



Comparative analyses of historical and conceptual developments in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden show differences in the drug policy agenda and governance, despite fundamental similarities in these Nordic welfare states.

Drug policy agenda
Nordic countries
welfare
conceptualisation

This piece of research undertook a comparative analysis of how drug users and drug use are conceptualized and managed in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. The Nordic countries are often described as quite similar welfare states, with common characteristics and ideologies; but this study has demonstrated that very different policies can be adopted by similar political systems to address similar conditions and issues in society.

The present-day drug policies of Denmark, Finland, and Sweden have a common basis in a conceptualization of ‘the drug problem’ as a *social* problem that should be managed primarily through social reform and various kinds of social expertise. However, scrutinizing the historical and conceptual developments in each country, and comparing 3 themes - *Sanctions against drug users, coercive treatment, and medical substitution treatment* - we find that:

- In both Finland and Sweden, the welfare approach to conceptualizing and managing drug problems was coupled with a conception of drug use and drug users as ‘alien’ to society.
- In Denmark, the welfare approach rested upon an understanding of drug use and drug users as part of society, as a ‘normal’ social problem.
- There are, however, recent signs of convergence between the drug policies of these three Nordic countries in regard to all three themes

Overall the study shows how similar welfare systems conceptualize drug use and users according to specific national developments, traditions, and actors influencing the drug policy agenda.

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