

# A half-century of the Kettil Bruun Society: a history against a backdrop of global developments

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## Abstract

The Kettil Bruun Society (KBS) has developed from a small, almost informal group of social researchers to a relatively large organisation that has sustained itself over the decades, organising regularly its annual symposia and less regular thematic meetings which offer a platform for comparative social and epidemiological alcohol research.

Unlike the few previous papers on KBS, which focused on internal development, the aim of this one is to put its history in a wider global political, social and economic context.

Several global developments were identified that may have affected the KBS and its history: the emergence of the new left generation in the

60s; growth and decline of the welfare state, in particular the Nordic welfare state with its health-oriented alcohol monopolies; globalisation and internationalisation of research; emergence and expansion of neoliberal ideologies; globalisation of the alcohol industry and social aspects organisations; technological and methodological advances in research.

The Society's original organisational culture, with a focus on the comparative perspective, openness, transparency and supportive relationships among members, has been sustained but is likely to evolve under a pressure of recent global developments.

**Keywords:** Kettil Bruun Society, Social history, Alcohol research.

## ■ Introduction

This paper on the development of the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol (KBS) contributes to a growing literature on the development of scholarly societies, their interaction with other historical trends and their contribution to the international development of knowledge [e.g. 1, 2]. For instance, concerning international social research, a short book on the history of the International

Sociological Association (ISA) [3] follows 50 years of the history of ISA, which was founded under the auspices of UNESCO, alongside other social research associations, in hope that their mission will be: *to knit together social sciences scholars of the world, (...) to raise the level of social science research in the belief that greater knowledge in these fields will benefit mankind, (...) to promote research in the fields crucial to the establishment of a peaceful world order* [3: 13].

Among the ISA's initial aims were the promotion of sociological research world-wide, but also the encouragement of comparative research and the development of instruments suitable for cross-national studies. The book also concludes that despite its substantial impact on the internationalisation of sociology, the ISA has fallen short of some of its founders' ideals [3: 55].

For another example, Boncourt describes the history of the foundation and development of eight European social research associations, and finds that *as associations grow, their objectives, practices and agendas become increasingly autonomous from what their founders intended* [4: 10]. However, the author stresses that an international association can be seen as a resource to reduce possible conflicts or divergent interests.

The Kettil Bruun Society (KBS), the subject of this paper, is a research society which has existed under its current name since 1987. Its major aim is *to promote social and epidemiological research which fosters a comparative understanding of the social aspects of alcohol use and alcohol problems*. Its vital mission is to promote a spirit of international research cooperation: <https://www.ketilbruun.org/kbs-aims/>.

There have been several papers describing the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol and its history. The first was published as an editorial in *Addiction* [5] twelve years after the society was formally established. Already in that paper it was stressed that KBS has its roots in earlier international research initiatives and social movements but had evolved as an independent entity with its own specific organisational culture. Another paper from 2004 also presented a brief historical background of KBS, but the focus was on its then current activities, including annual and thematic meetings and collaborative projects. The description of the KBS's achievements was balanced by an acknowledgement of its limitations. The authors concluded that the KBS was not very successful in extending its geographical scope, as the majority of members are from a limited number of countries with a strong social alcohol research tradition, and beyond there were only a few committed individuals from a wider range of countries [6: 163]. The most recent publication aimed to

*analyse research presented at KBS annual meetings and to provide an overview of the developments of the research agenda between 1983 and 2017*. Over these 34 years, the number of papers presented at the annual meeting increased almost fivefold from 35 to 160, while papers on policy and prevention grew at a much higher pace, reflecting growing involvement in alcohol policy considerations [7].

These previous papers devoted to the history of the KBS have mostly shed light on its internal development. However, the KBS did not emerge in a social vacuum. Its history is associated with global developments dating back to the 60s. The aim of this paper is to reflect upon how these global developments have affected the emergence and evolution of the KBS, which has grown from a relatively small, informal network of researchers from a dozen or so countries to a society whose regular annual meetings bring together researchers from about 30 countries on five continents.

The following global developments will be considered:

- emergence of the “new left” generation in the 60s, whose members contributed to the foundation of the KBS;
- growth and decline of the welfare state, in particular the Nordic welfare state with its health-oriented alcohol monopolies;
- globalisation and internationalisation of research;
- emergence and expansion of neoliberal ideologies, which brought decline in alcohol control policies and diminishing support for social research;
- globalisation of the alcohol industry and its social aspects organisations challenging evidence-based policy recommendations and
- technological and methodological advances in research.

The paper is based on a review of relevant literature, on KBS circulars and on its newsletter, the *Drinking and Drugs Practices Surveyor*, as well as on the memories of the paper's authors. The sources were not fully searched and the data were not systematically extracted; it is thus a narrative rather than a systematic review.

## ■ Results

### Prehistory – links with the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions

The KBS starts the count of its annual symposia with the first meeting of the Epidemiology Section of the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions (ICAA) in 1975. ICAA was established early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, formalising a tradition of international temperance congresses dating back to 1885 [8], and for decades waved a flag of temperance reinforced by introduction of full or partial alcohol prohibition in a number of countries. However, the Repeal of American prohibition in 1933 reflected declining support for temperance movements and also crowned a victory in the United States of urban and immigrant cultures over previously dominant, older Protestant and rural cultures. After Repeal, America was looking for a new interpretation of alcohol problems. As argued by Joe Gusfield, *the new emphasis [was] on alcoholism, the public view of the alcohol problem focussed on deviant, incompetent drinkers, on those suffering from the disease of alcoholism (...) The object of concern became the deviant drinker, the alcoholic* [9: 199]. A new “alcoholism movement”, including Alcoholics Anonymous, rapidly developed in the vacuum left by the decline of the temperance movement, whose major focus had been on the abusive substance – alcohol [10, 11]. Alcohol became a source of pleasure for adults except for the unfortunate “alcoholics”, who had to be deprived of these pleasures due to the disease they suffer from. Support for prohibitive policies and the temperance movement faded away also in Europe, which affected ICAA and its prospects. Despite its roots in temperance organisations (including for its executive director, Archer Tongue) the ICAA looked for new allies. Already in the 60s, the ICAA, which held conferences or so-called international institutes every year, started bringing in people involved in the new alcoholism movement. In the mid-60s, it also invited French pioneers of the emphasis on alcohol consumption level and its distribution such as Sully Ledermann [8]. Feeling that the old model of the abstinence-oriented global movement was archaic and did not fit

contemporary cultures, the ICAA was well on its way out of being dominated by temperance organisations in the mid-60s. In addition to broadening its ideological scope, the ICAA intended to extend its generational and cultural horizon, attracting younger people who belonged to the 60s generation. Perhaps that is why Robin Room was appointed to chair a new ICAA Epidemiology Section in 1975.

From the beginning, the dominant strand in the Alcohol Epidemiology section was population surveys on drinking practices and problems. In the 60s, survey research was seen by university sociology departments in the US as a practice that would turn sociology into a Science, and young sociologists with that training were recruited to early studies on “drinking practices and problems”. In some European countries, also, there was a turn to surveys of the general population on drinking practices and problems.

### Emergence of the 60s generation and the total consumption model

The sociologists from the ICAA Epidemiology Section, or the “Epi Section” as they called it, were nearly all from the 60s “new left” generation, discovering in the international meetings for the first time that the same movement in thinking had been developing independently in a number of countries. The young generation of that time felt that the world would rapidly change and nothing would be as it had been before – and that they themselves had caused that shock. As Michnik expressed it *a new concept of youth contestation emerged (...). It was simply a challenge to the legitimacy of the adult world's norms. It could have taken the form of a protest against racial segregation, Vietnam war, demand of sexual freedom or university reforms and abolishing censorship or political rights. This rebellion that manifested in various parts of the world, had one thing in common – it was an act of refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the old order* [12: 5].

Young sociologists of those times involved in the ICAA “Epi Section” were also increasingly interested in alcohol policies. Having been taught labelling theories in

their universities, which claimed convincingly that deviancy is a product of social stigmatisation, they were not very likely to accept a disease concept of alcoholism as the key to understanding alcohol problems. For them, even its medicalisation as a mental health defect could lead to its reduction to the individual level, whereby the process of labelling would be reinforced. Moreover, placing alcoholics in institutions may produce unintended side-effects, as described by Erving Goffman [13]. They also could not be enthusiasts of alcohol prohibition, coming from the generation that worshipped freedom as its major value. Against this background, a concept of population-based strategies had to emerge, almost inevitably supported by comparative research [14]. Emergence of population-based strategies based on the total consumption approach coincided with development of the Nordic welfare state in the 70s, which intended to base its policies on scientific evidence and prevent stigmatisation of individuals such as individual drunkards. As argued by Room and Tigerstedt [15: 6]: *In an era when drinking habits were increasingly viewed as a private rather than public matter, there was a growing unease about the intervention in individual lives (...) and a lively awareness among social scientists of the potential adverse effects of singling out and labelling individuals. The total consumption approach deflected attention instead to patterns in the whole population, and emphasised control measures such as taxes and hours of sale which were general rather than individualized in their application.*

#### International scope with a comparative perspective and commitment to the welfare state

Ideological commonalities in the generation that came of age in the 60s and the international spread of the welfare state and its institutions led to increasing interest in international research collaboration. As early as the 70s, a long-lasting collaboration arose between the Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies (FFAS) and the Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto, with exchanges of junior staff spending a few months at each institute. The psychiatrist Griffith Edwards in London had become interested in general population surveys and alcohol policy, and both he

and the FFAS had connections to those interested in alcohol issues at WHO's European office. It was the time of the first publication of the so-called "purple book", advocating a policy focus on the level of alcohol consumption in the population as a whole [16]. Klaus Mäkelä and Pekka Sulkunen from Finland, Norman Giesbrecht and Eric Single from Canada, Ole-Jørgen Skog from Norway and Robin Room, then from the US, were a bunch of social researchers all from the 60s generation and thus interested in the relation of research to policy and in social movements and policy changes. And, given each had a base in a nationally- or provincially-funded research centre, it was almost inevitable that they would pursue the idea of comparative studies across nations. (For the US centre in Berkeley, California, it was a tough sell to the funders in Washington, and the centre almost lost its core funding, as recalled by one of the authors.)

This was how the International Study of Alcohol Control Experiences (ISACE) was launched in 1977, which was as much a sociological as an epidemiological exercise. The study, led by Klaus Mäkelä [17], combined the experiences of seven jurisdictions: California, Finland, Holland, Ireland, Ontario, Poland and Switzerland. The group was reinforced by more sociologists from that generation, in particular from new ISACE countries, including Richard Müller from Switzerland and Jacek Moskalewicz from Poland (who joined the group thanks to Ignacy Wald, a neurologist from an earlier generation). Wald acknowledged the necessity of demedicalisation of the alcohol question and accepted a common language within different traditions of thought, including social research traditions.

The ISACE project was founded on a very detailed description of demographic, economic and social trends in participating countries. However, in addition to statistical data, cultural as well as sociological data were considered and deeply analysed. In its final report, the ISACE study accepted the contemporaneous reality of the welfare state and argued against a shifting in the locus of control from the general population towards minorities within it e.g., youth and individual deviant drinkers. There were 18 co-authors of the final report [17, 18], brought

together for analysis and comparison, who met together four times on its annual project meetings. A well-integrated international group of alcohol social researchers who shared common values was a by-product of that project. After working together for four years, all participants acknowledged the enormous benefits of a comparative perspective. Learning and understanding the development of other countries and cultures may not only satisfy one's curiosity but also enriches understanding of your own cultural and political developments. Therefore, after presenting results of the ISACE at the plenary session of ICAA in Vienna in 1981, the members of its Epidemiology Section attending its meetings, representing about 20 countries and including a dozen or so ISACE participants, considered the prospects for further collaboration.

### **Institutionalisation of comparative research**

A sense of a unique identity was growing, which was expressed in a decision of the "Epi Section" to hold meetings outside the ICAA framework every two years. Its first "independent" meeting took place in Vuoranta near Helsinki in 1982 and was hosted by the Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies. The Vuoranta centre was a training site for ALKO – the Finnish Alcohol Monopoly – and participants were only expected to cover their travel expenses. Altogether, the Vuoranta meeting was attended by less than thirty participants from a dozen or so countries. A tradition to pre-circulate the papers to be read in advance and to assign a discussant for each paper was initiated. The next meeting of the group of researchers interested in comparative alcohol studies was hosted by the Swiss Institute for Alcohol Problems in Konolfingen near Bern in the autumn of 1982, without any relation to ICAA. The geographical scope of the group was extended to bring more people from Europe, e.g. Austria and Denmark, from Australia and from what were called at that time developing countries, including Mexico. It was in Konolfingen that an International Group for Comparative Alcohol Studies (IGCAS) was established. IGCAS was an informal network of researchers and institutions with a mission to promote international research collaboration.

The subsequent IGCAS meeting was arranged by Kettil Bruun and hosted by the Swedish Alcohol Monopoly – Systembolaget – in Lidingö, near Stockholm, in 1984. The meeting was attended by 26 participants representing 12 countries. In addition to presentation of the research papers, the group had a number of working group meetings to elaborate by-laws and organisational details of the new, more structured society, which would not only promote comparative alcohol research but also the values of its founding members.

The new Society was to be managed by a Co-ordinating Committee composed of the president, vice president and nine other members of the co-ordinating committee, all elected in an all-member mail ballot. To prevent domination by one or two countries with the most resources and most members, the election rules specified that the members of the Co-ordinating Committee should represent a minimum of six different countries, and that the President and Vice-President should be from different countries.

Moreover, in addition to the original mission of promoting social and epidemiological research, the by-laws stated that the Society would also promote the spirit of international cooperation among and through its members. In the meantime, recognition grew that there was considerable overlap in interests and membership between the IGCAS and the ICAA Alcohol Epidemiology Section, and it was eventually decided that the Epidemiology Section tradition of annual general meetings on alcohol social and epidemiological studies and the IGCAS tradition of international comparative meetings on particular topical areas should be organised into a single scholarly society.

The final meeting of the IGCAS group took place in Zaborów near Warsaw in 1986 and was hosted by the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology. The number of participants increased again, and also its geographical scope, since it included a researcher from Africa. Moreover, in addition to quantitative papers, more space was taken by qualitative research. Within its mission to extend a comparative perspective, a policy was adopted of supporting the participation of less well-off countries and researchers. This was a general impulse of international scholarly groups, perhaps particularly for those with a leftist tinge.

Thus, extending the geographical scope combined well both a leftish ideological inclination to be increasingly inclusive and providing an opening for new cultures and research ambitions, aiming to achieve a collective of researchers representing global perspectives, rather than just the point of view of well-funded academic circles from the US and Western Europe.

### Birth of the Kettil Bruun Society

In the same year, during the 12<sup>th</sup> ICAA “Epi Section” meeting in Dubrovnik in 1986, the name of the new society was adopted in recognition of the formative contributions to the field of Kettil Bruun, who had suddenly passed away one year earlier. Kettil Bruun promoted and personalised the values his younger colleagues wished to maintain and expand, like co-operation instead of rivalry (facilitated by comparative projects), mutual support, sharing and exchanging research experiences and extending the geographical and cultural context. Since the very beginning, the existing members of the KBS encouraged new scholars to join the KBS, in particular from countries and cultures which were not represented among its members. Moreover, a non-elitist approach was adopted in the KBS culture, as all speakers get the same presentation time and none receive a long introduction (no matter what her/his credentials) with mention of name and affiliation only.

Since then, the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol has continued both meeting traditions with its independent annual Alcohol Epidemiology Symposia, usually in June, and thematic meetings on a variety of topics that take place on average annually and often result in thematic sections or issues of journals. While abstracts and accounts of the Alcohol Epidemiology Symposia between 1981 and 1991 had been published in the *Drinking and Drug Practices Surveyor* by the Alcohol Research Group in Berkeley, along with accounts of some IGCAS meetings, already in Spring 1987, the first KBS circular was published as a bi-annual document for the following ten years. The circular announced results of the first elections for KBS: Robin Room was elected as President, while Klaus Mäkelä was Vice-President. The members of the

Co-ordinating Committee represented seven countries including Sally Casswell (New Zealand), Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl (Austria), Norman Giesbrecht (Canada), Jacek Moskalewicz (Poland), Ole-Jørgen Skog (Norway), Tom Harford (USA), Denise Herd (USA), Esa Österberg (Finland) and Eric Single (Canada) [19]. Six of twelve members of the new governing body originated from the ISACE study. The circular included brief descriptions of current comparative research initiatives and meetings, including the annual meeting of the Alcohol Epidemiology Section of ICAA held in Aix-en-Provence in early June 1987. In fact, the meeting in Aix was also the occasion of the first business meeting of the KBS [20].

The second KBS circular presented a list of 115 members, of whom two thirds were men. The members represented 23 different countries from all continents. Despite this variation, three quarters of members originated from six countries: USA, Canada, UK and three Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden and Finland). The remaining countries were represented by one to five members [21].

The Society's ties with ICAA were gradually weakening. Already, when the KBS was set up, the Society had outgrown the ICAA section model, which assigned the section at each conference four afternoons of about four hours each. The “Epi Section” weakened its ties with ICAA also due to ICAA's arbitrary management style and limitations on the number of epidemiology sessions during ICAA conferences. Nevertheless, the KBS tradition of annual symposium meeting in the first week of June reflects that, for a considerable time, these meetings were set up to be on the same continent as the ICAA conference and the week before or the week after the ICAA conference, usually held at about that time.

The ICAA itself was having more difficulty raising money. It moved on from relying on money and participants from 1) legacy temperance organisations and 2) alcoholism movement interests (mainly foundations funded by rich Alcoholics Anonymous members) to looking to money from alcohol industry-funded “social aspects” organisations. There was a split in

the ICAA Board over this around 1995, with the neo-temperance societies and the social researchers eventually leaving [8]. Later on, the ICAA received extra funding from rich countries from the Arabian Gulf. In these countries, maintaining a tradition of religion-based alcohol prohibition, ICAA's agnostic stance in terms of alcohol policy was attractive to some of the decision-makers, and ICAA also became a means to provide alcohol treatment for errant princes.

### Neoliberal economies and alcohol research

The neoliberal ideologies that have prevailed globally since the 80s demand reducing the interference of the State in the marketplace and encourage public-private co-operation, which tended to result in reduced public expenditures on research and increased industry influence on its framing and direction. This neoliberal wave also affected the European Union, which reduced the resources and powers of health-oriented alcohol monopolies that had previously supported research in the Nordic countries, as well as the commitment to the public health interest in the face of the growing economic power of private industries, both at the national and international levels [22].

The issue of funding alcohol research also became more in question with the emergence of the so-called social aspects organisations launched by the alcohol industry – organisations with the overt mission to improve the public image of the alcohol industry and hidden missions such as undermining research-based recommendations to reduce the level of drinking in the population as a whole [23]. Moreover, alcohol industry-funded researchers and experts offer their services to policy-makers promoting ineffective policies [24, 25], with particular success in low-income countries with modest or no funds for social and policy research [26].

The KBS reacted to these threats at the expense of its openness and inclusiveness. Initially, a declaration of conflict of interest was demanded from all participants presenting papers, but more recently according to the revised by-laws *a person who, in the past three years, has conducted, commissioned or disseminated research for an organization a) producing, distributing, selling or promoting alcoholic beverages, b) proxies or*

*affiliates of a) or, c) which is an advocacy, trade or Social Aspects Organisation for an industry included in a), is neither eligible to be a member of the Kettil Bruun Society, nor eligible to make a presentation at and/or attend a meeting of the Society* [27]. Public health-oriented government monopolies are excluded from the restrictions. This pre-occupation with preventing the influence of the industry reduces attention to the potential impact of other sources of support such as public funding on research priorities and recommendations [28].

The question of research funding affected also the further growth of the KBS in terms of expanding its thematic scope to drug studies. Drug research, both in North America and in Europe, is much better funded than alcohol research. The budget of the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is at least three times that of its alcohol counterpart, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). Similarly, the European Union has a specialised agency, the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Abuse (EMCDDA), with a regular budget, while alcohol research, if funded at all from European Union sources, has received relatively little funding allocated in a much less regular manner. A few years ago, the KBS discussed an option to go beyond alcohol research to cover also drug studies, but this option was eventually rejected, in part to avoid an influx of drug researchers from rich countries who could dominate the KBS membership and perhaps some of its values.

### Rise and decline of community action projects

In the early years of the KBS, interest in community action research projects rapidly increased. This increase could be associated with the WHO Community Response to Alcohol Problems study, the original version of which was carried out in Mexico, Scotland and Zambia [29], opening the eyes of politicians and policy-makers to its great potential at the local level. This international eye-opening is well illustrated by a weeklong conference in Toronto in 1989 attended by 60 participants from a dozen countries from five continents [30]. That conference was followed by a series of international meetings, often sponsored by the KBS, held in 1992 in San

Diego, USA, in 1995 in Greve-in-Chianti, Italy, in 1997 in Malmö, Sweden, in 1998 in Russell, New Zealand and in 2002 in Helsinki, Finland, which offered a forum to exchange research and practical experiences in launching and evaluating activities aiming at reduction of problems due to alcohol consumption at the local community level. Since then, however, this research tradition appears to have lost its momentum [8]. Declining interest in the community action projects in the KBS could be explained in a number of ways that are external and have little to do with autonomous scientific developments. First of all, evidence-based interventions like reducing the affordability and availability of alcohol are usually decided at the national or regional, rather than local community, level so local councils are deprived of the most powerful tools to reduce alcohol consumption and problems associated with drinking. Moreover, even at the national level, in the neoliberal age the State has been under pressure to reduce its interventions and to allow the market a freer rein. Even in countries where attempts were made to empower local councils to control the number of alcohol outlets, local councils were more interested in increasing income from licensing fees than in population-based prevention [31]. In addition to these structural changes, new competitive rules were adopted in many countries in funding various civic initiatives from public funds. The system of financing of individual public interest and service entities was replaced by a system of grants. As a result, various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders whose cooperation reinforces community actions have to compete with each other for funds and recognition. It is perhaps a reflection of these trends that the idea of comprehensive community projects, including community action research, has slowly disappeared from the Society's research agenda.

### Extending the geographical scope of the KBS

Another global development that affected the Society was associated with the growing interest of the increasingly transnational alcohol industry in conquering new markets in Asia and Africa, in particular against a background of consumption levelling off in some high-income countries in Western Europe, North America and elsewhere.

There the industry has applied much more aggressive marketing strategies than in their headquarters countries, often breaking self-imposed rules introduced in their countries of origin [e.g. 32]. Moreover, the social aspects organisations funded by the industry came to low-income countries with ready-made packages of national alcohol policies [33] containing numerous measures the impact of which on alcohol consumption is not evidence-based, like server-intervention training. In effect, in some of these countries, especially in times of a booming economy, alcohol consumption increased rapidly, followed by a high tide of alcohol problems that not only affected public health and order but also hindered economic development of those countries. Against this background, a number of WHO-sponsored initiatives were launched, including comparative studies to arm countries like Thailand with research capacities to meet new threats and to formulate and evaluate appropriate policies. The KBS was able to attract a number of researchers from Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and from some African countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. Some became very active Society members going so far as to take responsibility for organising a thematic meeting like the one held in Kampala, Uganda in 2010, the KBS Annual Symposium there in 2013 and the 2018 KBS Annual Symposium in Chiang Mai, Thailand, as well as the 2023 KBS Annual Symposium to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa. Supporting and sustaining participation of researchers from low-income countries remains a priority of the Society in accordance with its by-laws.

Since 1987, when the ICAA "Epi Section" meetings were renamed to KBS annual symposia, the Society has had 35 annual symposia hosted by colleagues from 19 countries of which 26 have been organised by European countries. However, six meetings were held in North America, and one each in Africa, Asia and Australia: <https://www.ketilbruun.org/>.

KBS has also moved into journal publication, with an emphasis on expanding geographic representation in the relevant research literatures. A new journal sponsored by KBS, the International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research (IJADR), published its first issue in 2012

[34], and has since developed into the KBS journal, formally recognised as such in the KBS by-laws [35], with KBS helping to fund it to support a greater cultural diversity of authors and editorial board members, with substantial representation from low- and middle-income countries.

### Cross-cultural projects and KBS side-meetings

As noted above, a major element in the emergence of the KBS was a series of successive cross-national collaborative projects, culminating in the International Group for Comparative Alcohol Studies (IGCAS). Other such cross-cultural collaborative collectives have regularly emerged through the years the KBS has existed. Often a collaborative project of the headquarters or a regional office of the World Health Organization has been central to initiating such collectives, as was true, for instance, with the WHO's Community Response to Alcohol Problems project [29]. A tradition which has emerged and continued is of such collaborative collectives holding meetings around the edge of the annual KBS Symposium. A time is reserved during the Symposium meeting week (usually on a Tuesday afternoon) for such collectives to meet informally, and often to give a brief report to other KBS members at the Friday KBS membership meeting. And the collective will usually hold its own meeting to carry on its business on one or more days of the weekend before the KBS meeting.

The most active and long-lasting such collective has been GENACIS (Gender, Alcohol and Culture: an International Study), led by Sharon Wilsnack, which centred on a collaboratively- designed general-population questionnaire focusing on issues in drinking patterns and problems in family life, with attention to gender issues [36, 37]. A major report on findings from the collaborative analyses included data from surveys in 35 countries [38]. More recently, Anne-Marie Laslett has led another collaborative collective around KBS meetings focusing on population survey and response-agency case data on Gender and Alcohol's Harm to Others (GENAHTO) [39, 40]. Again, substantial portions of the data in the study come from studies sponsored by the World Health

Organization, in this case jointly with the Thai Health Agency.

### Technological and scientific developments

In addition to social and economic developments, the Kettil Bruun Society – along with research in general – has been changed by technological innovations. At the beginning, the papers to be presented at KBS symposia were pre-circulated by regular mail to be read prior to the symposium. Some participants carried numerous papers with them to the conference, in particular those who failed to read them at home. Today, all papers can be squeezed on smaller and smaller devices which you can place in your pocket. Currently, e-mail communication facilitates interchange between a presenter and his/her commentator; however in individual cases late delivery of papers still puts the commentator in a confusing but challenging position.

In the “olddays” only oral comments without any visual support dominated, differing a lot in scope and form, and ranging from a short check list of questions to extended lectures whose quality might compete with the content of the paper being discussed. The emergence of Power Point technology brought about a formal standardisation of comments. This was reinforced by detailed guidelines for commentators in the “conference packet”.

The technology allows also for virtual meetings – a development which was accelerated by the COVID pandemic. So far, the KBS has had just one virtual annual symposium, which was difficult to perform and coordinate due to the fact that participants live in many different time zones. However, thanks to the developed technologies of virtual meetings, the volume of travel may diminish, along with the volume of carbon dioxide emission. On the other hand, virtual meetings deprive participants of direct, informal contacts which may be fruitful both socially and scientifically, contributing to mutual understanding and communication and thus broadening prospects for comparative research. The capacity-building dimension of these direct, less formal communications should not be overlooked either.

Along with technological developments, progress in scientific methods has also been

important. Continued advances in statistical tools for quantitative and qualitative data as well as on-line access to a variety of statistical data, have also changed the scope of research. Meanwhile, research is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, with the KBS clearly attracting more disciplines than in the past.

## ■ Discussion

This paper confirms the findings of several earlier studies about the progressive expansion of the Kettil Bruun Society and its research priorities. The paper attempts to place KBS history against a backdrop of global developments that changed the world in the last 50 years. As put forward in the introduction, the KBS and the global development of comparative research on alcohol have not occurred in a social vacuum. Looking more broadly across topics in the social sciences, the KBS was not unique in its mission to foster international research co-operation and comparative studies, as similar objectives were adopted in other social research societies founded a few decades earlier [3, 4].

The KBS's roots reach back to the 60s and the emergence of the "new left" generation that came of age at the time. Young social researchers of that generation who came to alcohol studies were not likely to accept the primacy of the disease concept of alcoholism, having been taught labelling theories and being critical of total institutions. Neither would they support temperance or prohibitionist ideologies contradictory to the values of their generation. Against this background, a concept of population-based strategies emerged that found support in comparative research initiated in the early 70s. [16].

The total alcohol consumption model, taking into account the population as a whole, was in line with the new concept of the Nordic welfare state that had non-discrimination among its basic values and looked for scientific support for pragmatic policies [15]. It can then be argued that alcohol research and Nordic welfare ideologies inspired each other without affecting research autonomy, as discussed in another context by [41]. In fact, the total consumption model, which had strong roots in scientific evidence, fits *well into* (the) *dominant*

*ideological climate and did not contradict powerful political and economic interests* in Nordic alcohol monopoly countries [42], as vested private interests were eliminated or at least strongly curtailed there [17].

Cultural commonalities among a new generation of researchers, including shared common values, increased an interest in international collaboration. It was realised that quantitative comparison between national datasets is only one, and usually not the most important, aspect. What is more important is agreeing on common designs, providing an audience for each other, and learning from each other. Looking at your data from an international perspective enriches your understanding of political and social developments in your own country.

A sense of separate identity among that generation of alcohol researchers grew and led to the idea of an institutionalisation of collaboration to perpetuate, extend and sustain links. This institutionalisation process was not completed overnight. It took some years to launch an International Group for Comparative Alcohol Studies, a voluntary association of researchers willing to develop comparative research, and a few years more to establish what is now the Kettil Bruun Society. A final parting with the ICAA came a decade later, when the ICAA was looking for financial support from alcohol industry.

The ISACE project's report, in a close-to prophetic way, envisaged and warned against a decline of the welfare state and a shift in the focus of attention from the whole population to trouble-making individuals. In fact, about the time the ISACE report was published, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan initiated economic reforms that heralded the entrance of neoliberal ideologies world-wide and the slow decline of the welfare state.

The neoliberal wave culminated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In many countries the funding of social research on alcohol was cut off. In others, access to funding became more difficult, especially for comparative research. The question of funding became a burning issue with the appearance of industry-related "social aspects organisations" that aim to improve the public image of the alcohol industry and to undermine policy recommendations based on the total

consumption model that would reduce consumption and thus affect its revenues. The social aspects organisations frequently offered generous grants to those who were willing to apply. In a longer perspective, however, replacing public sources of funding by those of the industry could force a change in research priorities to satisfy the interests of the industry at the expense of public interests. The Society responded to these threats at the expense of its openness and inclusiveness, banning researchers employed by the alcohol industry from attending the KBS meetings.

Neoliberal ideologies prevailing world-wide affected research priorities in a more direct way, which can be exemplified by the community action projects that were presented and discussed in a series of KBS thematic meetings, but which almost disappeared from the KBS symposia in the 2000s. In a world dominated by economic considerations, the potential of national alcohol control policies was reduced, as were, even more so, the control powers of local communities, which were left with little power to control alcohol availability or alcohol marketing. Moreover, new public governance systems, including public spending based on a system of competitive grants, reduced prospects for comprehensive community action projects, stimulating competition between local stakeholders instead of their co-operation.

It is very likely that the grant-based system for funding research that prevails in most countries and encourages competition could eventually affect readiness to undertake comparative projects. In fact, recent years did not witness many new comparative projects initiated within the frame of the KBS. The number of thematic meetings had been slowly declining even before the COVID pandemic. It could be a random fluctuation, but it may be a new trend associated with research governance and funding that encourages individual success, competition and growing specialisation. Those individual motifs could be reinforced by national policies that stimulate competition between countries, prioritising national interests over longrun benefits that may result from international research co-operation. As a signal of the potential resulting change, it was difficult to collect four papers on comparative

alcohol research for a plenary in the programme of the 2022 KBS symposium.

In addition to global developments like changing ideologies and related shifts in funding and research priorities, technological and scientific developments are also of importance. The internet and email have had a very big impact on the way communication takes place in the KBS. New technology also allows for virtual meetings. Although the KBS has so far had only one virtual meeting, this option has been a great advantage during COVID but has its disadvantages regarding the quality of communication and networking.

All these developments could easily lead to major changes in the culture and in the way researchers interact with each other within the KBS. However, unlike other social research societies that can be seen as having “fallen short of the ideas some of its founders have held” [3], the values that laid the foundation for the KBS have been sustained over the last 50 years. The democratic structures built into its by-laws still work, encouraging the diversity, co-operation and mutual support that still prevail among its members.

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