

Self-help and survival- a study of the Links.

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Abstract

This study has been carried out as part of a Swedish investigation within the framework of an international project on the AA movement, The International Collaborative Study of Alcoholics Anonymous (ICSAA). The purpose of the study has been to describe and analyse the Link movement in terms of its character and development as a self-help movement by and for persons with alcohol problems. The questions raised encompass the movement's process of development, organisational culture and members' self-image. The most important point of departure for the analysis has been the political culture of Sweden, a culture characterised by an integrative State authority and corporatist solutions to social problems.

Data was collected by questionnaire (n=474), by observations of various Link activities, by interview and by studying the movement's seven different periodicals and other written material. Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches have been applied. A comparison with the AA movement and its members is also an important part of the study.

The Link Society movement was started in 1945, under the ideological influence first of the Oxford Group and later the AA movement, which is clearly reflected in their seven-point programme. The Link movement has rejected the more spiritual elements of the AA Programme, however, substituting the type of profane solidarity characteristic of Swedish populist movements. The formation of the Links was a backlash against the intensive expansion in Sweden of an institutional care deeply marked by the attempts, coloured by the ideas of emergent social engineering, to "organise and lay straight" the life of the ordinary citizen and not least the life of the deviant one. The movement is anchored in a working-class self-help ideology based on comrade support and the view of alcoholism as a disease, i.e. the Link movement offered an alternative to professionalised community care of alcoholics. Half of the Link movement has successively been incorporated into the government decision-making apparatus and can now be described as a political interest group with hierarchical structures and centralised decision-making. At the same time, the survival strategy of the other half of the movement has been to remain a self-help group independent of the State, a loose organisational structure and grassroots democracy. The study shows also that the Links provides the feeling of security and the opportunity for members, to build up new individual networks both within and outside the movement, and to develop a way of life, an everyday lifestyle as an alternative to the one of alcoholics.

Key words: Link Society, Link movement, AA, alcohol abuse, self-help movement, Swedish political culture