alcohol-network domains in Denmark provides an empirical background on which both the actual work performed by policy and its impact can be assessed more thoroughly than we believed was possible within a strictly isolationist epistemology of causes and effects.⁴

Methods

Any historical study has to rely on adequate “archives.” The ANT perspective implies a certain skepticism towards traditional reliance on comparative longitudinal methodology, as the idea of “measuring the same phenomenon at different points in time” misses the complex changes in the networks and the structural configurations of the phenomenon. This does not mean that we should not rely on (or “believe in”) longitudinal surveys of, say, alcohol consumption, but rather that these should be considered to be archival sources which include less “comparable” forms and sources of data. In our case, along with legislation, media coverage, and other sources (see below), existing studies of Danish alcohol consumption represent an important archival source, as they provide the most reliable sources of information on the topic. However, they are treated as archival sources, as they seldom

follow the path pursued here of tracing alcohol networks and structural configurations in Denmark. Traditional meta-studies attempt to assess the robustness of statistical effects by comparing a long list of more or less identical studies. We, however, integrate these studies in our analysis of the wider structural configurations in the sociomaterial network domains of alcohol policy, culture, and industry.

The network-nature of the research object at hand means that it is notoriously difficult to abstractly demarcate which criteria should be included and which should be excluded. One must, to some extent, follow the deliberately pragmatic ANT slogan of “follow the actants” in order to successfully reveal how “the net works.” Nevertheless, we have in this study specified a list of sources for each network domain that is to be systematically included:

- *Policy*: We rely primarily on two sources—alcohol legislation and political programs of the two main parliamentary coalitions in the period (liberal-conservative and socialist-social democratic).
- *Culture*: We use official statistics (Statistics Denmark) to cover developments in general consumption, and recurring surveys (National Board of Health) to cover developments in adolescent drinking patterns. We use official media statistics (InfoMedia) to assess public attention to the subject. In addition to these public sources, we review existing peer-reviewed research (quantitative and qualitative) on Danish alcohol culture.
- *Industry*: Rather than conducting a “symbolic interpretation” of alcohol advertisements, we focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives of the major industrial associations because these contain explicit strategic deliberations on alcohol policy and culture.

Revealing the structural configurations between these three domains is a particularly difficult task. We therefore focus our inquiry on the parallel development of a split between two quasi actants (the responsible adult and the irresponsible adolescent) in the three domains. This cannot be carried out com-

paratively in the usual sense of deductively qualifying the traits which are to be validated, as the network ontology of actants tells us that these will vary from one network to the other. Instead, we attempt to reveal the split in a more inductive way, by comparing major trends in the three domains and validating their mutual relationship by associating their historical sequences.

Finally, it is worth noting that Denmark is obviously not an isolated entity. The EU policy level, the international field of public health research, and developments in consumer capitalism are three important supranational networks in which it is entangled. In fact, we believe that the present analysis is of great relevance to other countries. To what extent this is so, however, cannot be judged from this study alone. We therefore hope that the approach employed will inspire similar case studies of other countries and supranational networks.

Historical background: From temperance and excises to economic and cultural liberalization

Historically, Denmark is the only Nordic country that has not had a state monopoly on alcohol. It has had a more liberal policy and culture, and fewer institutions of care and treatment for addicts than the other Nordic countries (Eriksen, 1993, 2007). Instead, Danish governments have focused on market regulation as a harm-reduction and demand-adverse device (Thorsen, 1993). This regulation was mainly founded on an immense 1917 excise on spirits, a license system on serving, and restrictions on retail sales (Møller, 2008). But from the early 1970s to the late 1990s, the number of licenses approved per 1000 inhabitants doubled, and restrictions on opening hours for bars and discotheques were substantially loosened (Møller, 2008). This development has mainly been caused by fear of illegal regulation since the Danish entrance into the EC in 1972, by commerce and tourism concerns (e.g., construction of a nighttime economy), and by an increasing dislike of

traditional values (such as soberness and temperance) and traditional (universalist/collective) regulation (Møller, 2008). As might be expected, from the 1960s until the 1980s, Danish alcohol consumption per capita rose sharply (Danmarks Statistik, 2010a). Hence, political, economic, and cultural networks codeveloped in a changing structural configuration, positioning alcohol in a new environment of economic, political, and cultural liberalism. In ANT parlance, alcohol hence reconfigured as an actant involved in social and economic life, increasingly formatted in the leisure domain. As a consequence, it also began reconfiguration as a quasi actant, taking an important position in the shared understandings of leisure life, and hence of autonomy, fun, and sociability. This undoubtedly is important for understanding why alcohol became even more associated with youth lifestyles than in most other European countries. In fact, according to some studies, since 1998, Danish 15-year-olds have ranked number one among European countries with regards to binge drinking frequency (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), 2007, p. 104; Kuntsche et al., 2011).⁵ The emergence and expansion of consumer capitalism, and of youth as both a social group and a lifestyle, during a structural reconfiguration of alcohol as an important leisure (quasi) actant due to simultaneous cultural and economic liberalization, strongly supported the development of a particular sphere of adolescent drinking.

The emergence of a Danish adolescent culture of alcohol intoxication

Alcohol is an integral part of Danish leisure culture (Gundelach & Järvinen, 2006; Elmeland, 1996; Järvinen, Demant, & Østergaard, 2010). However, a distinction between youth and adulthood in this regard has gradually emerged (cf. Room, 2007).

Total alcohol consumption in Denmark stagnated at about 12 L of pure alcohol per year per capita for more than 15 years from the 1980s onwards (Danmarks Statistik, 2010a). This level has not been far from the median in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the same period (OECD, 2010).⁶ This may indicate that the

changed role of alcohol in Danish leisure culture had reached a stabilized configuration. It is also relevant to note that the Temperance Society has very few members in Denmark compared to the other Nordic Countries, and is currently at risk of dissolution (Sørensen, 2012).

Adolescent drinking, however, continued to increase. Drinking and drunkenness frequency among 15-year-olds underwent a sharp rise between 1988 and 1998 (Rasmussen & Due 2010, p. 41; Andersen, Rasmussen, Due, & Holstein, unpublished). A study by the Danish National Board of Health (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2010, p. 18) indicated that as many as 62% of the 15-year-old boys and 55% of the girls had been binge drinking (5+ drinks) within the recent month in 1998.

A break had occurred between the alcohol consumption of adults and adolescents which persisted into the mid-2000s (despite increasing pressure on adolescent drinking, as we shall see below). According to survey data from 2008 (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2008, pp. 26-30), an average of 12.2 drinks was consumed in the last week among those aged 16 to 20 years, compared to 7.2 drinks in the general population. Binge drinking in the last week in the same youth age group was 32.5%, compared to 11.6% in the general population. Problematic drinking (more than the amount recommended by public health authorities) was 25.7%, compared to 9.5% in the general population.

The same study includes questions on attitudes towards alcohol. These show that, among adults, alcohol consumption is considered widespread. Almost 50% of the Danish population believe their level of alcohol consumption to be “normal,” and another almost 50% believe it to be “less than others.” 40% thought it acceptable to drink in order to get drunk. This indicates a general normalization of even high levels of alcohol consumption in the sense that it is widespread, that people perceive it as even more prevalent than it actually is, and that it is not regarded as a particularly risky behavior.⁷ Turning the

focus to adolescents, among those aged 16 to 30 years, as many as 85% thought it acceptable to drink in order to get drunk. A related survey among ages 15 to 16 years showed that even among those who drank 7-9 or 10+ drinks at the last party, about 70% believe they drank the same amount as others at the party (Demant & Østergaard, 2007, p. 528).

The paradox here is that the growing autonomy of a distinctly adolescent drinking culture was seemingly sparked by the economic and cultural liberalization of alcohol in society at large and the structural reconfiguration of alcohol networks. Indeed, not only was there no legal regulation of adolescents' alcohol consumption before 1998 (except from commercial serving), parents' attitudes seem to have been lenient, favoring democratic values and adolescent self-government over firm restrictions. Unfortunately, we can only rely on indirect evidence on this point. First, the prevalence of drinking and binge drinking among 15 year olds (cf. above). Second, the amount of very young who had tried alcohol at least once in the 1990s: as many as about 70% of the 11 year olds and about 85% of the 13 year olds (Rasmussen & Due, 2010, p. 41). Third, surveys among parents from the mid-2000s support this (Järvinen & Østergaard, 2009). Only 7% of the parents of those aged 14-16 years exercise zero-tolerance policy on alcohol, whereas about 59% restrict their children's use to 1-4 drinks, and 35% allow binge drinking or have no rules. The study also showed that the belief that adolescent drinking cannot be curbed by restrictions and monitoring is widespread, and that about 50% of Danish parents believe that it is natural for adolescents to learn to drink in the company of peers. Further, despite the high prevalence of continued and heavy drinking among adolescents, about 80% of those aged 16-20 years report that they have never had problems with their parents because they had been drinking alcohol (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2009, p. 12).

As we shall see below, since the above figures date from the mid-2000s, they are even likely to be less striking than the case in the mid-1990s, but this remains hypothetical due to the

lack of surveys on the matter during these years. The point made here is that the emergence of a strong and autonomous adolescent culture of alcohol intoxication was made possible by the structural configuration of alcohol as an actant of leisure, pleasure, and youth in a particularly liberal environment including both market regulation and parental attitudes (parents being themselves adults engaged in a highly liberal alcohol culture). But this configuration with few bindings and a very low risk perception has made not only high levels of alcohol intake normal, but even normalized alcohol intoxication among adolescents. Danish adolescents have had a low perception of risks compared to other European countries (Gundelach & Järvinen, 2006), whereas the devaluation of risks apparently plays an important role in learning to become an alcohol user (Østergaard, 2009; Parker, 2005). Further, little parental restriction and surveillance are highly associated with the frequency of adolescent binge drinking (Järvinen & Østergaard, 2009).

The social networks of adolescent intoxication

In the light of the above, it is not surprising to find that binge drinking and intoxication are important phenomena in the creation and delimitation of adolescent socialities. For Danish adolescents, collective drinking at private (house) parties constitutes an important base for social activities, and binge drinking is regarded as a sign of maturity functioning as an important demarcation between childhood and youth (Østergaard, 2008; Gundelach & Järvinen, 2006; Järvinen & Gundelach, 2007; Demant & Järvinen, 2006). In Denmark, binge drinking is the symbolic mark of the adolescent who has achieved independence and autonomy from his/her parents. The conviction is widespread that drinking is the “natural” way of acting out one’s youth and freedom, and restrictions (parental or personal) tended to be perceived as a mark of the dominated or of the bore (Demant & Järvinen, 2006). A radical case of this phenomenon is found in adolescents traveling to international nightlife resorts with the prime purpose of partying and getting drunk (Tutenges, 2010). However, this is also indicated clearly in the mainstream attitudes towards

alcohol among adolescents: In a comparative study of European universities, Stock and colleagues showed that Danish students are the most critical of banning alcohol on campuses, something that is not explained by higher frequencies of drinking and problematic drinking (Stock et al., 2009).

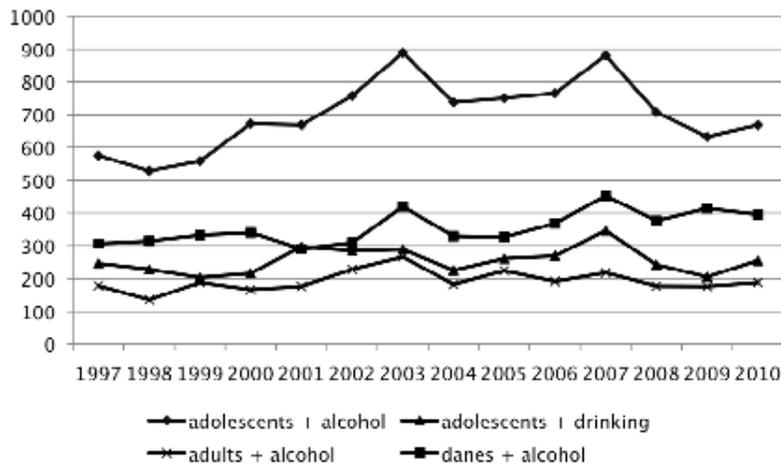
Undoubtedly, this is why, among adolescents, the amount of binge drinking is positively associated with other social activities and the valuation of friendship (Järvinen, Demant, & Østergaard, 2010, p. 37; Järvinen & Gundelach, 2007). Consequently, although intoxication is an explicit and prevailing goal in Danish adolescent leisure culture, we should be reluctant to conclude that it is necessarily “intoxication for intoxication’s own sake.” Heavy and frequent intoxication at parties and in nightlife distinguishes the “social,” “mature,” and “popular” adolescent, whereas nondrinkers or moderate drinkers are apparently regarded as “quiet,” “childish,” or “nerds” (see also Gundelach & Järvinen, 2006).

Clearly, alcohol has been engaged in adolescent networks of social leisure activities through wider commercial, political, and cultural networks, forming an actant that works and is actively employed in social life. It has also developed into a quasi actant which, by connoting a distinct kind of youth sociality, autonomy, and drinking style, (quasi) acts in adolescent socialities because it serves as a shared reference point of meaning and moral attitudes. However, whereas alcohol as a quasi actant in this sense has been attributed mostly positive value among adolescents, within the last decade it has been readopted in adult, political, and economic networks, reconfigured in a much more negative light to an extent, where it potentially contested the general liberalized configuration. However, as we shall see, the solution to this potential threat has been to reinforce in policy the adult-adolescent split evident in consumption and culture, enhancing it to an extent where even industry actants have adapted to the new split configuration of alcohol (quasi) actants.

Public awareness explodes

Public awareness of adolescent drinking rose sharply in 1998 when national media covered the recent ESPAD result that Danish youth held the “European record in drinking.” Figure 1 below reports article counts in the five major national Danish newspapers based on combinations of relevant key words since 1997. From 1998 to 2003, there was a clear tendency towards increased media awareness. Notably, the number of articles containing both “adolescent” and “alcohol” increased about 70% in this period. Peaks are evident in 2003 and 2007, and are probably related to public debate over increased age restrictions and changes in excise. There is a clear difference in coverage between adolescent and adult drinking and drinking in general. The media coverage was focused mainly on adolescent drinking with a stable level of 3-4 times as many articles containing “adolescent” and “alcohol” as “adults” and “alcohol.”

FIGURE 1
Article counts on alcohol in major Danish newspapers 1997-2010



SOURCE: Infomedia. Newspaper articles from Ekstra Bladet, BT, Politiken, Jyllands-Posten, and Berlingske.

The first age restriction (15 years) on buying alcohol from retail outlets was imposed in 1998 (1997 LSF/1 LSF 186). Judging from the combination of increased public awareness and new policy restrictions, this could be seen as the beginning of a new era in Danish alcohol history, marking the development of a new configuration of alcohol networks. In fact, age restrictions were raised to 16 years in 2004 (Lov nr. 213 af 31/03/2004) and again to 18 years for drinks stronger than 16.5% vol. in 2010 (LOV nr 707 af 25/06/2010, § 2, stk. 2). Further, the national action plan for public health 2002-2010 (Regeringen, 2002) set a great reduction in heavy drinking, a reduction in young drinking, and the elimination of child drinking as overall goals. Finally, the government has imposed heavy excise on alcopops.

However, the change was not as large as it may seem at first glance. Or rather, the change was important, but it was not a change in the overall liberal configuration of alcohol networks in Danish society. Rather, the above regulation was directed at adolescent alcohol consumption—not that of adults. In fact, concerning adults, liberalization continued in both political and cultural spheres.

As indicated by Figure 1, public awareness focused mainly on adolescent drinking rather than adult drinking. Further, a survey from 2009 showed that as many as 64% of the population approved of a general 18-year age restriction on buying alcohol, but only 17% indicated that they wanted to reduce their own consumption (Mandag Morgen & TrygFonden, 2009).

Liberals and Conservatives won the 2001 election after almost 10 years of social democratic rule. They soon lowered excises on alcohol, first and foremost with the argument of countering private cross-border shopping due to lower prices in Germany. In 2002, excise on spirits was lowered from 275 crowns (€ 37) to 150 crowns (€ 20) per liter of pure alcohol (LOV nr 1063, 17/12/2002, § 2). In 2004, excise on beer was lowered from 58.40 crowns (€ 8) to 50.90 crowns (€ 7) per liter of pure alco-

hol, and excise on wine was lowered from 5.29 crowns (€ 0.71) to 4.60 crowns (€ 0.62) per 0.75 L (LOV nr 1392, 20/12/2004, § 3, stk. 1 and 2, respectively). With inflation taken into account, the liberal-conservative government has thus pursued a liberal tax policy on alcohol.

Nevertheless, throughout the liberal-conservative term, much discourse has been advanced on health-promoting regulation of individual behavior. In 2007, an extra excise of 2.90 crowns (€ 0.40) per liter of pure alcohol and 8.35 crowns (€ 1.12) per liter of alcopops (cf. LBK nr 1239, 22/10/2007 and LBK nr 890, 17/08/2006, respectively) were imposed to support “health-promoting initiatives.” In 2010, as a part of the government’s plan for the country to reach the world’s top 10 in terms of mean life expectancy, excise on alcopops was raised by another 0.25 crowns (€ 0.03) per liter, and raising excises on beer and wine was “considered” (cf. Skatteministeriet [Ministry of Taxation], 2010a, 2010b, and 2010c, respectively). These tax increases are minimal compared to the very significant tax reductions on alcohol in the first part of the 2000s, and could be seen as attempts to protect the large Danish beer producers rather than as profound efforts to improve public health. Whereas wine and spirits consumption has increased within the last decade, beer consumption has dropped drastically, mainly due to the increase in alcopops consumption (Danmarks Statistik, 2010b). Alcopops thus constitute a considerable threat to important domestic breweries, such as Carlsberg—the third largest company in the country measured by turnover (Berlingske, 2010)—and Tuborg (cf. discussion of the industry below). In public debate, it has also been argued that alcopops increase alcohol consumption among the very young (Berlingske, 2010).

In contrast to the concerns raised in the government’s action plans, TV commercials for alcohol were legalized in Denmark in 2002. The only special regulation is now against certain representations of alcohol use as positively correlated with social, sexual, and other kinds of personal success and skill

(BEK nr 105 af 28/01/2010, § 13). Alcohol marketing directed towards minors remains prohibited (LBK nr 839 af 31/08/2009, § 8). Besides the legal restrictions on marketing, Denmark has an additional regulatory institution, the Board of Complaints Concerning Alcohol Commercials (Alkohol-reklamenævnet).⁸ It was formed by an initiative of the alcohol industry itself in the 1990s after a series of incidents in which important companies such as Carlsberg were criticized for their marketing. This initiative seems to have some significance to the members, even though Carlsberg, for example, has overstepped these additional and more restrictive rules a number of times (cf. discussion of industry below).

The government's national action plan for public health 2002-2010 (Regeringen, 2002, p. 13) set out the following overall goals on alcohol: "The number of large-scale consumers should be reduced significantly, adolescent alcohol consumption should be diminished, and alcohol consumption among children should be eliminated." On the face of it, this contrasts with the liberal direction pursued in tax policy. This is explained by the proposed solutions, split between the individual, the community, and the public sector. The government stressed individual responsibility and restricted its own role to four points: a) a high level of public information about alcohol, b) prevention education of central public employees (not specified), c) care for children and relatives of addicts, and d) enhanced previous initiatives (Regeringen, 2002, p. 15). Raising excises or other demand and supply reducing initiatives aimed directly at alcohol as a product are not mentioned. The 2009 follow-up action plan again stresses individual (and municipal) responsibility and does not substantially change the direction of policy (Regeringen, 2009).

The liberal-conservative government has clearly combined the policy of liberalization with one of harm reduction. The use of video surveillance and bouncers is now widespread, more organized, and regulated, and police have been permitted to employ diverse means in order to reduce the level of alcohol-

related violence (e.g., allowing police to identify certain areas, called “visitation zones,” with no restrictions on police inspections on the street (LOV nr 444 af 09/06/2004, § 6)). In line with the EU Commission recommendations, the Danish maximum blood alcohol concentration when driving (BAC) has been reduced to 0.5g/L from 0.8g/L in 2010. Moreover, the Highway Code has been made more stringent so that fines are now calculated in proportion to the BAC and monthly net salary, and the use of an alcohol lock has been made obligatory for severe violators.

This line of policy of liberalization and harm reduction is not a unique invention of the liberal-conservative government. First, it is conceded by the main opposition parties: “We must increase excises on products that ruin the Danes’ health—tobacco, saturated fat, sweets, pops, and chocolate.” That is, apparently not on alcohol, although it is explicitly recognized as an equally important public health factor (Socialdemokraterne & Socialistisk Folkeparti, 2009). Second, it has deep historical roots. Since the 1970s, a liberal market policy on alcohol has slowly taken priority over health policy (Møller, 2008). In 2005, the last restrictions on retail sales were removed (minimum ages excepted, see below; LOV nr 606, 24/06/2005). Treatment options for alcohol abuse have been improved, and nightlife safety regulation has increased dramatically.

In conclusion, although declarations of intent and restrictions on minors give the opposite impression, policy has not focused on an overall reduction in alcohol consumption but, to some extent, on the case of minors, especially the very young. The age of 18 is not arbitrary since it is the age of majority (when a person has the right to vote and obtain a driver’s license). Regulation thus assumes a marked distinction between subjects of universal regulation on the one hand and those of general liberalization and individualized regulation of deviant behavior on the other. Here, regulation does not center on alcohol itself. Hence, it is rather alcohol as the particular (quasi) actant of adolescent consumption and sociality that

was readopted in policy and subjected to severe restrictions, whereas the structural configuration of adult alcohol consumption has rather been enhanced in the same period. As we have seen, the same was the case for public awareness, which rose dramatically concerning adolescents in the early 2000s, but only marginally in relation to adults. This alliance between policy and adult/parent networks undoubtedly played an important role in this second step in the separation of adult and adolescent alcohol networks, the first one being that of consumption patterns and culture.

Alcohol industry and prevention

The industry has also had its part in the alliance between policy and adult alcohol networks. The difference between an 18-year age restriction on buying spirits and a 16-year age restriction for buying beer in shops, and the lowered taxes on everything but alcopops, are not the only traces of the industry in the Danish policy and culture. First, alongside the public National Board of Health, the Danish alcohol industry is an important actor when it comes to prevention campaigns. Besides the Board of Complaints Concerning Alcohol Commercials (Alkoholreklamenævnet) mentioned above, the producers of beer and spirits have each launched important campaigns focusing on pleasurable and disciplined drinking (rather than abstinence), condemning or cautioning against uncontrolled intoxication, which, it is argued, destroys the party (Demant & Houborg, 2011). The main initiative by the Danish Spirits Producers (Danske Spritproducenter) and the Wine and Spirits Association Denmark (Vin og Spiritus Organisationen i Danmark), the Association of Good Alcohol Habits (GODA [Gode Alkoholvaner]),⁹ makes the purpose clear: “Abuse represents the greatest threat to the reputation of the wine and spirits industry” (GODA, 2011). The purpose is thus to enhance “the enjoyment of alcohol in moderate amounts at occasions that naturally encourage the pleasure: at festive occasions, in a relaxing hour, at a good meal. . . . Good alcohol culture further means no alcohol to minors” (GODA, 2011). Similarly, the Association of Beer Producers (Bryggeriforeningen) has involved itself in preventive activities in

the educational system and at major festive activities, such as the Roskilde Festival, the Superliga football (the Danish Premier League), and J-Dag (a popular occasion to party on the day Tuborg's Christmas beer is launched). The focus of these campaigns is on not drinking excessively—something that seems to be defined by the ability to adapt to socially accepted behavior—and on individual control in order to avoid violence and other antisocial behavior. This is all the more remarkable as the politically independent National Board of Public Health focuses its recommendations precisely on absolute restrictions (5 drinks in a night, 7 in a week for women and 14 for men). Alcohol-infused social and sensational pleasure is thus made a social regulatory device vis-à-vis individual deviant behavior. In doing so, as is evident from our discussion of adolescent alcohol culture above, it imitates rather than confronts the ideology inherent in contemporary patterns of consumption. These initiatives also fit well with governmental strategies because they place important responsibility on the individual. Ironically, industry prevention campaigns seem to contribute to the normalization of frequent and heavy drinking and to the cultural narrative about alcohol's "natural" role in pleasure, youth, and intimacy for those who can "control" their drinking, which again tends to individualize problems.

In this light, it is easier to understand why the Association of Beer Producers (Bryggeriforeningen, 2009) has supported the age restrictions of 16 and 18 years for low and high alcohol drinks, respectively, and why wine and spirits producers have supported a general 18-year restriction (Politiken, 4/21/2009). Part of the Association's CSR strategy is active participation in the prevention of adolescent drinking while also redirecting the focus away from mainstream use and stressing individual control at the expense of regulation and the general problematization of alcohol as a commodity.

Important parties in the nightlife industry have also involved themselves in preventive initiatives and regulation. A major association of nightclubs, Nox Network, has linked itself with

police authorities and coordinated its efforts to prevent violence. In 2008, at the request of one of the clubs in Nox Network, the Danish Data Protection Agency (a public administrator of personal data legislation) approved the registration of photographs, fingerprints, and personal data of all customers at discotheques, partly as a preventive initiative and partly as a surveillance measure against banned guests (cf. Datatilsynet, 2008). According to this association, by the following year, about 30 clubs across the country had implemented some of these guest registration measures (Politiken, 5/26/2009).

Clearly, the private sector's engagement in preventive work is motivated by reputation concerns: They are afraid not only of being directly associated with alcohol-related problems, such as addiction and violence, and of being accused of causing them but also of a potential turn in the common attitudes towards alcohol itself as the main and blameworthy cause of problems, entailing diminished demand. This explains why their campaigns seem to draw so much on the concerns already present in policy and culture (violence, safety, and addiction) rather than, say, long-term health effects, and why they focus on individual problems of self-control.

Adolescent
drinking style
responses to
politico-cultural
reconfigurations

In the 2000s, a series of purely quantitative studies considered the imposed age restrictions and excise reliefs on buying alcohol as policy events and set out to assess their effects on consumption and related measures. However, as a whole, results have been ambiguous and far from indicating the expected strong relationship. A study by Grittner and colleagues indicated that 2003 excise reliefs have had only minor short-term effects on consumption (Grittner, Gustafsson, & Bloomfield, 2009). Gustafsson (2010) showed that the 2003 excise reliefs do not explain changes in consumption in Southern Sweden (which may have been expected due to increased cross-border shopping). On the other hand, Bloomfield and colleagues demonstrated that the 2003 excise reliefs have been followed by a sharp rise in underage alcohol intoxication hospitalizations (Bloomfield et al., 2009). These studies indicate that the effects of a liberal policy on

availability and price do not necessarily have clear predictable consequences: general consumption did not increase, but under-age intoxication did. A similar point can be made with regard to age restrictions. Møller (2002) found no evidence of a reduction in 14-year-olds that have purchased alcohol after the legal age restriction to 15 years in 1998, but did find a reduction in consumption among 11-17 year olds (Møller, 2002). Jørgensen and colleagues showed that the raised age restriction (from 15- to 16-year-olds) for ages 13 to 16 in 2005 had no immediate effect on consumption, although personal purchases dropped (but was substituted by other forms of purchase—e.g., the willingness of parents and older friends to supply alcohol to minors) (Jørgensen et al., 2006). Andersen and colleagues' results on alcohol drinking and drunkenness frequency among 15-year-olds since 1988 showed a sharp rise between 1988 and 1998, when the first age restrictions were imposed, no change between 1998 and 2002, and a substantial drop between 2002 and 2006 (Andersen et al., unpublished). We find it unlikely that the first age restriction of 15 years in 1998 would not have an effect but that its increase to 16 years in 2003 would, all other things being equal.

Nevertheless, something did happen in relation to adolescent alcohol consumption patterns. The number of 13-year-olds who had tried alcohol before 1998 (about 85%) dropped until 2006 (about 50%) (Rasmussen & Due, 2010, p. 41). Binge drinking among ages 11-13 years dropped in the same period and then stabilized (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2010). The share of binge drinking among 15-year-olds seemed to have dropped slightly from a peak of about 65% in the early 2000s to about 50% by the end of the decade (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2010).¹⁰ Danish adolescents remain among the highest-consuming in the EU, but this is explained partially by decreasing consumption in other countries as well (Kuntsche et al., 2011).

So, even though the development in adolescent drinking in Denmark in the 1990s and early 2000s has a curve-like \cap -shape, which is strikingly parallel to the development in policy and public/parent attention (moving from general liberalization

towards adolescent regulation), studies assessing the direct effects of policy events have met substantial difficulties in revealing the causal link. For instance, Mäkelä et al. (2008) test the effects of dramatic excise reliefs in 2003 and 2004 in the Nordic countries (45% on spirits in Denmark). General consumption did not increase but underage intoxication did. To explain this seemingly ambiguous relationship, the authors propose a “saturation” in the population, i.e., through some idea of general trends in individual marginal utility (see Bloomfield, 2012). Obviously, this calls for a more thorough sociological explanation of how such individual marginal utility is configured structurally in wider alcohol networks.

Public attention to adolescent intoxication, political regulation of adolescent consumption, increased parental concerns with their children, and CSR-based industry prevention initiatives all seem to have remained loyal to the preexisting liberal configuration of alcohol in society at large. Contrary to the regulation in other important areas of public health and consumption (tobacco, fat, sugar), this has enhanced the split already growing between adult and adolescent alcohol networks. This development not only implied a reorganization of alcohol as an actant in adolescent social life through strong regulation, but also a repositioning of it as a shared moral and collective (quasi) actant whose legitimacy has been put under pressure, notably concerning adolescent intoxication. A recent qualitative study indicates that the “democratic dialogue” initiated among teachers, parents, and adolescents in schools has in fact revealed a growing opposition between “mainstream” adolescents, who enter negotiations over lower and safer alcohol consumption, and “counter culture” adolescents, who cling to intoxication and unsafe drinking styles as a configuration of their opposition to the schooling system and society at large (Kolind, 2011; see also Elmeland & Kolind, 2012).

It is likely that the ongoing media coverage has increased parental concerns at the expense of liberal attitudes, and that this is an important factor in explaining the rise in ages of

drinking and the first episode of drunkenness. We may suggest that there has been a change in the principles of upbringing and legal regulation concerning alcohol, with increased awareness of not contributing to early normalization and drunkenness debut. Interestingly, increased media coverage seems to be inversely correlated with actual consumption among the very young. This again indicates that the changes in consumption may equally reflect a broader moral change in the appreciation of alcohol, again related to changes in legislation, public awareness, industry, economy etc.—briefly put: in the structural configurations of alcohol networks.

Conclusion

International research on alcohol policy has often pointed to increased individualization and liberalization (Lindbladh, Lyttkens, Hanson, & Östergreen, 1998; Room, Babor, & Rehm, 2005; Törrönen, 2000; Measham, 2006; Elmeland & Kolind, 2012). At the overall level, this study of Danish alcohol policy, culture, and industry confirms this development. One could suggest that this makes Denmark a case of post-modern, consumer capitalist individualization, which would certainly not be untrue. However, closer study reveals the particularities of how such international trends have been incorporated in the Danish case. The dynamics revealed in this study confirm the idea of constantly developing structural configurations in policy, culture, and industry networks, in which alcohol plays an important role, both as an actant (the sociomaterial entity active in the networks) and as a quasi actant (the moral and cultural significance employed in the networks).

The analysis reveals how these structural configurations tend to codevelop and stabilize over the years. The liberalization of industry, policy, and culture that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s has been significantly stable over the years. However, a split in this configuration has gradually emerged, in which adolescent drinking has become a particular network of leisure

consumption centered on intoxication as a means of a social striving for autonomy, maturity, and pleasure. This seems largely to have been approved by the liberal and democratic configurations between political, industrial, and parental networks. A potential rupture emerged with the declaration of a Danish “European record” in adolescent binge drinking in 1998. Public attention, policy, and industry began to reconfigure, searching for a solution to the problem. However, rather than a radical shift, the result was a complete segregation of adolescent drinking from the adult liberal alcohol network configuration. Regulation and concern about adolescent alcohol use soared, entailing a demarcation between alcohol as a (quasi) actant in adolescent and adult networks. This demarcation is to some extent strategic in that it serves the industry as a way to brand alcohol-related problems as a problem of individual control that is mainly restricted to adolescents. It simultaneously allows politicians to exercise both liberalization (*vis-à-vis* voters) and regulation (*vis-à-vis* minors), thus satisfying all parties. It finally exempts the adult population from changing their own consumption patterns and alcohol culture.

Purely quantitative studies that focus on the effect on consumption of isolated policy events (such as the imposition of age restrictions on buying alcohol) have had difficulty revealing any direct causal links. This structural reconfiguration of relations between industry, policy, and adult networks however helps explain why the general historical trends in policy, parental attitudes, adolescent consumption, public awareness, and industry involvement nevertheless exhibit a striking parallelism.

Here, the ANT perspective of actants and networks have proven fruitful. It has provided this study with the means for inductive historical inquiry into the changing nature of alcohol policy and culture. However, it has been necessary to abandon the strict social ontology of transparent empiricism in traditional ANT (Callon & Latour, 1981), and to include the developments in the way alcohol is employed morally by other actants in the network. This, therefore, has been labeled as being a “quasi actant”

(Krarup & Blok, 2011). This perspective brings the analysis closer to Foucauldian governmentality studies. The notion of quasi actants, however, focuses particularly on how alcohol works morally by being employed by actants themselves, rather than the more abstract and impersonal notion of power.

Based on our analysis, some suggestions can be made for future analytical improvements and empirical research. First, there is a need to investigate beyond national borders. Similar case studies of other countries will provide the means for comparison. There is, however, also a need to focus on important international networks and configurations such as the EU and the globalized alcohol industry. Second, quantitative studies that use the ANT analysis and perspective employed here should be able to develop a more nuanced picture of policy and consumption. Effects of isolated events will not provide substantial insight into the complex dynamics of historical development. Instead, we should find ways to employ quantitative data more broadly in the historical analysis of how culture and policy is configured in the social context.

Notes

1. For a definition and review of the literature on the impact of alcopops, see Metzner and Kraus (2008).
2. On the decreasing general level of alcohol consumption, cf. Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik, 2010a). On adolescent binge drinking and age of first intoxication in the period, cf. National Board of Health (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2010, p. 18) and (Sundhedsstyrelsen, 2007, p. 15) respectively.
3. This should not be considered a “break” with ANT. In fact, Krarup and Blok (2011) argue that the one-sided empiricist methodology of opening up black boxes unintentionally heterogenizes the subject-side of subject-object network relations. The “virtual bent” of quasi actants hence attempts to reconstruct, not deconstruct, ANT.
4. We are not the first to take such a broad approach to recent developments in Danish alcohol history. Thorsen (1993) and Laursen and Sabroe (1996) both review policy in relation to the values and norms found among adults. And in a recent study Elmeland and Kolind (2012) review official documents with a case study of parents’ bottom up approaches to prevention.

5. Note that the Danish ESPAD data lack quality, which makes them problematic to use for comparative analysis.
6. Note that OECD figures show a sharp increase in 2000 which is simply due to improved measurement by Statistics Denmark.
7. Parker (2005) distinguished five dimensions of normalization with respect to drug use: a) availability and accessibility, b) trying rates, c) recent and regular use, d) the social accommodation of "sensible" recreational use, and e) cultural accommodation. Following Wolfensberger, Parker stressed the process of normalization through which outsider activity becomes mainstream behavior. We, for our part, applied the concept to alcohol consumption with regard to the processes distinguishing the very young (among whom drinking is outsider behavior) and the somewhat older (among whom drinking is the norm) (for a discussion, see Järvinen & Demant, 2011).
8. Several European countries have similar industry-led self-regulation institutions on alcohol marketing (European Alcohol and Health Forum, 2009).
9. GODA focuses on adolescents, parents, teachers, and authorities. In particular, it focuses on schools, youth education, and youth clubs.
10. Longitudinal comparison is complicated by the fact that the National Board of Health changed its survey procedures in 2003.

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