

OBITUARY

Kettil Bruun: A Scientist of Conviction

International research on alcohol suffered an irretrievable loss when Kettil Bruun died suddenly at work on December 16th, 1985, at the age of 61.

The vitality of Finnish alcohol research is to a great extent due to Kettil Bruun's creativity and inspiration. He served as the director of the Social Research Institute of Alcohol Studies from 1955 to 1968 and as the secretary of the Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies from 1955 to 1980.

Kettil Bruun's influence was felt far beyond Finland and his work won wide international recognition. He was for long an active member of the Nordic Committee for Alcohol Research, and acted as the first chairman of the Nordic Alcohol and Drug Research Commission during the years 1979-1981. In the 1980s he held a professorship for 3 years at Stockholm University in Sweden. He served with dedication in a number of expert functions in the World Health Organization and in 1971 was the first social scientist awarded the Jellinek prize for alcohol research.

The theme of Kettil Bruun's doctoral thesis from the year 1959 was an experiment on the dynamics of drinking groups. In satisfying the strictest requirements of positivistic science, it at the same time provides a rich picture of Finnish drinking culture. In 1961 he published a study in collaboration with Touko Markkanen comparing two different forms of treating alcoholism. A forerunner in this field, this study still stands as a model of experimental research. In 1966 Bruun published with Juha Partanen and Touko Markkanen a study of twins which analysed the hereditary influence on the use of alcohol, drawing upon good data and advanced methods.

In the course of the 1960s Kettil Bruun published a number of studies in which he described and critically reviewed official management and control of deviant behaviour. Important here was that his main object of research was not deviant individuals but instead the action of the authorities.

Many of Kettil Bruun's studies are Nordic comparisons. In a collaborative monograph with

Ragnar Hauge published in 1963, he drew comparisons between drinking habits among boys living in the Nordic capital cities. His general project entitled 'Alcohol in the Nordic countries' from 1972 provided substantial new information about the Nordic countries. A broad comparative study of pharmaceutical control measures in the Nordic countries was published in 1983.

The Gentlemen's Club, published in 1975 and co-authored by Kettil Bruun, Lynn Pan and Ingemar Rexed, analyses structural and power relationships within the sphere of international control of narcotics and drugs. A study entitled 'Alcohol Control Policies in a Public Health Perspective' was released the same year by a research team led by Kettil Bruun, making a profound impact on international discussion of alcohol policy and scientific research in the field.

While holding a professorship in Stockholm, Kettil Bruun typically became the centre of an active research group that published in 1985 an exhaustive survey of the history of alcohol control in Sweden. During his time in Stockholm he also produced a book co-authored with Nils Christie analysing drug and narcotics policy, and he keenly participated in public discussion in Sweden.

At a time when survey material virtually dominated sociological research, Bruun's flexibility with methodology was astonishing. In fact few sociologists in the Nordic countries, or indeed in the world, have measured up to Kettil Bruun in terms of the range of research design and methods which he employed to compile data. Not only did he conduct experiments but he exploited interview material, official statistics, participant observation, fiction, expert interviews and archive records. He entirely ignored the academic controversy over soft and hard methodology. His objective was simply to attain information on the actual workings of the Nordic societies. Instead of restricting his focus to building up theoretical systems, he applied his talent to mapping out sociological problem areas. Beyond all

else he could skillfully analyse the interrelationships between individual behaviour and social institutions and action. It is for this reason that the diversity of his discourse on social policy represents a genuine wellspring of research. His analysis of alcohol and drug policies was an extension of scientific argument into the controversial issues of social policy.

In many respects Kettil Bruun assumed a critical attitude towards Finnish and Scandinavian societies. At the same time he had an affinity for the Nordic scientific-moral style of argumentation. He was also a liberal with the proviso that he never discussed social affairs merely from the liberal point of view; instead he continuously introduced new information into discussion. A form of positivistic belief in the power of science on one hand, and, on the other, a liberal confidence in public discussion to bring about solutions to problem issues merged in Bruun in a unique and fruitful combination. The science of Kettil Bruun was not one of social planning or manipulation but was a science of rationally conducted civic argument and debate. He analysed information and its concealment, and annexes to his research reveal his struggle against bureaucratic subterfuge. In his native country Kettil Bruun will also be remembered as an unintimidated chairman of the Social Sciences Research Council, who uncompromisingly stood for the freedom of research in the face of political attack.

Kettil Bruun was gifted with the capacity to work closely and inspiringly with researchers of very different personality types. Just as he boldly utilized divergent methods of data collection and analysis, he employed problem-centred methods to cross the boundaries of scientific fields. He collaborated in authorship with physicians, historians and economists. Not a statistician himself, he jointly conducted studies with others that have turned out to be

statistically some of the most stylistic and sophisticated in alcohol research.

Later in his career, Kettil Bruun attracted research teams combining many age groups, scientific fields and cultures. Despite their size, these research groups were never hierarchically organized, since Kettil Bruun possessed the exceptional talent to elicit collective scientific thinking from the most unlikely combinations. Just as he advocated an open public scrutiny and scientific argumentation, he sought to preserve an arena of democratic and scientific discourse around him. His creativity, openness and indifference to the dictates of bureaucracy stood out alongside his generosity and diligence. Kettil Bruun was quick to offer comment on any draft manuscript be it thesis or critical essay.

Kettil Bruun's public recognition does not fully reflect the scope of his international achievements. In uncomplicated and egalitarian attitudes, he bound researchers of different ages together in dialogue, leaving the marks of his tempered critical analysis mirrored in publications and friendships around the world.

We have lost in Kettil Bruun a scientist of rare ability and a spokesman for society. For some, a fatherly friend is also gone. For others, a resolute colleague and an unassuming but exacting benefactor of young researchers is no longer with us. Greatness is usually measured by achievement, but it is also found in those who leave a space unfilled, not only in their public deeds but also in their private lives and among friends and co-workers.

KLAUS MAKELA

*The Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies,
Kalevankatu 12,
00100 Helsinki 10,
Finland.*

This document is a scanned copy of a printed document. No warranty is given about the accuracy of the copy. Users should refer to the original published version of the material.