

Summary:

Alcohol policy is typically studied at national, regional, and municipal levels.

Nevertheless, alcohol policy is heavily influenced by decisions and procedures made at street level. This dissertation embraces a bottom-up perspective and focuses on the nightlife in Oslo, where the Alcohol Act encounters a drinking culture with liberal norms for intoxication. The aim is to understand what happens when alcohol policy developed by the authorities is implemented at street level.

The focus is on those who work in the nightlife, namely, bartenders, liquor inspectors, and police officers. A street-level framework is used to understand the logic of choices and constraints. Street-level practitioners encounter many dilemmas in their face-to-face meetings with nightlife guests and they have to make decisions based on discretion. Bartenders are encouraged to sell as much alcohol as possible, but at the same time serve responsibly in accordance with the Alcohol Act. Liquor inspectors have a responsibility to report contraventions of the Alcohol Act in a context where drunkenness is normalized and accepted. Police officers have to decide whom to arrest and whose behavior to ignore. Bartenders, liquor inspectors, and police officers negotiate rules and norms in their daily practice and develop routines and coping mechanisms in their everyday struggle to perform good work.

Based on interviews with street-level workers, fieldwork in the nightlife setting, and purchase attempts with pseudo-intoxicated patrons, the study reveals how nightlife street-level practitioners use their discretion to produce informal practices that are fundamentally different from and more diverse than those intended by policy makers. Bartenders, liquor inspectors, and police officers enforce the Alcohol Act more leniently than intended by the authorities. A number of mechanisms are involved in understanding the gap between policy as written and policy in practice. Possible understandings of this discrepancy can be situational conditions, such as stress and large workloads, conflicting goal expectations, limited resources, and a drinking culture with liberal norms for intoxication. In their meeting with drunk patrons, bartenders, liquor inspectors, and police officers negotiate regulations and norms, and they raise the threshold for what is considered as deviance. The study demonstrates how street-level logic sets the permissible limit for

intoxication far above that set by the Alcohol Act.