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The real worry: what matters is that government funding of drug policy studies is so deficient.

Robin Room

Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia; and
Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs, Department of Public Health Sciences,
Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

In my view, it is not an appropriate criticism of the cannabis policy document of Ireland's Green Party that the documents from various sources that it cited as backup all turned out to have been funded by the Open Society Foundation (OSF) (Smyth & Barry, 2019). Nor is this occurrence an accident. "Illicit drugs" are not central to any academic discipline or profession, so that few university faculty are recruited to teach on the basis of expertise in the area. Academic research on "illicit drugs", and particularly policy research, is thus dependent on specific funding, usually from governments, and particularly from the U.S. government, which has played a dominant role in the field. In the era since Nixon's War on Drugs, it has been difficult to find government funding for research which looks beyond the official orthodoxy on drug policies. It is even hard to get funding for evaluations of drug prohibition policies. Thus our review of research on drug policies from a public health perspective concluded that "it is striking ... that so little can be said about how effective [drug law] enforcement is in accomplishing its goals" (Babor et al., 2018, p. 188). My own experience as a researcher, then in the U.S., coming into drug research from alcohol in the 1970s (e.g., Room, 1977) was that there were much tighter boundaries in the drug than the alcohol field on what it was possible to research and wise to say if you wanted further funding. So, as a researcher dependent on government funding, I retreated to alcohol studies for further research support while in the US.

It is not only in the US that there are tacit politically-imposed limits on what a drug researcher can say and remain in good graces with political powers, as illustrated by various political flashpoints over scholarly comparisons of the inherent dangerousness of drugs (Room, 2006; Travis, 2009). So the OSF has largely had the field to itself, in terms of support for policy studies relevant to drug prohibition regimes. Direct support of the review of research on drug policies already mentioned came from a scholarly society, the Society for the Study of Addiction, rather than from any government (although funds from one or another government supported many of the authors in their official day-jobs). When, now based in Australia, I wanted to do a study of options for reforming the UN drug conventions (Room, 2012), it was funded with money which came initially from the OSF. Let me report that there was no attempt by anyone associated with OSF to influence what the publications from the study said. And that, despite being funded by OSF, the Transparify

(2016) study quoted by Smyth and Barry carries a negative rating of OSF's fiscal transparency can be taken as another good sign concerning OSF's behaviour as a funder.

Given the aversion of political establishments to drug policy studies, it is no surprise that a policy document on reform in current cannabis policy relies a great deal on research with nongovernmental funding, which in the drug policy area has mostly meant OSF. And certainly it is appropriate that each scholarly study or publication that is supported by funding from OSF disclose this fact. But I see no reason why this rule should be applied to a political party's policy document. The questions to ask of such a document, it seems to me, are not where did it get its ideas from and what may have influenced them, but rather whether the policies it is arguing for are effective and just, and whether the evidence offered to support them makes sense.

Questions like these should be asked also of the ongoing political process in a democracy, including questions about priorities for research funding. And to my mind it makes no sense that such a large hole has been left in the policy-relevant literature -- a hole which OSF has tried to fill -- by the failure of governments to fund studies which bear on the effects, intended and unintended, of prohibitionist drug policies and their alternatives. Perhaps the shifts in cannabis policy at subfederal levels in the US and at national and provincial levels in Canada will eventually force some much-needed change in this.

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