



## REPORT

### **NordAN annual conference 2009**

The annual NordAN conference 2009 on Symbolism of Alcohol and Drinking, took place in Helsinki 23rd - 25th October at the Hotel Hilton Helsinki Kalastajatorppa with 105 participants from 10 countries mostly from the Northern Dimension area or the Baltic Sea States.

The conference was organised by the NordAN secretariat and the hosting member organisation the Finnish Centre for Health Promotion. The conference was supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland and participants were officially welcomed by representatives of the City of Helsinki at a reception in the Old Court House in the city.

### **Friday Open Seminars**

Friday - ahead of the official conference program - interest groups and sections within NordAN together with the organising committee had organised a four special seminars on Women-, Drink-driving- School prevention- and Education of workforce issues open to all participants of the conference.

### **Saturday Opening Ceremony**

In the Saturday opening ceremony of the conference **Gabriel Romanus**, the President of NordAN and **Janna Juvakka**, Executive Director, the Finnish Centre for Health Promotion welcomed the participants while) **Kari Paaso** who is the Director of the Department for Promotion of Welfare and Health in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, was setting the scene for the conference theme from Finnish perspective.

### **Saturday Round Table Discussion**

In the following plenary session **Heidi Hautala** who is a Member of European Parliament from Finland and **Hans Olav Fekjær**, who is both an author and Senior adviser in the Norwegian umbrella organisation, Actis, introduced the main theme of the conference Public Health, Symbolism, marketing of alcohol and the cultural learned effects of alcohol and drinking while **Philip Lalander** who is Professor in social psychology from the University of Växjö in Sweden spoke on both alcohol and drugs in society from a cultural analytic perspective. The last introductory speaker, **Wim van Dalen**, the Managing Director of the Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy, (STAP) spoke on alcohol marketing issues stating that as alcohol industry has become primarily a marketing industry alcohol marketing has also become the Achilles' heel of the alcohol industry.

### **Saturday parallel sessions and recommendations:**

In Saturday afternoon four parallel sessions or workshops had been organised and divided the participants. On some of the workshops the plenary speakers had been given the chance to develop further and clarify their position and some additional introductory speakers were presented as well.

The overarching purpose of the workshops was to encourage participants to discuss how best to prevent the harm done by alcohol and drugs - regarding both the negative consequences and the positive image and cultural symbols that are enshrined in the minds of people most.

The four chairs, Hasse Schneiderman, NordAN, Anders Ulstein, Actis, Norway, Árni Einarsson, FRÆ, Iceland and Kari Paaso from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland was asked to look for 1 - 3 specific recommendations that could possibly emerge from the discussions to be reported back to the Sunday plenary session. The chairs and the reporters was therefore asked to take notes during the discussions and after the sessions these notes was edited by the conference staff and handed to the president of NordAN Gabriel Romanus who reported back to all the participants in the Sunday closing session.

Please notice that despite this procedure the listed recommendations from each parallel session does not necessarily represent the opinion of the key note speaker; nor does it express the position of the assembled participants or NordAN.

### **1: Symbolism of alcohol and drinking**

The first workshop on symbolism of alcohol and drinking **Hans Olav Fekjær**, Senior adviser in Actis, from Norway developed further on the main theme Symbolism of alcohol and drinking while **Matilda Hellman** the project coordinator from Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues (NVC) spoke on the changed images of addiction

#### **Recommendations emerged from discussion in workshop 1:**

- In slowly changing the positive cultural images and learned expectations of alcohol there are three important arenas where NGOs can have a very positive role:
- Create alcohol free "white zones" in society during pregnancy, when being with children and adolescens, sports- and cultural arrangements and events and of course in traffic be it land-, sea- and airtraffic
- Create awareness about role models and especially the role of the adult parent and teachers and their influence on children
- Improving the pedagogical quality of school based prevention work

### **2: Symbolism of using drugs**

In the second workshop on symbolism of using drugs **Philip Lalander** from the University of Växjö in Sweden spoke in depth on youth culture, norms and drugs and of methods in preventive work. He was seconded by another Swedish professor of Social Science, **Bengt Svensson** from the department of Social Issues, Health and Society of the University of Malmö, who gave a lecture on the attraction of a life using drugs stating that from the perspective of drug users ordinary life sometimes seems a worse alternative than the life as a drug-addict.

#### **Recommendations emerged from discussion in workshop 2:**

- As common traits are the search for recognition and identity, key for success is integration.
- It is crucial to study and understand the social bonds and culture of the drug community and the attraction it represents in order to design both good prevention and treatment strategies – supplementing the public health perspective.
- For alienated immigrant youth groups in search for identity and community, the drug culture and its street life may represent a particular attraction.

### **3: Youth drinking and prevention**

In the third session; youth drinking and prevention both the images and the reality of youth drinking was viewed on by researcher, PhD, **Kirsimarja Raitasalo** from the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland while **Kjetil Vesteraas** the Manager of youth organisation Juvente from Norway also spoke on youth culture, norms and drinking and laid forward his experience with different methods in preventive work.

### **Recommendations emerged from discussion in workshop 3:**

- Prevention is an educational activity and we therefore need to focus on aspects of the meaning and symbolism of drinking alcohol in program development.
- Prevention carried out by NGOs should be incorporated by the educational system in a comprehensive prevention plan.
- Enthusiasm is a powerful tool when forwarding an opinion or message – maybe the most powerful?
- The authorities theoretical approach and the more practical and ideological work of NGOs should interact to benefit and develop each other.
- Generalised opinions on youth drinking habits can be counter-productive to prevention measures as sub-groups can influence measured trends.

### **4: Marketing: Should alcohol advertising be banned?**

The fourth session was devoted to the marketing of alcohol. It was **Wim van Dalen**, from Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy (STAP) and **Satu Räsänen** from the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health in Finland who introduced the issue – and as banning of alcohol marketing is considered to protect children a direct question to discuss had already been stated in the program: Should alcohol advertising be banned?

### **Recommendations emerged from discussion in workshop 4:**

- In the long term the goal is to ban alcohol advertising – in a short term it is to regulate it.
- But as self-regulation by the alcohol industries is not effective – legislation on regulation, both on national and European level, is needed
- As we need more content restrictions – we could promote the principle of French Evin law in all countries
- As we need more volume restrictions – we could promote TV-bans etc.
- And don't say that some of these things are politically impossible!

### **Sunday Round Table Discussion**

Sunday a lively round table discussion on the future of international alcohol and drug policy was chaired by **Gabriel Romanus**.

**Lars Møller** the Regional Adviser on Alcohol and Drugs in the Division of Health Programmes of World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe, spoke on the development of the global strategy on alcohol from a European perspective, while the Director in the Division for Public Health of the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, **Maria Renström** gave a status report of the European alcohol policy after the Swedish presidency late 2009. Administrator **Timo Jetsu** from DG Justice, freedom and security in the European Commission, had been asked to give a presentation on the new UN declaration and action plan on global drug problems also from a European perspective.

The three speeches were commented by three Non Governmental Organisation Secretary Generals: **Anders Ulstein**, Secretary General of Europe against Drugs (EURAD), **Øystein Bakke**, Secretary General of Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA) and **Mariann Skar**, Secretary General, European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare)