Alternative regulations for alcohol marketing
Towards a ‘best–fit’ for Belgium

BACKGROUND

A substantial body of knowledge has accumulated during recent years on the feasibility and effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different policy options and interventions shown to reduce the harmful use of alcohol. However, findings on a “best fit design” are not clear-cut depending on the contextual, social or cultural issues in each country.

The project bears in mind the careful implementation of an evidence-based (alternative) regulation system in the Belgian context, with special attention for the specific cultural and social practices and the context-bound implications and limitations.

The project is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Tom Decorte, in partnership with Else De Donder (VAD) and Martin de Duve (Univers Santé).

AIM & METHODS

The aim of this project is to perform a critical analysis of the regulation of alcohol marketing in Belgium and in 6 European countries.

1. The literature review results in an overview of alcohol marketing regulations in Belgium and in 6 European countries (France, Finland, Norway, Poland and UK).

2. Exploratory interviews are conducted with (inter)national experts in this field.

3. In-depth interviews and small-scale questionnaire are used to collect the opinion of Belgian stakeholders. The instrument is developed based on the data collected during literature review and exploratory interviews.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How is the marketing for alcohol regulated in Belgium?

2. How is the marketing for alcohol regulated in France, Finland, Norway, Poland, the Netherlands and the UK?

3. What are the pros and cons of each of the (alternative) regulation systems?

4. Which marketing regulation system can be considered as a “best fit design” for Belgium taking into account the specificities of the Belgian context and the views of all stakeholders involved?

BELGIUM: CHALLENGES TO FIND A ‘BEST FIT’

Existing co-regulation focuses mainly on content restrictions and restrictions of audiences (no ‘minors’).

Some key issues:

- **Co-regulation** mainly relying on self-regulation: limits of self regulation?

- **Lack of transparency**: Complexity of the statutory framework which includes 6 independent regulations

- **Complaint system**:
  - No mandatory pre-screening
  - Does not start from the perspective of the consumer
  - There is no legal backstop
  - Lack of effective sanctions

- Independent advisory committee is absent

- No continuous monitoring

- Extent of support for this regulation by broader society is not known

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A BEGINNING (de Bruijn et al., 2010)

- Volume restrictions
- Content restrictions
- Supporting regulatory framework
- Effective sanctions
- Pre-screening
- Independent advisory committee
- Transparent
- Broad support
- Comprehensive
- Legal backstop
- Continuous monitoring