

Pekka Suksanen: Alcohol and the
Imperative of Health in Mass
Society: Images of Alcohol Policy
among the Local Elites. 72:

14

Community Prevention of Alcohol Problems

Edited by

Marja Holmila

Senior Researcher

Social Research Institute of Alcohol Studies

Helsinki

Finland

Macmillan, London 1997

Foreword by Sally Casswell

Professor, Director of Alcohol and Public Health Research Unit

University of Auckland

New Zealand

Consultant Editor: Jo Campling



in association with
THE WHO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE

4 Alcohol and the Imperative of Health in Mass Society: Images of Alcohol Policy among the Local Elites

Pekka Sulkinen

L07 Akseli(M):98 to me it's clear that availability increases the problem, there's no doubt, but what's not so clear is whether availability should be restricted . . . after all we're living in a free democracy, so to what extent can people be patronized? Personally I've always felt that grown up people can look after themselves, but when we have problems with people who cannot look after themselves then of course it's down to society to take over, and of course we all have to pay for it, for all the billions that diseases caused by alcohol use are costing.

1. THE PUBLIC HEALTH PREDICAMENT

A starting point for the Lahti research is that social problems are conceptual constructions. Any sociological intervention, in fact any reasonable sociological theory, must assume that some kind of communicability is the foundation of the social order, whatever its nature and whatever its degree of consensus.

Alcohol as a social problem is a particularly interesting case: the social history of 'the alcohol question' does not always reflect the prevalence or seriousness of alcohol problems in the reality of people's own everyday experience (see Chapter 2). Rather, alcohol, like drugs, is *perceived* as a cause of worry, often in ways that are quite unrelated to the extent of the problems they create. In the Nordic case the two even compete, drugs being the 'good enemy' as alcohol is much more difficult to

combat because of economic and cultural interests related to its use (Christie and Bruun 1985).

Perceptions of alcohol as a social problem articulate general conceptions of society, especially the state and the individual self. Early temperance movements were vanguards of modernity in many ways: they represented rationality, controlled social order and the Protestant ethic. In the new consumer society the position of alcohol has become reversed: it represents 'modernity' in the sense of individuals' competence and responsibility to judge what is good for them, it stands for high standards of living, cosmopolitanism and ritualistic inventiveness as a means of social integration (Sulkunen 1983). In the modern welfare state the rationale for controlling alcohol use is no longer based on the rationalistic moral values of sobriety and frugality but on 'the public good' of reducing pain and cost to society (Edwards *et al.* 1994). Even so it is felt to be in contradiction with the values of individual sovereignty and responsibility.

This contradiction underlies what has been called the public health predicament of contemporary advanced societies (Sulkunen 1996). We are more aware than ever before that individuals' problems cause a burden to others and the society as a whole: as suffering and as costs. In all Western countries the health service is in a deepening fiscal crisis. In Deborah Lupton's words, health is no longer an individual problem that can recover from diseases with the help of medical technology. It has become a public imperative that must be actively promoted by many kinds of non-medical measures. Local community action projects such as the one we conducted in Lahti are one important form of the 'new public health movement' (Lupton 1995, 58).

We have more expert knowledge than ever before about the causes of problems, about the possibilities of treating them and about potential measures of prevention. Yet we are also more reluctant to accept any measures that might be interpreted as deflections from individual consumers' sovereignty, and all such attempts can be accused of being propelled by particular interests in the guise of the public good. In fact, one might argue that the whole notion of 'society' and with that, the notion of the public good, has become blurred. What is the society in whose interests one should accept that one can be deprived of the right to sell, buy or consume anything at any time? What

is the public good for which sacrifices of freedom to choose and control oneself should be made, and how is each individual expected to benefit from it?

These are the questions that impose themselves in any reflections, public or private, on alcohol as a social problem today. It should be noted that as they are formulated above they do not refer specifically to alcohol at all. The new public health rhetoric itself is a discourse of moral neutralization: it does not take a moral stand in terms of lifestyles, consumption or alcohol use directly but talks of these only as factors influencing the health and general wellbeing of the population. It transforms moral and power issues into neutral expert discourse.

Yet in spite of vast expert knowledge on the causes and consequences of alcoholism, the construction of alcohol as a social problem is today only partly based on it. Equally important are general conceptions of the individual, the society and especially the state. In mass society, where great political ideologies no longer organise these conceptions, people are both confused and ambivalent about different possibilities. Alcohol policy is not embedded in distinct social doctrines, and therefore fairly abstract analytical tools are needed to understand the hidden or fuzzy texture of alcohol policy argumentation from this general perspective.

2. POSITIONS AND VALUES

When people construct social problems conceptually they do not do this in a vacuum, as if they were not themselves part of the world of which they speak. The construction of social problems is a process of verbal negotiation in which participants have ideas of the social world as a structure in which they place themselves. Talking about alcohol they also develop conceptions of themselves as individuals and as citizens, and whatever they say, they say from *a position* in their world. For example, when discussing alcohol policy they may look at it from the point of view of 'the public good' (if they believe in it), from a point of view of a parent, or of a consumer, and their opinions on, say, alcohol taxes will vary accordingly. These kinds of relationships between the structures of the world and the positions from which these structures are talked about are called

enunciative projections (Sulkunen and Törrönen, forthcoming/b). When talking about alcohol policy people not only construct images of the world but also images of themselves by projecting themselves on to the actors in the world. Sometimes they see themselves as those who have power to influence other peoples' behaviour, at other times as those who are so influenced, or sometimes in both positions simultaneously.

Secondly, the construction of social problems is a process of constructing *values*. In traditional norm-theoretical approaches, values are understood as given and only applied to concrete behaviours like alcohol use (Parsons and Shils 1951, 72; see also Sulkunen and Törrönen, forthcoming/a). The problem with norm-theoretical value concepts is that they assume that the meaning attached to, say, drinking, is constant, known and independent of 'values' whose only function is to regulate understandings of acceptability (Pittman 1967; Bales 1946). In our view the definitions of drinking itself are value-laden relationships between alcohol, society and the self. They are multidimensional and not only matters of acceptability. The multidimensionality of values can be grasped by the concept of modality (Sulkunen and Törrönen, forthcoming/a). Acceptability is only one case of so-called deontic modalities (permission: someone is not obliged to do not-A), and can be a very important element in some patterns of argumentation, but there are others, as we shall see.

For example, the common Finnish images of alcohol use as transgression of the boundaries of normal everyday life can be understood as valuable in terms of the ability or power that alcohol gives to break norms. On the other hand, images of integrated or civilised social drinking are usually related to the values of competence (knowing how to drink).¹ Correspondingly, understandings of the functions and contradictions of preventive alcohol policy are related to value-laden conceptions of the role of the state and its relations to individuals.

The theory of enunciative projections and modal values is the basis of what we call reflexive intervention into the construction of alcohol as a social problem. We not only interviewed the Lahti influentials, we also made interpretations of what they had told us and invited them to a feedback session to discuss our 'results' (Appendix). The analysis in this chapter is mainly based on typescripts of the recorded feedback sessions.

Positions and values are important objects for reflexive

intervention, because they are elements of the participants' identities and understandings of themselves, at least in their relationship to alcohol use, but very likely also more generally as individuals and citizens. In this case, however, we did not even expect to meet homogeneous microcultures of the kind one might meet in working-class pubs (Sulkunen *et al.* 1985) or middle-class cafés (Sulkunen 1992): instead we expected to identify types of arguments about alcohol policy and see if and in what way our intervention would be received.

3. CONTROL AND TRANSGRESSION

Although argumentation patterns about alcohol policy can be looked at as reflections of how people understand the relationships between society and the self, it is not irrelevant what kind of 'interpretative repertoires' (Potter and Wetherell 1987) are available for the symbolic functions of alcohol itself. It is a well-documented fact (see, for example, Sulkunen 1993 for a summary) that in Finnish culture very strong connotations of transgression are associated with drinking. Alcohol is a drug and its use is embedded in rituals that mark a strong borderline between normal social life and life beyond its conventions. Many of these rituals imply the idea of control: the doorman in restaurants, restricted opening hours of off-licences, age limits, precise measurements of the dose, etc. And vice versa, alcohol control measures are usually interpreted as reinforcing the transgressive meaning of drinking (Partanen 1991, 217–35).

Such 'border controls' between the sober world and the world of intoxication are not necessarily seen as something negative. Reaching for the 'forbidden fruit' is not only a sin but also a sign of heroism. Heroic drinking, as Juha Partanen (1991, 236–50) has called it, implies and requires the rituals of transgression that the various forms of alcohol control represent. In fact, it was one hypothesis of the intervention study of the Lahti influentials (Appendix, Introduction) that one could expect to find a rather clearcut relationship between conceptions of alcohol as an object of consumption and conceptions of alcohol as a problem and an object of control. Those who would see drinking in terms of transgressing the norms of everyday life might be expected to define alcoholism in terms of lost self-

control and accept external controls more willingly than those for whom alcoholic beverages are mostly an integrated part of normal life. The latter would, we thought, be more inclined to see alcoholism as a medical rather than as a social problem and consequently to see secondary and tertiary rather than primary prevention as the preferred remedy.

The interview protocol was designed to explore this expectation: the first part of the interview consisted of extracts from well-known international films, presenting both transgressive and non-transgressive drinking scenes. The second part consisted of educational material, including a video programme called *The Alcohol Roulette* produced by the Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto. This video defends the so-called total consumption theory, or availability theory, according to which alcohol problems can be prevented by limiting the availability, and thus the overall consumption of alcohol.

The idea of transgressive drinking was familiar to almost all those we interviewed but there was great variation in how they related it to their own behaviour. Some quite straightforwardly recognised themselves in the most transgressive film scenes; others recognised the pattern but took distance from it, saying that it belongs to the past or that it is typical not of 'us' but of others, such as young people, the working class, people in the country, and so on. A few persons had difficulty in understanding the pattern at all: for them alcohol use was not a transfiguration of the normal social world, and they thought that people who act like those in the film are either alcoholics or deviant in some other way (Sulkunen 1993).

A major conclusion on alcohol policy argumentation appeared early in the course of our interviews. There was very little consistency in what people said. First, arguments were unstable within groups and even in different individuals' minds. Secondly, alcohol policy views were not in any systematic way related to understandings about alcohol or about alcohol problems. Our initial hypothesis, that transgressive images of alcohol use would be related to conceptions of alcohol as a social rather than a medical or psychological problem, and that such conceptions would permit people to accept stronger external controls, did not hold true. Those who identified their own behaviour with the transgressive image of drinking were not more willing than others to accept public control measures to prevent alcohol

problems. On the other hand, the interviewees who understood the need for primary prevention, especially preventive alcohol taxation, were not those who would associate transgressive connotations with their own alcohol use.

4. THREE VIEWS ON ALCOHOL POLICY

Obviously there was something wrong in our initial conceptualizations, and it soon began to appear that the fault lay in our understanding of control, which was too simple.

Early on we could identify rather easily two approaches to alcohol policy: the welfare state approach and neoliberalism. First, the ARF video already introduced the total consumption theory, which we have analysed as a 'modernist welfare state' philosophy in alcohol policy. The idea was understood and even accepted by some groups. The modern welfare state approach denies any moral superiority of the state over individuals, and therefore public intervention into private consumption needs specific justifications. Alcoholism is a disease, and should be treated as any disease. However, efforts aimed at its prevention are legitimate, not because of the pain it causes to the diseased individual but because of the suffering it causes to others, either directly in the family, on the roads or in the workplace, or indirectly as societal costs.

The responsibility of the state to take care of alcoholics is justified on three grounds. First, alcoholism is a disease and therefore not wholly dependent on the individual's free will:

L04 Lauri(M):894 it's a contradiction, because you would think that alcoholism is your own fault, and if somebody gets a heart condition or something in the kidneys, well that's not of your own making. But people discriminate against alcoholism say, is it right that enormous amounts of money is spent on that when it is your own fault. But then it is . . . it is a disease and it is not up to your own will it's up to chemical reactions or physiology, so I mean it is right that this problem is taken care of by society.

Secondly, even if alcoholism is partly incurable and also a moral weakness, it nevertheless causes suffering to others, and this may be reduced by investing public money in treatment:

L04 Leena (F):868 is it any good that alcoholics have been for so long treated in this country, and it's expensive too . . . but when you think of it if there is no money put into this, you'll see how there will be trouble indirectly, other people will have to suffer, maybe indirect benefits will follow [from treatment] even if the sick person did not recover. . . .

Thirdly, alcoholism as such is a cost burden to the health care system, and should therefore be prevented or otherwise controlled:

L02 Jussi(M):384 there was this TV programme, they talked about how much a liver transplant costs, that's 500 000, half-a-million, I don't know how many of these are done . . . in this town but when the bill comes to the city, to society, well that's an expensive liver if it's put to the same use as the old one.

The welfare state approach faces a dilemma. Public intervention into private consumer behaviour is believed to be inefficient and often dysfunctional, even if justified from the public health perspective. In our groups, price policy was felt to be the most acceptable one, on grounds of both efficacy and justice. Taxing alcohol was considered to be just because through taxes heavy drinkers cover part of the cost burden they cause to society, much like in the case of environmental problems.

The second pattern of argumentation was the neoliberal or libertarian idea that everybody should be responsible for him- or herself and that others should not be bothered with external controls such as heavy taxation or limited availability. It, too, contests the idea that the state – or for that matter anyone or any institution – might have moral superiority over individuals. The two groups of journalists (Groups 1 and 3) and one group of cultural personalities (Group 4) who represented this view, believed alcoholism to be an individual disease in the sense that it is hereditary, a disposition of the personality, but most of all a disease of the will and therefore a moral responsibility. The bottom of the problem is not signalled by loss of health or of social ties but by the loss of free will. The most serious alcoholic is the one who is not able to decide whether or not he or she wants to drink. From the social point of view, self-induced health problems are not relevant:

L01 Harri (M): 623 I think cirrhosis is not even a problem, just like lung cancer is not a problem. . . .

The thrust of this argument was that public measures restricting the availability of alcohol negatively affect individuals' competence to drink sensibly, and are therefore harmful to society. This is a version of the 'forbidden fruit' argument but has this new line: it is not that interdictions attract transgression but rather that they are an obstacle to individuals' own competence to enjoy and control their alcohol use, and therefore they obstruct the civilization process which otherwise is going on in society. In all these groups the idea of modernizing drinking patterns was very strongly emphasized.

In a later group (Group 5) we found a third approach, also libertarian in its antipathy towards public alcohol control, but distinct from the other two in one respect. Whereas both the welfare state approach and the libertarian approach share the view that nobody should or can have moral responsibility for other people's behaviour, this other version of liberalism is based on the idea that ordinary people are not mature enough to handle alcohol without moral supervision. The objection to state control was not that it is not needed; instead, it should be returned to the (patriarchal) family. The 'socialist' model, where the state has taken up the moral functions of the family, leads to moral decay.

This understanding of the role of public powers in treating and preventing alcohol problems was individualistic on the grounds that everybody should pay his or her own way rather than depend on others. Thus, the objections to treating alcoholism – defined as addiction and disease – in public hospitals was quite straightforward:

L05 PS(M):347 What should be done to alcoholics?

L05 Hannu (M):348 The same as to the Government: send them to a logging camp (laughter).

L05 Mauri(M): 352 . . . the logging camp idea sounds good, as I said before loitering is the mother of all alcoholics, when people have something meaningful to do and they have other businesses than just thinking about how to spend their day they'll leave all other stuff aside, yes the logging camp is quite a practical idea to put it roughly.

However, people defending this approach did not deny the moral superiority that the state might have over citizens:

L05 Hannu (M) you should think about the culture and about the kind of people. Finnish people have become used to obey and observe a strong central government under Swedish rule, then under Russia they picked up Russian habits like drinking. Finnish people don't seem to have the manners and even if you should give them responsibility you can't and then of course think about young people . . . if you let them decide like about smoking that's abandoning them.

Even the classical individualists were in favour of liberalizing wine sales moderately ('special counters in qualified grocery stores'), but then they underlined the importance of authority in the family:

L05 Reijo (M):376 I'm one of those who'd like to defend wine departments in general grocery stores. We've forgotten in Finland, it became a fashion to belittle the role of the family in the alcohol question as well, it was some kind of socialist East German model that children were taken out of the cradle straight to kindergartens. I wish we'd get back to the old safe society where the home had responsibilities. Somehow I like to be old-fashioned in this that the right ways in alcohol-related matters come from the family . . . in principle I'm against norms and strict control by society and that's why I said that wine policy should be liberalized.

The suspicion felt towards the state was not so much based on conceptions of universal sovereignty of individuals; it was rather a criticism of the idea that the modern welfare state could take over functions that in classical bourgeois society have been invested in the family.

5. DEFENDING THE PUBLIC GOOD

One of the groups where the total consumption theory was at least partly accepted consisted of municipal administrators and experts in local health and social affairs (Group 2).

The enunciative position (Sulkunen and Törrönen, forthcoming/b) adopted in this group towards society was constructed

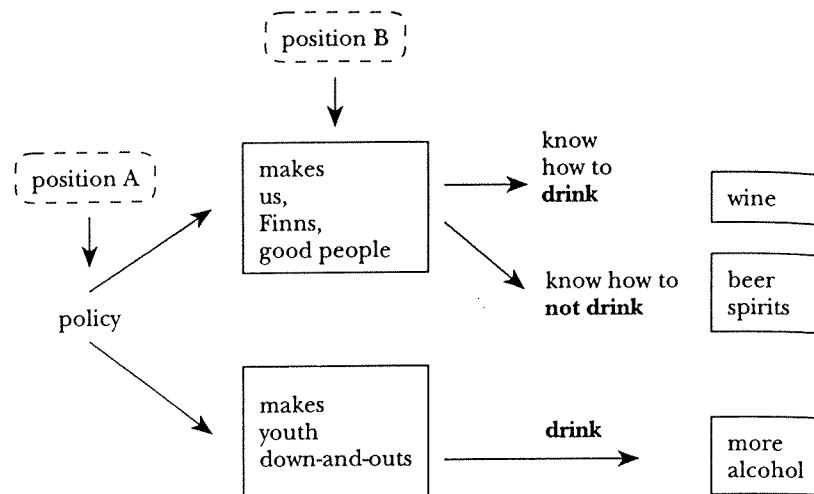


Figure 4.1 Causal structure of argumentation on alcohol policy

on the projection of 'us' as influential and socially responsible members of society. In the feedback session an analysis was presented to participants based on Fig. 4.1. When causal effects of alcohol policy measures are looked at from the point of view of consumers, they are often divided into two kinds. Effects on 'us' influence our competence to enjoy drinking and to control ourselves. 'We' are therefore seen to be modalized persons, equipped with competence (the modal capacity of knowing how to drink), while policy effects on 'others' may be direct so that 'they' simply react, for example drink themselves to an early death, if availability is improved (Sulkunen 1992). However, this group was looking at alcohol policy from the point of view of policy makers, instead of consumers or citizens:

LFBK02 PS: this group places itself here [Fig. 4.1 position A] and not here [Fig. 4.1 position B], it's like the point of view of the policymakers on the matter here in this group, and this is different from many of the other groups in our study.

The analysis was accepted but reflectively, and with a good-humoured sense of irony:

LFBK02 Petri(M): well, are we not in quite an important post in society (laughter).

LFBK02 Leo(M): or at least we should be able to give advice to others as to how they should go about it so that . . .

LFBK02 Petri(M): you're right, it's really a calling for us to take up that role, isn't it?

LFBK02 Anne(F): that's right.

In this group, too, the welfare state model of alcohol policy oriented to the control of total consumption was met with reservations. Too much control and care will reduce individuals' sense of self-responsibility and could lead to a laxity in keeping one's way of life within reasonable limits. But the reservation was still in line with the projection of 'us' as powerful representatives of the society at large:

LFBK02 Petri(M): aren't we talking here precisely about the problem of the consequences of alcohol effects, I mean if this bloke just dies then OK that's his problem, but when it causes problems to society, when society has taken on the responsibility to attend to all his needs, putting him into intensive care and using all the knowledge and technology we have, doing everything to keep him alive, even though this bloke himself gives sod all to living in this world, just couldn't care less, then you could ask whether we're actually giving sufficient opportunity to making these choices.

In another group (Group 4) the ARF video was an effective intervention and changed the participants' point of view from the one of a consumer to the one of defending the public good. In the first interview session most of them unquestionably supported the neoliberal view, arguing that in 'Continental Europe', where alcohol trade is free, there are fewer problems because controls do not obstruct consumers' competence in enjoying the pleasures of drinking. In this group the ARF video was exceptionally shown only in the feedback session.

LFBK04 Minna(F): it's quite interesting that this availability theory at least as far as I know has not been discussed in public to the same extent as we've talked about liberalization, at least I haven't heard anything, that if this is the result that these problems increase that the boil gets bigger and wider that was used to describe this [the skewed statistical distribution of alcohol consumption - PS] I think that's pretty shocking.

LFBK04 PS(M): how in general do you feel, how awkward is this problem if you think that alcohol causes costs in society and causes suffering and in a sense we all agree that society must carry some responsibility, but on the other hand this conflicts with the freedom of individuals, how do you see this?

LFBK04 Minna(F): well on this basis I must say one is inclined to take the position that if it really gets out of control to that extent, but I mean if we think of French habits, that's been presented like they say that they've got lots of alcoholics but it's still not everything's free there, the picture that's presented to us is too rosy, we haven't been given all the facts, I don't know who wants to give this sort of picture.

Minna looks at policy information from the point of view of a suspicious citizen, and later adds, in response to the interviewer's remark that availability control may contradict individual freedom:

LFBK04 Minna(F): well yes in a sense it does but if you think of health whether in terms of health in society or physical health in individuals, then if its necessary from that point of view then I would say that if you're unable to look after yourself then society should step in and set things straight.

Other members of this group agreed, but great ambivalence continued on individuals' own responsibility and right to demand care, especially in cases where smoking has damaged one's health. Again we can see that support for control policy is easy as long as it can be interpreted to be selectively directed at 'them' (smokers, those who cannot take care of themselves), or when it is looked at from the point of view of 'the public good'.

6. CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES²

Some neoliberals reacted to the ARF video by denying its validity. In a group of journalists one participant formulated this criticism as follows:

LFBK03 Helena(N):1004 the latter at least was a mess, it confused availability and in general drinking and the consequences of drinking, it was all mixed up, it wasn't just availability theory, it mixed it all up, is booze available, is booze used, then it just stated that where people drink more booze there's more alcohol, I mean that's clear, but as far as I can see that had nothing to do with if it's readily available, then it's used more, there was no proof of that. . . .

LFBK03 Maria(N):1009 the experience we have is that restrictions, they do not solve the problem anyway.

LFBK03 Susanna(N):1010 it makes it into a forbidden fruit, and we all know how tempting that can be.

LFBK03 Susanna(N):1016 everything, like to me this cartoon thing was absolutely awful like from above to below, let auntie explain this to everyone.

LFBK03 Eeva(N):1017 like to a child.

LFBK03 Helena(N):1018 but it was for Americans and they don't understand anything.

This is an example of the general ambivalence towards expert knowledge that is typical of contemporary risk society (Beck 1992; Sulkunen 1996). We are dependent on research for rational action and opinions, yet all knowledge is suspect of representing and promoting particular interests or ideologies. Here the participants accepted the positive correlation between total consumption and the prevalence of heavy drinking, demonstrated by researchers in the video. However, they refused to believe in the effects of availability on consumption because of its political consequences.

What is even more interesting, they did this by contrasting personal first-hand experience with the researchers' testimony, and the latter failed to convince them. They did not in fact even grant expert status to this claim ('there was no proof of that'). Although themselves specialists in information, they evaluated the video from a veridictory position (this is how it seems *vs* this is how it is) rather than from an epistemological one (this is what is believed *vs* this is what the truth is). The resulting contradiction is an illusion or – in their words – confusion, rather than an erroneous assumption that can be evaluated on the

basis of the participants' own expert competence. The veridictory stance places them on the same footing with everybody who has experience of things, not in the position of someone whose knowledge is superior to that of the audience. They are constructing a contract of confidence rather than building up legitimacy for their own authority (Sulkunen and Törrönen/b).

For ordinary citizens such a position would be quite expected. However, for this group it reflects their understanding of their role in society as journalists and explains why the position from which they look at alcohol policy is that of an individual consumer:

LFBK03 JT(M): you also had this, like this other group of journalists that you started to think about things [from the point of view of policy objects] and you were annoyed that there's someone from above forcefully manipulating . . . in general you felt uncomfortable about sanctions, that they were unnecessary, restricting availability or other forms of control, in a sense what you were saying was that in the long run we should get rid of them, do you agree with this?

LFBK03 Susanna(F): well yes I do.

LFBK03 Eeva(F): absolutely yes.

This enunciative position first seemed odd to us, because the participants in this group were journalists, not ordinary citizens, and they were invited to the study in this very capacity. In mass society theory it is often argued that journalists tend to see themselves as independent professionals who see themselves as informed gatekeepers rather than as advocates (Janowicz 1975). Their legitimacy is based on their identity as representatives of the public good instead of particular interests or points of view.

In the feedback discussion with our journalist groups it turned out that their conception of themselves as professionals did not correspond to the image of informed gatekeepers or representatives of the public good:

LFBK03 Eeva(F): when you said that the purpose of this study was to talk with opinion-formers I must say I wondered who am I to be an opinion-former, I mean I'm just an ordinary reporter, I don't identify with any system and I certainly don't feel I have any real influence in the local community or in society.

LFBK03 Sami(M): journalists don't make the decisions.

LFBK03 Eeva(F): not a single revolution has ever started from a paper.

They see themselves as cultural intermediaries, to use Featherstone's (1991) term, but with an emphasis on their audience's freedom of choice rather than on their own special competence as sources of information, ideas or values. In a sense, their understanding of themselves as journalists closely resembles their relationship to alcohol policy. They identify themselves not with 'power' but with those who are subjected to it. For them the idea that they should be sources of norms or of objective information as 'educators' is completely alien, because they themselves would not like to be 'educated':

LFBK03 Sami(M): the very word education, I mean the word itself says that the educator is not going to hand out all the information there is but he has a certain object, he's trying to turn it like a ship, but we as journalists we're like the ideological ideal, we distribute information and we're not educators, to me there's a clear difference, to me what we can do via the press to influence people is to disseminate information, if we give to people all the information that we can give them, then people can freely choose on that basis what they want to do, but if we start to educate them then we're no longer journalists.

LFBK03 PS(M): so what you're saying is that, you could rephrase that by saying that your only role is one of an intermediary and that's the most important thing.

LFBK03 Sami(M): that's the most important job.

LFBK03 Helena(F): recognizing that we always make choices and that those choices make a difference.

The journalist's job is rendered valuable by opposing it with the role of educators in terms of the modalities of obligation. Educators are 'deontic subjects' and the behaviour and thoughts of their audience are the object of their activity. In contrast to this, journalists are helpers to their audience, who are the real subjects making choices on the basis of the ability given to them by access to unconstrained and non-selective information (Pietilä 1995, 48).

In a similar fashion the other group of journalists reacted very negatively to an American educational video on alcohol and traffic that was shown to them in the first interview session:

LFBK01 PS(M):161 could I suggest my own interpretation here . . . you said that this video seemed infantile to you, it was associated with a children's programme which in a sense is annoying to adults, being force-fed this sort of children's programme, adults can cope better with shock therapies, regard them as more interesting, realistic, on the other hand I thought whether there could be a difference here, that this American version, in a sense it suggests or offers norms rather than just information and education, like look how it enters your blood-stream and like this is not how to behave, it sort of gives you behavioural rules and as such it's an infantile approach, someone said here that we all know this that it's not necessary . . . to explain to people . . . but on the other hand . . . when this sort of emotional shock education is provided it still leaves the viewer . . . the freedom of choice that he's not told what he ought to do, he does what he does but this shows him what it can all lead to.

LFBK01 Pete(M):163 yes I can accept that idea in the sense that if this sort of forced stuff is fed to us unconsciously then. . . .

LFBK01 Harri(M):164 yes I can subscribe to that as well.

LFBK01 Pete(M):165 I might like immediately get this reaction if someone tries to force something to me, in the shock film I can make up my own mind as far as that's concerned, but to me any situation where everyone agrees, I want to find something where I could disagree, it really annoys me. . . . I'll always start to dig up for something on the other side of the coin.

It is as important for themselves as it is to their image of their audience to be able to act as subjects. Rationality is an unquestioned value but only in so far as it is modalized as (inner) competence and ability (not obstructed by outsiders' use of power) to make choices and not as obligation (imposed by others) to make the 'right' choice.

7. MORAL AUTHORITY

The group (Group 5) where the classical liberalist understanding of the role of the state was most uniformly represented consisted of five influential local businessmen, from 49 to 62 years of age, in their grey suits, talking in a moderate matter-of-fact style. In the feedback session their 'conservatism' was stressed first in the context of their understandings of the relationship between alcohol and work:

LFBK05 PS(M) 3: the impression I had was that the point of view was fairly traditional . . . the one thing that particularly struck me was that even the old Weberian Protestant ethic was fairly typical, should one say a fairly reserved attitude to all forms of pleasure in general, a very strong orientation to work, so that in almost every respect work came first and everything else followed.

LFBK05 Jouko(M) 4: (to his pal): hello conservative!

LFBK05 PS(M) 5: although they talked a lot about this [alcohol] in the context of working life, it still didn't provide any sort of relaxation as a counterbalance to work, even after the day's work you had to earn it by going for a long run or something else, a very reserved, perhaps even puritanical attitude to everything.

LFBK05 Reijo(M) 28: yes the old saying that if you work hard you have to play hard, that didn't really come out here.

The researchers explained what they meant by classical liberalism underlying the differences between this group's understandings and the modern welfare state ideology or the neoliberal position. In contrast to the other two arguments, in this group the need for moral authority was stressed by some participants, but questioning the right of the state to replace the family in exercising it. The group congratulated the researchers for this interpretation, saying that the purpose of the original interview had left them perplexed but now it had become clear.

Conservatism was for this group almost a matter of pride, not something they would rather have secluded from sight. But it was not an ideological engagement either. They stood aside, talking about 'the Finns' as if they were not Finns themselves,

and their own uniformity in the interview was thought to be a 'coincidence', not a conscious and reflected matter of principle:

LFBK05 Reijo(M):12 the observations you had here, these that pointed to puritanism . . . I don't know how you can generalize this but the group we had here. . . .

LFBK05 Jouko(M):13 it happened to be really conservative . . . I mean all of these blokes, they're all different of course, but it just happened that their thoughts happened to be along similar lines here.

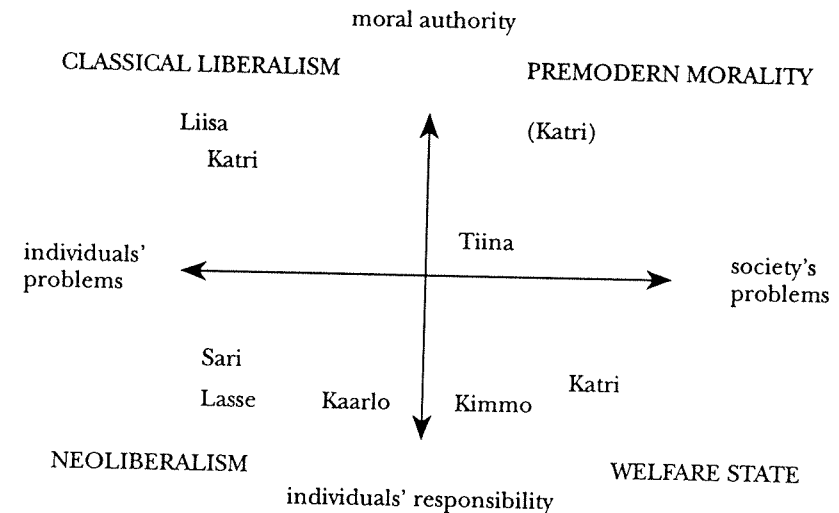
8. POLITICAL IDEOLOGY VERSUS INDIVIDUAL CHOICE

One of the key themes in mass society theory has been that political doctrines become inconsistent and commitment to them becomes weak. In our groups this was reflected in a lack of correspondence between political engagement and ideas about control policy: people took positions within and between the three schemes we outlined – the modern welfare state, neoliberalism and classical liberalism – either arbitrarily or in the context of their specific roles in society, as functionaries, journalists, employers, etc. This flexibility was striking in a group of politicians (Group 6) whom we interviewed in a late phase of our field-work.³ All three schemes were apparent within the group, but not integrated to the respective political orientations represented by the participants.

The researchers noted this:

L06 PS(M):20 . . . this was interesting and in a sense a rather difficult group to analyse in that it was put together in the democratic diplomatic Finnish way, both sexes and all age groups and all well not all political persuasions but quite a good balance in any case and so the end result is quite a wide spectrum of opinions, I can't say that this group was of this or that opinion, but all sorts of opinions were represented. . . .

The opinions on alcohol policy were mapped on to a space defined by two axes: one opposing moral authority and individual responsibility, the other opposing the burden to society and individuals' private problems caused by alcohol. The map looked like Figure 4.2. In their reactions the politicians approved their



Liisa 38, Conservative, attorney
Katri 42, Christian Party, nurse
Lasse 63, Left Federation, retired construction painter, entrepreneur
Tiina 60, Green Party, teacher
Kimmo 23, Social Democrat, student
Sari 25, Conservative, student
Kaarlo 55, Social Democrat, journalist, local bank manager, entrepreneur

Figure 4.2 Alcohol policy views in Group 6 (Members of the City Council)

placements on the map but immediately explained their positions by reference to their personal rather than ideological backgrounds. It turned out that Lasse, a representative of the Left Federation (Communist), had a long experience as an entrepreneur 'on the other side of the barricade', and he also had the 'highest taxed income' among the City Council Members, which explains his anti-paternalistic attitude. Katri referred to her job as a nurse, which has shown her that

LFBK06 Katri(F): . . . yes alcohol really is a public-health problem, it's a big public health problem, perhaps it's my professional background why I speak about these things in this manner.

Probed on the ideological position of the Christian Party, she was unwilling to accept the idea that her alcohol policy views were related to moral condemnation of drinking, which would

represent a stand in the figure that is called 'premodern morality'. The party line, she insisted, was based on the view that healthy lifestyles are the basis of their critical attitude to liberalizing alcohol sales. She is not a drinker but does not object to other people having fun if it remains within appropriate limits.

In a similar fashion Liisa, a Conservative attorney, explained her position by reference to her professional experience:

LFBK06 Liisa(F): well a lot of it's this that because I see a lot of these things on the job, crime cases . . . alcohol is involved and not just in adolescents' cases, I mean for them it's involved in most of their cases in one way or another, and then I have a lot of family law cases, again alcohol figures in one way or another, so I mean obviously this is reflected in the comments I have been making here.

LFBK06 PS(M): yes well but I was just thinking that this could also be related to this sort of traditional bourgeois ideology this kind of classical liberalism.

LFBK06 Liisa(F): mm yes of course yes there's plenty to chew over here (laughter) . . . it won't all go down in one bite.

The participants agreed that ideological debates have not recently been very important in their political activities. 'It is just these fiscal problems of the city, we've got no time for thinking about anything else, of course it would be good to talk and think but that's not what we do these days' (Liisa).

Kaarlo (55), a Social Democrat, affirms that in his party the ideological idealization of the 1970s is now over and has produced a hangover. The ongoing dismantling of the welfare state is one of its effects. Party rule is no longer strong:

L06 Kaarlo(M): I would say that this whole mentality of pulling down the welfare state . . . that we've now reached some sort of hangover stage that we're slowly beginning to give in and no longer sticking so firmly to these [principles] . . . then there's this aspect of the costs which is affecting things in the sense that we're forced to reform now . . . I've been at every party conference since 1981 and it seems to me that none of the decisions of earlier conferences count for anything, nothing of the old is sacred, we're taking a very short-term view on things, as long as we can cope for

the next year or so then everything's alright, we can forget our earlier principles.

Sari (25), a Conservative student, is first quite shocked about her own liberalism ('Am I now then completely without morality?') but then reflects on her position as part of a general reaction to welfare state paternalism, evokes arguments about its homogenising effects especially in educational policy but then also recognises the drawback of neoliberal policy that it may lead to selective inequalities between school districts.

It is nothing new that politicians' stands in alcohol-related issues are free of party discipline. In Finland it is customary that when Parliament debates alcohol legislation, individual members can vote according to their conscience rather than having to adhere to their group's majority decision. Such political freedom is usually thought necessary because parliamentarians' and their constituents' moral attitude to alcohol as such may vary and regional variations are often important.

Here we are not, however, discussing only moral attitudes towards alcohol as such: what is at issue is a wider question about values related to society, the state and the self that vary according to the point of view from which the politicians look at the matter. The difference in the interviewer's location on the map of arguments is not a difference in the norm-theoretical sense of values: acceptance or not of drinking as such. As mentioned above, even Katri, representative of the conservative Christian party that has a puritanistic ideological background and a tradition as 'the anti-alcohol party of Finland', emphasizes her approval of other people's drinking. The division between those who oppose alcohol control and those who are ready to accept it depends, first, on the position from which the person looks at these relationships, and second, how he or she understands the value of moral obligation from above as against the competence (of self-control) from below.

9. CONCLUSION: ENDOTACTIC VERSUS EXOTACTIC VALUE SYSTEMS

That alcohol is not on the political agenda proper does not mean that people are indifferent towards the problem. They are often

confused about the way the problem should be understood and treated but they engage in discussions about it eagerly, even with some passion. They understand the public health predicament – the need to keep social health costs within bearable limits through preventive policy, which, however, tends to contradict individual responsibility and freedom of choice. Among the Lahti influentials the universalistic preventive approach that focuses on total consumption and general availability was accepted with difficulty, and mostly by those who could identify themselves as administrators or specialists with professional responsibilities to defend the public good.

But even so, the positions taken in the issue were largely arbitrary and depended on contingent factors such as professional background and to some extent age. Political ideologies were almost completely unrelated to opinions about alcohol policy.

Such contingency and arbitrariness in political issues is a key theme in the mass society theory. When commitment to political ideologies dissipates people become atomised and isolated in their individuality, falling prey to non-rational forces, emotional agitation and manipulation by the powerful through the mass media (Kornhauser 1959; Mills 1959).

Indeed public debates on alcohol issues in Finnish society, reflected in our discussions with the Lahti influentials, bear signs of the mass society syndrome. Liberalization of the alcohol control system, under the pretext of the requirements placed by our recent membership of the European Union, serves particular interests of the alcohol industries. It is supported by the major press and has not been seriously challenged by organised groups or social movements. The liberal tide in alcohol policy, even at the face of the accentuating crisis in alcohol-related health costs, could well be seen as a consequence of the end of politics in mass society.

In our interviews the mass society syndrome was reflected not only in the ideological contingency of views on alcohol policy. Also the enunciative position taken by the people who themselves are influentials, often with personal responsibility in municipal affairs, tended strongly to be that of private consumers subordinated to power and control rather than that of the powerful controllers or representatives of the public good. Even those who accepted society's preventive measures in alcohol policy often reverted to the distinction between 'us',

who are competent drinkers, and 'them' who are incompetent to take care and responsibility for themselves (see also Sulkunen 1992). Control measures were seen to be acceptable and effective only if they are directed to the latter.

However, our interviews with the Lahti influentials also provides a corrective to the mass society view. First, the journalists, among whom were our most liberal interviewees, were far from the mass society model of media manipulation; if anything they were openly hostile to the idea that the media should or could influence their audience's opinions or attitudes in any other way than serving them as distributors of objective and pluralistic information. They considered themselves as cultural intermediaries, with an emphasis on providing their readers and hearers a possibility of choice, rather than on themselves as being sources of knowledge and even less of norms and values.

Secondly, in the analysis of liberalist views on alcohol policy the distinction between classical liberalism and neoliberalism is essential. The classical liberals stressed moral authority over individuals, and in this they were in fact more opposed to neoliberalist views than to the welfare state arguments, even though their practical conclusions were more in line with the former than with the latter. They stressed individuals' duty or obligation to society, whereas the welfare state and neoliberal arguments emphasised individuals' own responsibility, will and competence that were seen to be in contradiction with society's interference in alcohol consumption through restrictive controls.

Willing and competence are endotactic modalities whereas obligation is an exotactic modality (Sulkunen and Törrönen, forthcoming/a). By endotactic modalities we mean modal qualifications that derive from the subject: it is the subject who wills and knows how to drink and control her or his drinking. Obligation or duty are exotactic modalities in the sense that they are imposed on the subject from the outside.

A precise understanding of the current liberalistic thinking that is opposed to the state's role in controlling people's behaviour in the name of the public good should pay close attention to this distinction. In the traditional mass society literature (post)modern people are often seen to become excessively directed from the outside. C. Wright Mills' fear of the 'cheerful robots', or David Riesman's analysis of the 'other-directed character' striving to conformity with others in order to gain

their acceptance, reflect a concern about people falling prey to manipulation or to a diffuse anxiety, in conditions where traditions have lost their regulating force and commitment to collectively maintained value systems fails. Such views seem less than convincing as an interpretation of the non-political but libertarian understandings of the individual as willing, competent and responsible self. The individual self is the endotactic centre of social life that sees any obligation from above or conformity to others as a violation of adult citizens' sovereignty and freedom. As our interviewees said about American society, the model country of individualism in popular stereotypes, tongue in cheek and fully understanding the irony:

L03 Helena(F): the whole culture is one where they have foolproof directions for everything, they've got instructions for like how to open a bottle, I mean the whole culture is so different that you can't . . .

L03 Eeva(F): it's more like a mass culture.

It is in the light of this endotactic value system that the imperative of health was seen as regards alcohol. Even those who understood drinking as a transgressive ritual thought that it was acceptable and desired in so far as it was the will of the individual and within the competence of his or her self-control. Any conformity to outside rules and regulations was seen as obstruction of these modal qualities.

NOTES

- 1 This kind of dichotomy was used in the analysis of our interview data and also in the feedback sessions. The theoretical inadequacies of this dichotomy are indisputable (Partanen 1991, 199–250) but for the sake of simplicity they had to be ignored in this context.
- 2 This section is based on Minna Pietilä's Master's thesis in sociology: ' "We set out as crusaders and realized that it is impossible" – Journalists' opinions on alcohol policy and on their professional roles in interview talk' (Pietilä 1995).
- 3 The following analysis is published with the permission of the persons involved.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 4: THE RESEARCH AND INTERVENTION METHODS

Jukka Törrönen and Pekka Sulkunen

1. Introduction

What provided the basis for the relationship between the researchers and the voices in the field in the sociological intervention discussed above? And how did this relationship shift and develop during the course of the research? These sorts of questions have attracted much attention in all types of action and audience research (see Elden and Chisholm 1993; Greenwood *et al.* 1993).

In a project that uses an experimental design and that aims to produce generalizable conclusions about the effects of different policy options, the researcher's role *vis-à-vis* the field comes close to that of a thief: he is smuggling the knowledge he has gathered out in the field into the academic world, possibly giving it up for purposes of political decision-making. At the same time the subject of the study is objectified, treated as a controllable mass (Foucault 1988; see Lupton 1995, 48–76). The guerilla adopts exactly the opposite strategy: he identifies with the interests of the community that is being researched and makes use of his knowledge and skills to mobilize resistance at the local level. His aim is to turn the local community into a competent subject capable of acting independently in the shadow of more powerful forces (cf. the organic intellectual, Gramsci 1971; see Tester 1994, pp. 21–4). Further, the researcher may also adopt the role of agent: criss-cross the field more or less at leisure, as if in a foreign land. In this instance he will be working closely with the local people to effect the changes that the project sponsor wants to see (Sulkunen 1991).

All these researcher roles and research designs have their societal vocations and missions. In this project, however, we did not take on any of these roles but that of critics. We wanted to have a sociological intervention that calls into question the said objectives as well as the conventional patterns of action that both the field and the 'project' (science) adopts for itself and imposes on others. This sort of sociological intervention comes close to agent research. A good agent usually begins work by analysing the field using the means of intervention. Two types

of theory are needed in this exercise: on the one hand a background theory of what this society is about in the first place, and secondly a theory of how people's statements should be analysed and interpreted (Sulkunen 1992).

Another thing that the agent and critic share is that they both regard their object of study as mobile, starting from the assumption that the voices in the field precede the researcher's gaze (Touraine 1981). However, a sociological intervention differs from agent activity in that it will not try to silence the voices in the field, to force them back into line, to put them on a pedestal; rather, the purpose is to pick them up and give them a good shake. The objective, ultimately, is to reinforce the voices in the field by providing them with the tools they need for self-reflection. This was what we wanted to do by coming back with the results within two or three weeks of the group interviews: at the feedback sessions we analysed the social identity of our opinion-formers and their position in the social structure, examined the consistency of and contradictions in their thinking, looked at alternative ways of perceiving alcohol policy and the field of social problems. The opinion-formers, for their part, confirmed those of our interpretations that they felt were right, showed where we had gone wrong, and drew attention to the places where we had stopped short in our analysis.

This kind of sociological intervention transcends the ancient dualisms we have between object and subject, theory and practice, action and structure, and so on (cf. Jordan and Yeomans 1995). It continues the tradition of dialectical, emancipatory research – with the difference that the target of emancipation comprises not only the subjects of the study but also the researchers (which explains the description of our approach as reflexive intervention).

2. Starting-Points, Main Themes and Identification of the Interviewees

What we set out to do in our study was to explore the views of local opinion-formers of alcohol as a social problem. The focus was on the problem of legitimacy: in what way and on what grounds did our opinion-formers consider it possible for them to address alcohol as a social problem from their own perspective of opinion-formers who wielded significant power in society?

Our baseline assumption was that their attitudes would depend on three factors: how they define alcohol, how they understand the social structure and how they see the relationship between public power and civil society (Sulkunen 1992).

The need for information was focused under three main themes. One concerned the ways of alcohol consumption. In Finland, patterns of alcohol use have traditionally been transgressive (Falk and Sulkunen 1983; Simpura 1993). The same still applies today, but with the continuing modernization of society people are increasingly looking upon alcohol as an everyday source of social pleasure.

The second main theme concerned views on alcohol problems. Traditionally, conceptions of alcohol have been closely interwoven with notions of cultural class differences. In Finland, views of the public prevention and treatment of alcohol problems have also shown an interesting ambivalence: on the one hand concepts of the state in modern society include the idea that all citizens are equal; on the other hand, alcohol problems are thought to be culturally and socially divided: alcohol problems do not concern adults and competent individuals, but young people and lower classes (Sulkunen 1994, Törrönen 1995).

In the case of the third main theme, that of alcohol policy, we were interested to find out how far people who regard themselves as local opinion-formers are capable of examining and willing to examine social problems from a general societal perspective rather than simply as individual citizens (cf. Holmila 1981).

In the identification of the opinion-formers we used what is known as the reputation method (Haranne 1976, 4). We started by asking the secretary of the Lahti alcohol education office to indicate two opinion-formers in town. We went to see these people and asked them in turn to say who they thought were opinion-formers in Lahti in business, in politics (and administration), in the mass media and in culture. We then went on to see the people who were mentioned at the top of each list.¹ We received new lists of names. This process continued until we reached saturation point, i.e. no new names were appearing on the lists any more. Thus the local opinion-formers identified their own closed elite network on the basis of reputations, very much in the same way as in the snowball method. The size of

this network proved to be quite small, as indeed has been found in many similar studies of local power elites (see e.g. Hunter 1953): in a city with a population of 100 000, it comprised no more than some 30 people.

At the second stage we asked the top names on our lists to compile groups of six to eight people for group interviews. The groups were to include people who were active in the same area (e.g. business), who were influential, and who all know each other. Eventually we ended up with seven groups.

3. The Group Interviews²

The group interviews and the feedback sessions were held at the local hotel and catering college. They started in the afternoon, around 5 p.m. The group interviews lasted between three and four hours; the duration of the feedback sessions varied from 90 minutes to three hours.

The first theme covered in the group interviews concerned drinking habits. To stimulate discussion we started the interviews by showing drinking scenes from films.³ Their purpose was both to inspire wide-ranging debate on different types of drinking habits and to facilitate the discussion by creating reference points for the exchange of opinions. As for the video scenes, they were included to make sure that each group talked about the same themes, i.e. to ensure inter-group comparability.

The idea of using video clips as a basis for conversation came from the tradition of audience and reception research that is currently very popular in cultural studies (for more on this, see Moores 1993). Our own solution to the contested issue between the semiotic approach and reception research as to whether the ultimate source of meaning is the text (video clip) or reader (viewer) is very simple. The text provides the framework and offers guidelines for the reader's signification; whereas the reader uses the interpretation repertoires he has assimilated as a resource in interpreting the texts (cf. Gilbert & Mulkey 1984). Hence a new text is created. The interpretations that the opinion-formers presented of the video clips can indeed be regarded as independent cultural products. In them they not only represent their relationship to the video clips but also construct for themselves different positions and angles on reality as they compare the clips with the real world.

There were six clips describing drinking habits and drinking situations. The first and the second scene were from the film *L'Invitation* by Claude Goretta. They show how a person called Rémy Placet arranges a party for her colleagues; it all starts pleasantly enough but in the end people are getting very drunk and the young woman gets carried away and arranges a strip-tease. The third scene was edited from the film *Un Homme et Une Femme*, by Claude Lelouche. Two single parents and their children are eating out in a restaurant. A relationship develops between the man and the woman. Alcohol has a secondary role in the scene, but as a fully natural and integral part of the meal. The fourth scene was from the film *Girl Friends* by Claudia Weill. The scene describes a group of women getting drunk and making intimate confessions among themselves. The fifth scene was in a more mythical landscape. In it a half-dressed woman, upset by a shooting incident, asks John Wayne for a whisky (*Rio Lobo* by Howard Hawks). The setting in the sixth scene was closer to reality again: a group of men who are going hunting are singing and drinking their heads off in the car (*The Deer Hunter* by Michael Cimino). This latter scene clearly articulates the transgressive type of drinking that is seen in Finnish films (the mythical triangle, see Falk and Sulkunen 1983; Sulkunen 1993). A man joins other men to leave society (control) behind and to step into nature (freedom), but in the end arrives in loneliness (existential anxiety). The role of woman on this trip is twofold: she appears either as a source of control or as an object of desire.

After each scene the opinion-formers were asked the following reception questions: (1) What happened in this episode? (2) Does this episode correspond to your own experience of alcohol use? (3) Would you have presented something differently in the episode? (4) Can you identify yourself with any of the characters? and (5) What will happen next?

There then followed a conversation on the question of how the use of alcohol at the local level resembles or differs from the scene shown in the video clips, on how the participants' own drinking habits relate to the examples shown, and on whether they think that different population groups have different drinking habits. They were also asked to tell a short story of a situation in which alcohol was consumed and in which they had been themselves involved; and to describe a society where alcohol is not used at all.

By way of an introduction to the discussion on the second main theme, i.e. views on alcohol problems, we compared alcohol problems with other local problems (unemployment, crime, environmental problems). The opinion-formers then talked about situations in which drinking is acceptable as well as situations where it is less so. Then, they were shown two clips: one scene of compulsive drinking (*Under the Volcano* by John Huston) and another describing self-destructive drinking (*La Provinciale* by Claude Goretta). The same reception questions were presented as above. These episodes also served as an introduction to the following conversation on alcohol abuse. In this section the opinion-formers were also asked to define the terms 'drunkard', 'heavy drinker' and 'alcoholic' and to consider the reasons for, prevention and treatment of alcoholism.

The third main theme of alcohol policy was introduced through educational videos (AAA's educational film *Traffic Safety and Alcohol* and ARF's educational film *Alcohol Roulette*). After the reception conversations we presented the following questions: (1) In what way should alcohol be made available for sale?; Can you give reasons for your opinion? (2) What kind of alcohol policy would you prefer to see (with a list of alcohol-policy measures shown to the participants)? (3) What kind of effects could alcohol policy have? (4) What are the reasons for alcohol-policy measures? (5) Compare alcohol and drugs: should the government and the local authorities take the same attitude towards them? (6) Who should be responsible for prevention and treatment? (7) At what level and how should alcohol problems be prevented: international, national, or the local level, or not at all? (8) Who are the most competent experts and prevention workers? (9) Is alcohol a special case; how should other public-health problems be dealt with?

Finally, to round off the meeting on a lighter note, we showed a clip from a French health education video *One Glass OK, Third Glass Welcome the Troubles*. The meeting ended with tea.

4. Data Analysis, Interpretation and Feedback

The group interviews were video- and tape-recorded; the video-recording was for the sole purpose of helping the transcriber identify who was speaking.⁴ Once the transcription was completed, the material was prepared for analysis using a software

package called WPindex, specifically designed for the analysis of qualitative material (Sulkunen & Kekäläinen 1992). The material was first divided into segments more or less corresponding to the turns of talk in the group discussions. These segments were then coded into theme categories. Once the material had been systematically coded, two operations followed. First, we picked out from the material relevant themes and combinations of themes for closer analysis. Secondly, we calculated frequencies for the occurrence of different coded themes as well as their relationships, taking the segments as our observation units. We call this contingency analysis (Sulkunen 1992, 167-9). This gives the researcher a clear picture as to which themes have been frequently discussed in the material (unconditional frequencies). But most importantly, contingency analysis gives us clues as to which themes are connected to each other in the interviewees' speech (conditional frequencies: for instance, we can identify the themes that have been raised in segments where both the quantity of alcohol use (\$AA01) and the opposite sex (\$AS03) have been discussed). For instance, when we calculated which themes the opinion-formers had talked about when they were dealing with alcohol problems, we found that types of drink were very much to the fore. This clue took us straight back to the material. It turned out that our opinion-formers did not talk about different ways of alcohol use by using the word 'alcohol', but rather such words as 'beer', 'wine', 'booze', and so on. So the result was quite banal. However, it did make clear how contingency analysis can be used for presenting questions to the material. When, in the group of male journalists, we looked at the themes that they raised in connection with the issue of alcohol policy, we found that self-control and its opposite, external control, were very prominent. This was an important clue on the road from observation to analysis and interpretation.

In the analysis proper we leaned on the so-called speech/text interpretation theory (Sulkunen 1992). This theory proved to be an important tool of our sociological intervention. First, it helped us to analyse the way in which the opinion-formers constructed reality: what kind of categories, reasons, needs, obligations, desires, abilities and skills they projected on to reality. Secondly, the theory helped us to analyse the kind of position that opinion-formers take on reality: do they look at things from

the point of view of the individual citizen, influential actor in society, or consumer in search of pleasure (see Sulkuinen and Törrönen a and b)?

The transcription of the tapes, the preparation of the material and the actual analysis were all done within a very short space of time. We wanted to get back to our groups with the results within two to three weeks so that the issues discussed were still fresh in our memory.

The feedback stage was of course very much the climax of our sociological intervention. In the presentation of our results we followed the structure of the interview. In the case of the use of alcohol, the feedback revolved around the position of our opinion-formers *vis-à-vis* the mythical triangle of Finnish masculine drinking habits: Did they identify the triangle? Did they identify themselves with it? Did they take distance from it? Did they take an ironic attitude? Did they associate it with the past, with their youth? As regards the issue of alcohol problems, we focused on two points: whose was the alcohol problem according to our opinion-formers and who did they think has the responsibility for the treatment of alcohol problems? Finally, as regards the issue of alcohol policy, the feedback concentrated on the conversation around the availability theory (theory of total consumption).

5. Some Remarks on the Group Dynamics of the Feedback Sessions

The reception of the sociological intervention varied quite considerably between the different groups. The atmosphere in Group 1 (male journalists) was one of mutual confidence and openness. The journalists were amused to see how complex they were in their speech when it was unedited; they asked lots of questions; and they considered it a real discovery to hear our explanation as to how the solidarity of the male group on their mythical trip to inebriation is empty underneath the surface and leads eventually, at the end of the evening, to a cosmic experience of loneliness. Harri remembered immediately how some while ago on a crossing he had indeed staggered along the corridors of the ship all on his own. And Pete admitted to several times experiencing existential anxiety on the last legs of his trips to drunkenness.

The dialogue with the group of civil servants (Group 2) remained more distant. There was also some obvious internal friction within this group. According to Anne, the only woman in the group, ours was an emphatically masculine perspective: we completely silenced the voice of her and other women. She challenged many of our interpretations by saying that that is perhaps how men see things, but women don't; and at the end of the session she insisted that a group of female civil servants be called together to talk about the same themes.⁵ There were also other tensions. These had to do above all with the interpretation of the concepts of 'risk society' and 'real life'. Reacting to our interpretation that the group members felt they were living in a risk society which stresses the meaning of choices and the artificiality of life, Vilho said that 'life has always involved taking risks. In the old days . . . there was no one there who forced you to go bear hunting. But even so they all did'; and Otto followed: 'yes and earlier there were nothing but risks; now at least we have a choice (laughter)'. There was also some resistance to the description of life as artificial: Petri stressed that 'I must say I can't really swallow that argument, that we don't have the option of a real, genuine life'; and Anne concurred: 'I'm pleased you said that because I was thinking that I can't accept that either'. However, these tensions did not entirely knock the bottom out of our intervention but rather highlighted useful points from which to pick up the dialogue. The tensions also made it clear how a sociological intervention addresses multiple levels: (1) how things can be perceived in general, (2) the opinion-formers' group culture and way of life, and (3) their self-identification.

The dialogue with the third group (journalists) was far more relaxed and laid-back. In this group, too, there was a gender imbalance, this time in favour of women. Not that this bothered Sami, the only man in the group; quite on the contrary, he clearly enjoyed being accepted by the women and being regarded as a sensitive man. In general the journalists seemed to enjoy for once being on the other side of the microphone, under the spotlight. They clearly enjoyed making their critical assessments of how we had interpreted their speech, contextualizing our interpretations openly to their own perspective of individualist liberalism. The level of mutual confidence between the researchers and the journalists was so high that we

could take our intervention to the limit: we could safely be quite provocative in questioning their views and in offering them alternative conceptualizations without any risk of causing a conflict. When we said that they actually had no firm position on alcohol problems and alcohol policy at all, they took this as a compliment: but of course that is what is expected of journalists: they mustn't have any fixed views on anything, as Helena summarized. Later it turned out that taking a position would mean moralizing, regarding some way of life as better than another, which in turn would be in conflict with their journalist-identity, the function of 'neutral' mediation of information, and would lead to a Fascist attitude, to manipulation of the readership.

The fourth group of cultural opinion-formers consisted of wise old artists and cultural administrators. Again there was a strong sense of mutual confidence in our dialogue, but it was nevertheless far more formal than in the previous group. The sociological intervention, on the other hand, was clearly successful. In the case of one group member, Minna, it actually led to some sort of catharsis, inspiring a completely different view on both the transgressive male drinking culture and alcohol policy. She was surprised to find, firstly, that even in more cultivated circles people drank so heavily: 'I must say I was quite surprised because I knew these men [in the group], and finding that they could describe this as if it were their own experience'. Secondly, Minna's earlier views were completely shattered by the video *Alcohol Roulette* in which scientists described the availability theory and considered its social implications (in this group the video was shown exceptionally in connection with the feedback session). Before the video Minna had been of the opinion that alcohol should be made more readily available; but afterwards she began to doubt that position and in the end decided she was in favour of a restrictive alcohol policy after all. As regards the role of the intervention, Minna commented that it did make her think about the justification of her own positions.

The group dynamics with opinion-formers representing business life (Group 5) was very distinctive. These people sat in their chairs, looking very firm and dignified, listening to what we had to say about them. Having themselves presented long monologues in the group interviews, speaking as if their overhearers (Goffman 1981) consisted of their 200 employees, they now

expected the researchers to do the same. They did not enter into a dialogue with us but simply confirmed in short comments the validity of our interpretations. As such they were very pleased with what they heard and also surprised to see us produce such a coherent and accurate description on the basis of what seemed to be a rather meandering discussion around more or less unconnected film clips.

In the case of politicians (Group 6) our sociological intervention assumed features of 'ideology therapy'. The politicians appeared to be quite lost in terms of how society should be built and how different value premises should be weighed within society. The breakdown of ideologies (party positions), the drying up of social movements, the individualization of opinions was all too clearly to be seen in their speech. The ongoing recession seemed very much to restrict their freedom of movement in political decision-making. That is why in the feedback session they were eager to know where exactly they stood with their views, how it was possible to give complete interpretations to social issues, what kind of options are available for future action. This was, in other words, fertile ground indeed for an intervention, and the feedback session turned out to be very intensive. The conversation flowed freely in an electric atmosphere.

But things don't always go as you hope they would. Only one single person came to the feedback session for the second group of cultural opinion-formers (Group 7). Perhaps, after the long winter, the brilliant sunshine outdoors was too much.

NOTES

- 1 We wish to thank Kari Haavisto for his invaluable help in drawing up the lists and in setting up the contacts.
- 2 The group interviews can be described as semi-structured (for more on group interviews as a research method, see Morgan (ed.) 1993, Morgan 1998).
- 3 THE FILMS SHOWN
Scenes describing drinking habits
 (1) Scenes 1 and 2: *L'Invitation*. 1973. Director: Claude Goretta. Cast: Michel Robin, Jean-Luc Bideau, Jean Champion, Pierre Collet, Corinne Coderey, Rosine Rochette, Jacques Rispal, Neige Dolski, Cécile Vassort,

François Simon, Lucie Avenay, William Jacques, Roger Jendely, Gilbert Costa.

(2) Scene 3: *Un Homme et Une Femme*. 1966. Director: Claude Lelouche. Cast: Anouk Aimée, Jean-Louis Trintignant.

(3) Scene 4: *Girl Friends*. 1978. Director: Claudia Weill. Cast: Melanie Mayron, Anita Skinner.

(4) Scene 5: *Rio Lobo*. 1970. Director: Howard Hawks. Cast: John Wayne, Jorge Rivero, Jennifer O'Neill.

(5) Scene 6: *The Deer Hunter*. 1978. Director: Michael Cimino. Cast: Robert de Niro, John Cazale, John Savage, Christopher Walken, George Dzundza, Chuck Aspegren.

Scenes describing problem-drinking

(1) Scene 7: *La Provinciale*. 1980. Director: Claude Goretta. Cast: Nathalie Baye, Angela Winkler, Bruno Ganz, Dominique Paturol.

(2) Scene 8: *Under the Volcano*. 1984. Director: John Huston. Cast: Albert Finney, Jacqueline Bisset, Anthony Andrews.

Videos on alcohol education and policy

(1) Scene 9: *Traffic Safety and Alcohol*, AAA, USA 1978, for senior adults.

(2) Scene 10: *Alcohol Roulette*, ARF, Toronto 1983, for adults and senior adults.

Light relief

Un verre ça va, trois verres . . . bonjour les dégâts!. CFES, France 1984.

- 4 We wish to thank Leena Jaatinen who did the transcriptions very quickly and competently.
- 5 We decided not to assemble a separate group of leading female civil servants. However, the two groups of cultural opinion-formers did include a number of women representing cultural administration.