European Social Science Research Group on Drug Issues

K.-H.

Karl-Heinz

Reuband

Institut für Soziologie, Technische Universität Dresden, Germany

Prof. Dr. **Karl-Heinz** Reuband, Technische Universität Dresden, Institut für Soziologie, Mommsenstrasse 13, D-01062 Dresden (Germany)

Research on drug issues in most European countries has long been dominated by the medical profession, clinical psychologists and social workers. Social science research has been rather scarce and scattered. As a consequence, individualistic approaches have gained prominence over social science-oriented approaches, both regarding the etiology and epidemiology of drug use as well as the aspects of social reaction and social control. In view of this situation, there is a strong need for closer cooperation among social scientists eventually leading to some form of 'scientific community'.

This cooperation should be multinational: firstly, because in most European countries the number of social science researchers is too small to form the basis of a national scientific community; the next colleague working on the same topic is often doing his research in another country. Secondly, although most of the countries share the drug phenomena, they are not fully aware of the similarities and differences between them, both in terms of the characteristics of drug use and types of policy responses. By looking at similarities and differences in a cross-national perspective, one should be able to better understand the variations of the drug phenomena and their sociocultural determinants.

Given the need to establish a network of social scientists working on drug issues, extensive efforts were started in 1988 and 1989 to locate drug researchers in Europe and bring them together to exchange research findings and explore the possibilities of future cooperation. The efforts were met with great enthusiasm and the first conference on 'Drug Use and Drug Policy', organized by Karl-Heinz Reuband in cooperation with the Committee of Social Problems and Social Control within the German Sociological Association as well as the Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung of the University of Cologne, was finally held in Cologne (Germany) in September 1990. It was the first gathering to focus on a social science approach towards drug use in Europe, bringing together a large number of social scientists working on these topics from a basic or applied research perspective. The conference had the character of a workshop in which nearly all of the participants took an active role and presented their own research.

What became clear at the conference was how much the researchers had in common with regard to the type of research they were carrying out and the kind of questions they were asking. It also became evident that many topics which were being dealt with in some countries were being neglected in others. Generally, the need for continued cooperation was expressed and a network of researchers, the 'European Social Science Research Group on Drug Issues', was established. It was a declared aim to hold conferences regularly and to make closer cooperation on the basis of joint projects possible. It was hereby considered useful to change the conference location from

one year to the next. In order to share the burden of traveling between people from different countries and in order to attract new people into the field, the locations should alternate along the North-South and the West-East continuum.

Since the establishment of the 'European Social Science Research Group on Drug Issues' conferences with increasing participation from all over Europe and a diversity of themes have been held each year:

© 1995 S. KargerAG, Basel
1022-6877/95/0012-0061
\$8.00/0

In 1991 in Lyon (France), organized by Chafic Saliba in cooperation with the Centre National de Documentation sur les Toxicomanies in Lyon.

In 1992 in Loughborough (UK), organized by Philip Bean in cooperation with the University of Loughborough.

In 1993 in Rome (Italy), organized by Luigi Solivetti in cooperation with the Centre of Solidarity (CEIS).

In 1994 in Denmark, organized by the Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, University of Aarhus.

At the past conferences, the full spectrum of social-science-related questions that could be directed towards the drug phenomenon were discussed ranging from the epidemiology and etiology of drug use, history of drug use and social control, drugs and crime, needle sharing and AIDS, attitudes of the population towards drugs, social reaction and drug policy. Besides papers focussing on specific countries, several papers were presented that dealt with cross-national comparisons drawing on the few available data in the field. Moreover, it also became clear in this context how little comparative data are available and how useful it is to work on the basis of better and more comparative data, embedded into a social science perspective. Consequently, a number of researchers started engaging in joint projects.

The first conference in 1990 has been a breakthrough in establishing a network of otherwise scattered researchers. Since then the network has grown and has been further consolidated. The 'European Social Science Research Group on Drug Issues' not only represents the first active European research group in this field, but also has the largest membership and most active participation. Participants of the conferences have included – among others – researchers from Germany, France, UK, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Hungary, Greece, and, as special guests, the USA.

Membership in the group is open to social scientists coming from the fields of sociology, social psychology, criminology, economy, and social history. Scientists from these disciplines working on drug issues are encouraged to join. The group is European, given the need for closer collaboration and research especially in Western and Eastern Europe. Although restricted both in discipline and country of origin, participation from other disciplines and countries, up to a certain extent, is not ruled out and this has in fact been the practice at both conferences.

Reports on the situation in countries outside Europe with bigger or other forms of drug problems – such as the USA – might provide useful, additional information on the variability and the determinants of drug problems. Moreover, research results from countries where social science research on drug use is more advanced in certain areas might give some form of stimulus and a supplementary perspective to ongoing scientific efforts. To a certain extent, the same applies to

having selected participants from other disciplines, especially so when topics are discussed which are also dealt with by social scientists.

The European Social Science Research Group on Drug Issues is run by a coordinating committee which consists of Prof. Karl-Heinz Reuband, Chair (Germany), Prof. Philip Bean (UK), Prof. Ragnar Hauge (Norway), Dr. Dirk Korf (Netherlands), Dr. Chafic Saliba (France), and Dr. Luigi Solivetti (Italy).

Further information can be obtained from

Prof. Karl-Heinz Reuband,
Technische Universität Dresden,
Institut für Soziologie,
Mommsenstrasse 13,
D-01062 Dresden (Germany),
Tel. 49-351-4637377; Fax 49-351-4637223.

62

Reuband
Social Science Research Group