

PEKKA SULKUNEN AND INTERNATIONAL ALCOHOL SOCIOLOGY

Robin Room

Finland held a special attraction for sociologists elsewhere who became involved in alcohol studies in the 1960s or early 1970s. In Finnish society, unlike elsewhere, sociological perspectives on alcohol problems really mattered. And, for that matter, Finnish alcohol sociology looked outwards -- was engaged with the world. My first connections with Pekka reflected these frames. He and I were invited at different times onto the team led by Ketil Bruun which produced the purple book, the slim volume which became the core document of a new international public health paradigm for alcohol problems (Bruun et al., 1975). Behind the purple book stood a much fatter brown book (Sulkunen & Luntio, 1977), which Pekka played a large role in producing, and which may be seen as the founding document for what is now the World Health Organization's Global Information System on Alcohol and Health.

In some ways, it seems to me, much of Pekka's later work in alcohol sociology expanded outwards from that early engagement. He played a crucial role in the International Study of Alcohol Control Experiences (Mäkelä et al., 1981), in which an international group of sociologists investigated how and why our societies had headed in directions other than those indicated in the purple book. Twenty years later, he led a further international study of the factors and forces involved in the unravelling of the strict alcohol control systems, which had been installed as alternatives to prohibition in most Nordic countries earlier in the 20th century (Sulkunen et al., 2000).

These studies focused on politics and policies. But it was Pekka's work on alcohol and culture which many of us found most inspiring and fruitful. His 'Sulkunen triangles' (Sulkunen, 1983), laying out societal differences within Europe in choices of alcoholic beverages, initiated a tradition of cross-national comparison still lively today. His work on what had happened in French culture and society to reduce alcohol consumption levels quite radically from the 1960s onward (Sulkunen, 1989) set a model which others have followed in analysing reductions in alcohol consumption in

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southern European 'wine cultures'. For us in Northern California, the most inspiring of Pekka's initiatives on alcohol and culture were the studies of representations of drinking in Finnish movies he initiated with others around 1980 (e.g., Palk & Sulkunen, 1983). The excerpts from Finnish films that Pekka showed at international meetings, and his analyses of them, catalysed us into making our own studies of drinking in American films (e.g., Herd & Room, 1982). Pekka also stimulated a project on alcohol in French films (Stendler, 1987), as part of his longstanding interchange with French sociology, and co-hosted an international conference on cultural studies of drinking (Paakkanen & Sulkunen, 1987).

Around when I moved to Sweden in 1999, Pekka started inviting me to lecture annually on a social alcohol topic in a general sociological course he coordinated, and to meet with the doctoral seminar for students whose dissertations he was involved in supervising. The course and the seminar extended to many topics besides alcohol. I also learned, browsing the sociology section of the Helsinki academic bookstore, that Pekka's contributions to Finnish sociology extend well beyond alcohol studies -- for instance, that he wrote the main Finnish introductory textbook in sociology. So I realise that the view I can give is only a partial perspective on Pekka's sociological work and contributions to Finnish sociology. In terms of his participation in international alcohol studies, Pekka has been a flexible collaborator, always willing to offer or take on new ideas, and an inspiring project leader. His contributions have been many and enduring.

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Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Helsinki

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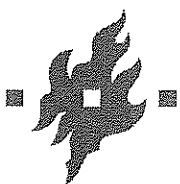
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