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Narratives in parliamentary Discourse on Drug Policies in the Western World.

A sociological perspective

(Summary)

The problem of addiction and the question of how drug policy should be conducted are issues that are still relevant and topical. There are ongoing discussions about regulations in many countries, and the situation is similar around the world. The people who influence the solutions chosen are politicians. Therefore, in my dissertation I analyse parliamentary discourses on drug policy and, in particular, the narratives used in these discussions. Based on this analysis, I try to answer the question of why politicians choose the solutions they do and not others, and what measures can be taken to ensure that the regulations they introduce are the most beneficial for society as a whole. A comparative analysis of several parliaments also makes it possible to determine how Poland compares to other countries.

Part one of the thesis ('Theoretical and Methodological Aspects') consists of two chapters. The first is devoted to a discussion of the constructionist approach, which is the theoretical basis of the thesis. Concepts within labelling theory, which are an important theoretical foundation for my proposed analysis, are also presented. The chapter also includes a description of drug issues and drug policies in relation to the theoretical framework described. The second chapter focuses on methodological aspects, where the different theoretical strands of narrative analysis and the chosen research technique are presented. Analytical categories that are useful for this thesis are also discussed.

The second part of the thesis ('Empirical Findings') comprises four empirical chapters and 'Conclusions'. Chapters three, four, five and six reconstruct the narratives about psychoactive drugs in the different parliaments (third - United States, fourth - United Kingdom, fifth - Poland, sixth - European Union). For each, I provide the historical, cultural and political context of the debates before analysing the material. The seventh chapter ('Conclusions') summarises the work and the analyses contained therein. It presents conclusions drawn from a comparison of debates from different countries, as well as relating them to other pre-existing ideas about drug policies. The chapter also includes an attempt to situate parliamentary narratives within a broader worldview and ideological framework.

The key findings, in general and summary terms, are as follows. More narratives referring to facts are used in the UK and the EU than in Poland and the US, where parliamentarians are more likely to appeal to emotions. This translates into trust in institutions. The work of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is a significant

element of European and UK drug policy. Information from their reports, as well as recommendations, are taken into account by parliamentarians and governments. Polish and American politicians refer to the institution with more reserve and distrust. Furthermore, the analysis of the research material leads to the conclusion that there is no single type of narrative that influences politicians more strongly. They are inclined to choose such solutions and construct such narratives that are in line with their preferred axiological perspectives. For some the overriding value is scientific knowledge, for others moral issues. Among the latter, a distinction can be made between those who prefer materialist values and advocate a tightening of drug policy and those who choose post-materialist values, advocating a liberalised approach. Politicians for whom scientific results are important are also in favour of leniency.

There is a growing political polarisation in the discussions, which makes it difficult for politicians to agree, and causes more and more parliamentarians to appeal to morality rather than scientific knowledge. Polarisation also negatively affects trust in institutions. Important elements of polarised debates are the construction of narratives based on the division between 'them' and 'us' and the accusation that political opponents are acting against common sense. It seems, therefore, that finding optimal solutions to drug policy requires a reduction in the rhetorical devices mentioned above.

Keywords: narrative analysis, drug policies, parliamentary discourse, labelling theory.

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