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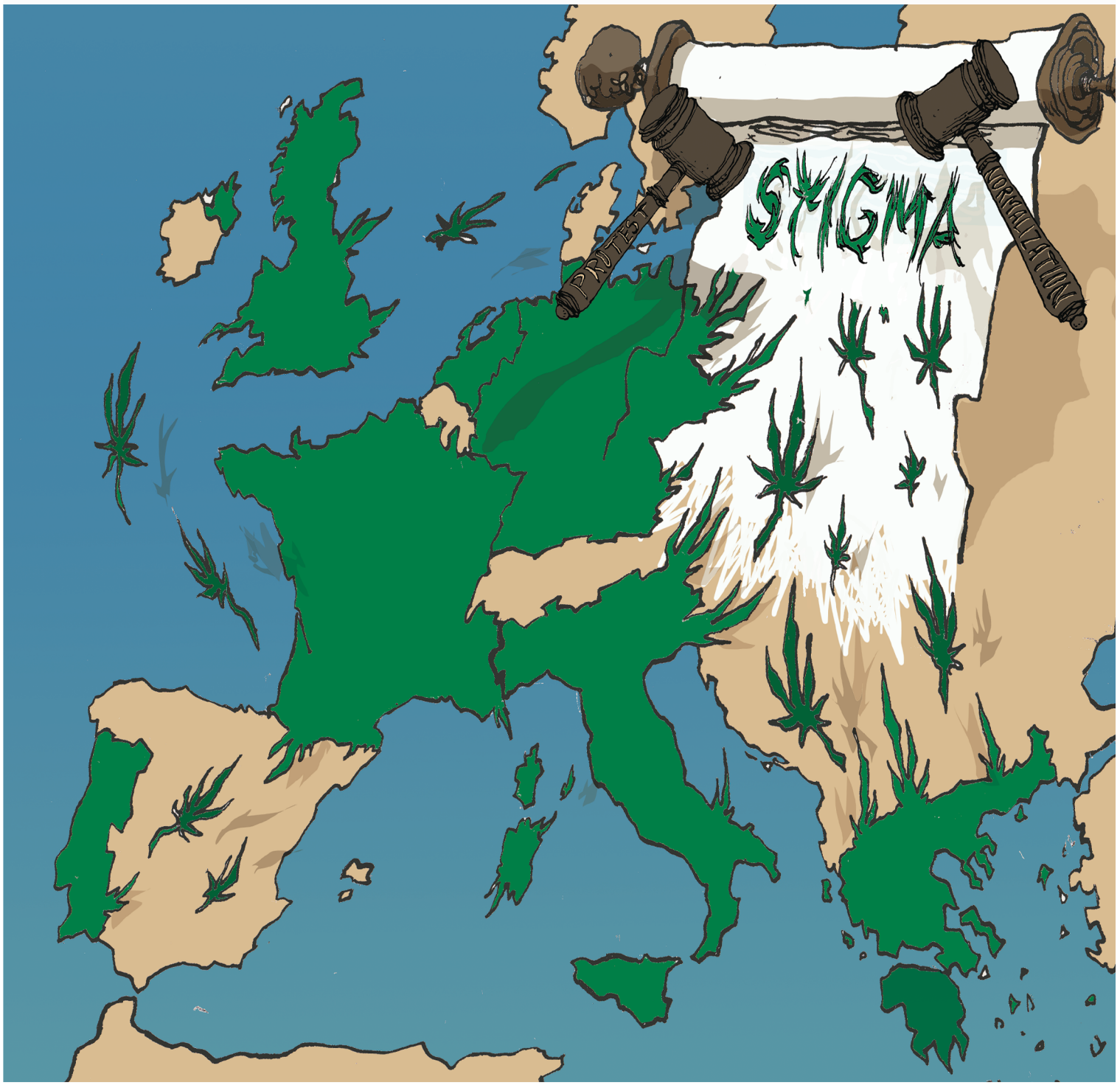
CANNABIS STIGMA PROTEST AND NORMALIZATION

KOSTAS SKLIAMIS



Cannabis, stigma, protest, and normalization

Kostas Skliamis

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Introduction

Background

After thousands of years of recreational, ritual, religious, and medical use, throughout the twentieth century cannabis evolved into one of the most strictly controlled psychoactive substance across the world. Through international conventions, the cultivation, manufacture, trafficking, and possession of cannabis became subject to criminal law (i.e., de jure criminalization). Bringing the law into practice through arrests and sentencing (i.e., de facto criminalization) fuelled a social process of labelling cannabis users as deviants, with users experiencing social exclusion and stigmatization.

However, criminalization and stigmatization did not prevent cannabis becoming the most used illicit drug worldwide, with an estimated 188 million last year users (World Drug Report, 2019). Growing concerns about the negative consequences of cannabis prohibition catalyzed protest and calls from civic society, scholars, and politicians for reform. Voices pleading for decriminalization — whether statutory (de jure) or actual (de facto)[1] — or legalization of cannabis became louder. Cannabis festivals are among the most concrete manifestations of civic society's protest of cannabis prohibition and call for cannabis reform.

From a sociological and criminological perspective, it is argued that cannabis has been losing its subcultural connotation in the past decades and has evolved into a de-stigmatized mainstream drug among youth and young adults — a social process that Parker, Aldridge, and Measham (1995, 1998) coined as normalization. Whether such a normalization process has become a common and global feature continues to be subject to scholarly debate (Pennay & Measham, 2016), not in the least because strong cross-national differences in national cannabis laws and policies, even between member states of the European Union (EU). In the EU there is no harmonized legislation on drug use; in some Member States cannabis use is prohibited, while in others it is not defined as an offense in the national drug law (EMCDDA, 2017a). Such differences in drug laws contribute to a significant variation of policies within the EU.

To conclude, cannabis users in different countries that have differing drug laws, approaches, and policies (including EU Member States) experience divergent forms of legal and social control. This may create a divergence in their perception of, opinions about, and responses towards national drug laws and cannabis policies. Also, cannabis policy may have an impact on the stigmatization of users, as well as on their daily life practices regarding cannabis use, and how they acquire cannabis.

[1] The latter is sometimes defined as depenalization. Depenalization is more common in French language. It refers to the introduction to the possibility of or policy of closing a criminal case without imposing punishment, for example, because the case is considered 'minor' or prosecution of it is 'not in the public interest' (EMCDDA, 2018a).

The international legal framework of cannabis prohibition

At the onset of the 20th century, the long history of cannabis use across many cultures for an extensive variety of purposes changed considerably, ushering in a new era of cannabis prohibition. Early attempts at cannabis prohibition trace back to the United States at the very beginning of the past century. In particular, the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906 created restrictions as well as the labelling of cannabis as a poison. A few years later, cannabis was discussed in the preparations of the International Opium Conference in 1911 in The Hague, which was based on the outcomes of the 1909 Shanghai Commission, and that would lead to the 1912 International Opium Convention. However, it was not until the International Opium Convention in 1925 that cannabis was included in a prohibitive regime of international drug control, where cannabis export to countries where it was illegal was prohibited (Bewley-Taylor et al., 2014). Following the approval of the 1925 International Opium Convention, European countries gradually outlawed cannabis (Ballotta et al., 2008).

In the next decade, a major milestone took place in the US with the introduction of the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937, which banned cannabis use, possession, and transfer throughout the US under federal law (Himmelstein, 1983). After the Second World War, the newly created United Nations (UN) that replaced the League of Nations, made drug prohibition one of its priorities (Levine, 2002; Fish, 2006). In 1961, the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs — a consolidation of nine multilateral drug control treaties negotiated between 1912 and 1953 (Sinha, 2001) — established the current system of global drug prohibition. Cannabis was — just like heroin — classified as Schedule I and Schedule IV, and thereby defined as among the most dangerous and harmful substances, with limited therapeutic (medical) value.

The Single Convention of 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the UN conventions that followed (i.e. the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 and the Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988) set out a treaty-based control regime representing a prohibitionist approach, aiming to control and eliminate drug use towards achieving a world free of drugs. The ideological basis is the abstinence paradigm, which holds *"…that individuals are incapable of regulating their use of certain psychoactive substances in a manner that is acceptable to society and not hazardous to health"* (Korf, 1995: 4). The goal was to be achieved by criminalizing the possession, cultivation, production, sale, and distribution of illicit drugs for non-medical and non-scientific purposes. These UN drug conventions require the signatory states to provide national legislation in order to comply with their treaty obligations. However, it must be noted that the Single Convention leaves some flexibility for countries in their interpretation of the necessity of such control. UN conventions are not self-executing and in the transposition into national law, countries are allowed to execute discretion, while applying the principle of good faith in interpreting international agreements in the light of

their object and purpose, according to Article 31 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (Ballotta et al., 2008).

Cannabis control in Europe

All EU Member States signed the aforementioned UN drug treaties. This implies that amongst others, possession, acquisition, distribution or the sale of cannabis must be punishable offences. Moreover, the UN drug convention of 1988 specifically requested countries to establish the possession, purchase, or cultivation of drugs *for personal consumption* as a criminal offence.

A milestone in the creation of the EU was the 'Treaty of Maastricht' (signed on 7 February 1992 and entered into force on 1 November 1993). One of the key points or pillars was the cooperation on justice and home affairs to provide the public a high level of safety, including fighting against organized crime and drug trafficking, and the creation of a European Police Office (Europol) for information exchange between national forces. In subsequent years, the harmonization of laws between Member States and the convergence of penalty levels became a reappearing issue in the European drug policy discourse. In December 1996, although the atmosphere was *"highly charged"* — not in the least because of the tension between France and the Netherlands about Dutch coffeeshops selling cannabis — the Member States agreed *"to move closer together on drug laws"* (Dorn, 1998: 5).[2] In the following decades, collaboration for data collection and knowledge exchange between European countries strongly increased and improved. The European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA, the EU 'drug agency') has been playing a key role in this evolution. Similarly, regarding enforcing supply side of the drug market, Europol evolved into an important player in data collection, knowledge exchange, and cross-border collaboration.

Nonetheless, significant differences remain between national drug policies in the EU. There is no harmonized European drug law, and there is little uniformity in the laws penalizing unauthorized cannabis use among the EU Member States (EMCDDA, 2017a). The criminal or administrative response to drug use offenses is the responsibility of the EU Member States, not of the EU (EMCDDA, 2018a). As the UN conventions do not require signatory states to define drug use as a criminal offence, cannabis use is illegal in some European countries, while it is not in other countries. The UN 1988 drug convention specifically requested countries to establish the possession, purchase, or cultivation of drugs *for personal consumption* as a criminal offence. However, because implementation is subject to constitutional principles and the basic concepts of a country's

[2] Council Framework Decision 2004/757/JHA of 25 October 2004 laying down minimum provisions on the constituent elements of criminal acts and penalties in the field of illicit drug trafficking. There were attempts to harmonize drug laws. However, as illicit drugs were placed within the so-called third pillar, Member States were obliged to translate/integrate necessary legal measures into their national drug laws.

legal system, and because there are different national interpretations of a criminal offence, national legislation on cannabis-use related offences varies widely across Europe, including alternatives to conviction or punishment (EMCDDA, 2017a). In conclusion, EU Member States largely retain their individual freedom and authority to decide on the cannabis legislation and cannabis policy in their jurisdiction. The result is a variety of approaches within the EU across a wide spectrum, from liberal to punitive. In their national drug law, some countries treat all illicit drugs the same, whereas others have two or more schedules and commonly define cannabis offences as a less serious legal matter. This variety of legislation and procedures within the EU reflects both the requirements as suggested by the UN Conventions and the 'room for maneuver' at Member State level (Ballotta et al., 2008).

Finally, within the EU there are not only severe differences in the "law in the books" (i.e. cannabis legislation) but also in the "law in action" (i.e., law enforcement practices). For example, regarding cannabis supply, a recent study reported strong variation across EU countries in sentencing practices. According to a survey among national experts, the expected median sentences for the supply of 1 kg of cannabis resin varied within the EU from zero to ten years and from zero to twelve years in the case of 10 kg. Expected median sentences were lowest in the Netherlands and highest in Greece, while a country like Germany took an intermediate position (EMCDDA 2017b).

Prevalence of cannabis use in Europe

Approximately 91.2 million, or more than one quarter (27.4%) of EU citizens (aged 15–64) have used cannabis at least once in their lifetime, including 24.7 million (7.4%) who used cannabis in the last year. With 17.5 million persons (14.4%) figures for last year cannabis use were highest among young people (aged 15–34). The national estimates of EU Member States of cannabis use among young people in the last year varies significantly (ranging from 3.5% to 21.8%). Both lifetime use among adults aged 15-64 and last year use among young people aged 15-34 was highest in France (EMCDDA, 2019a).

The social transformation of cannabis: the role of stigma

Notwithstanding the prevalence of cannabis use today, users may still feel stigmatized. The US played a key role in the social history of stigma related to cannabis use and users, with massive anti-cannabis propaganda, the enactment of the Marihuana Tax Act (1937), and the movie "Reefer Madness" (1936) as landmark events. This widespread anti-cannabis campaign created negative connotations with herbal cannabis, often lumping cannabis users into stereotypes of immigrants and criminals; and it established the social image of cannabis use as rule-breaking and deviant behavior, while cannabis users were labeled as offenders and criminals (Himmelstein, 1983).

In sociological and criminological theory, the concept of deviance can be traced back to Durkheim (1897), who was the first to argue that there can be no normal in the absence of abnormal or deviant. Building upon Durkheim's work on deviance, Goffman (1963) used the term stigma to explain labelling, and defined stigmatization as a process that occurs through the social construction of identity whereby those who do not conform to being normal are subject to the judgment of others. In his ground-breaking work 'Outsiders' — with a primary focus on cannabis users — Becker (1963) introduced labelling theory into the field of criminology as an approach to understand deviant and criminal behavior. Labelling theory builds on the symbolic interactionist tenet that people define and construct their identities from society's perceptions of them (Shulman, 2004). Instead of defining deviance as the quality of an act that a person commits, Becker understood it as a consequence of the application of rules and sanctions by others to an 'offender', while the 'deviant' is someone to whom the label has successfully been applied; *"deviant behavior is behavior that people so label"* (Becker, 1963: 9). To this end, once individuals have been labeled or defined as deviants, they often face new problems that stem from the reactions by the self and others to negative stereotypes (i.e., stigma) that are attached to the deviant label (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967).

Since Becker introduced constructionist theory into the study of drug use and conceptualized cannabis use as a form of deviant behavior, the concepts 'labelling', 'stigma', and 'deviance' have been widely applied in the field of social drug research, specifically in examining drug users' experiences (Goode, 2018). In the past decades, illicit drug use has often been associated with stigma or social disapproval (Palamar et al. 2011). Scholars have highlighted that illicit drug users are a highly stigmatized group as they have been continuously subjected to a process of relational and social degradation and tend to experience rejection (Ahern et al., 2007; Albertin et al., 2011; Palamar, 2012). However, it has also been argued that not all drug users experience stigma, or at least not in the same degree, and therefore are not all are equally stigmatized (Ahern et al., 2007). This is mainly because drugs affect individuals differently (Lau et al., 2015).

Regarding cannabis more specifically, it has been stated that its use continues to be viewed as an aberrant activity in many contexts and that cannabis users still experience stigma (Bottorff, et al. 2013; Erving, 2016; Mostaghim & Hathaway,2013; Westfall et al, 2009; Ware, 2008; Reinarman & Cohen, 2007; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1995). On the other hand, over the years, the public image of cannabis has gradually shifted away from the negative stereotypes and the cannabis user stigma of the 'Reefer Madness' era, designed to depreciate the value of cannabis, demonize its use, and marginalize the users. Instead, it has been argued that some societies have become more accepting of cannabis and that in the last decades cannabis has undergone a normalizing process, reflecting an increased prevalence of cannabis use and increased social acceptance and cultural accommodation (Hathaway et al., 2011; Parker, 2005). However, cannabis users are not a homogenous category. Not all cannabis users experience stigma and there are users who do

not conform to stereotypes (Miles, 2014). For example, prior research indicates that high use respondents may experience stigma differently than less committed users. Furthermore, practices of users, social settings of cannabis use, and user's rules or strategies for managing risks can vary significantly and play a crucial role in managing stigma (Hathaway, 2004). Open use and openness about one's use is guarded by some cannabis users to avoid the social disapproval that comes with the cannabis user identity (Hathaway et al., 2011).

Given these different views, and taking into consideration that cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug, an important criminological question arises: To what extent and how do cannabis users in different countries with different cannabis policies perceive, experience, and respond to stigmatization?

Rethinking and opposition to cannabis prohibition

In opposition to the international prohibitionist approach, there are voices in the political debate that express a growing concern that the UN drug control regime is outdated, ineffective, and destructive. For example, critical political voices were formally represented in the 2016 General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Drugs, raising questions about the necessity of cannabis prohibition and recommending alternative approaches such as decriminalization and regulation of cannabis (IDPC, 2016). At the institutional level, on 24 January in 2019, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that cannabis and associated substances be rescheduled in the international drug control framework (Ghebreyesus, 2019). At national level, a growing number of jurisdictions have introduced a more liberal cannabis policy, shifting away from the punitive approach that had been the norm in past decades. In addition to countries that defined cannabis use as illegal, over time, some countries have introduced a policy of decriminalization or legalization of cannabis use. In a growing number of jurisdictions, the possession of a certain quantity of cannabis for personal use has been decriminalized, is no longer a priority for the police, and/or is subject to administrative rather than criminal law sanctions[3]. In fact, cannabis legalization and regulation of cannabis supply has become an increasingly attractive policy option for countries to consider (TNI, 2016).

An early and significant legal and policy reform appeared in 1976 in the Netherlands with the revision of the Opium Act, that (de jure) decriminalized cannabis and the implementation of a

[3] In particular with regard to users such administrative sanctions may include small fines, warnings, diversion to treatment, etc. Although utilizing other areas of law, such as civil law or administrative law in case of drug offences is often seen as a move towards liberalization, it can also have a serious harmful impact on offenders, for example through the eviction from their homes as a legal sanction for domestic cannabis cultivation in the Netherlands (Bruijn, 2021).

toleration policy that (de facto) decriminalized the retail cannabis market via so-called coffeeshops where adults (18 years or older) can buy and smoke cannabis (Korf, 1995; 2011). In recent years a more radical shift in cannabis policy is taking place in the Americas, with the legalization and regulation of cannabis supply for recreational use in Colorado in 2014, followed by an increasing number of US states and the rapid development of a commercial cannabis market (EMCDDA, 2018b), and with Uruguay (in the years subsequent to the new drug law that passed in 2013) and Canada (in 2018) that legalized cannabis for recreational use and introduced a policy framework to regulate the production, supply, and sale of cannabis (Government of Canada, 2019).

The official political and institutional statements at UNGASS and from the WHO, as well as national or regional (state-level) shifts in cannabis legislation and cannabis policy, echo voices for reform that have become stronger in civic society, where activists and cannabis legalization advocates argue that on a societal level, cannabis prohibition not only failed to eliminate use, but on contrary, has led to the establishment of black markets, drug-related violence, a rise of profitable criminal organizations, and enormous public expenditure on law enforcement targeting cannabis-related crimes (Cussen & Block, 2000; NORML, 2003; Reuter, 2013; Single et al., 2000; Todd, 2018). For individuals, they argue that cannabis prohibition has led to further criminalization of users for non-violent crimes that has negative consequences and dramatic results for users' careers and lives (Beckett & Herbert, 2008; Single et., 2000). In Europe, one strategy initiated by cannabis reform advocates is to establish cannabis social clubs (CSCs) with users growing cannabis for non-profit distribution to club members. This bottom-up reform strategy was first established and proliferated throughout Spain (Alonso, 2011; Pardal, 2016), and implemented at a much smaller scale by several other European countries (Decorte, 2015).

The case of cannabis festivals

Another and much broader manifestation of civic society's protest against cannabis prohibition and call for cannabis reform are so-called cannabis festivals that in many cases are organized by the cannabis movement of the Global Marijuana March (GMM) that was established in 1999, creating an international platform to hold events that support cannabis legalization (Deutsche Hanfverband, 2019). In 2018, GMM took place in over five hundred cities across the globe (Toronto Global Marijuana March, 2019).

Cannabis festivals represent a special category of protest events. In general, protest events focus on a specific issue — in particular, on demands for changes to a specific policy decision — and form protest campaigns, with their own forms and dynamics (Porta & Andretta, 2002). Historically, festivals have long been associated not only with resistance and social protest, but they have also been linked to more organized movements for social change (Sharpe, 2008). Those

protest festivals provide a platform for marginalized or minority groups to speak out on issues, challenge the views of the established order, and posit their festival as an instrument of social change (Jepson et al., 2008; Sharpe 2008). In this sense, cannabis festivals may create and constitute collective opposition to cannabis prohibition and advocate cannabis policy reform.

Cannabis festivals organized in the context of GMM come in different shapes, some are rather small while others attract large crowds of participants; they can be a protest march through the city or a music festival with a speakers' corner. Strikingly, to date, cannabis festivals have never been empirically researched. To distinguish cannabis festivals from other types of commercial cannabis related events, such as those designed to promote cannabis cultivation materials or CBD-products, we defined them as *"social gatherings organized by civic society movements, where people congregate to protest against cannabis prohibition and advocate cannabis law reform"* (Skliamis & Korf, 2018: 105).

Cannabis festivals offer a novel and unique opportunity to (i) investigate how and why civic society, and cannabis users more specifically, in different countries that have different cannabis legislation and policies organize opposition to cannabis prohibition and advocate cannabis law reform, and (ii) to explore the role of such festivals in cannabis reform, de-stigmatization, normalization, and the social acceptance of users.

Normalization

From the mid-1990s onwards cannabis has been described as the most normalized illicit drug in various countries (Korf, 2006; Lee & Kirkpatrick, 2005; Osborne & Fogel, 2007; Parker, Aldridge, & Measham, 1995; Warner et al., 1999). Drug use normalization is based on the idea that recreational use of certain drugs, cannabis in particular, has become widely socially and culturally accepted. The fundamental feature of normalization is that stigmatized or deviant individuals or groups become included in many features of everyday life, as their identities or behavior become increasingly accommodated and perhaps eventually valued (Parker, 2005; Sandberg, 2012). In short, the normalization thesis refers to both the societal responses to cannabis use and cannabis users, and to developments in the number and type of cannabis users and patterns of use.

Critical scholars have argued that the normalization thesis was empirically incorrect, as the majority of young people had never used cannabis (Ramsay & Partridge, 1999), and others have pleaded for more nuanced, ''differentiated'' understandings of normalization (Shildrick, 2002). One approach is to differentiate between countries with different cannabis legislation (Sznitman, 2007; Sznitman et al., 2013). Another approach is to distinguish between user groups, for example experimental vs. regular users (Sznitman et al., 2015), or age groups (Green, 2016) and extend the analysis of normalization from adolescents and young adults to older adults (Erickson & Hathaway, 2010). Furthermore, scholars have called for greater consideration of social factors such

as the local culture and contexts of cannabis use (Asbridge et al., 2016; Hathaway et al., 2016; Measham & Shiner, 2009) and suggest studying normalization by exploring the specific settings (when, where, and with whom) in which cannabis is used. Adapting the normalization thesis to accommodate such social or 'micro-level' factors may provide greater scope to tease out the everyday experience of normalization without losing sight of the broad legal, social, and structural dimensions of such experience (Duff et al. 2012).

In sum, complementary to stigmatization, exploring normalization is a promising theoretical concept in better understanding differences and similarities in cannabis users and cannabis use across countries with different cannabis legislation and policies. Leading questions are: To what extent and how do cannabis users perceive and experience social acceptance? How do they practice (self-regulate) cannabis use in everyday life?

Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to better understand the role of national drug legislation and drug policies in the stigmatization and normalization of drug use. The focus is on cannabis, as this is the most widely used illicit drug, while at the same time it is the core substance in the opposition to the UN international prohibitionist approach towards controlled psychoactive drugs. To study the impact of national cannabis legislation and policy, capturing cross-national variation was central to research design. For feasibility reasons, research was restricted to European countries. In addition, we chose to concentrate on a consumer perspective, and primarily research the experiences, practices, perceptions, and opinions of cannabis users. The central question is: To what extent and how do national cannabis legislation and policies impact the stigmatization and normalization of cannabis users? This central question was translated into the following research questions:

a) Why and how are cannabis festivals organized in different European countries with different cannabis policies?
b) How do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies perceive the contribution of cannabis festivals to cannabis policy reform, and the destigmatization, normalization, and social acceptance of cannabis users?
c) To what extent and how do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies perceive, experience, and respond to stigma?
d) To what extent and how do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies practice (self-regulate) cannabis use in everyday life?
e) How do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies acquire and where do they buy cannabis?

f) How do cannabis users in different countries with different cannabis policies perceive drug policy, and more specifically cannabis policy, in their country? How do they evaluate the punitiveness of drug policy and law enforcement practice in their country?

Methods

For the purpose of this dissertation, the first empirical part of the research was conducted at cannabis festivals in the capital cities of four EU Member States: Amsterdam (the Netherlands), Berlin (Germany), Rome (Italy), and Athens (Greece). Evidently, a first prerequisite was the annual organization of a large-scale cannabis festival in the capital city. The selected countries fairly represent the variation in national cannabis policy within the EU, as well as having geographical spread across Europe. In each capital city, we used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In 2016 (Amsterdam and Berlin) and 2017 (Rome and Athens), local organizers of the cannabis festivals were interviewed, festival performed participant observations were made, and conducted a survey with a short questionnaire among festival participants, with some sociodemographic items and questions about motives for festival participation and normalization (n = 1,355 respondents in total).

The next empirical step was a survey with a longer questionnaire that was delivered to young adult last year cannabis users (18–40 years) residing in one of the four EU countries, as well as users from three other European countries (France, Portugal, and the UK) without an annual large-scale cannabis festival in the capital city (nor any other city).[4] This user survey was conducted February-October 2019. Respondents (n = 1,225 in total) were recruited and interviewed inside or in the vicinity of coffeeshops (i.e., close to the entrance) in the Netherlands. Coffeeshops are mostly pub-like settings, in which the sale of small quantities of cannabis is condoned under strict conditions, and visitors can also use cannabis (Korf, 2011). Coffeeshops not only attract domestic customers, they also attract users from abroad who buy and use cannabis during their stay in the Netherlands, but in many cases also use cannabis in their home country (Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014). Therefore, coffeeshops offer a unique opportunity to catch current drug users from many different countries (Korf et al., 2016), and interview them about perceptions, experiences, behavioral practices, and opinions regarding cannabis in their own country. The questionnaire included items about sociodemographic characteristics, drug policy perceptions, substance use and supply, stigmatization, normalization, and self-regulation of cannabis use, and finally some questions about cannabis festivals. Although this convenience sample, as well as the

[4] In Paris (France) the activist cannabis event is only a small-scale march with low participation. Lisbon (Portugal) does not have an annual activist cannabis festival. Although in London (UK) there is an annual cannabis rally (known as 'London 420 March'), but that lasts only 3 hours, and does not fulfil the characteristics of an organized cannabis festival.

subsamples per country, cannot be expected to generate normative data for the population of cannabis users, it was assumed that data would allow for comparative analysis and thereby inform about cross-national differences in characteristics, practices, perceptions, and opinions.

In both surveys, the questionnaires were available in all the applicable languages. Participation was voluntary and completely anonymous, and respondents provided informed consent. Data were statistically analyzed with SPSS v. 24.

Table 1 Overview of cannabis policy in the seven countries of study.

Country	Cannabis Schedule *	Possession for Personal Use	Legal Status-Recreational Use	Sentencing Practice on Cannabis Supply **1 kg / 10 kg
The Netherlands (NL)	Yes	Illegal, tolerated	Not an offence	Lowest / Lowest (#26 of 26) / (#25 of 25)
France (FR)	No	Illegal	Illegal	Low / Low (#25 of 26) / (#23 of 25)
Germany (GER)	No	Illegal	Not an offence	Medium / Medium (#12 of 26) / (#15 of 25)
Greece (GR)	Yes	Illegal	Illegal	Highest / 2nd Highest (#1 of 26) / (#2 of 25)
Italy (IT)	Yes	Illegal ***	Not an offence	Medium-High / Medium-High
Portugal (PT)	No	Administrative offence	Administrative offence	Medium-Low / Low (#17 of 26) / (#22 of 25)
United Kingdom (UK)	Yes	Illegal	Not an offence	Not available****

* Cannabis is included in a different schedule from heroin.

** Based on the rank number (#) of countries in order of sentences from low to high (EMCDDA, 2017b, p. 16).

*** Possession of small amount of cannabis for personal use considered a misdemeanor punishable by administrative sanctions (but not a fine).

**** The UK is not included in that EMCDDA report. However, the Sentencing Council (2012) of the UK has published guidelines on sentencing for the judiciary and criminal justice professionals. These guidelines refer -among others- to sentences concerning supply of 100g and 6 kg of cannabis. Despite this useful document, comparisons cannot be made due to (i) the non-proportionality of comparable sizes (1kg and 100 gr / and 10 kg with 6 kg respectively) and (ii) differentiation in measures as EMCCDA report refers to expected sentences while the UK Sentencing Council refers to guidelines.

Together, the seven countries selected for our study represent the maximum variation in national cannabis policy within Europe, on a continuum from relatively liberal (The Netherlands) to punitive (Greece). In terms of national cannabis policy ('law in the books' as well as 'law in action'), variation referred to: scheduling of cannabis (whether or not in a category separate from 'hard drugs'); legal status of cannabis use and possession for personal use; and sentencing practices for dealing cannabis.

Outline

Chapters 2 and 3 are about cannabis festival (research questions a and b). **Chapter 2** explores the aims, background, and structure of cannabis festivals in the capital cities of four European countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Greece). Furthermore, from the perspectives of festival visitors (n = 1355), it investigates the main reason for festival attendance, the openness about festival attendance, and opinions regarding the contribution of these festivals in the social acceptance of cannabis. In **Chapter 3,** the fieldwork is relocated from the cannabis festivals to the user survey that was conducted in or close to Dutch coffeeshops (n = 1,255). Thereby the research was expanded by including participants from three more countries (UK, France, Portugal), thus covering a wider variation in national cannabis policies within Europe. The user survey engaged both attendees and non-attendees of cannabis festivals. This chapter investigates to what extent and why cannabis users participate in cannabis festivals in their country, examines how open they are to admitting festival attendance, analyzes cross-national differences in motivations for and openness about festival attendance, and discusses the contribution of cannabis festivals to cannabis policy reform, and the de-stigmatization, normalization and social acceptance of cannabis users.

Chapters 4 to 7 are empirically based on the user survey. **Chapter 4** explores the role of national drug policies in cannabis-related stigmatization (research question c) as experienced by cannabis users. It is hypothesized that a strict cannabis policy in a country contributes to increased stigmatization, whereas a liberal cannabis policy contributes to de-stigmatization and normalization. This chapter assesses whether and to what extent cannabis users perceive, experience, and respond to stigmatization. Inspired by stigma theory and scholarly literature, three dimensions of stigma are investigated: discrimination, perceived devaluation, and alienation. In **Chapter 5**, the focus is on the extent to which and how cannabis users practice/ self-regulate cannabis use in everyday life (research question d). It investigates the role of social and physical settings in cannabis use (where, when, and with whom to use or not to use cannabis), as well as specific rules that users apply regarding cannabis consumption. **Chapter 6** (research question e) assesses how users perceive the availability of cannabis in their country, how they acquire cannabis in their country, and investigates which methods they apply when buying cannabis.

Chapters 2 to 6 look at cross-national differences in relation to national cannabis policies as typified in the overview outlined above, on a continuum from relatively liberal to relatively punitive. The comparison is mainly based on the legal status of and law enforcement approach towards cannabis (de jure, and partly de facto). **Chapter 7** (research question f) takes a different perspective, by examining what cannabis users perceive as the main drug policy priorities and how they evaluate the punitiveness of cannabis policy and law enforcement practice in their country.

Chapter 8 integrates the findings of the previous chapters, containing the discussion and the conclusion (including methodological and critical reflections), as well as recommendations for future research. **Chapter 9 / 10:** Summary / Samenvatting.

As several of the next chapters have been published (or have been accepted for publication) in peer reviewed journals or a book, the spelling may sometimes alternate between UK English and US English, and the reference style sometimes differs between chapters. Moreover, sometimes parts of published text (for example about national cannabis policies), methods, or a table appear in several chapters.

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2

Cannabis festivals and their attendees in four European cities with different national cannabis policies

Skliamis, K., & Korf, D. J. (2019). Cannabis festivals and their attendees in four European cities with different national cannabis policies. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, *10*(2), 138-154.

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to: describe and contextualize the aims and distinctive and common characteristics of cannabis festivals in countries with different cannabis policies; assess characteristics of participants; identify reasons to attend cannabis festivals; explore to which extent cannabis festivals contribute to the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis, as perceived by attendees.

Design/methodology/approach: The approach incorporates three methods of data collection in the research design; quantitative research among 1,355 participants, participant observation and interviews with the organizers.

Findings: Cannabis festivals in Amsterdam, Berlin, Rome and Athens have common features but also maintain and reproduce local, social and cultural characteristics. Cannabis festivals, as well as their attendees, represent heterogeneous categories. The style of the festival – music festival or march combined with music – affects the main reason for attendance by the participants. In cannabis festivals more similar to music festivals the majority of the respondents attended for entertainment while at the cannabis festivals in the form of a march combined with music the majority attended for protest. Furthermore, increasing age, residency and the high frequency of cannabis use are factors that led the participants to attend for protest.

Originality/value: The research on cannabis festivals is limited. This paper not only explores the aims of cannabis festivals in four capital cities of Europe and the characteristics of their attendees including motivations, but also offers interesting insights for understanding the ways in which political and social constructions like cannabis festivals shape attitudes, perception and behaviors around cannabis use.

Introduction

Cannabis festivals represent a category of special events in an era where cannabis legalization is gaining momentum. Particularly in Europe, cannabis festivals are organized in many countries by civic organizations who aim to intervene in the politics regarding cannabis legalization. The organizers aim to protest against the current drug laws and cannabis policies and at the same time to celebrate cannabis culture. In this paper, cannabis festivals and their participants are explored in four European capital cities: Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and Berlin (Germany), Rome (Italy) and Athens (Greece). The four European countries selected for this study represent maximum variation in national cannabis policy, on a continuum from relatively liberal to punitive, as well as geographical spread across Europe (North and South).

Cannabis festival is a term that is being used in a variety of contexts, ranging from political protests against cannabis prohibition to commercial fairs dominated by entrepreneurs in the cannabis industry. Recently cannabis related commercial events tend to be named as “cannabis expositions”. In the current study, cannabis festivals are defined as “social gatherings organized by civic society movements, where people congregate to oppose cannabis prohibition and advocate cannabis law reform” (Skliamis & Korf, 2018).

Cannabis festivals can be understood as a representation of a wider social phenomenon. Festivals are among the fastest growing types of events in the world and are considered important cultural practices (Quinn 2005; Rouba, 2012). Festivals range from small street fairs to extravagant events (Wynn and Yetis 2016) and affect societies in economic, political, and socio-cultural ways (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006). Festivals can be considered a “link between culture and politics”, and they provide a vehicle through which people can advocate or contest certain notions of identity and ideology (Smith, 1995). On the other hand, festivals are being used as commodities by entertainment industries (Jeong and Santos, 2004), and are vulnerable to overcommercialization (Rogers and Anastasiadou, 2011). Variation in aims, characteristics, and context may explain why festivals are often studied individually (Rouba, 2012).

Cannabis festivals in different countries share the aim of decriminalization or legalization and may have other common features. The objective of the current study was: to describe and contextualize the aims and distinctive and common characteristics of cannabis festivals in countries with different cannabis policies; assess characteristics of participants; identify reasons to attend cannabis festivals; explore the potential contribution of cannabis festivals to the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis, as perceived by attendees.

Variation in cannabis policies and sentencing practices

The countries selected for this study represent the maximum variation in national cannabis policy within Europe, on a continuum from relatively liberal to punitive, as well as being geographical

spread across Europe (North and South). In terms of national cannabis policy, variation referred to: scheduling of cannabis; legal status of use and possession of cannabis; difference in sentencing practices.

The Netherlands has probably the most liberal cannabis policy at the consumer level in the EU. Cannabis is listed in Schedule II (soft drugs). Sentences for acts involving substances listed in Schedule I (hard drugs) of the Opium Act are more severe than for those listed in Schedule II. Although cannabis is officially an illicit drug, the Dutch retail cannabis market has uniquely been decriminalized under the policy of "toleration" via so-called coffeeshops where adults (18 years or older) can buy and smoke cannabis (Korf et al., 2011; Wouters, 2013). On the other hand, cannabis supply to coffeeshops has not been decriminalized and every year thousands of cannabis growers are arrested (Korf, 2011). In Germany, cannabis was placed in Schedule I of the Betäubungsmittelgesetz (Narcotic Act) together with other "non-marketable narcotics" such as heroin for decades. However, cannabis was transferred to Schedule III (marketable narcotic drugs available on special prescription) and thereby placed in the same schedule as methadone for example. In Italy, since 2014, law 79/2014 listed cannabis in Schedule II (less dangerous drugs). In Greece, on June 29, 2017 cannabis was transferred to Schedule II (drugs eligible for prescription). However, at the time of our research, cannabis was still in Schedule I (all narcotics not eligible for prescription) and will be discussed as such unless otherwise specified.

Cannabis consumption is not subject to penalties in the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy, while Greek drug laws allows for incarceration. Possession of cannabis for personal use is subject to a range of sanctions in the national drug laws of EU countries, with little consistency between countries in the limits they set (EMCDDA, 2017a). Although, according to the national drug laws, possession of illicit drugs is an offence, possession of a defined small amount of cannabis for personal use (up to 5 grams in the Netherlands; 6 grams or more in Germany, e.g., 15 grams in the state of Berlin; 1,5 grams in Italy) is commonly not prosecuted or is subject to administrative sanctions. Alternatively, the Greek drug law (4139/2013) does not make a distinction between possession and use, and possession of cannabis for personal use is considered an offence. Individuals found to be using or possessing small quantities of cannabis for personal use (quantity not defined by the law) could face a prison sentence of up to five months.

Finally, regarding cannabis supply, a recent study reported strong variation in sentencing practices across EU countries. According to a survey of national experts (EMCDDA, 2017b), the expected median sentences for the supply of cannabis resin varied within the EU from 0 to 10 years for 1 kg, and from 0 to 12 years for 10 kg. Expected median sentences are lowest in the Netherlands and highest in Greece, while Germany takes an intermediate position. Meanwhile, in Italy expected sentences are higher than in Germany but lower than in Greece.

In the next sections, we first give an overview of the qualitative and quantitative methods applied in the present study. Subsequently, from participant observation and interviews with the local organizers, we describe the four cannabis festivals, followed by the results from the survey.

Methods

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used. To capture the distinctive and common characteristics of the four cannabis festivals, semi-structured in-depth interviews with the organizers were conducted. Interviews were guided by a set of questions aimed at understanding the philosophy, aims, policies, and practices of the festivals and also capturing the distinctive characteristics. The local organizers were contacted in the weeks before the festivals for a preliminary contact in order to collect more information about the festival, and to arrange an interview after the festival. This interview was conducted about one or two weeks after the festival, collecting more details about the background, aim, organizational structure, characteristics of the festival and their evaluation on the festival. One of the interviews was held at the organization's office (Cannabis Liberation Day) and the others via skype. Interviews lasted between one and three hours. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

At all the festivals, the first author performed participant observations from start to finish; in Amsterdam together with four field assistants (each one in different location of the festival, collectively covering the whole festival); in Berlin with one field assistant (from start to finish); in Athens with one field assistant (from start to finish in both days) and in Rome also with one field assistant (from start to finish). Observations were loosely structured around the following predefined themes: characteristics of the festival site; general atmosphere; police presence; and participants' demographic profile (age, gender, and ethnicity), behavior, and substance use. On the day after the festival, the observations were entered into the computer, and in subsequent days observations were completed with additional input from the field assistants and photos acquired at the festival or that could be found online.

A survey was also conducted among a convenience sample of participants at these four festivals, using a one-page custom-designed questionnaire. To approximate representativeness, with a small interview team (the same that performed the qualitative observations), taking into account gender and age distribution as much as possible, respondents were approached at various areas of the festivals (i.e., music stage, food area, market area, park, and sound-systems area). The purpose of the survey was explained, the respondents' anonymity was ensured, and they verbally consented to participation. The questionnaires were in Dutch and English in Amsterdam, in German and English in Berlin, in Italian and English in Rome, and in Greek and English in Athens. The questionnaire contains five items about demographic characteristics (gender, age, place of birth, and residence), three items about cannabis use, one question concerning reasons for

attending the festival (protest /activism, entertainment /leisure, to meet people/socialize; to use cannabis; curiosity; and other/do not know/don't want to say), and last but not least two questions about social and cultural acceptance (Do you think that this cannabis festival affects the cultural and social acceptance of cannabis? ; Would you let your colleagues/fellow students know that you attended the festival?)

Completing the questionnaire took 2-3 minutes. All data were processed with SPSS 24.0. Continuous variables were analyzed using ANOVA, and categorical and nominal variables were analyzed with chi^2 tests. Daily cannabis use was defined as "≥20 days" in the past month. Non-daily cannabis use includes "not last month" and "never a user". The variable "residency" was created by combining age, country of birth, age at arrival in the country of study (the Netherlands or Germany), and place of residence, leading to the formation of four categories: locals: persons born or living ≥5 years in the respective country (the Netherlands/Germany/Italy/Greece) and a resident of the respective city (Amsterdam/Berlin/Rome/Athens); non-locals: persons born or living ≥5 years in the respective country and resident of this country but not of the respective city; expats: persons not born or not living in the respective country for <5 years[5]; tourists: persons not born nor living in the respective country. A significance level of 0.05 was used for all the analyses and only significant results have been reported.

Results

Four European Cannabis Festivals

Cannabis festivals organized in Europe often take place in May, as part of the Global Marijuana March (GMM), an annual event held at different locations across the world that may include marches, meetings, rallies, festivals, and educational outreach. The festivals in this study took place during weekends in Summer 2016 (Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag in Amsterdam; Hanfparade in Berlin) and May 2017 (Million Marijuana March in Rome; Athens Cannabis Protestival in Athens). All of these festivals participate in the worldwide GMM celebrations and demonstrations, and had similarities in aim, basic characteristics, and organizational structure. According to local organizers, the festivals have an activist identity, aim to end cannabis prohibition, support cannabis policy reform and simultaneously celebrate cannabis culture. Furthermore, the local organizers believe that these festivals strive to participate in the political process and try to influence public opinion in favor of cannabis legalization.

[5] The "five years" criterion constitutes the Dutch national minimum to obtain a passport, as well as the German minimum for a permanent residence document.

Table 1 Characteristics of four cannabis festivals

	Amsterdam	Berlin	Rome	Athens
General characteristics				
Name	Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag (Cannabis Liberation Day)	Hanfparade (Hemp parade)	Million Marijuana March- Antimo-nopolismo Canna-binico	Athens Cannabis Protestival
Organized since	2009	1997	2000	2004
Date of festival in study	12 June 2016	13 August 2016	27 May 2017	5-6 May 2017
Duration	8 hours	9 hours	9 hours	10 hours / day
Population estimated by or-ganizers/observers	5.000/5.000	12.500/10.000	15.000/10.000	14.000/12.000 (both days)
Licensed as a type of festival	Cultural event Music festival	Political event Rally with music	Political event Rally with music	Cultural event Music festival
Organizational Characteristics				
Volunteers	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sponsors	Yes	Yes	Yes (only one)	Yes
Commercial Market	Yes	No	No	Yes
Food Market	Yes	No	No	Yes
Promotion Stands	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Info Stands	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
House Rules	Yes	No	No	No
Speakers/Speeches	Yes	Yes	No	No
Workshops /Seminars	Yes	No	No	Yes
Movies/Documentaries	Yes	No	No	No
Social Media	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fence	No	No	No	Yes
Use and sale of alcohol / drugs				
Sale of Alcohol/Cannabis	No	No	Both	Alcohol
Use of Cannabis	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
Use of Alcohol	Low	High	Low	Moderate
Use of Other Drugs	No	No	No	Yes
Cannabis + Alcohol	No	Yes	No	Yes
Extra observations				
Anti-Social behavior	No	No	No	No
Environmental issues	No	No	Yes (litter)	Yes (litter)
Multicultural/ethnicity groups	Yes	No	No	No
Sustainability profile	No	No	No	No
Families	Yes	No	No	No
Flags	No	Yes	No	No
Banners	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

General Characteristics

All four festivals took place in the open air and neither one had an entrance fee nor an age limit. The number of attendants was estimated from 5000 in Amsterdam to a maximum of 15.000 in Rome (Table 1). Considering the size of the cities and the public transportation system, all four festival locations were easily accessible. Even though the festivals in Amsterdam and Athens took place out of the inner city, access was easy by tram or metro, respectively, and a parking area was provided. Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag in Amsterdam was organized in Flevopark, one of the biggest green areas in Amsterdam, located next to a lively multi-ethnic neighborhood a few kilometers from the inner city. The festival began at 2.00 p.m. and ended at 10.00 pm. The Athens Cannabis Protestival was a two-day festival from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. each day, located at the Army Park (also known as Goudi Park) a few kilometers from the city center. Both festivals were licensed by the city administration as cultural events, with a music stage, bands, and DJs. The local organizer in Athens explained that the choice for a music festival was embedded in what he called "cultural activism": "*we use culture, in this case music, in order to promote our political and social messages to bigger audiences*". Like with other music festivals, the license in Amsterdam and Athens required the presence of a First Aid kiosk.

The latter was not the case in Berlin and in Rome, where the cannabis festivals were accorded as political events. They both started as a rally with music trucks from squares located next to the central train stations. The Hanfparade rally in Berlin started at 1.00 p.m. at Washington Plaza, continued through the main avenues of the city and finished at Alexanderplatz, the biggest central square in the city at 4.30 pm, where the festival continued until 10.00 p.m. The Million Marijuana March in Rome had a similar structure. Participants initially gathered at Piazza della Republica at 13.00 PM and from there started a rally following central avenues of Rome which ended at Piazza san Giovanni. There, the music trucks created a festival atmosphere, and people stayed until 22.00 p.m.

Regarding the demographic profile of attendants, some striking differences between the festivals were seen. While in Berlin, Rome, and Athens the vast majority identified as white, participants in Amsterdam represented a more multi-ethnic group. Also, many adolescents were observed at the festivals in Berlin and Rome, but not in Amsterdam and Athens.

Symbolism

The organizers of these festivals chose specific places to organize these festivals and all locations had a symbolic meaning. The places where festivals take place often have a symbolism and they are used because of that (Mueller and Schade, 2012). A place can be considered as "symbolic" whenever it means something to a group of individuals, in such a way that it contributes to giving an identity to the group (Monnet, 2011). In terms of the post-industrial city, festivals enhance

the sense of place and trends towards a gradual re-appropriation of public space by citizens (Chatzinakos, 2015). All festivals seem to involve and engender some form of social concentration and connectivity (Lee et al., 2012). For the choice of a rallying or dispersion point, or for pausing along the itinerary of a demonstration, organizers of political demonstrations opposing the established power often make use of symbolic places (Monnet, 2011).

Concerning the symbolism (or symbolic characteristics) included in these festivals, many differences were also observed and derived from the interviews with the organizers. Even if in Amsterdam there was not a symbolic meaning of the place, symbolic locations were integral to the other three festivals. In Berlin, the rally did a politically symbolic 20 min stop at the Ministry of Health at 3 p.m., declaring the support of the organization on legalization of medical cannabis, which was one of the main aims. Also, Alexanderplatz is strongly symbolic for the city of Berlin. In Rome, the gathering places and the route was purposefully chosen, including symbolic places for big demonstrations. The organizer of the Million Marijuana March in Rome stated that *"anyone who wants to make a big event or a big demonstration uses this square. It's like a symbol if you want to do an event in Rome".* In Athens, according to the local organizer*, "this location had a symbolic meaning because it is located next to the Ministry of Justice which is responsible for the National Drug Policies."* Furthermore, permission was obtained by the Ministry of Defense as well as that the "Army Park" officially belongs to that Ministry. The permission worked as an unofficial statement that the Greek Government would not create obstacles for the organization of such a festival.

Organizational Characteristics

Concerning their economic sufficiency and autonomy, all four cannabis festivals in our study mainly depended on sponsorship and revenue from rent in the market area. None of the festivals collected revenue from entrance fees. As the festival in Rome did not have a market area, revenues were limited. The cannabis festivals in Amsterdam, Berlin, and Rome were based on volunteerism, while in Athens only a few core members of the organization worked voluntarily, while all others were paid. The level of commercialization varied across the festivals (Table 1). In Amsterdam, the presence of several Dutch companies related to cannabis cultivation, sponsors, and a market area with 53 stands promoting or selling cannabis paraphernalia (electronic devices in particular), cannabis seeds, books, clothes, and 17 kiosks in the food and drinks area, gave the cannabis festival a more commercial character.

According to the local organizer in Amsterdam "the festival tried to combine a modern way of activism, which is not opposed to commercialization, and a healthy economic sustainable organization based on volunteers." Because, the Hanfparade in Berlin was identified as a political event, selling products or services was not allowed. However, there was a market area (20 kiosks)

where advertising and promotion were allowed, including some big cannabis industry companies (similar to Amsterdam).

Nonetheless, the Hanfparade had fewer commercial features than we observed in Amsterdam. In Berlin, there are other events—such as the Cannabis Business Conference and Cannabis Expo (Mary Jane Berlin)—that have an exclusive commercial character. As was stated by the local organizer "the Hanfparade is a grass-root political movement where there is no place for business. The combination of a grass-root activist movement with business in terms of commercialization could create confusion and extensive complaints from both the participants and the volunteers." In Rome, where the festival was licensed as a political rally similar to political marches, the festival was not allowed to have a food area, a market area, or promotion stands. In Athens, there were 3 music stages, 10 promotion stands, and 40 kiosks at the market and food area, which gave a kind of commercial character, similar to many other music festivals. The local organizer stated: "We kept the number of the kiosks limited to 40. We didn't want more as it would give the festival a very commercial character and this is not the aim of the festival."

Political Characteristics

A striking difference in the nature of the festivals was found in both the interviews and the observations regarding the different levels of politicization. Here, we define politicization as the act of giving a political tone or character to the cannabis festivals. In Berlin, several left-wing and liberal political parties (representing a coalition of political parties in Berlin that had agreed to strive for partial decriminalization of cannabis) participated in the Hanfparade. In Amsterdam, only the very small "Piratenpartij" officially took part in the festival. However, representatives from other political parties participated in panel discussions, and one of the keynote speakers at Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag was Dries van Agt (Christian Democrats), who was Minister of Justice when cannabis was decriminalized in 1976, and Prime Minister from 1977-1982. In Athens and in Rome, no political parties participated in the festivals. Furthermore, in Amsterdam, next to the music stage, there was a big screen where messages and mottos supporting legalization were displayed. Also, similar messages could be seen on printed posters around the festival. In Athens, similar messages on banners made by the organizers could be seen around the festival. However, in Athens no speeches or panels took place and the focus was on the music. In Rome, the festival particularly aimed to participate in the recent debate that took place in the Italian Parliament in summer 2016 about regulating production of cannabis, including cultivation by individuals or by Social Cannabis Clubs under a state monopoly. For that reason, the official name for this year was 'Million Marijuana March - Antimonopolismo Cannabinico'.

In Rome, even if the particular aim had political characteristics, and even if the rally was held as a political march and the permission was as such, no banners or messages relating to

legalization or with that specific request were present. Furthermore, no such speeches took place. It is worth noting that the only festival were the participants carried handmade banners and flags supporting the cannabis legalization was in Berlin. Furthermore, hundreds of flags were shared by the sponsors, while the organization of Hanfparade also had official banners supporting legalization. Furthermore, the Hanfparade was considered a political rally and the organizers had obtained permission by the Municipality. On the music stage, many speeches took place regarding cannabis legalization. As we can see through the observation, even if the events in Berlin and Rome were licensed and officially labeled as political events, they had striking differences at the level of politicization. In the same vein, despite the fact that the events in Amsterdam and Athens were in the form of a music festival, the level of politicization was much higher in Amsterdam.

Cannabis culture

The broad open use of cannabis in these festivals in combination with the similarities in music, the festival atmosphere, and the participants' behavior constitute basic feature of what we call "cannabis culture". The common symbolic characteristic of these festivals was the "celebration of cannabis culture". Cannabis culture refers to a social context of associated social behaviors and beliefs that mainly depends upon cannabis consumption and the support of the idea of legalization. From the beginning of the rise of cannabis culture in the 1960s until today, cannabis has evolved its own language, etiquette, art, literature, and music (Brownlee, 2002). All of these cultural aspects that cannabis encompasses gradually formed what is known today as "cannabis culture" and includes specific beliefs, symbols, and music styles i.e., reggae, dub, and hip hop. Even if there are global differences in the perception and also in the items of "cannabis culture"—differences in terminology (i.e., spliffs and joints), in use (use of paper filter known as a crutch, or rolling tip; use of cannabis with tobacco or not; use of paraphernalia as vaporizers or bongs), in ethics (pass the joint after a certain amount of puffs etc.)—music styles related to cannabis are globally and commonly recognized and they constitute a symbolic characteristic of "cannabis culture".

Use and sale of cannabis and alcohol

Regarding the use of cannabis and alcohol, considerable differences between the festivals were observed (Table 1). In Amsterdam, the sale of alcohol was not allowed, and alcohol use during the festival (mainly beer) was the exception rather than the rule. On the other hand, cannabis use was more common. As we observed, people used cannabis either in joints or pipes, while sponsors offered free use from vaporizers. In Berlin, selling alcohol at the festival was also not allowed, but alcohol use (mainly beer) combined with cannabis use (mainly in joints) was very

frequently observed, not only at Washington Plaza and Alexanderplatz, but also during the rally. In Rome, the music trucks were allowed to sell beer. However, beer consumption was limited. On the other hand, cannabis use was widespread, from the very beginning to the closure of the festival. The continuous presence of dozens of street dealers selling cannabis might have made this easier. In Athens, alcohol sale was allowed at the festival and there were two bars. The use of cannabis was extensive and many attendants combined drinking beer with smoking cannabis (joints). Use of illicit drugs other than cannabis was only observed around one of the three music stages (i.e. the Dance Stage) at the festival in Athens.

Police presence

Despite differences in legal context and cannabis policy, and even though police were much more present at the cannabis festivals in Berlin and Rome than in Amsterdam and Athens, police generally tolerated the extensive use of cannabis by participants. In Amsterdam and Athens, police basically did not pay attention to cannabis use. At the festival in Amsterdam, police appeared only once for a parking issue. Similarly, in Athens police appeared for a sound-pollution issue and gave a friendly warning. Contrarily, in Berlin and Rome dozens of police officers accompanied the rallies—a common feature of political demonstrations or parades—and after the rallies, they remained at the festival areas (Alexanderplatz and Piazza di san Giovanni respectively). In Berlin, on several occasions the police approached groups of adolescents and kindly but decisively asked them to put out the spliffs they were smoking. Overall, this took place in a friendly atmosphere. In Rome, the arrival of police at the starting point of the rally (Piazza della Republica) made participants first run away in panic, but returned once it was clear that police appeared on purpose in order to let the people know that they had to begin the rally and leave the square. Therefore, no intention to arrest cannabis users took place.

Survey Results

The respondents (n = 1355) included 387 attendants from Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag in Amsterdam, 341 from Hanfparade in Berlin, 251 from Million Marijuana March in Rome, and 376 from Athens Cannabis Protestival in Athens. Demographic characteristics are presented in Table 2. In the total sample, close to two-thirds were male (62.8 percent), with more males in Berlin and Amsterdam, and less in Athens and Rome. Age ranged from 14 to 70 years (mean age 24.9 years). On average, respondents in Amsterdam were the oldest (29.2 years). Respondents in Athens were 3 years younger than those in Amsterdam; respondents in Berlin were three 3 years younger than those in Athens; and respondents in Rome were 3 years younger than those in Berlin and almost 10 years younger than those in Amsterdam. Overall, 18- to 24-year-old respondents constituted the largest age category, followed by 25- to 34-year-olds. However, in

Rome the second largest age category were minors (<18 years of age; 29.1 percent). While minors were rare in Amsterdam and Athens, they represented 15.0 percent of respondents in Berlin.

Table 2 Demographic and cannabis use characteristics, main reason for festival attendance, and acceptance of cannabis

	Total (n=1,335)	Amsterdam (n=387)	Berlin (n=341)	Rome (n=251)	Athens (n=376)	Test	p
Gender							
Male	62.8%	60.2%	58.4%	68.5%	65.7%	χ2 8.863 (df3)	.031
Female	37.2%	39.8%	41.6%	31.5%	34.3%		
Age							
Range	14-70	17-70	14-57	14-34	16-54	F(3,1351)=92.038	.001
M (SD)	24.9 (8.39)	29.2(10.48)	22.8(6.18)	19.6(3.73)	26.1(7.37)		
Age Categories							
14-17	9.7%	0.5%	15.0%	29.1%	1.6%	χ2 317.649 (df9)	<.001
18-24	50.1%	41.6%	53.7%	61.4%	48.1%		
25-34	29.2%	34.6%	26.1%	9.6%	39.6%		
35+	10.9%	23.3%	5.3%	0.0%	10.6%		
Residency							
Locals	54.4%	27.6%	57.2%	64.5%	85.6%	χ2 374.023 (df9)	<.001
Non-Locals	24.8%	33.3%	27.0%	33.5%	13.3%		
Expats	12.6%	21.3%	5.3%	0.8%	0.3%		
Tourists	8.2%	17.8%	10.5%	1.2%	0.8%		
Cannabis Use							
Lifetime	97.0%	97.4%	97.4%	97.2%	96.3%	χ2 1.104 (df3)	.776
Last Month	90.0%	88.4%	91.2%	96.4%	86.7%	χ2 17.863 (df3)	<.001
Days Last Month (SD)	17.6 (11.84)	19.7 (12.06)	17.2 (11.35)	18.3 (11.30)	15.5 (12.05)	F (3, 1351) =8.346	<.001
Daily Use	54.2%	62.8%	51.3%	55.0%	47.3%	χ2 24.079 (df3)	<.001
Cannabis Use at Festival	84.9%	80.6%	82.4%	96.8%	80.6%	χ2 37.967 (d3)	<.001
Main Reason							
Protest/Activism	35.3%	19.4%	41.6%	45.0%	39.4%	χ2 239.876 (df15)	<.001
Entertainment/Leisure	35.4%	44.7%	30.8%	12.4%	45.5%		
To meet people/Socialize	8.1%	10.6%	8.5%	8.8%	4.8%		
To use cannabis	6.3%	3.6%	5.6%	19.9%	0.8%		
Curiosity	11.6%	18.3%	11.7%	11.2%	4.8%		
Other/ Don't know	3.2%	3.4%	1.8%	2.8%	4.8%		
Acceptance of Cannabis							
Yes, in positive way	83.1%	89.7%	87.4%	72.5%	79.5%	χ2 42.723 (df6)	<.001
Yes, in negative way	3.2%	1.3%	2.3%	6.8%	3.7%		
No	13.7%	9.0%	10.3%	20.7%	16.8%		
Colleagues/Fellow students							
Sure	55.2%	61.0%	51.9%	54.6%	52.7%	χ2 29.070 (df12)	.004
Probably yes	29.4%	25.1%	27.9%	29.5%	35.4%		
I don't know	8.2%	7.8%	11.7%	6.8%	6.4%		
Probably not	4.3%	5.2%	4.4%	4.8%	2.9%		
Certainly not	2.9%	1.0%	4.1%	4.4%	2.7%		

Conversely, respondents aged 35 years and older were rare in Berlin and in Rome, but represented close to a quarter of respondents in Amsterdam and one in ten in Athens.

Significant differences in the attendants' residency were found between the festivals. In the total sample, over half of respondents were locals, but they constituted by far the largest group in Athens (more than eight of ten), and the smallest category in Amsterdam (less than three out of ten). In Amsterdam, close to four out of ten respondents were expats or tourists, followed by one out of seven respondents in Berlin. Expats and tourists were rare in Athens and Rome.

Cannabis use

The vast majority of respondents had used cannabis at least once in their lifetime, and nine out of ten had used cannabis in the past month (Table 2). On average, respondents had used cannabis on 17.6 days in the past month, 4 days more in Amsterdam than in Athens, with Berlin and Rome taking an intermediate position. Over half of respondents were daily cannabis users, but more often in Amsterdam than in the other cities, and least often in Athens. The analysis also reveals that in the total sample, eight out of ten respondents used cannabis at the festival (84.9 percent), but by far most often in Rome (96,8 percent).

Cultural and social acceptance of cannabis

A large majority of respondents thought that the cannabis festival they attended, positively affects the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis, most often in Amsterdam and Berlin (Table 2). In each city, only a very small minority of the festival attendees thought that the cannabis festival affected acceptance in a negative way. Furthermore, the vast majority of respondents replied that they would not hide their attendance of the festival (Table 2). The negative answers were slightly higher in Berlin and Rome, the cities with rallies and younger respondents.

Reasons for festival attendance

The most prevalent reason for participating in cannabis festivals was "entertainment/leisure" or "protest/activism" (Table 2). However, there were significant differences between the four cities, with "protest/activism" most often reported in Berlin (41.6 percent) and Rome (45.0 percent), and "entertainment/leisure" in Amsterdam (38.3 percent) and Athens (45.5 percent). "Curiosity" ranked third, although this was a more common response in Amsterdam than in the other cities, and least common in Athens. Other reasons—i.e., "to meet people/socialize" or "to use cannabis"—were less often reported. However, in Rome "to use cannabis" ranked as the second main reason (19.9 percent).

To further elaborate differences in reasons for attending cannabis festivals, demographic and cannabis use characteristics were assessed. As shown in Table 3, respondents were more likely

to choose “protest/activism” with increasing age, while the opposite was found for “to use cannabis.” That is, the younger respondents were more likely choose “to use cannabis”’ as the main reason. Furthermore, with decreasing age, respondents were more likely to choose “to use cannabis” as the main reason for attendance. “Entertainment/leisure” as the main reason was more prevalent among young adults (age categories 18–24 and 25–34), than among minors and older respondents (35+ years). Regarding residency, locals and non-locals more often reported “protest/activism” than expats and tourists, and expats and tourists most often chose “entertainment.” Daily cannabis users were more likely to report “protest/activism” than non-daily users, while the latter were more likely to report “entertainment.”

Discussion

All of these festivals share common characteristics such as the activist identity, the common aim to support cannabis policy reform, and last but not least to celebrate cannabis culture. On the other hand, they had distinct differences not only in organizational structure and the level of politicization and commercialization but also in the profile of the participants.

The difference in the political characteristics of the festivals can first be explained by differences in the official status accorded by the respective municipalities (i.e., “a political march” in Berlin and Rome not allowing for commercial activities or “a festival” like many others in Amsterdam and in Athens). However, the Million Marijuana March in Rome was officially “a political march” but did not appear to have or embed any political characteristics. Therefore, it can be argued that an official status does not automatically define the character of a festival. Second, the differences in character between the festivals can be explained by differences in current cannabis policies and laws. Dutch drug law and cannabis policy allowed for the presence of Dutch cannabis-related companies (e.g., coffeeshops, cannabis seeds, and electronic devices for using cannabis). Although Dutch politicians plea for further steps away from criminalization, the political debate on cannabis policy reform appears less fundamental than in Germany. German cannabis policy is more restrictive. Therefore, it can be argued that, for cannabis reformers, there is much more to be gained in Germany than in the Netherlands. In the same vein, it would be expected that the festivals in Athens and Rome would be characterized by a higher level of politicization as the cannabis laws in these countries are much stricter than in Amsterdam and Berlin. Also, despite that the festival in Rome had the special name of 'Antimopolismo Cannabinico' which is directly related with the recent political discussions in the country, the festival did not have any political atmosphere or any political characteristics. Furthermore, in Athens Cannabis Protestival, the level of politicization was low and the political characteristics were limited, even if the official name was 'Protestival'.

Cannabis festivals can attract people for a variety of reasons. They may come to protest current cannabis policy, but they may also have other reasons. Reasons for attending cannabis festivals can be derived from reasons for attending festivals in general, where often mentioned reasons include “curiosity”, “escape from routine”, or “entertainment” (Scott, 1996).

Table 3 Main reasons for festival attendance, by gender, age, residency and daily cannabis use (%)

n=1355	Gender χ2 1.909 (df5) p=.862		Age χ2 69.469 (df15) p<.001				Residency χ2 53.149 (df15) p<.001				Daily Use χ2 45.783 (df5) p<.001	
Main Reason	M	F	≤17	18-24	25-34	35+	Locals	Non-locals	Expats	Tourists	Yes	No
Protest	35.4	35.1	32.1	32.3	35.0	52.7	38.0	36.1	24.3	23.4	42.4	26.9
Entertainment	34.9	36.3	29.0	38.7	36.3	23.6	35.4	31.3	49.5	36.0	30.0	41.9
Socialization	7.9	8.5	3.8	8.7	9.1	6.8	7.8	9.3	8.7	6.3	7.6	8.7
To use cannabis	6.7	5.8	16.8	7.1	3.5	1.4	6.9	6.8	1.0	6.3	7.5	5.0
Curiosity	11.5	11.7	16.8	10.2	11.8	12.8	8.1	14.6	15.5	22.5	9.8	13.7
Other/Don’t know	3.6	2.6	1.5	3.1	4.3	2.7	3.8	2.0	1.0	5.4	2.7	3.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Analysis of over two dozen empirical studies found similar as well as other “motivators” but revealed *socialization* as the most common dimension in motivators for attending music festivals (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013). Given that music usually is an important element of cannabis festivals, socialization could similarly be a major reason for attendance. Research has also shown that the specific type or theme of a festival may alter the motivations of attendees (Yolal, Çetinel & Uysal, 2009), e.g., wine in the case of a wine festival (Yuan et al., 2005) or food in a wine and food festival (Park et al., 2008). In the same vein, one of the expected reasons for attending a cannabis festival would be to use cannabis.

In our research, the most prevalent reasons for attendance were “protest/activism” and “entertainment/leisure,” but not in the same order in the four cities. Historically, festivals were produced for political purposes (Jarvis, 1994) and they have been used as a space for the public to express dissent to the established order (Abrahams, 1982; Waterman, 1998). Besides serving as a space for resistance, festivals have also been linked to more organized movements for social change (Sharpe, 2008). Therefore, in the context of the current study we could claim, in accordance with the opinions of the organizers, that the festivals create a space where people can gather in public and oppose current policies regarding cannabis. It could also be claimed that cannabis festivals provide a platform for those who oppose cannabis prohibition and seek an opportunity to publicly speak out on specific issues that concern them, opposing current drug laws in particular. People with common social demands gather to demand legal changes that require political and social changes. In this respect, cannabis festivals are operating as an instrument of social change.

In addition to social protest, one major reason that festivals historically used to take place is for celebration, specifically a celebration of a culture, i.e., cannabis culture in the current context. The most common and encompassing type of public community celebration remains the festival (Arcodia and Whitford, 2007). The key characteristic of a festival that distinguishes it from other events is that there is a clear community and celebratory focus to the occurrence (Arcodia and Robb, 2000). Therefore, cultural festivals emerged to be a common platform for individuals to come together and display a socio-cultural ethos (Rokam, 2005). Also, entertainment is considered as a main part of the celebration and it has become the core of festivalization in the cultural urban landscape (Dogan, 2011). Furthermore, cultural festivals ultimately promote the continuation of a culture (Lee et al., 2012), where in the present case cannabis festivals not only aim to celebrate the cannabis culture, but also to contribute to its continuation.

In Berlin and in Rome respondents more often opted "for protest", whereas in Amsterdam and Athens "for entertainment" was more common. Various aspects might explain a stronger preference for protest in Berlin and Rome. These two cannabis festivals in Berlin and Rome were framed as political events and they were officially labeled as such. This could also explain why the demand for the legalization of cannabis is expressed through a political march. In particular, several political parties were represented in Berlin. Furthermore, the Million Marijuana March in Rome had a specific demand directly related with political decisions concerning the regulation of cannabis cultivation for personal use.

The current investigation also suggests that younger festival participants are less interested in protest and political activism for cannabis reform. Across the four cities, older respondents (25+ years of age) were more likely to choose protest/activism as the main reason for attending the cannabis festival. One explanation could be that, in statistical terms, this age gradient suggests a "survival bias." That is, the cannabis users who keep attending festivals are the ones that are more ideologically dedicated to cannabis. Another explanation could be that the older cannabis users, whether because of more social responsibilities (e.g. job, family) or based on personal experience, are more afraid of the negative consequences of repressive cannabis policies such as legal sanctions and stigma (Hathaway et al., 2011) and are more inclined towards activism for legalization. Alternatively, it could be that today's youth and young adults tend to worry less about cannabis legalization. They may believe that cannabis is available anyway, whether in coffeeshops (Amsterdam) or from other sources (Berlin, Athens and Rome), so why not choose to attend a cannabis festival for entertainment rather than for activism?

Furthermore, frequent cannabis users were more likely to choose protest/activism as the main reason for attending the cannabis festival. It can be argued that, with more frequent use, cannabis users would benefit more from legalization. Assuming that cannabis is a more important aspect in the self-defined identity of daily users (Liebregts et al., 2015), it may be that they are more inclined to consider cannabis use as an inalienable civil right—a right that calls for protest

and activism. At the cannabis festivals in Berlin and in Rome, which were framed as political events and they were officially labeled as such, respondents more often opted for protest in comparison with Amsterdam and Athens where participants mainly chose to attend for entertainment.

All festivals were less male-dominated than one would expect from the gender distribution in the user population. In Europe last year, male cannabis users outnumbered females by a factor of two (EMCDDA, 2016). In our survey, among festival attendees in these four cities, close to four out of ten respondents were female. The majority of respondents were youth and young adults (aged 18–34 years), the age group reported to have the highest rate of current cannabis use in the EU (EMCDDA 2016). However, many more minors (<18 years) were interviewed in Rome (29.1 percent) and in Berlin (15.0 percent) than in Amsterdam (0.5 percent) and in Athens (1.6 percent). One explanation could be that, in Dutch cannabis policy, a clear distinction is made between minors and adults. Since the mid-1990s, the minimum age to be allowed in a coffeeshop is 18, and this legal restriction is actively enforced (Wouters, 2013). Although this policy does not keep Dutch youth from using cannabis—life time prevalence among students aged 15–16 years was 22 percent, above the EU average of 16 percent (The ESPAD Group, 2016)—the minimum age policy for coffeeshops might discourage youth from attending a cannabis festival.

More than one out of five of the minors in Rome chose “to use cannabis” as the main reason for attendance. Furthermore, because of the extended illegal sale of cannabis, it could be argued that younger participants and specifically minors attended the festivals as an easy opportunity to find street dealers in order to buy and use cannabis at the festival. The majority of festival participants were current cannabis users, often daily users, and most respondents used cannabis at the festival. However, when asked for their main reason for attending the festival only a few reported “to use cannabis.” This indicates that, at least in cities like Amsterdam, Berlin, and Athens, they do not need the public space of a festival in order to smoke a joint. However, in Rome, one out of five had attended in order “to use cannabis”, with the vast majority (96.8 percent) using cannabis at the festival compared with ~80% in the other festivals. Table 3 indicates that for the total sample, the younger respondents are more likely to opt for “to use cannabis” as an attendance reason.

Regarding the residency of the respondents more than four out of five in Athens were locals while more than three out of five were locals in Rome. In Berlin, more than half of the respondents were locals vs one in five in Amsterdam. In Amsterdam one out of three respondents were expats and tourists vs nearly one out of six in Berlin, while expats and tourists were rare in Athens and Rome. One of the reasons to pay attention to the residency and the presence of tourism is because festivals are emerging worldwide as a growing and vibrant sector of the tourism industry (Arcodia and Whitford, 2007) and they play a major role in tourism industry development (Arcodia & Robb, 2000). The use of the term 'festival tourism' is increasing among tourism researchers,

the vast majority of whom conceive of the festival primarily in terms of its economic potential (Quinn, 2005). In addition, governments, cities, and municipalities have also begun to look at these events as economic opportunities for tourism (Sharpe, 2008). However, this is not the case in our research. In establishing the connection between festivals and tourism for cannabis festival, the organizers' aim is particularly relevant. In selecting artists, themes, and direction the festival producers and directors can be seen as the 'gate keepers' (Derrett, 2003) as they have absolute control of the marketing processes and festival strategy (Jepso et al., 2008). Even if all of the cities are considered significant touristic destinations in Europe for different reasons, the organizers did not mainly target on attract tourists, and neither the government nor the municipalities promoted the festival locally or internationally. The organizers of Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag and Hanfparade tried to promote the festivals mainly in other provinces and also in other neighboring countries such as Belgium and Austria respectively. Furthermore, the fact that the websites were in both Dutch-English and German-English respectively could be considered a basic attempt to overcome the national borders. That did not happen in Athens Cannabis Protestival and Million Marijuana March where the promotion was limited at to national level.

Conclusion

Cannabis festivals represent a category of special events in an era where cannabis legalization is gaining momentum. Particularly in Europe, cannabis festivals are organized in many countries by civic organizations who aim to intervene in the politics regarding cannabis legalization. The organizers aim to protest against current drug laws and cannabis policies and at the same time celebrate cannabis culture. Cannabis festivals in Amsterdam, Berlin, Athens, and Rome have common features but also maintain and reproduce local, social, and cultural characteristics. Cannabis festivals, as well as their visitors, represent heterogeneous categories. They can be understood as an expression of cultural politics, a celebration of cannabis culture, or represent a protest movement.

In the total sample, age ranged from 14 to 70 years (mean age 24.9 years) and close to two-thirds were male. Overall, 18- to 24-year-old respondents constituted the largest age category. The vast majority of respondents had used cannabis at least once in their lifetime, and nine out of ten had used cannabis in the past month. Over half of respondents were daily cannabis users, but more often in Amsterdam than in the other cities, and least often in Athens. The analysis also reveals that in the total sample, eight out of ten respondents used cannabis at the festival. A large majority of respondents thought that the cannabis festival they attended positively affects the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis. Furthermore, the vast majority of respondents replied that they would not hide their attendance of the festival. The negative answers were slightly higher in Berlin and Rome, the cities with rallies and younger respondents.

The most prevalent reason for participating in cannabis festivals was “entertainment/leisure” or “protest/activism”, but there were significant differences between the four cities, with “protest/activism” most often reported in Berlin (41.6 percent) and Rome (45.0 percent), and “entertainment/leisure” in Amsterdam (38.3 percent) and Athens (45.5 percent). The style of the festival — music festival or march combined with music — affects the main reason for attendance by the participants. In cannabis festivals more similar to music festivals the majority of the respondents attended for entertainment while at the cannabis festivals in the form of a march combined with music the majority attended for protest. Furthermore, increasing age, residency and the high frequency of cannabis use are factors that led the participants to attend for protest.

This study has implications for research as well as policy making in various fields. Future studies may use this study and its results as a platform for guidance in further research. Cannabis festivals may serve as important research fields for getting in contact with large numbers of cannabis users. Future research on cannabis or cannabis users could be held at these festivals. Furthermore, this paper identifies motivations for attending cannabis festivals and could be added in the increasing literature of event studies concerning participant's motivations. Last but not least, city officials, policy makers, festivals organizers and promoters could use such information to expand these events into new areas i.e., tourism -in places that cannabis is legal i.e., California, Colorado etc. - in the same way that music festivals do. Cities that hold cannabis festivals could also conduct research in order to understand the potential benefits or the socioeconomic importance of holding such events; and to explore the potential impact of cannabis festivals on the national or regional drug policies.

The main limitations of this study must be acknowledged. Study limitations include restriction to only four capital cities from four European countries respectively. Although our study in Amsterdam, Berlin, Rome and Athens guaranteed some variation in national drug policies, future research could include more variation. Another limitation refers to the survey among festival attendees. The festival participant samples were not normative, and we used a short questionnaire. However, given that festival attendees do not make up a well-defined population, the method we applied enabled surveying a large number of outdoor festival participants in a limited time. One more limitation to be mentioned is that participants in the survey could not be given private space to complete the questionnaires, and may therefore have been influenced by others in close proximity. Furthermore, qualitative interviews could deepen insight into attendees’ motivations for participation in cannabis festivals, the role of age (or maturity) in this matter and also provide a further insight on the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis as it is perceived by the attendees.

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3

Cannabis users, cannabis festivals and societal acceptance of cannabis

Skliamis, K. (2021). Cannabis users, cannabis festivals, and social acceptance of cannabis. In C. Chatwin, G. R., Potter & B. Werse (Eds.), *Who? Variation and distinction in the European drugs landscape* (pp. 109-126). Pabst Publishers.

Abstract

This chapter investigates to what extent and why cannabis users participate in cannabis festivals; examines how open they are to admitting attendance at cannabis festivals; explores their perceptions regarding the potential contribution of cannabis festivals to the societal acceptance of cannabis; and analyses cross-national differences in motivations, openness and perceived societal acceptance in the context of normalisation. A survey was conducted in Dutch coffeeshops among current cannabis users (n=1255) from seven European countries with different cannabis policies. Curiosity, entertainment and protest were the most common reasons for festival attendance. Two thirds said they were open about their (future) festival attendance. Perceived contribution to the societal acceptance of cannabis was more ambiguous, yet more often positive than negative. Although significant cross-national differences were found, for example regarding protest as the main reason to attend cannabis festivals, they could not simply be linked to punitiveness of national cannabis policy. However, in countries with strict policies or ongoing discussions about legalisation where large cannabis festivals take place, such festivals were more often believed to contribute positively to the societal acceptance of cannabis, and thus can be understood as a de-stigmatisation channel. Regarding micro-level elements of normalisation, daily users were more open about sharing their experience of attendance and were also more positive about the contribution of cannabis festivals to the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis. Younger cannabis users (aged 18-29) were more likely to be open about their attendance than older ones (30-40 years), reflecting differences across generations in the cultural accommodation of cannabis use. Findings make an important contribution to both our understanding of the process of normalisation and to debates about the relevance of national cannabis policy in predicting behaviour in relation to cannabis.

Introduction

Growing concerns about the negative consequences of cannabis prohibition have catalysed protest and calls from civic society for cannabis policy reform. Among the most concrete manifestations of protest against cannabis prohibition are so-called cannabis festivals, i.e., social gatherings organised by civic society movements, where people congregate to protest against cannabis prohibition, advocate cannabis law reform, and celebrate cannabis culture. In 2016-2017, I studied the annual large-scale cannabis festivals in the capital cities of four European countries with different national cannabis policies (the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Greece) (Skliamis & Korf, 2019). The four festivals had common features, but also maintained and reproduced local, social and cultural characteristics. A survey among the festival visitors demonstrated that, overall, protest and entertainment were the two main reasons for attendance. Increasing age and daily cannabis use were factors that increased the likelihood of participants attending as protest. Furthermore, a large majority of respondents were open about their attendance to their social/professional circle, and also thought that the cannabis festival they attended positively affects the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis. These findings might be considered as indicative signs of the societal impact that cannabis festivals can have regarding cannabis normalisation and de-stigmatisation.

To build on this work and further investigate the potential contribution of cannabis festivals to the societal acceptance of cannabis and to cannabis normalisation, the research reported on in this chapter has extended its scope. It thus engages non-attendees of cannabis festivals as well as attendees, and it also includes participants from three additional countries (France, Portugal, and UK). Together, these seven countries represent a wider variation in national cannabis policies within Europe, ranging from relatively liberal (The Netherlands) to most punitive (Greece).

The aims of this chapter are to present findings from the research relating to the following areas: (i) to what extent cannabis users participate in cannabis festivals in their country (ii) what motivates users to attend cannabis festivals, both for those who have actually attended and for those who might choose to do so in the future; (iii) how open cannabis users are to admitting, or potentially admitting, their attendance at cannabis festivals; (iv) how they perceive the potential contribution of cannabis festivals to societal acceptance of cannabis; and (v) differences in motivations, openness and perceived contribution to societal acceptance across the different countries and different national drug policies included within the sample. The discussion draws out the relevance of the findings to debates on the normalisation process and the extent to which national cannabis policy is associated with cannabis related behaviour such as openness about attendance at cannabis festivals and perceived positive impact of festivals on societal acceptance of cannabis.

Background and context

Since the 1990s, it has been argued that cannabis has undergone a normalising process, reflecting the increased prevalence of cannabis use and its increased social acceptance and cultural accommodation (Parker, 2005; Hathaway, 2004). However, and despite cross-national variation in policies, the official status of cannabis throughout Europe still remains illegal. Scholars have argued that cannabis use continues to be viewed as an aberrant activity in many contexts, and cannabis users still experience associated stigma (Bottorff, et al. 2013; Mostaghim & Hathaway, 2013; Hathaway et al., 2011). In opposition to the international prohibitionist approach, there are voices in civic society advocating for cannabis policy reform, which are collectively represented in the public debate by cannabis movements. One common action of cannabis movements is the organisation of cannabis festivals.

Historically, festivals can take multiple forms and they can also play multiple roles (Gibson & Connell, 2011). Among these roles, festivals are also produced for political purposes (Jarvis, 1994). Historical investigations described early festivals as a space for the public to express dissent to the established order (Abrahams, 1982; Waterman, 1998). Furthermore, festivals have been associated with resistance and social protest (Sharpe, 2008). Protest festivals provide a platform for those in marginalised or minority groups to speak out on issues, challenge the views of the established order and posit their festival as an instrument of social change (Jepsonet al., 2008). In addition, they provide a way for groups to challenge dominant ideologies, and move specific issues to the centre, particularly when the event is organised around a culture or identity that is marginalised in dominant culture (Jackson, 1992; Kates & Belk, 2001; Sharpe, 2008).

Protest events and campaigns have played a pivotal role in the rise of several “new” social movements (Della Porta & Andretta, 2002). In Europe, protest has been considered as the main way of enacting social movements (Della Porta, 2008). A protest event focuses on a specific issue; in particular on demands for changes in a specific policy decision (Della Porta & Andretta, 2002). Besides serving as a space for protest and resistance, festivals have also been linked to more organised movements for social change (Sharpe, 2008). They provide an opportunity for members of the movement to build networks and celebrate solidarity (Eyerman, 2002).

Cannabis festivals in Europe can be considered as a relatively new type of protest festival. The vast majority of cannabis festivals are organised in the context of Global Marijuana March (GMM) that has been an international movement for the legalization of cannabis since 1999, creating an international platform to hold various events that protest against cannabis prohibition and support cannabis legalisation (Deutsche Hanfverband, 2019). In 2018, GMMs took place in 42 nations and over 500 cities across the globe (“2018 Global Marijuana March and 420 event map”, 2020; Toronto Global Marijuana March, 2018). GMM events come in different shapes and sizes as they may include marches, meetings, rallies, concerts, and festivals. In four of the countries in this

study (Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, and Greece), cannabis festivals are held annually in the capital city (5000-15000 participants). The other three countries (Portugal, France, UK) have smaller annual cannabis festival in their capital city and/or in other cities (with participants totalling in the hundreds). In order to distinguish these cannabis festivals from various types of commercial cannabis-related events, for example CBD-related expos, they were defined as social gatherings organised by civic society movements, where people congregate to protest against cannabis prohibition, advocate cannabis law reform, and celebrate cannabis culture (Skliamis & Korf, 2018; 2019). The same definition was also provided to the participants in the survey.

Together, the seven countries selected for our study represent a wide variation in national cannabis policy within Europe, on a continuum from relatively liberal (The Netherlands) to punitive (Greece). In this study, in terms of national cannabis policy ('law in the books' as well as 'law in action'), variation referred to: scheduling of cannabis (whether or not in a category separate from 'hard drugs'); legal status of cannabis use and possession for personal use; and sentencing practices for dealing cannabis (see Table 1).

Table 1 Overview of cannabis policy in the seven countries of study.

Country	Drug Law*	Cannabis Schedule **	Possession for Personal Use	Legal Status-Recreational Use	Sentencing Practice on Cannabis Supply *** 1 kg / 10 kg
The Netherlands	Opiumwet	Yes	Illegal, mostly tolerated	Not an offence	Lowest / Lowest (#26 of 26) / (#25 of 25)
France	Loi no 70-1320 (31/12/1970)	No	Illegal	Illegal	Low / Low (#25 of 26) / (#23 of 25)
Germany	Betäubungsmittel-gesetz (BtMG)	No	Illegal	Not an offence	Medium / Medium (#12 of 26) / (#15 of 25)
Greece	4139/2013, 2238/B/29-6-2017	Yes	Illegal	Illegal	Highest / 2nd Highest (#1 of 26) / (#2 of 25)
Italy	Consolidated Law/ Decree No 309 1990, 79/2014	Yes	Illegal ****	Not an offence	Medium-High / Medium-High (#7 of 26) / (#7 of 25)
Portugal	Decree Law 15/93, Law 30/2000	No	Administrative offence	Administrative offence	Medium-Low / Low (#17 of 26) / (#22 of 25)
United Kingdom	Misuse of Drugs Act	Yes	Illegal	Not an offence	Not available

*EMCDDA (2019a); Legifrance (2019); E-nomothesia (2019)

** Cannabis is included in a different schedule from heroin.

*** Based on the rank number (#) of countries in order of sentences from low to high (EMCDDA, 2017b, p. 16).

**** Possession of small amount of cannabis for personal use considered a misdemeanor punishable by administrative sanctions (but not a fine).

Methods

Data collection and sample

Between February and October 2019, the survey was conducted in the Netherlands among current cannabis users who normally resided in one of these seven countries. Participants were recruited and surveyed inside or in the vicinity (i.e. close to the entrance) of 46 different coffeeshops in the Netherlands, mostly in Amsterdam (41/46), spread across the city. Dutch coffeeshops are mostly cafe-like settings, in which the sale of small quantities of cannabis is condoned under strict conditions, and visitors can also use cannabis (Van Ooyen-Houben & Kleemans, 2016). Coffeeshops also attract foreign tourists, users from abroad who during their stay in the Netherlands buy and use cannabis, but in many cases also use cannabis in their home country (Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014). Therefore, coffeeshops (in particular in Amsterdam) offer a unique opportunity to find current drug users from many different countries (Korf et al., 2016).

The inclusion criteria were: (i) resident of the Netherlands OR resident of one of the other six countries, staying in the Netherlands as a tourist; (ii) aged 18-40 years; (iii) having used cannabis at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey (respondents not residing in the Netherlands: before they arrived in the Netherlands and not including their time in the Netherlands).

To assure gender diversity, we aimed for a minimum of 30% female respondents.[6] Although the age range of visitors in Dutch coffeeshops is wide (18 to 65+ years), a large proportion of coffeeshop visitors are younger than 30 (Nabben et al., 2016; Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014). To ascertain variation in age, we aimed for 40% of respondents in the age group 30-40. Taking into account representation of country of residence in previous coffeeshop surveys (Korf et al., 2016), country population size, and distance from the Netherlands, target numbers per country were set at around 200 respondents from France, Italy, the UK, and the Netherlands, and half as many for Greece and Portugal.

Participants were recruited face-to-face through fieldwork, with the assistance of a team of 13 students speaking two or more of the applicable languages, and being familiar with coffeeshops, and who were specially trained for this project in contacting potential respondents, explaining the survey by using an informed consent form, and assuring their written informed consent. Participants could choose a printed questionnaire, or the online version that could only be accessed by typing the link or scanning the QR code from the informed consent form. The questionnaire was available in all the applicable languages (Dutch, German, Greek, English, French, Italian and Portuguese).

[6] Among young people (15-34) using cannabis in the last year in the EU, the ratio of males to females is two to one; among cannabis users entering treatment, 16% are female and 84% male (EMCDDA, 2018).

Data were analysed with SPSS V.24. Chi-square tests were used to determine differences between countries, groups and categories. Statistical significance was set at $p \leq .05$. Daily or near daily (further on: daily) cannabis use was defined as having used the drug on twenty days or more in the last month (cf. EMCDDA, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Table 2 depicts the sociodemographic and cannabis use characteristics for the total sample and by country. In the total sample (n=1225), country representation as well as gender and age distribution were largely in accordance with targets. Number of participants per country ranged from 86 (Greece) and 93 (Portugal) to 190 or more for the other countries. Close to one third of participants were female, slightly over two-thirds were male, and a small group defined themselves as 'other' (0.7%). The share of female participants ranged from 27.8% (France) to 36.8% (Portugal). As targeted, age ranged from 18-40 years and four out of ten respondents were aged 30-40 years (mean age was 27.0 years, SD = 6.3). However, in the German sample only one quarter was aged 30-40 years. The total sample also showed diversity in employment status and type of household. Six out of ten participants were employed, over one third were students (with or without a job) and a small percentage were unemployed (4.3%).

Table 2 Sociodemographic and cannabis use characteristics, by country, in %

(n)	Total (1225)	NL (218)	FR (230)	UK (190)	IT (217)	PT (93)	GR (86)	GER (191)	χ^2 (df)	p
Gender										
Male	67.5	71.6	70.9	62.1	71.0	63.4	70.9	60.7	11.911(6)	.064
Female	31.8	28.0	27.8	36.8	29.0	36.6	27.9	38.7		
Other	0.7	0.5	1.3	1.1	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.5		
Age Groups									24.517(6)	.001
18-29	59.8	56.4	54.3	58.9	54.8	60.2	74.9	59.8		
30-40	40.2	43.6	45.7	41.1	45.2	39.8	25.1	40.2		
Household									55.526(18)	.001
Alone	23.8	26.6	31.3	14.2	21.2	21.5	34.9	19.9		
Parents	32.6	29.8	23.5	38.4	35.0	31.2	30.2	39.8		
Partner	25.2	22.9	31.7	29.5	28.6	22.6	16.3	17.3		
Housemates	18.4	20.6	13.5	17.9	15.2	24.7	18.6	23.0		
Employment									54.624(12)	.001
Employed	59.7	54.6	63.9	73.7	63.1	58.1	54.7	45.5		
Student	36.0	37.6	29.6	24.7	35.5	40.9	39.5	49.7		
Neither	4.3	7.8	6.5	1.6	1.4	1.1	5.8	4.7		
Cannabis Use										
Last month	71.4	87.6	70.0	67.4	68.2	73.1	68.6	69.1	31.922(6)	.001
Daily	32.7	36.7	41.3	40.0	35.0	21.5	22.1	17.8	43.442(6)	.001

Close to one quarter of respondents were living alone, slightly more were living with their partner (with or without children), one third lived with their parent(s) and the rest were living with

housemates. In cross-national comparison, UK respondents were most often employed and least often living alone; German respondents were most often students; and French respondents least often were living with their parent(s).

Close to three-quarters of the total sample had used cannabis in the last 30 days (in the case of non-Dutch participants: prior to their arrival in the Netherlands). Last month use was most prevalent in the Dutch sample. In the total sample, one out of three respondents were daily users, with lowest prevalence in the German group, and highest rates among respondents from France and the UK.

Cannabis festival attendance

To assess cannabis festival attendance, such events were first explained and defined to respondents. Then, respondents were asked whether to their knowledge, such cannabis festivals have been organised in recent years in their country. Over half of the total sample replied in the affirmative, ranging from one quarter of French respondents to more than eight out of ten Greek respondents. Next, respondents were asked whether they had ever been to a cannabis festival in their country. Only 189 respondents said 'yes' (15.4%), most others said 'no' (81.2%) and a small minority preferred not to answer (3.4%). Given the differential existence and scale of cannabis festivals across the countries in our study (see background and context), it is not much of a surprise that attendance varied strongly across countries, ranging from only a few French respondents and one in ten participants from the UK to almost half of the Greek sample (Figure 1). Note that close to one in ten German respondents preferred not to say whether they had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country. This might indicate that attendance is a more sensitive issue in Germany than in other countries.

Festival attendees vs. non-attendees

Cannabis festival attendees represented a diverse (sub)population of cannabis users, in terms of gender and age, as well as type of household they were living in, employment status and frequency of cannabis use. Nonetheless, in the total sample some groups were more likely to attend than others. As shown in Table 3, male respondents as well as last month and daily cannabis users were more likely to have attended a festival in their country. However, no differences between attendees and non-attendees were found for age, type of household or employment status. The finding that last month and daily cannabis users were more strongly represented among attendees comes in line with prior research at cannabis festivals, where a large majority had used cannabis in the last month, and over half were daily users (Skliamis & Korf, 2019).

Figure 1 Attendance to cannabis festival, by country, in %

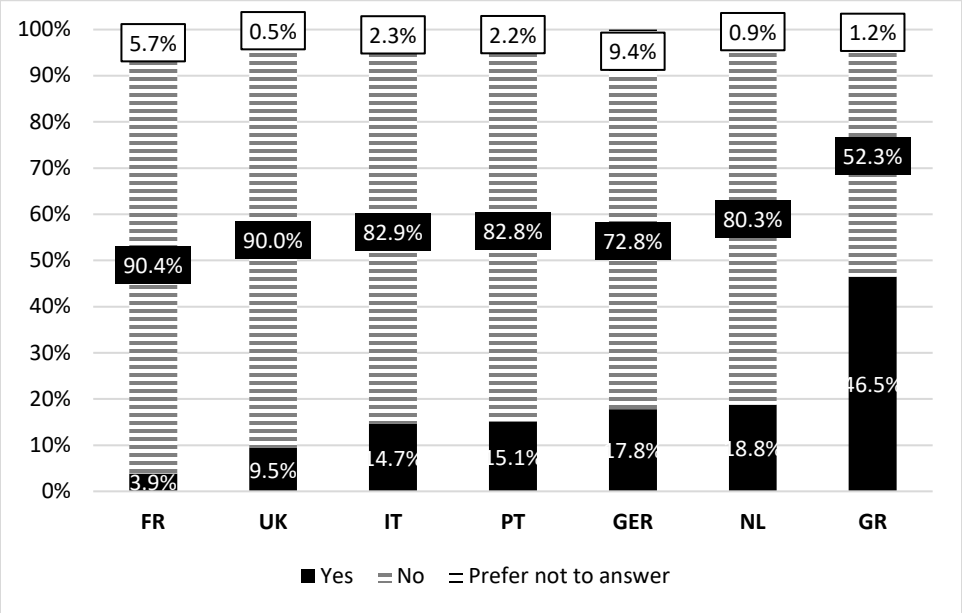

Table 3 Cannabis festival attendees' profile: attendees vs. non attendees (%)

(n=1183) *	Attendees (189)	Non-attendees (994)	χ^2 (df)	p
Gender			7.415 (2)	.025
Male (n=799)	71.4	66.8		
Female (n=378)	27.0	32.9		
Other (n=6)	1.6	0.3		
Age Group			0.127 (1)	.721
18-29 (n=706)	60.8	59.5		
30-40 (n=477)	39.2	40.5		
Household			2.669 (3)	.446
Alone (n=280)	20.6	24.2		
Parents (n=386)	33.9	32.4		
Partner (n=301)	23.8	25.8		
Housemates (n=216)	21.7	17.6	1.428 (2)	.492
Employment status				
Employed (n=707)	61.9	59.4		
Student (n=426)	32.8	36.6		
Neither (n=50)	5.3	4.0		
Last month cannabis use			10.478 (1)	.001
Yes (n=856)	82.0	70.5		
No (n=327)	18.0	29.5		
Daily cannabis use			8.435 (1)	.004
Yes (n=796)	41.8	31.0		
No (n=387)	58.2	69.0		

* Respondents who preferred not to answer whether they had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country excluded.

Main reason for festival attendance

To further elaborate upon the profile of cannabis festival attendees, respondents (both attendees and non-attendees) were asked: "What would be the main reason for you to attend a cannabis festival in your country?" To capture their main reason, they could choose only one out of six answers. Five options were the same ones as had been used in the prior festival survey conducted in the four capital cities in 2016-2017 (Skliamis & Korf, 2019). One option was *protest/activism*, as a common aim of cannabis festivals is to oppose cannabis prohibition and advocate decriminalisation or legalisation. Three other options were derived from more general reasons for attending festivals, namely: entertainment (Scott, 1996), because music can be an important element of cannabis festivals; to *meet people*, as socialisation is a common motivator for attending festivals (Abreu-Novais & Arcodia, 2013); and *curiosity* (Scott, 1996). Since the specific theme of a festival may play an important role in attendance (Yolal et al., 2009), for example food or wine at food or wine festivals (Park et al., 2008), the fifth option was: to *use cannabis*. In addition, respondents could also choose a sixth option: "I *would never attend* a cannabis festival."

Table 4 depicts the frequencies of the main reasons as reported by the total sample, and for those that had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country (attendees) and those who had never done so (non-attendees) separately. Protest was the most frequently chosen main reason among attendees, who reported this option two-and-half times more often than non-attendees (38.1% vs. 15.2%, see Table 4). A useful concept to explain this major difference could be: 'activity involvement', which refers to the importance of an activity to an individual (Hixson, 2014; Funk et al., 2007). People differ in terms of their involvement levels with activities (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). It can be argued that participation at and experience of cannabis festivals are conducive to perceptions and stances against prohibition. Furthermore, attendees would probably benefit more from cannabis legalisation than non-attendees, since attendees are also more often daily users (See Table 3). In contrast, although not surprisingly, non-attendees most often reported curiosity as their main reason to go to a cannabis festival in their country. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that they constituted a much larger group than non-attendees who said they would never attend such a festival (Table 4).

There were also significant differences between participants from the different countries included in the study regarding 'protest' as the main reason to attend a cannabis festival. Italians were most likely to attend for protest, followed at a distance by Germans and Greeks. The relatively high frequency of protest as the main reason is in accordance with prior research at cannabis festivals in Rome, Berlin and Athens (Skliamis & Korf, 2019). In recent years, there has been an ongoing public debate in Italy and Germany about cannabis legalisation – for example of medical cannabis, low THC cannabis, cultivation for personal use –, which may fuel protest amongst users and amplifies their call for cannabis law and policy reform. Not unexpectedly, protest was

also frequently reported for Greece, the country with the most stringent cannabis policy. However, even more Greek participants reported entertainment as the main reason for attendance, which can perhaps be explained by the fact that the large-scale annual cannabis festival in Athens is predominantly shaped as a two-day music festival (Skliamis & Korf, 2019). In the same logic of reasoning, it is also unsurprising that among cannabis users from the Netherlands and Portugal, the countries with the most liberal cannabis policies, protest was least likely to be given as the main reason for attendance. However, what does come as a surprise is that respondents from France and the UK were not much more often inclined to attend (in the future) a cannabis festival in their country for protest. One explanation could be that they either do not consider cannabis festivals as an arena for collective opposition or do not see protest as an effective way to change cannabis policy in their country, but further research is needed here to tease out the relationship between cannabis policy, protest and cannabis festival attendance.

Table 4 Main reason for (future) cannabis festival attendance, in %

TOTAL SAMPLE (n)	NL (218)	FR (230)	UK (190)	IT (217)	PT (93)	GR (86)	GER (191)	Total (1225)	χ^2 (sd)	P
Protest	9.2	16.1	13.2	32.3	10.8	24.4	24.6	18.8	149.276(30)	.001
Entertainment	17.9	13.9	28.4	19.8	29.0	38.4	26.7	22.8		
Meet people	15.1	12.6	14.2	6.9	7.5	4.7	7.9	10.6		
Use cannabis	18.3	11.3	13.7	4.1	8.6	3.5	3.7	9.7		
Curiosity	24.3	33.5	20.0	29.5	39.8	20.9	28.3	27.8		
Wouldn't attend	15.1	12.6	10.5	7.4	4.3	8.1	8.9	10.3		
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100		
ATTENDEES (n)	(41)	(9)	(18)	(32)	(14)	(40)	(35)	(189)	49.514(30)	.003
Protest	22.0	44.4	27.8	65.6	21.4	35.0	45.7	38.1		
Entertainment	31.7	22.2	22.2	15.6	50.0	45.0	20.0	29.6		
Meet people	17.1	22.2	16.7	6.3	14.3	5.0	11.4	11.6		
Use cannabis	14.6	11.1	27.8	3.1	0.0	2.5	2.9	7.9		
Curiosity	14.6	0.0	0.0	9.4	14.3	12.5	20.0	12.2		
Wouldn't attend	0.0	0.0	5.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5		
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100		
NON-ATTENDEES (n)	(175)	(208)	(171)	(180)	(77)	(45)	(138)	(994)	114.415(30)	.001
Protest	6.3	14.9	11.7	26.7	9.1	15.6	19.6	15.2		
Entertainment	14.9	13.9	29.2	21.1	26.0	33.3	29.0	21.9		
Meet people	14.9	12.0	14.0	6.7	6.5	4.4	7.2	10.5		
Use cannabis	19.4	11.5	12.3	4.4	10.4	4.4	2.9	10.2		
Curiosity	26.9	35.1	22.2	32.2	42.9	26.7	31.9	30.7		
Wouldn't attend	17.7	12.5	10.5	8.9	5.2	15.6	9.4	11.6		
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100		

Openness about festival attendance

In the early 2000s, scholars concluded that notwithstanding indications of a normalising process, open cannabis use and openness about one's use is often guarded to avoid the threat of sanctions from authorities, or loss of status, or offensive disapproval from non-users (Hammersley et

al., 2001; Hathaway, 2004). More recent studies indicate that cannabis users' references to stigma are related to informal sources of control, meaning that they hide their use most often from family and co-workers in an attempt to manage a personal/public divide in their workplace to mitigate potential stigma related to their professional image (Asbridge et al., 2016; Hathaway et al., 2011). It was therefore interesting to explore whether similar strategies also applied to hiding cannabis festival attendance.

Table 5 Openness and Acceptance by respondent characteristics (%)

OPENNESS (n = 1225)	Yes (818)	No (268)	Don't know (139)	χ^2 (sd)	p
Age					
18-29	72.4	16.8	10.8	30.530 (2)	<.001
30-40	58.4	29.4	12.2		
Employment status					
Employed	61.3	26.4	12.3	28.263 (4)	<.001
Student	75.5	15.2	9.3		
Neither	69.8	15.1	15.1		
Type of household					
Alone	67.4	21.6	11.0		
Parents	73.2	17.8	9.0	26.242 (6)	<.001
Partner	56.6	30.4	12.9		
Housemates	68.6	17.7	13.7		
Daily cannabis use					
Yes	78.8	14.8	6.5	38.843 (2)	<.001
No	61.0	25.3	13.7		
Festival attendance (n=1183)					
Attendees	84.7	10.1	5.3	30.833 (2)	<001
Non-attendees	64.0	23.8	12.2		
ATTENDANCE					
Daily cannabis use (n=1225)	(507)	(344)	(374)	18.474(2)	<.001
Yes	49.8	22.3	28.0		
No	37.3	30.9	31.8		
Festival attendance (n=1183)	(499)	(329)	(355)		
Attendees	65.1	17.5	17.5	48.429 (2)	<001
Non-attendees	37.8	29.8	32.4		

When asked if they would let their colleagues or fellow students know that they attended a cannabis festival (or would do so in the future), two thirds of the total sample replied in the affirmative, the others said that they would not tell, or that they did not know.[7] As shown in Table 5 younger respondents (aged 18-29) were more open than the older ones, students more than employed respondents, and daily cannabis users more than less frequent users. Furthermore, respondents who had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country were more likely to be

[7] More precisely, 24.6% answered 'definitely yes', 42.2% 'maybe yes', 13.4% 'maybe not', 8.5% 'definitely no', and 11.3% 'don't know'. For the statistical; analysis, we merged the first two answers into 'yes', the third and fourth answer into 'no'.

open about their (potential) attendance, than those who had never attended. No significant differences were found between the seven countries (Table 6), and also not between males and females.

Regarding age, the finding that younger cannabis users were more likely to be open about their attendance may reflect change in cultural accommodation of cannabis use. These participants grew up in an era where the meaning of drug use has changed from one which is associated with stigma, to one which is associated with normality (Sznitman, 2008) and broader cultural acceptance of cannabis (Forsyth & Copes, 2014). It can thus be argued that younger cannabis users are more likely to perceive attendance at cannabis festivals as a normalised experience to be shared with others rather than a stigmatised activity that they would attempt to hide. In addition, an explanation for the lower level of openness among the older users (30-40 years) could be that, because of more social responsibilities (e.g., job, family), they are more afraid of negative responses such as stigma (Hathaway et al.,2011). This could also explain why employed respondents and those who were living with a partner were less inclined to be open about cannabis festival attendance, and students and those who still lived with their parents were most open about attendance (Table 6).

Table 6 Openness and Acceptance, by country (%)

Total (n)	NL (218	FR (230)	UK (190)	IT (217)	PT (93)	GR (86)	GER (191)	Total (1225)	χ^2 (sd)	p
Openness									11.097(12)	.521
Yes	68.3	61.7	65.8	72.4	60.2	65.1	69.6	66.8		
No	20.6	25.2	23.7	19.8	23.7	20.9	19.4	21.9		
Don't know	11.0	13.0	10.5	7.8	16.1	14.0	11.0	11.3		
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100		
Acceptance									21.447(12)	.044
Yes	41.3	35.2	42.6	47.0	36.6	48.8	40.3	41.4		
No	26.1	30.4	24.7	31.3	24.7	31.4	27.2	28.1		
Don't know	32.6	34.3	32.6	21.7	38.7	19.8	32.5	30.5		
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100		

To explain why daily users and those who had attended cannabis festivals (attendees) were more open to sharing their experience of attendance with colleagues and fellow students, the concepts 'centrality' (i.e., the extent to which individuals view an activity to be a vital part of their life) and 'self-expression' (i.e., the degree to which individuals feel that the activity allows them to express themselves; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992), as well as identity salience (i.e. "the importance of an identity for defining one's self relative to other identities the individual holds"; Shamir, 1992, p. 302) might be helpful. Thus, attending cannabis festivals can be interpreted as an expression of a higher involvement (more centrality) and increased identity salience. For daily users, cannabis

appears to be a more important and central aspect in their self-defined identity (Liebregts, 2015), and therefore they are more open about their use and related activities.

Social and cultural acceptance

Finally, all respondents were asked if they thought that cannabis festivals affect the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis in their country. Four out of ten participants thought that the festivals would contribute in a positive way, close to three out of ten thought the festivals would have no impact, or only in a negative way, and another three out of ten said that they didn't know (mostly because they were not familiar with cannabis festivals per se).[8]

In the total sample, again no differences were found between males and females. Unlike openness, no differences were found for social and cultural acceptance with regard to age, employment status and type of household. However, as with openness, daily users and respondents who had attended a festival before, were more positive about the contribution of cannabis festivals to the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis in their country than non-daily users and non-attendees, respectively (Table 6).

Although there were statistically significant differences between the countries (see Table 5), they could not straightforwardly be linked to the punitiveness of national cannabis policies. One the one hand, Greek participants – living in the country with the most punitive policy – were most optimistic about the contribution of cannabis festivals to the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis in their country. On the other hand, respondents from France – where cannabis policy can also be characterized as relatively punitive – were least optimistic. Moreover, Portuguese participants replied rather similarly to those from France, even though Portuguese cannabis policy is known as quite liberal. One explanation could be that the low presence of only a few small-scale cannabis festivals in Portugal and France do not fuel confidence among cannabis users that they will contribute to the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis in their country.

Conclusion

People who go to cannabis festivals do so to protest against cannabis prohibition, but are also looking for entertainment, to meet new people or to use cannabis. Yet, across all the countries, for users who actually attend cannabis festivals, the most prevalent motivating reason for attendance was protest. This indicates a clear relationship between the experience of cannabis festivals and anti-prohibition views. However, on a continuum from relatively liberal to punitive, the importance of protest could not simply be linked to the strictness of national cannabis policy.

[8] 41.4% said 'yes, in a positive way'; 10.5% 'yes in a negative way'; and 17.6% 'no'. For the statistical analysis the latter two were merged into 'no' (28.1%).

The findings did not confirm our hypothesis that cannabis users from strict countries with a more strict cannabis policy would be less open about their attendance at cannabis festivals and less positive about the societal acceptance of cannabis, as compared to users from countries with a more liberal policy. No significant relationships were found between national cannabis policy and openness about attendance and positivity about the role of cannabis festivals in the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis. However, in countries with strict policies or ongoing discussions about legalisation where large cannabis festivals take place, these festivals were more often believed to contribute positively to the societal acceptance of cannabis. In this case, cannabis festivals can be seen as a de-stigmatisation channel and a normalisation medium.

An important limitation is that this chapter was based on a convenience sample, which cannot be expected to generate normative, statistically representative results for the population of current cannabis users. Yet, the sample was diverse in age, gender and other socio-demographic characteristics, as well as in cannabis use frequency, and thereby allowed for comparative cross-national analysis. However, daily cannabis users were over-represented in this study, as compared to only around one percent daily users in the adult population in the EU (EMCDDA, 2019). Since daily users were more open about their festival attendance and more positive about the role of festivals in the societal acceptance of cannabis. Consequently, this study might overestimate the significance of cannabis festivals for the normalisation of cannabis in the wider population.

This chapter contributes to a better understanding of the multi-level process of normalisation and to debates about the relevance of national drug policy in predicting behaviour in relation to illegal drugs. In the cannabis normalisation discourse, the macro-level of the legal context may be overvalued in understanding cannabis users' behaviour, opinions, and perceptions. Taken as a whole, the findings suggest that normalisation is not only about drug policy, and maybe even more about cultural and social accommodation, which is more a global than a national phenomenon (Chatwin, 2014, 2016; Reinarman et al., 2004). As the results indicate, normalisation in terms of cultural and social accommodation may also affect younger generations and older generations differently. Hence, in addition to the macro-level, exploration of the micro-level can improve the insight into the process of normalisation.

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4

Cannabis users and stigma: A comparison of users from European countries with different cannabis policies.

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Abstract

Cannabis is commonly characterized as the most normalized illicit drug. However, it remains a prohibited substance in most parts of the world, including Europe, and users can still be subject to stigmatization. The objective of this study is to assess to what extent and how cannabis users in different countries with different cannabis policies perceive, experience and respond to stigmatization. We conducted a survey in the Dutch coffeeshops among 1225 last year cannabis users from seven European countries, with national cannabis policies ranging from relatively liberal to punitive. Three dimensions of cannabis-related stigma were investigated (discrimination, perceived devaluation and alienation) and a sum score was used to reflect the general level of stigmatization. Perceived devaluation was the highest-scoring dimension of stigma and discrimination the lowest-scoring. The general level of stigmatization was lowest in the Netherlands and highest in Greece. This indicates that punitive cannabis policy is associated with stigma and liberal cannabis policy is associated with de-stigmatization. Besides country, daily cannabis use was also found to be a significant predictor of stigma, but gender, age, household type and employment status were not.

Keywords: Cannabis, cannabis policy, stigma, normalization

Introduction

For many decades, cannabis use has been associated with stigma (Becker, 1963; Erickson, 1976; Erickson and Goodstadt, 1979; Grinspoon and Bakalar, 1995; Kaplan, 1982). This changed from the mid-1990s onwards, with the introduction of the normalization thesis in social drug research. The normalization thesis suggests that recreational drug use has been de-stigmatized and is increasingly socially and culturally accepted by many members of the non-drug-using population and culturally embedded in wider society (Measham et al., 1994; Parker et al., 1998). A fundamental feature of normalization is that stigmatized or deviant individuals or groups become included in many aspects of everyday life, as their identities or behavior become increasingly accommodated (Parker, 2005; Sandberg, 2012). Among all illicit drugs, cannabis has been described as the most normalized in various countries (Korf, 2006; Lee and Kirkpatrick, 2005; Osborne and Fogel, 2007; Parker et al., 1995; Sznitman et al., 2013).

Notwithstanding the ongoing discourse over cannabis normalization, it should not be neglected that normalization has always coexisted with cannabis prohibition, as cannabis remains illegal in most jurisdictions. Since the development of the normalization thesis, considerable attention has been paid to studying the relationship between cannabis-related stigma and normalization (Asbridge et al., 2016; Duff and Erickson, 2014; Sandberg, 2012; Hathaway, 2004; Hathaway et al., 2011; Measham and Shiner, 2009; Shildrick, 2002; Williams, 2016). Scholars have stated that cannabis use continues to be viewed as an aberrant activity, and that cannabis users still experience stigma (Erving, 2016; Hathaway et al., 2011; Reilly et al., 1998). Prohibitionist policies and criminalization of cannabis places the users in a situation of deviance and exclusion (Suissa, 2001) with cannabis users experiencing fear of shame and status loss and internalizing guilt and discomfort because of perceived social disapproval of their use (Hathaway et al., 2011). However, not all drug users experience stigma or not in the same degree and therefore are not all are equally stigmatized (Ahern et al., 2007). Similarly, cannabis users do not constitute a homogenous category: not all the cannabis users experience stigma to the same degree and not all cannabis users are equally stigmatized (Duff et al., 2012; Liebregts, 2015; Miles, 2014).

Firstly, national cannabis policies are not equally prohibitive across the globe. Whereas an increasing number of countries have decriminalized cannabis, and Uruguay, Canada and a growing number of US states have even legalized it, many other countries persist in a prohibitionist policy (Decorte et al., 2020). Even within the EU with its open borders, cannabis legislation and enforcement practices show significant cross-national differences, ranging from relatively liberal to punitive (EMCDDA, 2017a). Therefore, differences in cannabis policies could play a role in the stigmatization of cannabis users.

Secondly, within and across countries sociodemographic characteristics may play a role in cannabis-related stigma. People's actions are shaped by subjective awareness of gender positioning

and by the way gender structures their social, cultural, and political milieu (Campbell and Herzberg, 2017). Literature suggests that drug use is gendered in terms of subjective experiences (Measham, 2002). The use of cannabis by women is still perceived as more rebellious and is often met with disapproval reflecting cultural assumptions about deviant behavior (Hathaway et al., 2016). Also, it has been noted that stigma and identity are differentiated by the socio-economic status of the user, such as having a job or being unemployed (Bancroft, 2009; Seddon, 2005). Furthermore, the normalization thesis links drug-using behaviours to ageing and to maturation, with transitions in type of household (from living with parents to having your own apartment) and from student to employed (Aldridge et al., 2011; Duff et al., 2012; Lau et al., 2015).

Thirdly, cannabis-related stigma is often associated with patterns of cannabis use and particularly with frequency of cannabis use. Prior research suggests that high-use respondents take more risks and may experience stigma differently than less committed users (Hathaway, 2004; Kolar et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that frequent (for example daily) users experience more stigma than less frequent users. Alternatively, because, for daily users, cannabis is more likely to be part of their self-identity (Blevins et al., 2018; Liebregts et al., 2015), it could be argued that they feel and express a certain pride or consciousness that makes them less sensitive towards internalizing stigma.

Aim

The aim of this study is to assess to what extent and how cannabis users in different countries with different cannabis policies perceive, experience and respond to stigmatization. We conducted a survey among current cannabis users from seven European countries, with national cannabis policies ranging from relatively liberal to more punitive (see below). We hypothesize that a strict cannabis policy contributes to stigma, whereas liberal cannabis policy contributes to de-stigmatization and normalization.

Alternatively, the literature suggests that normalization is a societal process that is taking place across the western world (Pennay and Measham, 2016), so there might be not so much difference in stigmatization between countries with different drug policies. This would mean that the prevalence of cannabis-related stigma is largely similar across countries, and that differences in stigmatization of cannabis users show similar patterns, which are associated with sociodemographic characteristics (gender, age, type of household, employment status) and/or frequency of cannabis use.

Theoretical Framework

Deviance, stigma, discrimination, alienation and devaluation

When assessing cannabis-related stigma cross-nationally, it is important to define stigmatization and specify how it is measured. Conceptually, stigma is strongly interlinked with deviance and labeling. In sociological theory, the concept of deviance can be traced back to Durkheim (1897), who argued that there can be no 'normal' in the absence of 'abnormal' or 'deviant'. In the field of criminology, Becker (1963) introduced labeling theory as an approach to understanding deviant and criminal behavior, and conceptualized cannabis use as a form of deviant behavior. Labeling theory builds from the symbolic interactionist tenet that people define and construct their identities from society's perceptions of them (Shulman, 2004). Once individuals have been labeled or defined as deviants, they often face new problems that stem from the reactions of self and others to negative stereotypes (stigma) that are attached to the deviant label (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967). Goffman (1963) used the term 'stigma' to explain labelling, and defined stigmatization as a process that occurs through the social construction of identity whereby those who do not conform to being 'normal' are subject to the judgment of others. It occurs when an individual has an undesirable characteristic that is contrary to a societal norm or a shared belief regarding how individuals should behave (Stafford and Scott, 1986). Stigma is therefore dependent on the relationship between the specific discrediting attribute and the specific social context (Major & O'Brien, 2004).

Stigma may be divided into public stigma and self-stigma (Corrigan, 2004). Public stigma includes the negative beliefs individuals in society have about individuals from stigmatized groups (Corrigan and Watson, 2002). Self-stigma reflects the social and psychological impact of stigmatization (Bos et al., 2013). It refers to internalization of negative stereotypes, discrimination and devaluation by others (Corrigan and Watson, 2002; Pattyn et al., 2014). Furthermore, self-stigma can be differentiated from perceived stigma, as 'a person can be aware of such stereotypes without concurring with them' (Pattyn et al., 2014: 232). Therefore, self-stigma refers to the self-adoption of a prevalent attitude or stereotype, whereas perceived stigma refers only to an individual's awareness of such attitudes (Guarneri et al., 2019; Livingston and Boyd, 2010; Pattyn et al., 2014).

In this study we choose a user perspective and focus on perceived stigma and self-stigma, rather than on public stigma. More specifically, we investigate three dimensions of stigma experienced by illicit drug users: discrimination, perceived devaluation, and alienation (Ahern et al., 2007). Drug use *discrimination* can be defined as experiences of rejection attributed to drug use (Ahern et al., 2007; Krieger, 1999, Link et al., 1997; Link & Phelan, 2001). *Perceived devaluation* is a facet of perceived stigma and occurs when drug users believe that most people in the general public endorse common negative stereotypes about them (Ahern et al., 2007; Link et al., 1997).

Alienation refers to the internalization of the views expressed in those stereotypes that drug users are marginal members of society (Ritsher et al., 2003).

Seven European countries with different cannabis policies

In the European Union, there is no harmonized European drug law, and there is little harmonization among the EU Member States in the laws penalizing unauthorized cannabis use (EMCDDA, 2017a). Significant differences remain between national drug policies in the EU. EU Member States largely retain their individual freedom and authority to decide on cannabis legislation and cannabis policy in their jurisdiction. The result is a variety of approaches within the EU, within a wide spectrum from liberal to punitive. In their national drug law, some countries treat all illicit drugs the same, others have two or more schedules and commonly define cannabis offences as a less serious legal matter. This variety of legislation and procedures within the EU reflect both the requirements as suggested by the UN Conventions and the 'room for maneuver' at Member State level (Ballotta et al., 2008).

Within the EU there are major differences not only in cannabis legislation ('law in the books'), but also in law enforcement practices ('law in action'). For example, regarding the supply of cannabis, a recent study reported great variation across EU countries in sentencing practices. According to a survey among national experts, expected median sentences for the supply of 1 kg of cannabis resin varied within the EU from 0 to 10 years, and from 0 to 12 years in the case of 10 kg. Expected median sentences were lowest in the Netherlands and highest in Greece, while a country such as Germany took an intermediate position (EMCDDA 2017b).

Table 1 Overview of cannabis policy in the seven countries of study

Country	Drug law[a]	Cannabis Schedule[b]	Possession for Personal Use	Legal Status-Recreational Use	Sentencing Practice on Cannabis Supply[c] 1 kg / 10 kg
The Netherlands (NL)	Opiumwet	Yes	Illegal, mostly tolerated	Not an offence	Lowest / Lowest (#26 of 26) / (#25 of 25)
France (FR)	Loi no 70-1320 (31/12/1970)	No	Illegal	Illegal	Low / Low (#25 of 26) / (#23 of 25)
Germany (GER)	Betäubungsmittel-gesetz (BtMG)	No	Illegal	Not an offence	Medium / Medium (#12 of 26) / (#15 of 25)
Greece (GR)	4139/2013, 2238/B/29-6-2017	Yes	Illegal	Illegal	Highest / 2nd Highest (#1 of 26) / (#2 of 25)
Italy (IT)	Consolidated Law/ Decree No 309 1990, 79/2014	Yes	Illegal[d]	Not an offence	Medium-High / Medium-High (#7 of 26) / (#7 of 25)
Portugal (PT)	Decree Law 15/93, Law 30/2000	No	Administrative offence	Administrative offence	Medium-Low / Low (#17 of 26) / (#22 of 25)
United Kingdom (UK)	Misuse of Drugs Act	Yes	Illegal	Not an offence	Not available

Sources: EMCDDA (2017a, 2017b).

[a] EMCDDA (2019a); Legifrance (2019); E-nomothesia (2019)

[b] Cannabis is included in a different schedule from heroin.

[c] Based on the rank number (#) of countries in order of sentences from low to high (EMCDDA, 2017b, p. 16).

[d] Possession of small amount of cannabis for personal use considered a misdemeanor punishable by administrative sanctions (but not a fine).

Together, the seven countries selected for our study represent a maximum variation in national cannabis policy within Europe. In terms of national cannabis policy ('law in the books' as well as 'law in action'), variation refers to: the scheduling of cannabis (whether or not in category separate from 'hard drugs'); the legal status of cannabis use and possession for personal use; sentencing practices for dealing cannabis (see Table 1).

On a continuum from liberal to punitive, we placed The Netherlands on the liberal side and Greece on the punitive side. In the Netherlands cannabis policy can be characterized as the most liberal at consumer level in the EU. Although cannabis is officially an illicit drug, there are hundreds of so-called coffeeshops, that is, café-like settings where adults (18 years or older) can buy and use cannabis under strict conditions (Van Ooyen-Houben and Kleemans, 2016). Portugal, which introduced a policy of decriminalization from 2000, is probably the country with the next most liberal cannabis policy. At the other end of the continuum, Greece has the most punitive cannabis policy in our study. Germany and Italy appear to take an intermediate position, and cannabis policy in France and the UK can be characterized as closer to the punitive end of the continuum.

Methods

Participants and procedures

In the period February-October 2019, we conducted a survey among a convenience sample of 1225 last year cannabis users aged 18-40 years and living in one of the seven countries in this study. Participants could be either Dutch, or tourists in the Netherlands, or people who had recently moved to the Netherlands (within 2 weeks prior to participation in the survey). Participants were recruited and interviewed inside or in the vicinity of coffeeshops (that is, close to the entrance) in the Netherlands, mostly in Amsterdam (41/46 coffeeshops). Coffeeshops attract not only domestic customers, but also tourists from abroad who buy and use cannabis during their stay in the Netherlands, and in many cases also use cannabis in their home country (Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014). Although, according to the official guidelines, access to coffeeshops should be restricted only to residents of the Netherlands, it is at the discretion of the local authorities to decide whether this criterion is applicable to the coffeeshops in their community, and most communities (including Amsterdam) do not implement that criterion (Korf, 2020). Therefore, coffeeshops offer a unique opportunity to catch current drug users from many different countries (Korf et al., 2016).

Although the age range of visitors in Dutch coffeeshops is wide (18 to 65+ years), a large proportion of coffeeshop visitors are under 30 (Nabben et al., 2016; Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014). To ascertain variation in age, we aimed at 40 percent of respondents in the age group 30-40 years. To ensure gender diversity, female coffeeshop visitors were purposely oversampled to

make up about one-third of the sample. Taking into account the representation of country of residence in previous coffeeshop surveys (Korf et al., 2016), country population size and distance to the Netherlands, target numbers per country were set at around 200 respondents from each of France, Italy, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, and half this number for Greece and Portugal. Participants signed a consent form which explained the purpose of the study and assured the respondents' anonymity. Consent forms and questionnaires were available in seven languages. The fieldwork and interviews were conducted by the first author, together with research assistants who were fluent in the respondents' language. Participants could choose between a print version or an online version.

Measures

To capture stigmatization, six items were derived from a study among illicit drug users by Ahern et al. (2007) and specified for cannabis: two items from the discrimination scale ('*Did some of your friends reject you because you use cannabis?*' and *'Did some of your family reject you because you use cannabis?'*), two items from the perceived devaluation scale (*'Most people believe that someone who uses cannabis is dangerous'* and *'Most people think that someone who uses cannabis is unreliable'*), and two items from the alienation scale (*'Do you sometimes avoid people because you think they might look down on you because you use cannabis?'* and *'Do you feel you have to prove yourself because you use cannabis?'*). The response options to these items were yes/agree [1] or no/disagree [0]. Exploratory factor analysis failed to recreate the three-factor structure found by Ahern and colleagues, probably because not all items from their study were included. We used only items that we assumed to be potentially applicable to cannabis users, and we left out items (for example, homelessness) that primarily relate to hard drugs and 'problem users'. However, the six items did show a satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .584). We therefore used the sum score of these items [0-6] to reflect the level of stigmatization experienced by our respondents.

The background characteristics used in the analyses were country, gender, age, household, employment and daily cannabis use. The categories for gender were female, male or other, but 'other' was omitted from the statistical analyses owing to small numbers. With respect to household, three categories were recognized: (1) living alone, (2) living with partner (with or without children) or with housemates, and (3) living with parents. Employment was also divided into three categories: (1) student (enrolled in school, college or university, with or without a side job), (2) employed (including self-employment), and (3) unemployed (neither student nor employed). In accordance with the European standard, daily or near daily (further on daily) cannabis use was defined as the use of cannabis on 20 days or more in the last 30 days (EMCDDA, 2019b). For

Dutch respondents, this was the last 30 days prior to the interview; for non-Dutch respondents this was the last 30 days in their home country, before arrival in the Netherlands).

Analyses

First, associations between country and other background characteristics, individual item scores for discrimination, perceived devaluation and alienation, and a stigmatisation sum score were assessed using $\chi 2$ tests for nominal and categorical measures and Anova for age and stigmatization sum score. Then, six separate logistic regressions models were calculated for individual items and a linear regression model for the stigmatization sum score. 'Country' was entered as an independent variable, and models were adjusted for age, gender, household type, employment status and daily cannabis use. For the regression analyses, country, gender, household and employment were recoded into dummy variables, and the first category (The Netherlands, female, living alone, and student, respectively) served as the reference group.

Findings

Table 2 depicts the sociodemographic and cannabis use characteristics of the total sample and by country. In accordance with the selection criteria, close to one-third of the total sample were female participants, two-thirds were male, and a small percentage defined themselves as 'other'. As targeted, the age of participants ranged from 18 to 40 years old (mean age: 27.0), with 40.2 percent aged 30-40 years (not shown in the table). No significant cross-national differences were found for gender. Concerning household type, close to one out of four respondents were living alone, one out of three were living with their parents and less than half of the total sample were living with a partner or housemates. Regarding employment status, six out of ten participants were employed, more than one third were students, and unemployed represented less than 5 percent of the total sample. Finally, close to one-third of respondents were daily cannabis users. In cross-national comparison, French respondents were least often living with their parents, and most often daily cannabis users; Greeks were most often living alone, and least often living a partner or housemates; Germans were most likely to live with their parents, be a student and to be a non-daily cannabis user; and UK participants were most often employed. Table 2 also shows three domains of stigma (discrimination, perceived devaluation, alienation), and the stigma sum score of the total sample and by country. In the total sample, the discrimination items scored lowest, with close to one in six participants stating that they had been rejected by friends, and about one in seven that they had been rejected by family.

Table 2 Sociodemographic and cannabis use characteristics, and stigma measures

Countries (n)	Total (1225)	NL (218)	FR (230)	GER (191)	GR (86)	IT (217)	PT (93)	UK (190)	Chisq/F (df)	P
Gender (%)									11.911(6)	.064
Male	67.5	71.6	70.9	60.7	70.9	71.0	63.4	62.1		
Female	31.8	28.0	27.8	38.7	27.9	29.0	36.6	36.8		
Other	0.7	0.5	1.3	0.5	1.2	0.0	0.0	1.1		
Mean age (years) (SD)	27.0 (6.3)	27.5 (7.0)	27.5 (6.0)	24.6 (5.8)	27.2 (4.7)	27.7 (6.1)	27.0 (6.2)	27.0 (6.5)	5.654 (6)	.001
Household (%)									35.043 (12)	.001
Alone	23.8	26.6	31.3	19.9	34.9	21.2	21.5	14.2		
Parents	32.6	29.8	23.5	39.8	30.2	35.0	31.2	38.4		
Partner/House-mates	43.7	43.6	45.2	40.3	34.9	43.8	47.3	47.4		
Employment (%)									54.624 (12)	.001
Student	36.0	37.6	29.6	49.7	39.5	35.5	40.9	24.7		
Employed	59.7	54.6	63.9	45.5	54.7	63.1	58.1	73.7		
Unemployed	4.3	7.8	6.5	4.7	5.8	1.4	1.1	1.6		
Cannabis Use (%)										
Daily users	32.7	36.7	41.3	17.8	22.1	35.0	21.5	40.0	43.442 (6)	.001
Discrimination (%)										
Friends Reject	18.0	12.8	17.4	23.6	39.5	14.3	17.2	14.2	38.852 (6)	.001
Family Reject	15.2	13.8	14.8	14.7	20.9	12.4	19.4	16.3	5.329 (6)	.502
Devaluation (%)										
Dangerous	25.4	15.1	33.5	29.3	23.3	29.5	18.3	23.2	26.714 (6)	.001
Unreliable	49.7	33.0	47.4	60.2	50.0	56.2	47.3	54.7	39.004 (6)	.001
Alienation (%)										
Avoid People	25.2	22.5	27.0	24.1	25.6	22.1	26.9	30.0	4.917 (6)	.554
Prove Yourself	22.6	16.1	22.2	23.6	32.6	23.5	24.7	23.2	10.710 (6)	.098
Stigma sum score (%)									Fisher's Ex-act	<.001
0	29.5	49.5	27.4	18.8	16.3	26.3	25.8	31.1		
1	25.6	18.3	25.2	30.9	27.9	26.7	32.3	23.7		
2	20.6	14.2	20.0	24.6	26.7	24.9	20.4	16.8		
3	13.0	9.2	17.0	13.1	16.3	11.1	9.7	14.7		
4	7.5	5.0	7.0	8.9	7.0	7.8	8.6	8.9		
5	2.6	3.2	2.6	1.6	1.2	2.3	2.2	4.2		
6	1.2	0.5	0.9	2.1	4.7	0.9	1.1	0.5		
Mean (SD)	1.56 (1.45)	1.13 (1.44)	1.62 (1.43)	1.75 (1.40)	1.92 (1.50)	1.58 (1.39)	1.54 (1.40)	1.62 (1.52)	4.804 (6)	<.001

Perceived devaluation scored higher, with one-quarter of the total sample reporting that most people believe that someone who uses cannabis is dangerous, and as much as half of all participants affirming that most people believe that cannabis users are unreliable. Alienation took an intermediate position, with one-quarter of participants stating that they avoid people because they think that they might look down on them because they use cannabis, and slightly fewer participants who say that they feel they need to prove themselves because of their own cannabis use. In cross-national comparison, no significant differences were found for one of the discrimination items ('family reject') and for the two alienation items ('avoid people', 'prove yourself').

Greek participants most often reported that they had been rejected by friends (discrimination). Dutch respondents scored lowest on both perceived devaluation items, while French participants most often thought that people think that cannabis users are dangerous, and Germans more often thought that people believe that someone who uses cannabis is unreliable.

When taken together in the sum score, 29. percent of the total sample stated that none of the six items applies to them, ranging from 18.8 percent of the Greeks to 49.5 percent of the Dutch, while only a few respondents (1.2 percent) answered in the affirmative for all six items. On the scale 0-6, the average sum score for the total sample was 1.56 (SD = 1.45). The level of stigmatization was lowest in the Netherlands, and highest in Greece (Table 2).

Table 3 depicts the results from six models of binary logistic regression. Models 1 and 2 cover the domain of discrimination, Models 3 and 4 the domain of perceived devaluation, and Models 5 and 6 the domain of alienation. In cross-national comparison, 'country' did not predict one of the discrimination items (Model 2, 'family reject') and one of the alienation items (Model 3, 'avoid people'). Germany was the only country with significant differences for all four other models. Model 1 indicates that Greeks were 4.8 times, and Germans 2.4 times more likely than Dutch participants to have been rejected by friends. In Model 3, participants from France, Germany and Italy were more likely (2.9, 2.3, and 2.2 times more than Dutch participants, respectively) to think that people believe that cannabis users are dangerous. Model 4 shows that participants from all other countries were more likely than the Dutch to think that people believe that cannabis users are unreliable. Germany was the strongest predictor (odds ratio: 3.1); for the other countries the odds ratio ranged from 1.9 (Portugal) to 2.6 (Italy). Finally, in Model 6 participants from all other countries besides France were more likely than the Dutch to want to prove themselves because of their cannabis use. Greece had the strongest predictive power (odds ratio: 2.8). The other countries' odds ratios ranged from 1.7 to 1.9.

Regarding sociodemographic variables, age and household type did not predict any of the three dimensions. In addition, none of the other sociodemographic variables predicted the outcome of Model 2 ('family reject') and Model 5 ('avoid'). Gender significantly predicted only perceived devaluation, with male participants being more likely than women to report perceived devaluation (Models 3 and 4). Finally, unemployed participants were more likely than students to think that people see them as dangerous (Model 3), and employed were more likely to feel they have to prove themselves because of their cannabis use (Model 6). Furthermore, frequency of use significantly contributed to the prediction of four dimensions of stigmatization (odds ratio: from 1.4 to 1.7). Compared with non-daily users, daily users were more likely to have been rejected by friends (Model 1); to think that people see cannabis users as unreliable (Model 4); to avoid people because they think they might look down on them because they use cannabis (Model 5); to want to prove themselves because of their cannabis use (Model 6).

Table 3 Regression models for Discrimination, Alienation, Perceived Devaluation, and Stigma

Domains	Discrimination						Perceived Devaluation						Alienation						Stigma				
Models (R2)	Model 1: Friends (.061)			Model 2: Family (.016)			Model 3: Dangerous (.054)			Model 4: Unreliable (.072)			Model 5: Avoid (.033)			Model 6: Prove (.041)			Model 7:Sum Score (.051)				
	(Exp)B	SE	p	(Exp)B	SE	p	(Exp)B	SE	p	(Exp)B	SE	p	(Exp)B	SE	p	(Exp)B	SE	p	Beta	t	p	95% Interval Lower	95% Interval Upper
Country																							
Netherlands (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	1.411	.270	.203	1.023	.276	.934	2.942	.238	.001	1.899	.200	.001	1.267	.224	.292	1.492	.248	.106	.489	3.612	<.001	.223	.755
Germany	2.390	.273	.001	1.165	.291	.599	2.308	.253	.001	3.120	.213	.001	1.232	.242	.389	1.792	.259	.024	.679	4.719	<.001	.397	.961
Greece	4.830	.304	<.001	1.761	.333	.090	1.771	.322	.076	2.102	.265	.005	1.312	.301	.366	2.797	.301	.001	.848	4.642	<.001	.489	1.206
Italy	1.117	.284	.696	.889	.287	.683	2.233	.243	.001	2.619	.202	.001	1.016	.234	.948	1.699	.248	.033	.445	3.242	.001	.176	.704
Portugal	1.500	.346	.241	1.594	.332	.160	1.212	.331	.562	1.873	.258	.015	1.440	.290	.208	1.912	.309	.036	.457	2.577	.010	.109	804
United Kingdom	1.093	.298	.766	1.192	.285	.538	1.579	.261	.080	2.478	.212	.001	1.510	.235	.079	1.719	.261	.038	.479	3.323	.001	.196	.762
Age																							
Age	1.033	.017	.051	1.011	.017	.532	1.011	.015	.466	1.003	.013	.789	1.003	.014	.814	1.007	.015	.640	.011	1.207	.228	-.007	.028
Gender																							
Female (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male	.843	.165	.301	.959	.176	.814	.737	.144	.034	.757	.129	.031	1.004	.147	.976	1.049	.153	.756	-.143	-1.610	.108	-.318	.031
Household																							
Alone (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parents	1.309	.227	.235	1.309	.241	.265	1.364	.202	.125	1.335	.178	.105	1.269	.199	.232	.828	.208	.365	.214	1.734	.083	-.028	.456
Partner/Housemates	.830	.197	.343	.962	.212	.855	.949	.178	.770	.989	.153	.945	.910	.176	.591	.933	.180	.701	-.068	-.645	.519	-.276	.139
Employment																							
Student (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed	1.036	.204	.862	1.146	.215	.526	.877	.175	.454	.740	.156	.054	1.025	.176	.888	.593	.183	.004	-.165	-1.524	.128	-.377	.047
Unemployed	1.174	.385	.677	1.494	.395	.310	.399	.435	.035	.709	.317	.277	1.861	.326	.057	.927	.356	.832	-.032	-.149	.881	-.459	.394
Daily Cannabis Use																							
No (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	1.414	.167	.038	1.290	.174	.143	1.303	.145	.068	1.479	.130	.003	1.664	.142	.001	1.670	.149	.001	.412	4.596	<.001	.236	.588

Table 3 also shows the results from the linear regression analysis to predict the stigmatization sum score (Model 7). Compared with the Netherlands, respondents from all other countries showed significantly higher levels of stigmatization: the model predicts that the stigma sum score is about half a point higher for Italians (0.45), Portuguese (0.46), British (0.48) and French (0.49), 0.68 points higher for Germans and 0.85 points higher for Greeks. None of the sociodemographic variables contribute to the prediction of the stigma sum score, but daily cannabis use does. Stigma sum score is 0.41 points higher for daily users than for non-daily users.

Discussion & Conclusion

The aim of this study was to assess to what extent and how cannabis users in different countries with different cannabis policies perceive, experience and respond to stigmatization. More specifically, we investigated three dimensions of stigma experienced by illicit drug users: discrimination, perceived devaluation, and alienation (Ahern et al., 2007).

The differential contribution of countries to the model predicting stigmatization largely confirmed our hypothesis that the level of cannabis-related stigma increases with the stringency of cannabis policy. As expected, taken together in the sum score, stigmatization was higher in all other countries compared with the country with the most liberal cannabis policy (the Netherlands). Also, level of stigmatization was relatively low in Portugal and relatively high in Greece, which was categorized as the most punitive country in our study. However, what comes as a surprise is that the degree of stigmatization reported by participants from Germany was similar to the level reported by those from Greece. Overall, the results indicate that most cannabis users in this study do not experience high degrees of discrimination, perceived devaluation or alienation. However, there were differences between the three domains of stigma. Discrimination was the domain that scored lowest, whereas perceived devaluation scored highest.

Regarding discrimination, most participants (more than four out of five) had not experienced rejection by family or/and friends because of their cannabis use. Interestingly, in the binary logistic regression analysis, neither country nor any of the sociodemographic variables or frequency of use predicted rejection by family. However, two countries predicted the other dimension of discrimination (Model 1). The fact that Greeks were 4.8 times more likely than the Dutch to experience rejection by friends, confirms a striking difference between the most liberal and the most restrictive country in our study. Remarkably, Germany is the only other country that predicts rejection by friends. Even though Germans did not report this dimension of discrimination as often as Greeks, they were 2.5 times more likely to experience it than Dutch.

Perceived devaluation was the most frequently reported dimension of stigma, with almost half of the respondents stating that people think that cannabis users are unreliable, and one in four reporting that most people believe that someone who uses cannabis is dangerous. This

confirms that cannabis users are still associated with negative stereotypes, albeit less strongly with danger, as used to be the case in the era of 'Reefer Madness', and more with personality traits such as laziness and a lack of motivation (Meier and White, 2018; Mortensen et al., 2019). Recent research has shown that in public opinion the terms 'irresponsible' and 'lazy' are among the five characteristics most highly associated with cannabis users (Mikos and Kam, 2019). As to differences between countries, binary logistic regression indicated that users from France, Germany and Italy were more likely than Dutch respondents to say that most people believe that cannabis users are dangerous. Also, participants from all countries were more likely than the Dutch to report that people think that cannabis users are unreliable. Germany was the strongest predictor (odds ratio: 3.1).

Regarding the prevalence of alienation, there were no cross-national differences, which suggests that participants' responses to stigmatization, whether passive (avoidance) or active (prove yourself), are not related to national cannabis policy. Moreover, when controlling for other sociodemographic variables and cannabis use frequency in binary logistic regression analysis, no cross-national differences were found in predicting avoidance. However, this was not the case for 'prove yourself': participants from Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and the UK were more likely than the Dutch to have experienced this type of alienation. As hypothesized, Greece was the strongest predictor (odds ratio: 2.8).

Interestingly, in the logistic regression models, sociodemographic variables generally did not contribute to the prediction of the three domains of cannabis-related stigma. Contrariwise, daily cannabis users in this study were more likely than less frequent users to have been rejected by friends (discrimination); to report that most people think that cannabis users are unreliable (perceived devaluation); and to experience alienation (avoidance and proving themselves because of their cannabis use).

With the three domains of stigmatization brought together on a stigma scale (sum score range 0–6), the average score of 1.56 (SD = 1.45) indicates that overall cannabis related stigmatization is low to moderate. The differences found between countries confirm our hypothesis that strict cannabis policy is associated with a higher degree of stigmatization whereas less punitive policy is associated with a lower degree of stigmatization of cannabis use and normalization, except for Germany. Indeed, cannabis users from the Netherlands, the country with the most liberal cannabis policy at the consumer level in the EU, experience the lowest level of stigma, followed by Portugal, which has a relatively liberal policy as well. Also, at the other end of the cannabis policy continuum, in Greece, the most punitive country in our study, the level of stigmatization was much higher. In short, in can be concluded that cannabis policy plays a significant role in the construction of perceptions of, experiences with and responses to stigmatization. However, what remains an intriguing question is why cannabis-related stigma in Germany was at a similar level to that in Greece. One explanation could be that German cannabis users are more aware of the

current illegal status of cannabis in their country, owing to the lively political debate at both the federal and the local level on decriminalization and legalization (Stover et al., 2019), and/or to the proximity to the Netherlands and its coffeeshop policy. Future research is warranted to unravel the atypical case of Germany.

In addition to national cannabis policy, frequency of cannabis use strongly explained differences in stigmatization, with daily users experiencing a much higher degree of stigma than non-daily users. This confirms previous studies concluding that cannabis related stigma is often associated with patterns of cannabis use and particularly with frequency of cannabis use (Hathaway, 2004; Kolar et al., 2018).

An important limitation of this study is that participants constituted a convenient and not a normative sample. Daily users in this study were over-represented. It is estimated that around 1 percent of adults in the EU are daily cannabis users (EMCDDA, 2019b), but this amounted to almost one-third in this study. Our results cannot be generalized to a broader population. As for the external validity, it cannot be assumed that it is a representative sample of cannabis users as a whole. Given that daily users reported higher levels of stigmatization than less frequent users, we expect that this study overestimates cannabis-related stigma and assume that it will be lower in normative statistical representative samples of current cannabis users. Another limitation is that we used only a selection from the items in the original scale (Ahern et al., 2007), and specified them for cannabis. We did so because the original scale was used for a much more heterogeneous population of drug users, including dependent problem users (of hard drugs). Nonetheless, additional items might improve the validity in the measurement of cannabis-related stigma. Moreover, the 'discrimination' items were exclusively focused on discrimination from friends and family. The results might have been different (that is, higher levels of reported discrimination) if these questions had been about experiences with neighbours, strangers, employers, etc. Another potential limitation of this study is that, because we focused on differences between countries, we did not ask about the provinces/regions/ states (*Länder*) of residence. As a consequence, we did not consider regional variation across Germany, where some states (*Länder*) have more restrictive attitudes and penal practices towards cannabis users than others. Also, we did not ask about the specific residence (rural or urban setting), which might affect perceptions of stigma. Furthermore, we investigated only perceived stigma and self-stigma (Corrigan and Watson, 2002) and thereby focused on the perspective of users. Findings on perceived stigma might be affected by the fact that the survey was conducted in the Netherlands, the most liberal country in this study. For participants outside the Netherlands, the experience of the liberal Dutch policy regarding cannabis use could have reinforced a potential contrast in comparison with their own country of residence and subsequently affected their responses to stigma questions. For that reason, during the process of recruiting the participants and administering the questionnaire, we emphasized verbally and also written on the questionnaire that the questions refer to the situation 'in

your country' and 'before you arrived in the Netherlands'. Further research in the general population is needed to assess to what extent and how stigmatization as reported by cannabis users corresponds to public stigma, that is, the beliefs that individuals in society hold about cannabis users (Corrigan and Watson, 2002).

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study has responded to the call for further examination of cannabis-related stigma and further exploration of the extent and nature of normalization across different countries with different cannabis policies. Our findings that not all cannabis users in this study experience a low degree of stigma confirms that cannabis users should not be understood as a homogeneous population.

The cross-national similarities and differences in cannabis-related stigma that resulted from our comparative analysis largely support a core element of the normalization thesis, namely that at societal level normalization encompasses liberal shifts in drug policy (Parker, 2005). However, even though stigmatization was lowest in countries with the most liberal cannabis policies in Europe, stigmatization was not fully absent. If stigmatization is understood as complementary to normalization, elaborating the extent to which and how cannabis users apply norms and follow self-regulation rules can contribute to a better understanding of stigmatization and de-stigmatization.

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5

Where, when, and with whom: Cannabis use, settings, and self-regulation rules

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Abstract

This article examines to what extent and how cannabis users in different countries, with different cannabis legislation and policies practice normalization and self-regulation of cannabis use in everyday life. Data were collected in a survey among a convenience sample of 1,225 last-year cannabis users aged 18-40 from seven European countries, with cannabis policies ranging from relatively liberal to more punitive. Participants were recruited in or in the vicinity of Dutch coffeeshops. We assessed whether cannabis users experience and interpret formal control and informal social norms differently across countries with different cannabis policies. The findings suggest that many cannabis users set boundaries to control their use. Irrespective of national cannabis policy, using cannabis in private settings and setting risk avoidance rules were equally predominant in all countries. This illustrates that many cannabis users are concerned with responsible use, demonstrating the importance that they attach to discretion. Overall, self-regulation was highest in the most liberal country (The Netherlands). This indicates that liberalization does not automatically lead to chaotic or otherwise problematic use as critics of the policy have predicted, as the diminishing of formal control (law enforcement) is accompanied by increased importance of informal norms and stronger self-regulation. In understanding risk-management, societal tolerance of cannabis use seems more important than cross-national differences in cannabis policy. The setting of cannabis use and self-regulation rules were strongly associated with frequency of use. Daily users were less selective in choosing settings of use and less strict in self-regulation rules. Further differences in age, gender, and household status underline the relevance of a differentiated, more nuanced understanding of cannabis normalization.

Key words: cannabis, cannabis policy, self-regulation, normalization, Europe

Introduction

Toward the end of the twentieth century, British sociologists and criminologists launched the normalization thesis, a groundbreaking theoretical framework to analyze and explain developments and patterns in contemporary drug use (Measham et al., 1994). From evidence they found in longitudinal research among adolescents that the use of some drugs was losing its subcultural connotations, they concluded that changing attitudes towards so-called 'soft' drugs had become more and more prevalent in wider society, and anticipated that the number of users would continue to rise (Parker et al., 1995; 1998). Soon, scholars claimed that cannabis had undergone a normalizing process in other countries as well, and cannabis was considered the most normalized illicit drug (Hathaway, 2004; Korf, 2006; Lee & Kirkpatrick, 2005; Osborne & Fogel, 2007; Warner et al., 1999). It has been argued that for many users, cannabis use was characterized by a broader social and cultural acceptance, and had become an ordinary, taken-for-granted part of life (Hathaway et al., 2011; Reinarman & Cohen, 2007; Sandberg, 2012; Liebregts, 2015).

Worldwide, between 1998 and 2017 the number of last-year cannabis users increased by about 30% (UNODC, 2019). In Europe, in the past decade the number of people aged 15-64 who had used cannabis at least once in their life grew from 74 million to 91 million (or by 22.5% to 27.4%), and last year prevalence among young adults (aged 15-34) from 12.5% to 14.4% (EMCDDA, 2009; 2019). Although these ascending trends are in accordance with the normalization thesis, the figures also demonstrate that the population that had never used cannabis outnumbers lifetime and recent users – an observation that early critics already highlighted to argue that the normalization thesis was empirically incorrect (Ramsay & Partridge, 1999). However, normalization is not the same as statistical 'normality' or 'normalcy', i.e. the normalization thesis does not presume that cannabis users constitute more than half of the population (Parker, 2005).

Cannabis normalization can be understood as a multifaceted process. As noted, the normalization thesis concerns both cannabis users and society as a whole. The societal level refers to society's perceptions of attitudes towards, and responses to cannabis users and encompasses the growing social and cultural acceptance of cannabis users (Parker, 2005; Hathaway et al., 2011; Sandberg, 2012). The user dimension refers to characteristics of what has been called 'cannabis culture' (Sandberg, 2012; Sandberg & Pedersen, 2011; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). It describes how users regulate their cannabis use in their daily lives and concerns informal mechanisms that define cannabis use norms, rules of conduct, and practices (Decorte et al., 2003; Parker, 2005; Reinarman & Cohen, 2007), or what Zinberg (1984) called 'social sanctions' (whether, when, and how cannabis should be used) and 'social rituals' (patterns of behavior).

Notably, the normalization thesis evolved from research with focus on recreational drug use, described as 'the occasional use of certain substances in certain settings and in a controlled way'

(Parker 2005, p. 206), as distinguished from excessive and dependent use. Thereby, recreational use entails moderated use that is integrated into users' leisure time (Parker, Williams, & Aldridge, 2002). At user level, normalization may be understood as a process of ‘‘reasoned choice’’ in assessing a range of factors to decide whether, when and how to use or not use a certain drug (Williams & Parker, 2001). Hence, cannabis use is conceptualized as a calculated risk based on cost-benefit assessments (Duff & Erickson, 2014; Parker et al., 1998). Accordingly, such controlled drug use functions as risk-management (Hathaway, 2004), as a protection mechanism that helps to prevent disruption of everyday life in which users have invested (Decorte, 2001). Cost factors include health risks, arrest, and impairment of school or work performance (Parker, 2005; Parker et al., 1998).

This study responds to the call for a more nuanced, differentiated understanding of normalization (Shildrick, 2002; Sznitman, 2013) and for greater consideration of social factors including local culture and contexts of cannabis use (Asbridge et al., 2016; Hathaway et al., 2016; Measham & Shiner, 2009) by examining normalization at user level, and, more specifically, the issue of how cannabis users control and self-regulate their use.

Despite cannabis increasingly being used in older age groups (Han & Palamar, 2018; Mauro et al, 2018; Moxon & Waters, 2016; Rossi, 2019), research into the drug's normalization has largely been confined to youth (Erickson & Hathaway, 2010; Green, 2016; Sznitman, 2007). Therefore, we are particularly interested in continuing the work by Canadian scholars who extended the analysis to mainstream, socially integrated adult users (mean age 30.5), and concluded that controlled use was primarily characterized by the avoidance of social disapproval through discretion in the choice of setting (time, place and company) and moderation in frequency of use (Duff et al., 2012; Duff & Erickson, 2014). Note that the research was conducted before cannabis legalization in Canada (in October 2018), yet its policy was already quite liberal compared to most other countries (Fischer et al., 2020).

To consider local culture and context, we chose to focus our research on cannabis users from different countries, representing different national cannabis policies. In a cross-national investigation of cannabis use normalization Sznitman et al. (2015) highlighted the contextual role of the ‘normality’ of use: in survey among high school students, experimental use was more common in countries with relative high prevalence rates, and regular use more common in relatively low prevalence countries and was also more male dominated. To take into consideration differentiation in use patterns, we defined use as at least once in past 12 months. Similarly, to allow for differentiation in socio-economic status, we did not specify employment or full-time student as eligibility criteria.

Aim

The assessment and management of risks associated with cannabis use is central to cannabis normalization (Duff & Erickson, 2014). The general purpose of this study is to shed more light on the normative context in which cannabis use occurs. Our principal aim is to examine to which extent and how cannabis users in different countries with different cannabis legislation and policies practice normalization and self-regulation of use in everyday life. We investigate how cannabis users regulate their use with regard to social and physical settings, and in terms of rules they may adopt and practice for when and where to use.

Data were collected in a survey among current cannabis users from seven European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, and The United Kingdom (UK). These countries' cannabis policies ranged from relatively liberal to more punitive (see below). We assess whether cannabis users experience and interpret formal control (for instance, fear of getting caught by the police for using cannabis while driving a car) and informal social norms (avoiding social disapproval and labeling) differently across countries with different cannabis policies, and whether they adjust their behavior and their patterns of use accordingly. Based on Duff et al. (2012), we hypothesize that in countries with a more liberal cannabis policy users are more strongly driven by informal norms than by formal control compared to those who live in countries with a more punitive policy.

Seven European countries with different cannabis policies

There is no harmonized European drug law, and there is little harmonization among the European Union (EU) Member States in the laws penalizing unauthorized cannabis use (EMCDDA, 2017a). In addition, there are remarkable differences in law enforcement practices. For example, regarding cannabis supply, a recent study reported strong variation across EU countries in sentencing practices. According to a survey among national experts, expected median sentences for the supply of 1 kg of cannabis resin varied within the EU from zero to ten years, and from zero to twelve years in the case of 10 kg. Expected median sentences were lowest in the Netherlands and highest in Greece, while other countries took an intermediate position (EMCDDA 2017b). Together, the seven countries selected for our study represent a maximum variation in national cannabis policy within Europe. In terms of national cannabis policy ('law in the books' as well as 'law in action'), variation refers to scheduling of cannabis (whether or not in category separate from 'hard drugs'); legal status of cannabis use and possession for personal use; and sentencing practices for dealing cannabis.

On a continuum from liberal to punitive, we placed The Netherlands on the liberal side and Greece on the punitive side. Cannabis policy in The Netherlands can be characterized as the most liberal at a consumer level in the EU. Although cannabis is officially an illicit drug, there are

hundreds so-called coffeeshops, i.e., café-like settings where adults (18 years or older) can buy and use cannabis under strict conditions (Van Ooyen-Houben & Kleemans, 2016). Portugal, that introduced a policy of decriminalization in 2000, is probably the country with the next most liberal cannabis policy. On the other side of the continuum, Greece has the most punitive cannabis policy, Germany and Italy appear to take an intermediate position, while cannabis policy in France and the UK can be characterized as closer to the punitive end of the continuum.

Table 1 Overview of cannabis policy in seven countries

Country	Cannabis Schedule [a]	Possession for Personal Use	Legal Status-Recreational Use	Sentencing Practice on Cannabis Supply [b] 1 kg / 10 kg
The Netherlands (NL)	Yes	IIlegal, tolerated	Not an offence	Lowest / Lowest (#26 of 26) / (#25 of 25)
France (FR)	No	Illegal	Illegal	Low / Low (#25 of 26) / (#23 of 25)
Germany (GER)	No	Illegal [c]	Not an offence	Medium / Medium (#12 of 26) / (#15 of 25)
Greece (GR)	Yes	Illegal	Illegal	Highest / 2nd Highest (#1 of 26) / (#2 of 25)
Italy (IT)	Yes	Illegal [d]	Not an offence	Medium-High / Medium-High (#7 of 26) / (#7 of 25)
Portugal (PT)	No	Administrative offence	Administrative offence	Medium-Low / Low (#17 of 26) / (#22 of 25)
United Kingdom (UK)	Yes	Illegal	Not an offence	Not available [e]

[a] Cannabis is included in a different schedule from heroin.
[b] Based on the rank number (#) of countries in order of sentences from low to high (EMCDDA, 2017b, p. 16).
[c] Charges may be dropped by the state attorney, though this differs between states.
[d] Possession of small amount of cannabis for personal use considered a misdemeanor punishable by administrative sanctions (but not a fine).
[e] The UK is not included in that EMCDDA report. However, the Sentencing Council (2012) of the UK has published guidelines on sentencing for the judiciary and criminal justice professionals. These guidelines refer -among others- to sentences concerning supply of 100g and 6 kg of cannabis. Despite this useful document, comparisons cannot be made due to (i) the non-proportionality of comparable sizes (1kg and 100 gr / and 10 kg with 6 kg respectively) and (ii) differentiation in measures as EMCCDA report refers to expected sentences while the UK Sentencing Council refers to guidelines.

Methods

Participants and procedures

During February-October 2019, together with a team of eleven field assistants, we conducted a survey among a targeted sample of 1,225 last year cannabis users aged 18-40 and living in one of the seven countries in this study. Participants were recruited and interviewed inside or in the vicinity of coffeeshops (i.e. close to the entrance) in the Netherlands, mostly in Amsterdam (41/46 coffeeshops were located in Amsterdam). Coffeeshops offer a unique opportunity to access current drug users from many different countries. They not only attract domestic customers, but also tourists from abroad who, during their stay in the Netherlands, buy and use

cannabis, and in many cases also use cannabis in their home country (Korf et al., 2016; Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014). To ascertain variation in the different countries' samples, we took into account representation of country of residence in previous coffeeshop surveys (Korf et al., 2016), country population size, and distance from the Netherlands. The target numbers per country were set at around 200 respondents from France, Italy, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, and half as many for Greece and Portugal. To obtain variation in age, taking into account that a large proportion of coffeeshop visitors is younger than 30 years (Nabben et al., 2016; Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014), we aimed to recruit 40% of respondents from the 30-40 age group. To assure gender diversity, female coffeeshop visitors were purposely oversampled to make up about a third of the sample. Participants signed a consent form which explained the purpose of the study and assured their anonymity. Consent forms and questionnaires were available in seven languages. Participants could choose between a print version or an online version. In both cases, the questionnaire was completed in the presence and under the supervision of an interviewer.

Measures

To assess physical settings of cannabis use, participants were asked how often they use cannabis in each of eight different settings (see Table 3), derived from the Canadian study among adult cannabis users mentioned earlier (Duff et al., 2012; Duff & Erickson, 2014) and from a cross-national European survey among current users of new psychoactive substances (Korf et al., 2019). For each setting, response options were (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, or (4) usually.

To assess the social company dimension of setting, participants were asked whether they use cannabis alone or in company of friends, partner, peers etc. Response options were: (1) Always alone, (2) Mostly alone, (3) Equally often alone and in company, (4) Mostly in company, or (5) Always in company. Furthermore, participants were questioned about 12 rules of use that they follow with regard to cannabis use, divided into five rules in favor of use ('In general, I use cannabis…'), and seven rules for when not to use ('I never use cannabis …'), with response options yes/no for each statement (see Table 5).

Background characteristics used in the analyses were country of residence, age, gender, household type, employment status, and daily cannabis use. Categories for gender were male, female or other, but the latter was omitted from statistical analyses due to small numbers. With respect to household, three categories were used: (1) living alone, (2) living with partner (with or without children) or with housemates, and (3) living with parents. Employment was also divided into three categories: (1) student (enrolled in school, college or university, with or without side job), (2) employed (including self-employment), and (3) unemployed (neither student nor

employed). In accordance with the European standard, daily or near daily (here referred as daily) cannabis use was defined as the use of cannabis on 20 days or more in the last 30 days (EMCDDA, 2019b). For Dutch respondents this was the last 30 days before the interview, for non-Dutch respondents this was the last 30 days in their home country, before their arrival in the Netherlands.

Analyses

First, associations between home country and other background characteristics were assessed using Chi^2 tests for nominal and categorical variables and Anova for age. Then, for the purpose of dimension reduction (from a large number of variables into a small number of factors), exploratory factor analyses (oblique rotation) were performed for physical settings and rules of use. The pattern matrix from the factor analysis for physical settings (KMO and Bartlett's Test = .801, which is considered meritorious and suggests that there is a substantial correlation in the data) showed three components (68.6% of total variance explained) with strongly interrelated items and sufficient factor loadings that describe the extent to which each question belongs to that factor: (1) 'car, as a driver' (.916), 'car, as a passenger' (.788), and 'school/university/work' (.656); (2) 'my home' (.862), 'friend's/partner's home' (.744); and (3) 'street/park/square' (-.824), 'nature' (-.734), and 'festivals/clubs/discos' (-.745). For each component, items loading together were transformed into a mean score that showed sufficient internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), together representing three dimensions, namely: (1) *risk-taking setting* (car as a driver; car as a passenger[1]; university/school/work, mean 1.59, SD= .78, Cronbach's alpha= .779); (2) *private setting* (my home; friend's/partner's home, mean 3.15, SD = .80, Cronbach's alpha= .548); and (3) *public setting* (street/park/square; nature; festivals/clubs/discos, mean 2.51, SD = .86, Cronbach's alpha= .723). Initial factor analysis for the rules of use resulted in four factors, but one factor consisted of only two items with very low internal inconsistency (Cronbach's alpha = .112). Excluding these two items, the next factor analysis (KMO and Bartlett's test: .694, which is considered sufficient) resulted in three components (52.4% of total variance explained): (1) 'never more than 2 joints' (.750), 'never stressed' (.734), 'never non-users' (.566) and 'never colleagues' (.598); (2) 'when I can financially afford it' (.793), 'when I am done with work/study' (.722), and 'when I am in a good mood' (.638); and (3) 'never with children' (.837), 'never with parents' (.697), and 'never during work/study' (.565). For each component, items loading together were transformed into a mean score: (1) *risk avoidance* (mean 0.47, SD= .34, Cronbach's alpha= .626); (2) *comfort* (mean 0.68, SD = .34, Cronbach's alpha= .544); and (3) *setting avoidance* (mean 0.78, SD =.30, Cronbach's alpha= .563).

In order to estimate the impact of home country and other independent variables (age, gender, employment status, household status, frequency of use) on each component, regression

analysis models were performed. Linear regression models were calculated for each dimension of *physical settings* (risk-taking, private, and public); an ordinal regression analysis was performed for *social setting* (social company), and linear regression models for each dimension of *rules of use* (risk avoidance, comfort, setting avoidance). In the linear regression analyses, country was entered as an independent variable, and models were adjusted for age, gender, household type and employment status. Country, gender, household and employment were recoded into dummy variables, with the Netherlands, female, living alone, and student as reference group. In the ordinal regression analyses, country, gender, employment, household, and daily use were set as factors, and age as covariate. All data were analyzed with SPSS V.24.

Findings

Table 2 depicts the sociodemographic and cannabis use characteristics of the total sample and by home country. In accordance with the selection criteria, close to one third of the total sample were female, two thirds were male, and a small percentage defined themselves as 'other'. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 40 (mean age: 27.0), with 40.2% aged 30-40 (not shown in Table 2).

Table 2 Sociodemographic and cannabis use characteristics by country

Country (n)	Total (1225)	NL (218)	FR (230)	GER (191)	GR (86)	IT (217)	PT (93)	UK (190)	Chi²/F (df)	p
Gender (%)									11.911(6)	.064
Male	67.5	71.6	70.9	60.7	70.9	71.0	63.4	62.1		
Female	31.8	28.0	27.8	38.7	27.9	29.0	36.6	36.8		
Other	0.7	0.5	1.3	0.5	1.2	0.0	0.0	1.1		
Mean age (years) (SD)	27.0 (6.3)	27.5 (7.0)	27.5 (6.0)	24.6 (5.8)	27.2 (4.7)	27.7 (6.1)	27.0 (6.2)	27.0 (6.5)	5.654 (6)	.001
Household (%)									35.043 (12)	.001
Alone	23.8	26.6	31.3	19.9	34.9	21.2	21.5	14.2		
Parents	32.6	29.8	23.5	39.8	30.2	35.0	31.2	38.4		
Partner/Housemates	43.7	43.6	45.2	40.3	34.9	43.8	47.3	47.4		
Employment (%)									54.624 (12)	.001
Student	36.0	37.6	29.6	49.7	39.5	35.5	40.9	24.7		
Employed	59.7	54.6	63.9	45.5	54.7	63.1	58.1	73.7		
Unemployed	4.3	7.8	6.5	4.7	5.8	1.4	1.1	1.6		
Cannabis Use										
Last month users(%)	71.4	87.6	70.0	69.1	68.6	68.2	73.1	67.4	31.922(6)	.001
Daily users(%)	32.7	36.7	41.3	17.8	22.1	35.0	21.5	40.0	43.442 (6)	.001
Days/Last Month* (SD)	11.6 (11.9)	13.0 (11.3)	13.4 (13.1)	7.8 (9.4)	9.3 (10.6)	12.2 (12.7)	9.4 (10.0)	13.1 (13.0)	6.354(6)	.001
Days/Last Month** (SD)	16.0 (11.2)	14.8 (10.9)	19.1 (11.7)	11.3 (9.4)	13.5 (10.3)	17.9 (11.6)	12.9 (9.6)	19.4 (11.2)	10.977(6)	.001

*In total sample
**Last month users only

Concerning household type, more than four in ten were living with a partner or housemate(s); one in three were living with their parents; and close to one in four were living alone. Regarding employment status, six out of ten participants were employed; more than one third were students; and those unemployed represented less than 5% of the total sample. Almost one third of respondents were daily cannabis users.

In cross-national comparison, French respondents were least often living with their parents, and most often were daily cannabis users; Greeks were most often living alone, and least often living with a partner or housemates; Germans were somewhat younger, most likely to live with their parents, be a student, and a non-daily cannabis user; and UK participants were most often employed. No significant cross-national differences were found for gender.

Physical and social setting of use

Table 3 depicts the physical setting of cannabis use for the total sample. A large majority reported that they usually or sometimes use cannabis at home or at a friend's/partner's home. A large majority also stated that they rarely or never use cannabis in a car (as a driver or passenger), nor at university/school or work. Use at festivals/clubs/discos, in nature, and in a street/park/square took an intermediate position.

Table 3 Physical and social setting of cannabis use, in % (n=1,225)

PHYSICAL SETTING	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	
My home	13.6	13.8	21.7	50.9	
Friend's/Partner's Home	4.5	12.0	41.0	42.5	
Street/Park/Square	25.6	24.9	31.0	18.4	
Nature (beach, mountains)	22.0	24.1	33.0	20.9	
Car (as a driver)	74.3	11.6	9.1	5.1	
Car (as a passenger)	55.3	20.8	15.4	8.5	
School/University/Work	67.0	16.4	9.7	6.9	
Festivals/Clubs/Discos	22.4	21.8	31.2	24.7	
SOCIAL SETTING	Always alone	Mostly alone	Alone and company	Mostly company	Always company
Social company	1.9	13.9	36.2	24.7	23.3

Table 3 also shows the extent to which cannabis is used alone or in the social company of friends, a partner, peers, et cetera. Close to half of the total sample reported that they use cannabis mostly or always in social company, more than one third used equally often in company or alone, and about one in six participants used cannabis mostly or always alone.

Table 4 presents the results from three models of linear regression for physical setting. Significant regression equations were found for all three models [Model 1, risk-taking $F(13, 1203)=12.150$, $p<.001$; Model 2, private setting $F(13, 1203)=23.877$, $p<.001$; Model 3, public setting $F(13, 1203)=19.339$, $p<.001$]. In Model 1, compared to the Netherlands, participants from

Table 4 Regression models for Physical Setting (linear) and Social Setting (ordinal)

	Physical Setting															Social Setting				
Models	Model 1: Risk Taking					Model 2: Private Setting					Model3: Public Setting					Model 4: Social Company				
(R^2)	(.116)					(.205)					(.173)									
	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper	B	SE	p	Lower	Upper
Country																				
Netherlands (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	.244	3.513	<.001	.108	.380	.123	1.798	.072	-.011	.257	.112	1.507	.132	-.034	.259	-.127	.175	.469	-.469	.216
Germany	.016	.217	.828	-.129	.161	-.049	-.670	.503	-.191	.094	.111	1.396	.163	-.045	.266	.369	.186	.048	.004	.734
Greece	.355	3.788	<.001	.171	.538	.101	1.093	.274	-.080	.281	.377	3.750	<.001	.180	.574	-.524	.236	.026	-.987	-.062
Italy	.174	2.471	.014	.036	.312	-.030	-.440	.660	-.166	.105	-.002	-.022	.983	-.150	.147	-.173	.177	.329	-.520	.174
Portugal	.446	4.905	<.001	.267	.624	.083	.924	.356	-.093	.258	.495	5.070	<.001	.303	.686	-.586	.229	.010	-1.035	-.138
United Kingdom	.214	2.890	.004	.069	.359	-.056	-.766	.444	-.198	.087	-.130	-1.636	.102	-.286	.026	-.003	.186	.986	-.368	.361
Age																				
Age	-.009	-1.919	.055	-.018	.000	-.015	-3.454	.001	-.024	-.007	-.016	-3.280	.001	-.026	-.006	-.024	.011	.036	-.046	-.002
Gender																				
Female (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		--
Male	.094	2.050	.041	.004	.183	.004	.092	.927	-.084	.092	.082	1.669	.095	-.014	.178	-.390	.115	.001	-.616	-.164
Household																				
Alone (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parents	.126	1.989	.047	.002	.250	-.430	-6.900	<.001	-.552	-.308	.260	3.820	<.001	.126	.393	.692	.138	<.001	.421	.962
Partner/Housemates	-.005	-.095	.924	-.112	.101	-.163	-3.061	.002	-.268	-.059	-.018	-.315	.752	-.133	.096	.844	.161	<.001	.529	1.160
Employment																				
Student ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-
Employed	.042	.752	.452	-.067	.151	-.052	-.959	.338	-.159	.055	-.092	-1.550	.121	-.209	.025	-.092	.140	.511	-.366	-.182
Unemployed	.142	1.273	.203	-.077	.360	.065	.591	.555	-.150	.280	-.017	-.144	.886	-.252	.218	-.550	.281	.050	-1.101	.001
Daily Cannabis Use																				
No (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	.410	8.932	<.001	.320	.500	.666	14.736	<.001	.577	.755	.471	9.544	<.001	.374	.568	-1.223	.120	<.001	-1.460	-.987

all other the countries except Germany showed significantly higher levels of using cannabis in risk-taking settings (for example, in a car), with the mean score highest for the Portuguese (+0.45 compared to the Dutch), followed by the Greeks (+0.36), and French (+0.25), British (+0.22), and Italians (+0.18). Male participants were more likely than females to use in risk-taking settings (means score +0.09), and users who live with their parents were more likely to do so compared to those who live alone (+0.13). Daily users were more likely to consume cannabis in a risk-taking setting than less frequent users (+0.41 compared to non-daily users).

Model 2 did not show any cross-national differences in predicting cannabis use in private settings. The likelihood of use in a private setting decreased with age (mean score -0.015 per increasing year of age), and was lower for participants who live with parents or with a partner/housemates compared to those who live alone (mean scores -0.43 and -0.17, respectively). Daily users were much more likely to use cannabis in a private setting than less frequent users (mean score +0.67).

In model 3, compared to Dutch participants, the Portuguese and Greeks were more likely to use cannabis in a public setting (mean scores +0.60 and +0.38). The likelihood of use in public settings decreased with age (mean score -0.016 per increasing year of age). Participants living with their parents were more likely to use in a public setting than those who live alone (mean score +0.26). As with the other two settings, daily users were much more likely to use cannabis in a public setting than non-daily users (+0.47).

Table 4 also depicts the results from ordinal regression for social setting (Model 4). Compared to Dutch users, Portuguese and Greek users were less likely to use cannabis in social company, and Germans more likely. Older age and male gender were negatively associated with use in social company: younger users and female users were less likely to use when alone. Participants living with parents or partner/housemates were more likely to use cannabis in social company than those living alone, and unemployed participants were more likely to use when alone than students. The same is the case for daily users when compared to non-daily users.

Rules for using and never using

Table 5 presents frequencies regarding the rules that participants follow for using or never using cannabis. In the total sample, more than eight in ten participants reported that they usually use cannabis with people they trust, followed by three-quarters that use when they have finished work or study. Close to two-thirds reported that they usually use cannabis when they can afford it financially and when they are in a good mood. Finally, six out of ten respondents said that they usually use cannabis before they go to sleep. In regard to never using, the most common rule was not to use in the presence of children (85.6%). Next, over three-quarters of participants replied that they never use cannabis in the presence of their parents or relatives,

and slightly less would apply that rule before or during work or study. Around half of the total sample reported that they never use more than 1-2 joints per day, followed by never in the company of non-users or in the presence of colleagues/students. The least common rule was to never use when stressed (41.7%).

Table 5 Rules for using or never using cannabis (n=1,225)

	% YES
In GENERAL, I use cannabis …	
Before I go to sleep	60.1
With people I trust	84.7
When I'm done with work/study	74.1
When I can afford it financially	64.6
When I am in a good mood	64.7
I NEVER use cannabis …	
During or before work/study	72.2
In company of non-users	46.3
In presence of children	85.6
In presence of my parents/relatives	76.5
In presence of colleagues/students	48.1
More than 1-2 joints on a day	52.9
When I am stressed	41.7

Table 6 shows the results from three models of linear regression for rules that participants follow for using or never using cannabis. Significant regression equations were found for all three models (Model 5, risk avoidance $F(13, 1203)=16.818$, $p<.001$; Model 6, comfort $F(13,1203)=2.907$, $p<.001$; and Model 7, setting avoidance $F(13,1203)=4.599$, $p<.001$]. Model 5 indicates that, compared to Dutch participants, Germans and Greeks were more likely to apply risk avoidance rules (mean score +0.16 and +0.10, respectively). The likelihood of users making these rules for themselves increased with age (mean score +0.008 per increasing year of age), and was lower for male users compared to female users (mean score -.04), but higher for participants living with partner/housemates (+0.05 compared to those who live alone). Daily users were less likely to apply risk avoidance rules (mean score -0.19 compared to non-daily users). Model 6 indicates that comfort rules were more common for Portuguese participants (means score +0.09 compared to the Dutch), but less common for those living with parents (-0.07 compared to those living alone). Daily users were less likely to have comfort rules (-0.09 compared to non-daily users). In model 7, setting avoidance rules did not differ between countries and were only predicted by employment status and frequency of use. Unemployed participants (-0.11 compared to students) and daily cannabis users (-0.08 compared to non-daily users) were less likely to apply these rules.

Table 6 Regression model for rules regarding using and never using cannabis

Models (R^2)	Model 5: Risk Avoidance (.154)					Model 6: Comfort (.030)					Model 7: Setting avoidance (.047)				
	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper
Country															
Netherlands (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	.041	1.356	.175	-.018	.100	-.042	-1.318	.188	-.104	.020	-.048	-.1708	.088	-.103	.007
Germany	.160	4.981	<.001	.097	.222	.012	.364	.716	-.054	.078	.042	1.410	.159	-.016	.100
Greece	.095	2.342	.019	.015	.175	.036	.843	.399	-.048	.120	.048	1.259	.208	-.027	.122
Italy	.043	1.403	.161	-.017	.103	-.009	-.277	.781	-.072	.054	.042	1.464	.143	-.014	.097
Portugal	.052	1.315	.189	-.026	.129	.087	2.104	.036	.006	.169	-.028	-.755	.450	-.100	.044
United Kingdom	.030	.924	.356	-.033	.093	.029	.844	.399	-.038	.095	-.035	-1.158	.247	-.093	.024
Age															
Age	.008	4.009	<.001	.004	.096	.001	.035	.972	-.004	.004	.001	.426	.670	-.003	.004
Gender															
Female (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male	-.042	-2.139	.034	-.081	-.004	.014	.677	.498	-.027	.055	-.026	-1.427	.154	-.062	.010
Household															
Alone (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parents	.024	.865	.387	-.030	.078	-.066	-2.288	.022	-.123	-.009	-.032	-1.258	.209	-.082	.018
Partner/Housemates	.050	2.121	.034	.004	.012	-.039	-1.564	.118	-.088	.010	.005	.208	.835	-.038	.048
Employment															
Student ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed	.072	2.976	.003	.024	.119	-.001	-.004	.997	-.050	.050	-.008	-.376	.707	-.052	.036
Unemployed	-.006	-.127	.899	-.101	.089	-.046	-.896	.370	-.146	.054	-.106	-2.350	.019	-.194	-.017
Daily Cannabis Use															
No (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	-.185	.020	<.001	-.224	-.146	.093	4.441	<.001	.052	.135	-.081	-4.357	<.001	-.117	-.044

Discussion

Across the seven countries, cannabis was much more likely to be used in the company of friends, partner and peers than when alone. The drug was also was commonly used in various physical environments, yet most often in private settings (i.e. user's own or friend's/partner's home), followed by in public settings such as streets, parks, nightlife, and festivals. Cannabis use in risk-taking settings which could potentially harm the user or others around them (i.e. in a car as a driver or passenger, and in school or the workplace) (Dubois et al., 2015; Earle et al., 2019), was uncommon. These results indicate that many cannabis users set boundaries to regulate their use and ensure that it takes place in a way that does not interfere with other aspects of their daily lives (cf. Erickson et al., 2010; Lau et al., 2015). That the majority avoids risky settings may imply that they avoid interference of their use in their daily life, and can be considered a form of self-regulation. Restricting use to appropriate times and places, social stigma might be avoided or minimized, although preference for certain physical settings could be more driven by discretion and respect towards non-users than by the threat/fear of stigmatization (cf. Duff et al., 2012).

Regarding rules that users adopt and practice for when and where to use cannabis, the most frequently reported set of rules was defined as setting avoidance. This refers to situations where

they never use cannabis, namely in the presence of children or parents/relatives and before or during work/study. This finding is consistent with Canadian research (Duff et al., 2012; Hathaway et al., 2011), and confirms that many cannabis users are concerned with responsible use (cf. Erickson et al., 2010). It also demonstrates the importance that many cannabis users attach to discretion (cf. Erickson et al., 2010; Lau et al., 2015) and/or to achieving or maintaining a good level of study and work performance by drawing a line between school/work time and leisure time (cf. Duff et al. 2012). Moreover, and similar to Duff et al.'s study, it refers to common assumptions about the social responsibilities of studying and working.

The second most often cited set of rules of use was labeled 'comfort'. These rules refer to situations in favor of use and entail economic ('only when I can afford it'), leisure ('only when I am done with study/work') and emotional aspects ('only when I am in a good mood'). Comfort rules place cannabis use in a recreational context of leisure (Parker et al., 2002). Restricting use to certain times or situations can serve as a risk-management strategy to counter the stigma that accompanies 'problematic' use (Duff et al., 2012).

Finally, a set of rules of use that we named 'risk avoidance' ranked third. Similar to setting avoidance, risk avoidance rules refer to when or where participants never use cannabis. Risk avoidance rules comprised moderating quantity ('never more than two joints') and not using when stressed, nor in the presence of colleagues or non-users. Our findings confirm previous research that showed that moderation of the frequency and volume of cannabis use is a structural factor that determines controlled use (Duff et al., 2012). Regular use of small amounts of cannabis do not appear to increase an individual's likelihood of experiencing problems, and does not threaten the ability to function well and perform expected roles (Asbridge et al., 2014). However, cannabis use in the presence of non-users or colleagues could violate societal norms and thus pose risks to users such as social disapproval, stigma, and status loss (Hammersley et. al., 2001; Hathaway, 2004).

`In terms of the evidence from this study concerning the possible role of national cannabis policies on use, cross-national comparisons revealed both similarities and differences in the setting of use and self-regulation rules. Irrespective of national cannabis policy, using cannabis in private settings was equally predominant in all countries, and so were setting avoidance rules. This indicates that discretion is a widely shared norm, a collective effort in cannabis culture that transcends cross-national differences in cannabis policy stringency, either as a mechanism to minimize the risk of social disapproval and stigma, or to emphasize respect and courtesy to non-users (Duff et al., 2012; Erickson et al., 2010; Lau et al., 2015).

On the other hand, compared to The Netherlands (that had the most liberal cannabis policy), using cannabis in risk-taking settings was more prevalent in all other countries, except Germany. Greece and Portugal differed most from the Netherlands, as cannabis was not only more likely to be used in risk-taking settings, but also in public settings, while it was less likely for the

drug to be used in social company. At first sight, the situation in Greece, the country with the most stringent cannabis policy in this study, could be interpreted as a confirmation of the hypothesis that users in countries with a more punitive cannabis policy are more strongly driven by formal control than informal norms (see Introduction). That would mean that fear of violating informal social norms would paradoxically result in users taking greater risks of formal control by law enforcers (e.g., arrest).

However, that does not explain the similarities between Portugal, where cannabis policy is relatively liberal, and Greece. An alternative explanation could be that the southern European physical climate in Greece and Portugal favors outdoor use (at the beach, in a car) more than in colder countries. That said, this does not explain why was this not also the case in Italy, a country with similar Mediterranean weather. Another possible explanation might be related to the contextual role of the normality of cannabis use in a country (Sznitman et al., 2015). While cannabis prevalence rates are around the EU average (lifetime use by adults 27.4%, last-year use by young adults 14.4%) in Germany, the Netherlands and UK, and above average for France and Italy, they are among the lowest in Portugal and Greece (EMCDDA, 2019b). According to the normalization thesis, societal acceptance of drug use is generally accompanied by increased prevalence rates (Parker et al., 1998).

It appears, then, that differences in societal and cultural accommodation of cannabis use are more important than cross-national differences in cannabis policy in understanding risk-management in terms of the setting of cannabis use and self-regulation rules (cf. Chatwin, 2011; Reinarman & Cohen, 2007). This does not mean that the legal status of cannabis does not matter. In this study, we examined only European users. Although cannabis is an illegal drug in their countries, in many others, cannabis policy is more punitive, and it might have a stronger impact on users' behaviour.

Concerning sociodemographic characteristics, with increasing age, cannabis users were less likely to use cannabis in private or public settings, and in the company of peers or partners, and were more likely to apply rules to avoid risks. This confirms that younger people tend to be more visible or less selective in their use (Parker et al., 1998, 2002); that their cannabis use is less confined to certain settings (Zinberg, 1984); and that for young users, cannabis use is more a social activity (Anderson e t al., 2015; Patrick et al. 2011; Lee et al., 2007), while use in solitude is more common among older users (Rossi, 2019). These age differences can be explained by the adult roles and responsibilities that come with maturation and aging (Shiner, 2009), and trigger strategic reasoned choices that make drug use fit better in the context of the demands of adulthood life (Williams & Askew, 2016; Osborne & Fogel, 2008).

Regarding gender, male users were more likely to use cannabis in risk-taking settings than females, less likely to use in the social company of peers and partners, and less likely to apply risk avoidance rules. These results are in line with research showing that female cannabis users are

more inclined than males to remain in control when using cannabis (Dahl & Sandberg, 2015). They also might reflect the socially constructed cannabis-related norms, roles, and behaviors that society has attached to genders (Hathaway et al., 2018; Hemsing & Greaves, 2020), characterized by women reporting less positive cannabis acceptability attitudes (Kolar et al., 2018), while male cannabis users tend to engage in riskier behaviors, such as driving under the influence of cannabis (Earle et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Dubois et al., 2015).

Turning to the micro-level of household type, compared to users who lived alone, those living with their parents were more likely to use cannabis in risk-taking and public settings, but were less inclined to apply rules that favor comfort. Together with users who lived with their partner or housemates, they were less likely to use in private settings or alone. In addition, users living with partner/housemates were more likely to apply risk avoidance rules than those who live alone. These results indicate that users who live with their parents are especially more inclined to not use in a home setting, whether out of respect to relatives or as method to possibly avoid judgment by or issues with others. However, as they more often turn to public settings and risk-taking settings, but are similar to others in applying risk avoidance rules, their cannabis use may encompass higher risks, such as arrest (e.g., for driving a car while intoxicated), traffic accidents, or lower school or work performance.

In contrast to household type, employment status did not contribute much to the prediction of use setting and self-regulation rules. Compared to students, only employed participants were more likely to apply risk avoidance rules, and unemployed participants used cannabis less often in the company of others.

Finally, frequency of use was a significant predictor of both settings of use and self-regulation rules. Daily cannabis users were more likely than non-daily users to use in private, public and risk-taking settings, but less likely to use in social company. Daily users were also less likely than non-daily users to apply risk avoidance and setting avoidance rules, while they were more inclined to apply rules favoring comfort. All in all, these findings indicate that daily users are less selective in where they use cannabis and may focus less on risk-management strategies.

Thereby, our findings underline the relevance of a differentiated, more nuanced understanding of normalization (Hathaway et al., 2016; Pennay & Measham, 2016; Shildrick, 2002; Sznitman, 2013). Setting selectivity and self-regulation rules are important ingredients for the social and cultural accommodation of cannabis use, and conducive to minimizing or eliminating stigma (Duff & Erickson, 2014). Cannabis-related stigma is often associated with patterns of cannabis use, frequent use in particular (Hathaway, 2004; Kolar et al., 2018), while controlled use is central to a growing societal tolerance, the wider social and structural dimensions of cannabis normalization (Duff et al. 2012). In sum, daily use is at odds with a core element of the normalization thesis, namely moderate and responsible use (Erickson & Hathaway, 2010; Lau et al., 2015; Measham & Shiner, 2009). That is unsurprising, as the normalization thesis is concerned

with recreational use (i.e., occasional use in certain settings) (Parker et al., 1995; 1998; 2002; Parker, 2005). While normalized, moderate, recreational cannabis use can be understood as one of many facets of users' lifestyles, daily users in our study were less selective in choosing settings of use, and seem to assign cannabis to a central role in their lives, which could indicate uncontrolled use (Liebregts et al., 2015). However, it may be questioned whether the concept of normalization of cannabis use should be restricted to 'occasional use'. Such a normative demarcation is at odds with the pluriform patterns of use, ranging from very occasionally to frequent use. Although in a dichotomous format, daily users differ from non-daily users in self-regulation, many daily users in this study also exercise discretion.

An important limitation of this study is that although normalization of drug use is a multifaceted concept that has been discussed in the literature from different angles, in this study we focused on the perspective of the users. Another limitation is that participants constitute a convenience sample that cannot be expected to generate normative, statistically representative results for the population of current cannabis users: daily users were over-represented. It is estimated that around 1% of adults in the EU are daily cannabis users (EMCDDA, 2019b), but almost a third of this study's participants were. Moreover, to some extent, cross-national differences might also be due to travel preferences for visiting a coffeeshop in The Netherlands. That said, the sample was diverse in frequency of cannabis use, as well as in age, gender, and other socio-demographic characteristics, and thereby allowed for comparative cross-national analysis. Although the overrepresentation of daily users generated lower levels of self-regulation for the whole sample, the relatively high proportion of daily users allowed for more differentiated insights into normalization.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the further development of the normalization thesis. In particular, it responds to the call for a differentiated approach and further cross-national exploration (Pennay & Measham, 2016). We compared current cannabis users from seven European countries with different cannabis legislation and policies, and examined how, and to what extent their self-regulating behavior contributes to the normalization of cannabis use in everyday life. In particular, we investigated how cannabis users regulate their use with regard to social and physical settings, and what rules they adopt regarding the setting of their use.

Cannabis was more likely to be used in the company of friends, partner and peers than when being alone. It was commonly used in various physical settings, yet most often in private settings. Cannabis use in risk-taking settings was uncommon. These results indicate that many cannabis users set boundaries to control their use and ensure that it takes place in a way that does not interfere with other aspects of their daily lives. This may be considered as a form of self-

regulation. Many of the users in our study restrict their use to certain times or situations, which can serve as a risk-management strategy to counter the social stigma that accompanies problematic use. However, the findings also indicate that many cannabis users are concerned with responsible use, and their preference for certain physical using settings could be driven more by discretion and respect towards non-users than by the threat or fear of stigmatization. Finally, the frequent application of risk avoidance rules indicated that moderation of the frequency and volume of use is a factor that determines controlled use and, subsequently, normalized use.

The differences in self-regulation that were associated with age, gender, household status, and frequency of use underline the relevance of a differentiated, more nuanced understanding of normalization. The setting of cannabis use and self-regulation rules were strongly associated with frequency of use. Compared to less frequent current users, daily users were less selective in choosing using settings and less strict in applying self-regulation rules.

Liberalization, if not legalization, is an important current international trend in cannabis policies (Decorte et al., 2020). An important finding in this study is that in cross-national comparison, overall, self-regulation was highest in the most liberal country (The Netherlands). This indicates that liberalization does not automatically lead to chaotic or otherwise problematic use as critics of the policy have predicted, as the diminishing of formal control (law enforcement) is accompanied by increased importance of informal norms and stronger self-regulation. Yet, irrespective of national cannabis policy, using cannabis in private settings was equally predominant in all countries, as was setting risk avoidance rules. It appears that differences in the societal and cultural accommodation of cannabis use is more important in understanding risk management in terms of the setting of cannabis use and self-regulation rules than cross-national differences in cannabis policy.

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6

How cannabis users obtain and purchase cannabis: A comparison of cannabis users from European countries with different cannabis policies

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Abstract

Objective: This study examines the role of cannabis policy in how cannabis users obtain and purchase cannabis. Methods: A survey was conducted in the Dutch coffeeshops among current cannabis users (n=1255) aged 18-40 from seven European countries with different cannabis policies. This study investigated whether acquisition methods and supply sources were associated with national cannabis policy, controlling for gender, age, and frequency of use. Results: Cross-national differences notwithstanding, cannabis was easily available to current cannabis users in Europe. Within and across countries, users acquired cannabis in various ways and buyers purchased it from various sources, representing a mixture of open, closed, and semi-open retail markets. Buying cannabis was the most common method of acquisition. Among participants who reported buying their cannabis (n = 929), buying from friends was the most common source of supply, followed by street dealers, home dealers, and delivery services. The vast majority of Dutch participants reported buying cannabis from coffeeshops. Contrariwise, French buyers were more likely to buy cannabis from street dealers and delivery services, and Greek buyers to buy it from home dealers and friends. Overall, the Internet played a marginal role in purchasing cannabis. Conclusion: Our findings confirm the significant role of social supply across Europe. Although cross-national differences were rather common in cannabis acquisition and supply, yet they were not unidirectionally linked with the punitiveness of national cannabis policy. Findings suggest a differentiated normalization of the cannabis retail market, with users often preferring to buy cannabis in a regulated or legal market.

Keywords: cannabis, cannabis policy, cannabis markets, dealing, social supply, cannabis accessibility

Introduction

Drug markets vary in relation to time, place, culture, and by the types of drugs being distributed (Potter, 2009); they also differ between countries and evolve in response to cultural, social, and policy changes (Potter, 2018). This plethora of differences has led to the emergence of a variety of supply methods. This study focuses on retail-level cannabis dealing and aims to investigate how users from European countries with different cannabis policies acquire cannabis, which is the most easily available and most commonly used illicit drug in Europe (ESPAD Group, 2020; EMCDDA, 2019a; 2019b; Eurobarometer, 2014).

A widely agreed classification of illicit retail drug market types distinguishes between open, semi-open, and closed markets (Pearson 2007). Open markets or street-based markets are open to any buyer, with no requirement for prior introduction to the seller and few barriers to access (May & Hough, 2004; Edmunds et al., 1996). In closed markets, contrary to the anonymity of open markets, social relationships are essential, as sellers and buyers only do business together if they know and trust each other (Potter, 2009). Semi-open markets operate in locations like clubs and cafes (Pearson, 2007; May & Hough, 2004) and the distribution of drugs does not require previous social relationships or any prior introduction (Tzanetakis, 2018). The steep growth of cell phone use has transformed retail drug markets. Buyers contact the seller and drug transactions take place either by making an appointment to meet or by delivering to the buyer's specified locations (May & Hough, 2004). In more recent years, the role of the internet in drug transactions and online drug markets (cryptomarkets) has developed (Tzanetakis et al., 2016).

Some retail-level drug transactions, especially in closed markets, have been characterized as social supply (May & Hough, 2004; Nicholas, 2008; Taylor & Potter, 2013), a concept that has been explored in studies focusing on cannabis (Caulkins & Pacula, 2006; Hathaway et al., 2018; Coomber et al., 2016; Natarajan & Hough, 2000; Potter, 2009; Scott et al., 2017). Core characteristics of social supply are (i) that it takes place among non-strangers and (ii) that it is non-commercial (Coomber & Turnbull, 2007; Harrison et al., 2007; Hough et al., 2003; Werse, 2008) or 'not-for-profit' (Potter, 2009). Social suppliers may make some minimal profit, but unlike dealers, their main motivation is to "help out a friend" (Hough et al., 2003; Scott et al., 2017). Yet, studies show that transactions often feature the sale of drugs with a modest mark-up to compensate the seller's effort and/or finance the seller's own use (Hathaway et al., 2018). On the other hand, it is not uncommon that users get drugs for free from friends through sharing and/or gift-giving (Werse, 2008; Werse et al., 2019). Moreover, a specific feature of the cannabis market all over the world is that some users cultivate their own cannabis either for personal use only, to share with friends, or to sell part of the crop (Decorte et al., 2011).

The main purpose of this study is to gain insight into how and where cannabis users acquire cannabis and to investigate whether and how this is related to differences in national cannabis

policies. First, it assesses the accessibility of cannabis as perceived by current cannabis users from seven European countries with different cannabis policies. Next, it investigates how they obtain cannabis, either by purchasing it themselves or through alternative methods. Last, it considers the sources of the users' cannabis purchases and explores cross-national differences.

Despite an acceleration in legislative and regulatory reform across the globe, so far cannabis legalization has only been implemented in Uruguay, Canada, and a growing number of US states (Decorte et al., 2020). In the European Union, although there is little harmonization among the EU Member States regarding cannabis legislation (EMCDDA, 2018) and there are remarkable differences in enforcement practices regarding cannabis supply (EMCDDA, 2017), no European country has legalized cannabis. Together, the seven countries selected for our study represent a maximum variation in national cannabis policy within Europe. In terms of national cannabis policy (i.e., 'law in the books' as well as 'law in action'), variation refers to the scheduling of cannabis (whether or not in a legal category separate from the so-called 'hard drugs', such as heroin and cocaine); the legal status of cannabis use (legal/illegal) and possession for personal use (legal/illegal); and sentencing practices for dealing cannabis. On a continuum from liberal to punitive, cannabis policy in the Netherlands can be characterized as the most liberal at the consumer level within the EU.

Table 1 Overview of cannabis policy in the seven countries of this study

Country	Cannabis Schedule *	Possession for Personal Use	Legal Status-Recreational Use	Sentencing Practice on Cannabis Supply **1 kg / 10 kg
The Netherlands (NL)	Yes	Illegal, tolerated	Not an offence	Lowest / Lowest (#26 of 26) / (#25 of 25)
France (FR)	No	Illegal	Illegal	Low / Low (#25 of 26) / (#23 of 25)
Germany (GER)	No	Illegal	Not an offence	Medium / Medium (#12 of 26) / (#15 of 25)
Greece (GR)	Yes	Illegal	Illegal	Highest / 2nd Highest (#1 of 26) / (#2 of 25)
Italy (IT)	Yes	Illegal ***	Not an offence	Medium-High / Medium-High (#7 of 26) / (#7 of 25)
Portugal (PT)	No	Administrative offence	Administrative offence	Medium-Low / Low (#17 of 26) / (#22 of 25)
United Kingdom (UK)	Yes	Illegal	Not an offence	Not available****

* Cannabis is included in a different schedule from heroin.
** Based on the rank number (#) of countries in order of sentences from low to high (EMCDDA, 2017, p. 16).
*** Possession of small amount of cannabis for personal use considered a misdemeanor punishable by administrative sanctions (but not a fine).
**** The UK is not included in that EMCDDA report. However, the Sentencing Council (2012) of the UK has published guidelines on sentencing for the judiciary and criminal justice professionals. These guidelines refer -among others- to sentences concerning supply of 100g and 6 kg of cannabis. Despite this useful document, comparisons cannot be made due to (i) the non-proportionality of comparable sizes (1kg and 100 gr / and 10 kg with 6 kg respectively) and (ii) differentiation in measures as EMCCDA report refers to expected sentences while the UK Sentencing Council refers to guidelines.

Although cannabis is officially an illicit drug, there are hundreds of so-called coffeeshops, i.e., café-like settings where adults (aged 18 years or older) can buy and use cannabis under strict conditions (Van Ooyen-Houben & Kleemans, 2016). The latter is not the case in Portugal. Portugal, that introduced a policy of decriminalization in 2000, is probably the country with the next most liberal cannabis policy. On the other side of the continuum, Greece has the most punitive cannabis policy in our study. Germany and Italy appear to take an intermediate position, while cannabis policy in France and the UK can be characterized as closer to the punitive end of the continuum.

Methods

Participants and procedures

Between February and October 2019, a convenience sample of 1,225 last year cannabis users aged 18–40 years and residing in one of the seven European countries in this study were recruited and surveyed inside or in the vicinity (i.e., close to the entrance) of coffeeshops in the Netherlands, mostly in Amsterdam (41/46 coffeeshops were located in Amsterdam). Except for the Dutch respondents, participants were tourists or had only recently moved to the Netherlands (within the 2 weeks prior to the interview). Coffeeshops not only attract domestic customers, they also attract foreign tourists that buy and use cannabis during their stay in the Netherlands, but in many cases also use and buy cannabis in their home country (Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014). Therefore, coffeeshops traditionally offer a unique opportunity to recruit current cannabis users from many different countries (Korf et al., 2016). This has remained despite official national guidelines that restrict coffeeshop access to residents of the Netherlands, as it is in the discretion of the local authorities to decide whether this applies to the coffeeshops in their community (Korf, 2020). To ascertain variation in the different countries' samples, we took into account representation of country of residence in previous coffeeshop surveys (Korf et al., 2016), country population size, and distance from the Netherlands. The target numbers per country were set at around 200 respondents from France, Italy, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, and half as many for Greece and Portugal.

To ascertain variation in age, and taking into account that many coffeeshop visitors are younger than 30 years of age (Nabben et al., 2016; Van Ooyen-Houben et al., 2014), 40% respondents were targeted to be in the age group 30–40 years. To assure gender diversity, female respondents were purposely oversampled to make up about a third of the sample. Participants signed a consent form that explained the purpose of the study and ensured the respondents' anonymity. Participants could choose between a printed questionnaire or an online version that could only be accessed by typing the link or scanning the QR code from the informed consent

form. Consent forms and questionnaires were available in all the applicable languages (Dutch, German, Greek, English, French, Italian, and Portuguese).

Measures

To assess the availability of cannabis as perceived by users, a standard question from the European Young People and Drugs survey (Eurobarometer, 2014) was used: *In your country*, *how difficult or easy would it be for you personally to obtain cannabis within 24 hours?* Respondents were requested to choose one from the original six options (very easy; fairly easy; fairly difficult; very difficult; impossible; and I don't know). In analysis, these options were merged into three new categories (very easy, fairly easy, else).

To investigate cannabis acquisition, first, participants were asked how they usually got cannabis in the past 12 months in their country. This question was derived from a European survey among users of new psychoactive substances, including most of the answering options (Werse et al., 2019). Participants could choose one or more of the following answers: bought it myself; grew my own cannabis; got it for free; in exchange for something else; friend bought it for me using my money; group buy (together with others). Next, only respondents who replied that they bought cannabis were asked where they usually bought cannabis in their country. This item was also derived from the same European survey among users of new psychoactive substances (Werse et al., 2019). Participants could choose one or more of the following answers: street dealer; home dealer; friends; delivery/mobile phone dealer; Internet; directly from a grower; and coffeeshops (the latter option was available only to Dutch participants).

Background characteristics used in analyses were country, age, gender, employment status, household type, and daily cannabis use. Gender was self-defined and respondents could choose between female, male, or the open option 'other'. The latter category was omitted from statistical analysis due to small numbers. In accordance with the European standard, daily cannabis use was defined as the use of cannabis on 20+ days in the 30 last days (EMCDDA, 2019a). For Dutch respondents this was the last 30 days before the interview, for non-Dutch respondents this was the last 30 days in their home country (before their arrival in the Netherlands).

Analyses

All data were processed with SPSS 24.0. Continuous variables were analyzed using ANOVA, and categorical and nominal variables were analyzed with Chi-square ($\chi 2$) tests. Statistical significance was set at $p \leq .05$. To determine which variables were independently associated with acquiring cannabis and buying cannabis, models of binary logistic regression analysis were conducted. Dependent variables of acquisition methods and supply sources were binary (e.g., buy my own cannabis: no/yes; from street dealer: no/yes, etc.). In regression models, 'country' was recoded into

dummy variables, and the first category (The Netherlands) served as the reference group. Regarding the independent variables gender, employment status, household type, and frequency of use, 'female', 'student', 'alone', and 'non-daily use' served as a reference group.

Results

Table 2 depicts the demographic and cannabis use characteristics for the total sample and by country. In accordance with the selection criteria, close to one-third of the total sample were female participants. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 40 years (mean age = 27.0), with 40.2% aged 30–40 years (not shown in table). Close to one-third of respondents were daily users.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics, daily cannabis use, and accessibility

Country (n)	Total (1225)	NL (218)	FR (230)	GER (191)	GR (86)	IT (217)	PT (93)	UK (190)	Chi^2/F (df)	p
Gender (%)									11.911(6)	.064
Male	67.5	71.6	70.9	60.7	70.9	71.0	63.4	62.1		
Female	31.8	28.0	27.8	38.7	27.9	29.0	36.6	36.8		
Other	0.7	0.5	1.3	0.5	1.2	0.0	0.0	1.1		
Mean age (years)	27.0	27.5	27.5	24.6	27.2	27.7	27.0	27.0	5.654 (6)	.001
(SD)	(6.3)	(7.0)	(6.0)	(5.8)	(4.7)	(6.1)	(6.2)	(6.5)		
Household (%)									35.043 (12)	.001
Alone	23.8	26.6	31.3	19.9	34.9	21.2	21.5	14.2		
Parents	32.6	29.8	23.5	39.8	30.2	35.0	31.2	38.4		
Partner/Housemates	43.7	43.6	45.2	40.3	34.9	43.8	47.3	47.4		
Employment (%)									54.624 (12)	.001
Student	36.0	37.6	29.6	49.7	39.5	35.5	40.9	24.7		
Employed	59.7	54.6	63.9	45.5	54.7	63.1	58.1	73.7		
Unemployed	4.3	7.8	6.5	4.7	5.8	1.4	1.1	1.6		
Cannabis Use (%)										
Daily use	32.7	36.7	41.3	17.8	22.1	35.0	21.5	40.0	43.442 (6)	.001
Accessibility (%)										
Very Easy	64.5	94.5	60.4	53.4	37.2	58.1	58.1	68.9		
Fairly Easy	27.8	4.1	29.6	35.6	46.5	31.3	37.6	2.4	142.024(12)	.001
Else	7.8	1.4	10.0	11.0	16.3	10.6	4.3	3.7		

Table 2 also shows that the vast majority of participants find the access to cannabis in their country easy. However, perceived availability varied across countries. While more than nine in ten Dutch participants reported very easy access, this dropped to less than four in ten Greeks.

When asked how they mostly obtained their cannabis in the past 12 months in their country, in general they reported 1 or 2 methods (1.49 on average). 'Buying it themselves' was by far the most common mode of acquisition, followed by 'obtaining cannabis from friends who bought it for them'. It was less common that the respondents said that they got their cannabis for free, and that they acquired their cannabis with others in a group buy. Growing your own cannabis or

getting cannabis 'in exchange for something' was the least popular option. In bivariate analysis (Table 3), almost all modes of acquisition showed cross-national differences. Buying your own cannabis was the most prevalent among Dutch participants, obtaining cannabis from friends who bought it for them as well as group buys were most often reported by Greeks, and getting cannabis for free ranked highest among Portuguese.

Table 3 also depicts where or from whom the participants who reported buying their own cannabis (n = 929) mostly do so. In general, the respondents reported 1 or 2 sources (1.40 on average). 'Friends' was the most prevalent source, reported by almost half of the buyers. Next, one-third of buyers reported 'street dealers', closely followed by 'home dealers' (i.e., suppliers who sell at their home address). One in every five buyers reported buying from delivery/order by mobile phone services. Only a small minority bought cannabis from growers or on the Internet. Finally, the vast majority of Dutch buyers reported coffeeshops as a supply source (as this option only exists in the Netherlands, it was available only to Dutch participants). Apart from coffeeshops, in the bivariate analyses the clearest cross-national differences per type of cannabis supplier were the relatively high prevalence of buying from street dealers in France, home dealers in Greece, friends in both Greece and Portugal, and growers in Germany.

Table 3 Methods of cannabis acquisition and sources of supply, in %

Acquisition (n)	NL (218)	FR (230)	GER (191)	GR (86)	IT (217)	PT (93)	UK (190)	Total (1225)	Chi^2 (df)	p
Bought myself	92.2	77.4	72.8	69.8	59.9	76.3	78.9	75.8	65.993(6)	<.001
Grow my own	7.3	5.7	5.8	1.2	4.6	6.5	4.2	5.3	5.772(6)	.449
Got it for free	26.1	14.8	23.0	12.8	23.5	38.7	14.2	21.2	36.171(6)	<.001
In exchange	2.3	6.1	6.3	9.3	2.3	9.7	1.6	4.6	21.513(6)	<.001
Friend bought it	12.4	23.5	25.7	40.7	29.5	32.3	23.7	24.8	35.408(6)	<.001
Group buy	17.4	11.3	22.5	32.6	20.7	17.2	6.3	17.0	41.746(6)	<.001
Supply (n)	NL (201)	FR (178)	GER (139)	GR (60)	IT (130)	PT (71)	UK (150)	Total (929)	Chi^2 (df)	p
Street Dealer	10.4	53.9	25.2	25.0	33.1	39.4	43.3	32.6	96.181(6)	<.001
Home Dealer	8.0	19.1	39.6	55.0	48.5	36.6	35.3	30.1	104.804(6)	<.001
Friends	19.4	48.9	56.8	70.0	60.0	64.8	38.0	46.1	102.504(6)	<.001
Delivery Service	1.0	36.0	25.9	15.0	20.8	22.5	26.0	20.8	78.756(6)	<.001
Internet	0.5	0.6	7.9	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.8	2.6	21.883(6)	<.001
From Grower	3.5	5.1	14.4	8.3	1.0	0.4	1.7	7.5	18.283(6)	.006
Coffeeshops	90.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

To further elaborate on cross-national differences in the most common modes of cannabis acquisition, controlling for background characteristics, Table 4 provides results from four models of binary logistic regression analysis. Growing your own cannabis or getting cannabis 'in exchange for something' were excluded because of low prevalence. Compared to Dutch participants, those from all other countries were less likely to buy their own cannabis. In addition,

Table 4 Regression models: Methods of cannabis acquisition

Models (R^2)	Model 1: Bought myself (.203)				Model 2: Friend bought it (.102)				Model 3: Got it for free (.106)				Model 4: Group buy (.086)			
	B	SE	Exp(B)	p	B	SE	(Exp)B	p	B	SE	Exp)B	p	B	SE	(Exp)B	p
Country																
Netherlands (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	.416	310	.243	<.001	.885	264	2.424	.001	-.675	.249	.509	007	-.452	.278	.636	104
Germany	.278	311	.279	<.001	.718	271	2.050	.008	-.358	.242	.699	139	.179	.256	1.196	485
Greece	.648	359	.192	<.001	1.618	309	5.043	<.001	-.987	.366	.373	007	.801	.299	2.227	007
Italy	.214	301	.109	<.001	1.093	260	2.983	<.001	-.145	.230	.865	528	.225	.249	1.252	368
Portugal	.159	362	.314	.001	1.091	309	2.979	<.001	.477	.271	1.612	079	-.036	.333	.965	915
United Kingdom	.203	322	.300	<.001	.718	277	2.050	.010	-.831	.274	.435	002	1.247	.365	.287	001
Age																
Age	017	016	.983	.286	.003	015	1.003	.863	.022	.016	1.022	169	-.040	.019	.961	032
Gender																
Female (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male	860	151	2.364	<.001	-.584	144	.557	<.001	-.633	.152	.531	.001	.190	.176	1.209	280
Employment																
Student(ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed	150	193	1.162	.437	-.156	182	.855	.391	-.363	.198	.696	066	-.094	.206	.910	648
Unemployed	060	400	1.062	.880	-.329	396	.720	.407	.202	.361	1.224	575	-.005	.407	.995	990
Household																
Alone(ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Partner/Housemates	287	199	.751	.151	.456	189	1.578	.016	.148	.196	1.159	452	.155	.218	1.168	477
Parents	577	228	.562	.011	.329	217	1.389	.130	.214	.229	1.238	351	.344	.240	1.411	151
Daily Cannabis Use																
No (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	.311	190	3.709	<.001	-.668	164	.513	<.001	-.736	.179	.479	.001	-.130	.178	.878	465

age, gender, and household type contributed to the prediction of some models of cannabis acquisition. With increasing age, participants were less likely to take part in a group buy. Male participants were more likely to report buying cannabis themselves than females, while female participants were more likely to get cannabis for free and to report that 'a friend bought it for me with my money'. Lastly, daily users were more likely than less frequent users to buy cannabis themselves. On the other hand, daily users were less likely to get cannabis for free and to report that 'a friend bought it for me with my money'.

Table 5 shows results from five models of binary logistic regression analysis predicting sources of buying cannabis. Given the strong preference for acquiring cannabis in coffeeshops among Dutch buyers, it is not surprising that buyers from all the other countries were more likely than the Dutch to buy cannabis from street dealers, home dealers, friends, and delivery/mobile phone services. In the cross-national comparison, compared to the Dutch, French buyers were most likely to buy from street dealers and delivery services, and Greek buyers from home dealers and friends. Germans were more likely to buy directly from growers. Regarding other characteristics, younger buyers were more likely to buy from street dealers and older ones to buy from delivery services. Among buyers, daily users were more likely to buy from home dealers and/or growers than less frequent users. Gender, employment status, and household type did not contribute to the prediction of the supply source.

Discussion

In this study, perceived access to cannabis varied across countries, from the easiest in the country with the most liberal cannabis policy (the Netherlands) to the most difficult in the country with the most repressive cannabis policy in our study (Greece). Although in our survey overall access was perceived as easier than in a survey among young Europeans (92.2% said that it would be very or fairly easy to obtain cannabis compared to 58% in the survey of Flash Eurobarometer 401; Eurobarometer, 2014), the rank-order in accessibility was largely similar to Eurobarometer survey, with Greece among the countries with the least easy access (Eurobarometer, 2014). Yet, across all of the countries in this study, the vast majority of participants perceived access to cannabis to be fairly or very easy. This finding may suggest an indication of normalized retail markets in these countries, as increased drug availability is one of the theoretical pillars of the normalization thesis (Coomber & Turnbull, 2007; Parker et al., 2002; Scott et al., 2017).

In line with previous research (Trautmann et al., 2013), across all of the countries included in this study, buying cannabis yourself was by far the most popular way to acquire cannabis, yet significantly more often reported by Dutch participants. The next common mode of acquisition was to have a friend buy the cannabis with the respondents' money. The popularity of this method confirms the importance of the role of a broker among cannabis users (Duffy et al., 2008;

Table 5 Regression models: Sources of cannabis supply

Models (R^2)	Model 1: Friends (.162)				Model 2: Street Dealer (.199)				Model 3: Home Dealer (.199)				Model 4: Delivery (.194)				Model 5: Grower (.073)			
	B	SE	Exp(B)	P	B	SE	Exp(B)	P	B	SE	Exp(B)	P	B	SE	Exp(B)	P	B	SE	Exp(B)	P
Country																				
Netherlands (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	1.412	.237	4.105	<.001	2.459	.286	11.699	<.001	.949	.328	2.584	.004	4.028	.730	56.152	<.001	.376	.521	1.456	.470
Germany	1.628	.252	5.094	<.001	.969	.310	2.635	.002	2.240	.325	9.394	<.001	3.684	.742	39.796	<.001	1.824	.471	6.198	<.001
Greece	2.239	.338	9.383	<.001	1.009	.386	2.744	.009	2.783	.378	16.171	<.001	2.979	.802	19.674	<.001	1.126	.614	3.082	.067
Italy	1.873	.256	6.505	<.001	1.497	.304	4.468	<.001	2.456	.321	11.656	<.001	3.341	.746	28.243	<.001	.757	.524	2.132	.149
Portugal	1.972	.309	7.187	<.001	1.793	.346	6.008	<.001	2.112	.369	8.265	<.001	3.460	.770	31.804	<.001	.671	.653	1.957	.304
United Kingdom	.905	.253	2.471	<.001	1.925	.297	6.856	<.001	1.866	.323	6.460	<.001	3.707	.741	40.740	<.001	1.163	.486	3.200	.017
Age																				
Age	-.024	.015	.976	.119	-.037	.017	.944	.029	-.012	.017	.988	.488	0.16	.018	1.016	.374	.030	.027	1.030	.270
Gender																				
Female (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male	-.291	.161	.748	.071	-.058	.173	.944	.739	.299	.181	1.349	.098	.058	.197	1.059	.770	.006	.292	1.006	.984
Employment																				
Student(ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employed	.001	.188	1.001	.997	-.256	.198	.774	.196	.112	.205	1.118	.586	-.144	.229	.866	.529	-.049	.342	.952	.886
Unemployed	.111	.382	1.118	.771	-.068	.415	.934	.870	.709	.406	2.032	.081	.155	.473	1.168	.743	.517	.614	1.677	.400
Household																				
Alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Partner/Housemates	.065	.179	1.067	.716	-.340	.198	.712	.086	.045	.199	1.047	.820	-.250	.205	.779	.224	.425	.329	1.530	.197
Parents	-.182	.213	.834	.393	.288	.223	1.334	.198	.037	.232	1.038	.872	-.900	.262	.407	.001	.009	.411	1.009	.982
Daily Cannabis Use																				
No (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	-.283	.151	.753	.060	.036	.159	1.037	.821	.705	.166	2.023	<.001	.135	.184	1.145	.462	.674	.271	1.961	.013

Hough et al., 2003; Lenton et al., 2015). A broker (i.e., a person, usually a friend or an acquaintance, who purchases drugs on behalf of a person or group) is important for buyers as it is a convenient and comfortable mode of cannabis transaction, creating a safe distance between users and dealers (Hathaway et al., 2018; Potter, 2009). The third most prevalent method to acquire cannabis was to get it for free. Sharing and gift-giving among peers may be seen as a 'social nicety' or even an 'unwritten rule' among cannabis users (Duffy et al., 2008) that reflects norms of reciprocity and sharing in cannabis use experience (Hathaway et al., 2018). The fourth strategy was 'group buy', with an individual buying cannabis on behalf of friends or acquaintances and the drug being split between those who have contributed money for that buy (Coomber et al., 2016). In addition to being 'a social thing', a group buy may also be economically motivated, as purchasing a larger quantity to fulfill the group's supply requirements might reduce the cost (Moyle & Coomber, 2019). Finally, only a small minority grew their own cannabis. On the one hand, this study supports earlier findings that domestic cultivation is practiced by users all across Europe (Potter et al., 2011); on the other hand, the relatively low figure also confirms that home growing is not a very common method to acquire cannabis (Belackova et al., 2019; Trautmann et al., 2013).

In order of popularity, the most common sources for buying cannabis, were (1) friends, at distance followed by (2) street dealers, (3) home dealers, and (4) delivery services. In other words, closed markets (friends, home dealers) were more important than open and semi-open markets. Dutch buyers were the exception to the rule, as coffeeshops (open market) were by far the most dominant place to buy cannabis. The principal role of friends as sellers is in line with recent cannabis retail studies (Chatwin & Potter 2014; Grigg et al., 2015; Hathaway et al., 2018; Lenton et al., 2015; Vlaemynck, 2013). Buying from friends has been characterized as a convenient and cost-effective option for acquiring cannabis (Moyle, 2013; Rossi, 2020) and it has been suggested that cannabis users apply this method because it minimizes potential risks, such as direct contact with 'real' dealers (Caulkins & Pacula, 2006; Coomber & Turnbull, 2007; Potter, 2009). This article explored the supply option of 'buying cannabis from a friend', which focuses on the perspective of the buyer. Future studies can focus more on the perspective of the seller, and explore how the seller views and experiences this relationship with the buyer. Street dealers and home dealers ranked at second and third place as the top suppliers to buyers. Street markets used to be very popular but since the emergence of cell phones they have been on the decline internationally (May & Hough, 2004). They have been described as threats to personal safety as they are more susceptible to violence than closed markets (Barratt et al., 2016; Harocopos & Hough, 2005; Reuter, 2009) and as riskier because both sellers and buyers expose themselves to law enforcement in public spaces (Tzanetakis 2018). However, this study shows that street dealers are still relevant to the retail cannabis market. This may be explained by the advantages of street selling, such as the openness of the setting to buyers, ease of locating buyers and sellers,

lack of need for a prior introduction to the seller, and in having only a few barriers to access (May & Hough, 2004; Sandberg, 2008). In contrast to the open street market, knowing someone is a prerequisite for buying cannabis from a home dealer. Home dealing can be understood as a segment of the closed market as home dealers only sell cannabis to selected customers, not to strangers. Home dealing is usually considered safer than street dealing as it takes place in a private place (Rossi, 2020). The emergence of mobile phones, internet, and social media has allowed the buying and selling of drugs to move out of openly accessible physical spaces (Mounteney et al., 2016) and has strongly contributed to the growing popularity of drug delivery services (Chatwin & Potter, 2014; Demant & Bakken, 2019; Thanki & Frederick, 2016). Yet, this study suggests that more traditional methods (street dealing and home dealing) are still more prevalent than delivery services. Given the abundant literature about the expanding role of the internet into the distribution of illicit drugs (Barratt et al., 2016; Broséus et al., 2017; Masson & Bancroft, 2018; Mounteney et al., 2016; Tzanetakis, 2018), and with cannabis being described as the most trafficked drug on cryptomarket platforms (Norbutas, 2018; Kruithof et al., 2016; Soska & Christin, 2015), it may be a surprise that only a very small minority of the users in this study buy cannabis on the internet. However, our findings confirm that only a small proportion of cannabis users have transitioned to cryptomarkets (Décary-Hétu et al., 2018). One explanation could be that cryptomarkets represent only a tiny fraction of the drug trade (Aldridge & Decary-Hétu, 2016; Trautmann et al., 2013). Also, it can be argued that access to the dark web requires access to computers and technological skills that many users don't have (Décary-Hétu et al., 2018; Demant et al., 2018).

An important limitation of this study is that it was based on a targeted, convenience sample, which cannot be expected to generate normative, statistically representative results for the entire population of current cannabis users. However, the sample was diverse in frequency of cannabis use, as well as in age and gender, and thereby allowed for comparative cross-national analysis. Yet, to some extent, cross-national differences might be also due to respondents' travel opportunities to the Netherlands (distance, costs) and preferences for visiting a coffeeshop. Interestingly, while in a survey among young Europeans as compared to female participants, male respondents more often stated that it would be easy for them to obtain cannabis within 24 hours (Eurobarometer, 2014), in our survey among current users we found no gender differences in accessibility. However, regression analysis in the present study showed that male users were more likely to buy their own cannabis, while female users were more likely to obtain cannabis through a friend that bought it for them with their money or to get it for free. This confirms that attitudes related to cannabis purchase (direct buy versus indirect buy and free acquisition) are gendered (Bennett & Holloway 2019; Hathaway et al., 2018). Female users may prefer alternatives to direct buy at the illegal market because they are less associated with threats to personal safety and risks of physical violence (Barratt et al., 2016). Although it has been argued that

feminine norms tend to emphasize risk aversion in cannabis use patterns (Hemsing & Greaves, 2020), female and male buyers were largely similar in where or from whom they buy cannabis. Regarding age, younger users were more likely to obtain cannabis through group buys and younger buyers had higher odds of buying cannabis from street dealers. Possibly, these age differences could be explained by adult roles and responsibilities that come with maturation and aging (Shiner, 2009; Osborne & Fogel, 2008; Williams & Askew, 2016), resulting in a shift away from peer groups and the risks deriving from street culture and open markets. Regression analysis also revealed frequency of use as a significant predictor of the mode of acquiring and buying cannabis. Compared to less frequent users, daily users were much more likely to buy cannabis themselves. Alternatively, and in line with Hathaway et al. (2018), non-daily users were more likely to obtain cannabis for free or from a friend who bought it for them with their money. Finally, among buyers, as compared to non-daily users, daily users had higher odds of buying cannabis from home dealers, which might reflect a higher level of privileged access. In other words, daily users appear to be less involved in social supply, and more oriented towards closed markets (home dealers, domestic cultivation).

In the cross-national comparison, controlling for gender, age, household, employment, and frequency of use, Dutch participants were the most likely to buy cannabis themselves and also differed in various other aspects of obtaining cannabis and buying behavior, in particular the dominance of coffeeshops as supply source. Since respondents were recruited inside or close to such premises, this study could have overestimated their role in how and where Dutch users acquire and buy cannabis. However, a strong preference for coffeeshops has also been reported in the 2018 national household survey, where 95.5% of last year users who buy their own cannabis reported that they (also) do so in coffeeshops (NDM, 2020). In regression analysis, compared to Dutch users, Greeks had not only the least easy access to cannabis, but they were also the most likely to let friends buy cannabis for them with their money and obtain cannabis through group buys; whilst among buyers, Greeks bought from friends and home dealers most often. In other words, in the Netherlands, the country with the most liberal cannabis policy in this study, users were most strongly oriented towards an open cannabis market, while in Greece, the country with the most punitive cannabis policy, users leaned more strongly towards a closed market and social supply. However, findings from other countries do not support a unidirectional link with punitiveness. For example, respondents from France, whose cannabis policy is relatively punitive, had the highest odds of buying from street dealers (open market) and relatively low odds of buying from home dealers (closed market). It appears that other factors, e.g., differences in the broader social and cultural accommodation of cannabis markets (Chatwin, 2011; Potter, 2018), are more important than differences in cannabis policy in understanding cross-national variation in how and where users obtain and buy cannabis. Further research is warranted to investigate the specific national, cultural, and social characteristics that affect the preferences on

different supply methods. In future studies about cannabis transactions, research could also focus on the growing diversification of cannabis products.

Cross-national differences notwithstanding, cannabis is easily available in the everyday lives of current cannabis users in Europe. Within and across countries, users acquire cannabis in various ways and buyers purchase it from various sources, representing a mixture of open, closed, and semi-open retail markets, as well as a combination of commercial and non-commercial supply methods. The ease of access to cannabis and the multiple supply methods and sources may be understood as signs of a normalized retail market. At the same time, the diversity in cannabis acquisition, depending on country, gender, age, household status, or frequency of cannabis use, indicates a differentiated normalization of the cannabis retail market. Nonetheless, our findings confirm the significant role of social supply (Coomber & Moyle, 2014; Taylor & Potter, 2013) across Europe. Thus, this study supports the claims that the normalization of cannabis use has extended to encompass a normalization of cannabis supply, especially recreational supply within friendship networks (Coomber et al., 2016). Yet, our findings also indicate that, in general, cannabis users prefer to buy their own cannabis. Although cross-national differences in cannabis acquisition were not unidirectionally linked with punitiveness of national cannabis policy, the Dutch coffeeshops in this study, together with the swift change from illegal to legal supply sources after cannabis legalization in Canada (Rotermann 2020) strongly suggests that, if they would have the choice, most cannabis users would strongly prefer to buy cannabis in an open, regulated, or legal market.

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7

Intermezzo: Cannabis users' perceptions of drug policy in their country

Introduction

Prior chapters explored cross-national similarities and differences in experiences, practices, and perceptions of cannabis users from seven European countries with different cannabis policies. Based on the legal status of cannabis and the law enforcement approach towards cannabis (de jure and partly de facto), these countries were placed on a continuum ranging from relatively liberal (the Netherlands) to relatively punitive (Greece). The Netherlands was often the most distinctive in the cross-national differences that were identified, even when controlling for confounders such as age, gender, and frequency of use in the regression analysis. Meanwhile, Greek users were regularly found to be the most contrasting to Dutch users, although not always. Other countries were sometimes closer to the Netherlands on one aspect but closer to Greece on another. One explanation for these mixed findings could be that national cannabis policies are too varied and complex to be unequivocally and one-dimensionally captured on an international continuum from liberal to punitive – even if the emphasis is on the consumer level.

Although with regard to punitiveness different aspects of the variation in cannabis policy across member states were taken into account, i.e., the classification of illicit substances (cannabis vs. so-called hard drugs), and diverging legal approaches towards cannabis use or possession and sentencing practices (see short overview table, Chapter 1), perhaps the actual variation in punitiveness of cannabis policy, particularly for 'cannabis policy in action', was not sufficiently reflected. What actually are the cannabis policy priorities of each country and how are they practically implemented? In principle, figures on cannabis-related arrests, seizures, and sanctions, for example, could provide better insight into cross-national differences in de facto cannabis policy. Although to a certain extent, such figures do exist, like those published in the annual EMCDDA drug reports, they do not only reflect the punitiveness (law enforcement activities, results), but also differences in the nature and size of cannabis markets (EMCDDA, 2017a; De Ruyver et al., 2013). Similar problems in the availability and completeness of data, as well as limitations in cross-national comparability, are also found in social cost and public expenditure studies (Vander Laenen et al., 2011).

As an alternative albeit imperfect, solution for the current analysis what cannabis users perceive as the main drug policy priorities and how they evaluate the punitiveness of cannabis policy and law enforcement practice in their country were examined. The countries in this thesis do not only differ in their legal approach towards cannabis. Even though they have committed themselves to a shared approach, as is agreed upon in the EU Drugs Strategy for example, their policy may also differ in other aspects. The EU Drugs Strategy represents the applicable drug policy position and aspirations of the EU and its Member States during a certain time frame (Ballotta et al., 2008). The empirical data for this thesis were collected at the time of the EU drugs strategy 2013-2020, which aimed to reduce drug demand and supply within the EU, as well as drug-related

health and social risks and harms. In the European Council recommendation on the EU Drugs Strategy (Recommendation 2012/C 402), an integrated approach is presented, incorporating criminal, social, and health policies towards security, health, and social aspects of the drug phenomenon. Notwithstanding shared core aims and similar policy instruments, the so-called pillars of policy (prevention, treatment, law enforcement, and harm reduction) (EMCDDA, 2017a), the EU Strategy does not require identical national policies, rather, it intends to add value to national strategies. The European Commission, referring to the European Union Drugs Strategy 2013-2020 and European Union Action Plan on Drugs 2017-2020, acknowledged that alternatives to imprisonment for drug-using offenders might reduce repeat offense rates and relieve financial and administrative burden and social costs, while also increasing social inclusion. Based on that, the European Council's conclusion 6931/2018 of 8 March 2018 encouraged the Member States in accordance with their national legislation—to provide alternatives to coercive sanctions for drug-using offenders where appropriate. The EU Strategy slips away from a strictly law enforcement-based approach and states that evidence-based drug demand reduction policies should include prevention, early detection and intervention, risk and harm reduction, treatment, rehabilitation, and social reintegration and recovery (EMCDDA, 2017b).

Aim and method

The aim of this chapter is to explore how cannabis users in different countries with different cannabis policies perceive drug policy in their countries. In particular, what cannabis users perceive as the main drug policy priorities and how they evaluate the punitiveness of cannabis policy and law enforcement practice in their country is examined.

Data were derived from the same survey used in Chapters 3-6. For this chapter, a specific set of items from the questionnaire was analyzed. Firstly, to assess drug policy perceptions from a multi-dimensional perspective, participants were asked to choose three main priorities that they think that their countries have from a list of seven drug policy priorities. The seven options were derived from and inspired by the Eurobarometer and the EU Drugs Strategy 2013-2020 (Eurobarometer 401, 2014; EMCDDA, 2017b). Secondly, focusing on policy in terms of the demand vs. supply side of the drug market, respondents were asked their opinion on how soft or tough the drug policy in their country was towards drug users and drug dealers (Likert scale: very soft, soft, moderate, tough, very tough). Thirdly, to more specifically investigate the perception of law enforcement policy towards drug dealers in their country, participants were asked (a) how large or small the chance is that a drug dealer who sells 100 grams (3.5 ounces) of cannabis in one month to users will be arrested by the police, and (b) if the cannabis dealer was arrested, would they be sentenced to prison. Similar questions were asked for arguably the most classical hard drug, i.e., about a drug dealer selling 100 grams of heroin in one month to users.

All data were processed with SPSS 24.0. Differences between countries, groups, and categories were tested with Chi^2 tests. Statistical significance was set at $p \leq .05$. Daily or near daily (further on: daily) cannabis use was defined as having used cannabis on twenty days or more in the 30 days. For Dutch respondents this was the last 30 days before the interview, while for non-Dutch respondents this was the last 30 days in their home country, before their arrival in the Netherlands. In order to estimate the impact of home country and other independent variables (age, gender, and frequency of use) on each dependent variable, regression analysis models were performed. Binary logistic regression models were calculated to estimate the impact of the above-mentioned variables on 'social integration' and 'arresting drug dealers' as top three drug policy priorities. Linear regression analyses were conducted to estimate the impact of the same variables on the stringency of drug policy towards users and dealers, as well as the risk of arrest and imprisonment. For the regression analyses, country, age, gender, and frequency of use were recoded into dummy variables, and the first category (The Netherlands, female, and non-daily users) served as the reference group.

Drug policy priorities

When asked to nominate from a list of seven predefined aspects of drug policy the three aspects that in their opinion were given the highest priority in their country, *drug prevention and education* and *arresting drug dealers* clearly ranked on top. In the total sample they were chosen by more than six out of ten participants. *Providing drug addicts access to treatment* and *reducing the risk of HIV and Aids among injecting drug users* took an intermediate position and were nominated by four out of ten. Overall, the drug policy priorities that were least frequently chosen as being in the top three priorities were *reducing theft committed by drug addicts*, *reducing overdose risk of drug overdose*, and *social integration/rehabilitation of drug addicts*, as they were nominated by around three in ten participants. However, the cross-national comparison showed significant differences between countries.

Table 1 Drug policy aspects with the top three highest priority

Countries	**Total**	**NL**	**FR**	**GER**	**GR**	**IT**	**PT**	**UK**	**Chi^2 (df)**	**p**
(n)	(1225)	(218)	(230)	(191)	(86)	(217)	(93)	(190)		
(%)	(100)	(17.8)	(18.8)	(15.6)	(7.0)	(17.7)	(7.6)	(15.5)		
Prevention	63.2	68.3	69.6	65.4	61.6	46.1	64.5	66.8	35.4806)	<.001
Arrest Dealers	61.4	46.8	74.8	45.5	75.6	69.1	41.9	72.1	94.067(6)	<.001
Provide Treatment	41.1	60.1	38.7	26.7	27.9	41.9	47.3	38.4	57.695(6)	<.001
Reducing Theft	30.5	27.5	22.6	26.2	40.7	35.9	26.9	38.9	23.562(6)	.001
Reducing HIV Risk	42.1	25.2	47.0	53.9	59.3	47.5	40.9	30.5	62.133(6)	<.001
Reducing Overdose Risk	30.7	27.5	27.0	51.3	18.6	26.7	22.6	32.1	51.266(6)	<.001
Social Integration	31.0	44.5	20.4	30.9	16.3	32.7	55.9	21.1	75.327(6)	<.001

Strikingly, *prevention* was much less often nominated by respondents from Italy than for any other country. *Arresting drug dealers* was least frequently chosen by Portuguese respondents, followed by Germans and Dutch—yet it was reported as a priority by a substantial minority of more than four in ten respondents. Contrariwise, it was perceived as the number one drug policy priority among Greeks, French, British, and Italians. Relative to other countries, drug policy in the Netherlands and Portugal emerged as the strongest oriented towards treatment and social integration, while Greece, France, and the UK stood out as the most directed towards law enforcement (i.e., arresting drug dealers and reducing drug-related theft) and least focused on social integration. Germany occupied a somewhat different position, with law enforcement being a top priority similar to the Netherlands and Portugal on the one hand, while having a relatively low level of priority for treatment and a strong focus on harm reduction (overdose and HIV) on the other hand. Lastly, the Italian drug policy priority profile as perceived by cannabis users was characterized by a greater than average prioritization of law enforcement (arresting dealers), an average priority with regard to harm reduction, treatment, and social integration, and prevention being the lowest priority.

As to *punitiveness*, when taking into account other variables, the regression analysis identified Portugal, the Netherlands, and Germany as having a lower priority for arresting drug dealers; and Greece and France as having the highest priority, closely followed by the UK and Italy. Interestingly in the context of stigmatization and de-stigmatization (see Chapter 4), *social integration* received the highest priority in Portugal and the Netherlands, and the lowest in Greece, France, and the UK, with Germany and Italy taking an intermediate position.

Table 2 Binary logistic regression analysis: drug policy priority to social integration and arresting dealers

(Nagelkerke $R^{2)}$	Social Integration (.091)				Arresting Dealers (.125)			
	B	SE	p	Exp(B)	B	SE	p	Exp(B)
Country								
Netherlands (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	-1.165	.216	<.001	.312	1.236	.207	<.001	3.441
Germany	-.511	.213	.016	.600	-.056	.206	.786	.946
Greece	-1.406	.324	<.001	.245	1.317	.289	<.001	3.731
Italy	-.498	.200	.013	.608	.979	.203	<.001	2.662
Portugal	.479	.252	.057	1.614	-.133	.254	.600	.875
United Kingdom	-1.055	.226	<.001	.348	1.086	.214	<.001	2.963
Age								
Age	.022	.010	.036	1.022	-.034	.010	<.001	.967
Gender								
Female (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Male	.150	.141	.287	1.162	.235	.133	.078	1.265
Daily cannabis use								
No (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	-.109	.142	.443	.896	.354	.138	.011	1.424

Policy towards users and dealers

Toughest in France

Participant opinion on how soft or tough drug policy towards drug users and towards drug dealers in their country was varied both across and within countries.

Table 3 Toughness of drug policy approach towards drug users and drug dealers

Countries (n) (%)	**Total** (1225) (100)	**NL** (218) (17.8)	**FR** (230) (18.8)	**GER** (191) (15.6)	**GR** (86) (7.0)	**IT** (217) (17.7)	**PT** (93) (7.6)	**UK** (190) (15.5)	**Chi² (df)**	**p**
Users									264.473(24)	<.001
Very soft	6.4	13.8	3.5	5.2	0.0	3.2	20.4	2.1		
Soft	21.8	39.0	10.9	28.3	14.0	18.9	26.9	13.2		
Moderate	29.5	32.1	20.4	31.4	43.0	21.7	39.8	33.2		
Tough	30.7	13.3	43.9	22.0	34.9	37.8	9.7	43.7		
Very tough	11.7	1.8	21.3	13.1	8.1	18.4	3.2	7.9		
Mean Score	3.20	2.50	3.69	3.09	3.37	3.49	2.48	3.42	39.325(6)	<.001
(sd)	1.10	0.95	1.04	1.11	0.83	1.09	1.03	0.89		
Dealers									146.400(24)	<.001
Very soft	1.7	3.2	0.9	1.6	3.5	1.8	2.2	0.0		
Soft	11.3	19.7	10.4	7.3	11.6	9.2	18.3	5.3		
Moderate	30.4	44.0	12.6	28.8	31.4	33.2	28.7	30.5		
Tough	36.8	28.0	42.6	41.4	40.7	25.9	33.3	36.3		
Very tough	19.8	5.0	33.5	20.9	12.8	19.8	7.5	27.9		
Mean Score	3.62	3.12	3.97	3.73	3.48	3.63	3.26	3.87	21.238(6)	<.001
(sd)	0.98	0.89	0.98	0.93	0.98	0.96	0.92	0.88		
Difference	0.42	0.62	0.30	0.64	0.11	0.14	0.78	0.45		
t	15.01	9.92	4.95	10.05	.74	1.80	8.31	7.14		
P	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.461	.074	<.001	<.001		

In the total sample, on a five-point scale ranging from very soft (1) to very tough (5), the average perception of drug policy was moderately tough towards users and somewhat tougher towards drug dealers (mean scores 3.20 and 3.62, respectively). In the cross-national comparison, drug policy towards users was perceived as toughest in France, followed by Italy, the UK, and Greece. Contrariwise, perceived stringency was lowest in Portugal and the Netherlands (soft-moderate), while Germany took an intermediate position (moderate) relative to other countries. Similarly, drug policy towards drug dealers was perceived as toughest in France and the UK, and was least tough in the Netherlands and Portugal. Interestingly, German participants perceived the drug policy towards dealers in their country almost as tough as those from France and Britain. Regarding differences in perceived stringency in policy towards users vs. dealers, the largest contrasts

Table 4 Linear Regression for drug policy toughness towards users/dealers, and for risk of arrest and imprisonment of cannabis dealers

Models	Model 1: Drug Policy Users					Model 2: Drug Policy Dealers					Model 3: Arrest Risk Cannabis Dealer					Model 4: Prison Risk Cannabis Dealer				
(R^2)	(.187)					(.116)					(.060)					(.084)				
	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper	Beta	t	p	Lower	Upper
Country																				
Netherlands (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	.415	12.376	<.001	.985	1.356	.342	9.785	<.001	.686	1.030	.289	8.031	<.001	.574	.945	.343	9.643	<.001	.767	1.160
Germany	.203	6.095	<.001	.416	.812	.211	6.088	<.001	.385	.752	.220	6.159	<.001	.423	.818	.216	6.122	<.001	.443	.860
Greece	.209	7.046	<.001	.650	1.151	.096	3.106	.002	.136	.600	.133	4.187	<.001	.284	.786	.191	6.086	<.001	.557	1.086
Italy	.349	10.499	<.001	.816	1.192	.201	5.838	<.001	.344	.691	.169	4.714	<.001	.263	.638	.180	5.089	<.001	.316	.712
Portugal	.006	.205	.838	-.218	.268	.038	1.223	.222	-.085	.366	.092	2.867	.004	.112	.598	.109	3.437	<.001	.193	.706
United Kingdom	.299	9.142	<.001	.714	1.104	.269	7.893	<.001	.547	.908	.186	5.285	<.001	.330	.720	.212	6.117	<.001	.436	.849
Age																				
Age	-.096	-3.635	<.001	-.026	-.008	-.141	-5.117	<.001	-.030	.014	-.009	-.333	.739	-.011	.008	-.007	-.244	.807	-.011	.008
Gender																				
Female (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		--
Male	.045	1.700	.089	-.016	.227	-.001	-.039	.969	-.115	.110	-.006	-.201	.841	-.134	.109	-.008	-.281	.779	-.147	.110
Daily Cannabis Use																				
No (ref)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	.109	4.097	<.001	.134	.380	.026	.944	.345	-.059	.169	-.041	-1.435	.151	-.213	.033	-.070	-2.468	.014	-.293	-.034

were perceived in Portugal and in the Netherlands, followed by Germany (i.e., softer towards users), while in both Greece and Italy drug policy towards users was perceived as equally tough as towards dealers. In regression analysis, when controlling for age, gender, and frequency of cannabis use, the overall picture remained largely the same (Table 4, Model 1 and 2). Drug policy towards users as well as towards dealers was perceived as softer in Portugal and the Netherlands than in the other countries and perceived as toughest in France.

Dealers' risks of arrest and imprisonment

Highest in France

As to the law enforcement policy towards cannabis dealers in their country, on a five-point scale ranging from very small (1) to very large (5), both the average perceived risk of arrest and the average perceived risk of imprisonment for arrestees were close to moderate (mean scores 2.62 and 2.78, respectively). Perceived risks for heroin dealers were higher: a moderate-large risk of arrest and a close to large risk of imprisonment (mean scores 3.46 and 3.81, respectively). Risk perceptions varied both within and across countries (Table 5).

In every country, there were some participants that perceived very small risks of arrests and imprisonment for cannabis and heroin, while others perceived these risks as very high. For both drugs and for the risk of arrest as well as of imprisonment, the perceived risks were lowest in the Netherlands and highest in France on average. The difference between the perceived risks for dealing cannabis compared to heroin was also largest in the Netherlands, albeit comparable to the UK. Contrariwise, the difference in the perceived risks of arrest and imprisonment between the two drugs was smallest in Greece and Italy.

The perceived risks of arrest and imprisonment for cannabis dealers in Portugal were closest to those in the Netherlands, followed by Italy, while the risks for heroin dealers in Italy were closest to those in the Netherlands, followed by Portugal. Perceived risks in Germany were relatively close to those in France and also quite similar to those in the UK and Greece. In the regression analysis, when controlling for age, gender, and frequency of cannabis use, the overall picture remained largely the same (Table 4, Model 3 and 4). The risk of arrest and imprisonment after arrest for cannabis dealing was perceived as being the lowest in the Netherlands, followed by Portugal, and the highest in France.

Country profiles

Taken together, the contrasts in drug policy perception were greatest between respondents from the Netherlands and Portugal on the one hand and cannabis users from France and Greece on the other. Users from the other three countries had less polarizing views on drug policy.

- Dutch and Portuguese users perceived the lowest punitiveness towards drug dealers, the softest drug policy towards both users and dealers, and lowest drug policy priority for arresting drug dealers, but the highest drug policy priority for social integration.
- French users took an opposite position on all these aspects. They perceived the highest punitiveness towards drug dealers and the toughest drug policy towards both users and dealers. Greek users showed a more mixed picture; they perceived a less punitive law enforcement approach towards drug dealers, but the highest drug policy priority for arresting drug dealers. Both Greek and French users considered social integration to be the lowest drug policy priority.
- Participants from the United Kingdom were closer to French and Greek users; they perceived a relatively punitive and tough approach, with social integration being a relatively low drug policy priority.
- This was followed by German users, with a similar perception of punitiveness and toughness in drug policy towards users and dealers, but a relatively low drug policy priority for arresting drug dealers and a medium priority for social integration. Overall, Italian users took an intermediate position in terms of punitiveness towards drug dealers, perceived a relatively tough policy towards users, and an average priority in social integration.

Gender, age and cannabis use frequency

Regarding the other independent variables in the regression analyses, gender did not significantly contribute to the prediction of the outcome variable in any of the models. Age was significantly associated with perceived toughness in approach and with 'social integration' and 'arresting dealers' as prioritized drug policy aspects. Younger users were more likely to consider the drug policy towards users and dealers in their country as tough and to report arresting drug dealers as a drug policy priority. While with increasing age, users were more likely to perceive 'social integration' as one of the top three drug policy priorities in their country. Regarding frequency of use, daily users were more likely to perceive the approach towards drug users in their country as tough and to believe that arresting dealers is one of the top three drug policy priorities compared to non-daily users. On the other hand, non-daily users were more likely to perceive a higher risk for arrested dealers to be sentenced to prison than daily users. Frequency of use did not predict 'social integration', toughness of drug policy towards drug dealers, or the risk of arrest of cannabis dealers.

Discussion/Conclusion

Cannabis users' perceptions of the punitiveness of drug policy in their country is largely in line with what was to be expected from the diversity in the legal status of cannabis and the law enforcement approach towards cannabis (de jure and partly de facto) as briefly outlined in Chapter

1. The perceptions of the Dutch and Portuguese cannabis users confirm the placement of their country on the liberal edge of the continuum, and the perceptions of the users from Greece and France confirm the position of their country at the other end, that of strict and punitive drug policies.

Table 5 Cannabis & heroin dealer's risk of arrest and imprisonment

Countries	**Total**	**NL**	**FR**	**GER**	**GR**	**IT**	**PT**	**UK**		
(n)	(1225)	(218)	(230)	(191)	(86)	(217)	(93)	(190)	**Chi^2 (df)/F(df)**	**p**
(%)	(100)	(17.8)	(18.8)	(15.6)	(7.0)	(17.7)	(7.6)	(15.5)		
Risk or arrest										
Cannabis Dealer									103.089(24)	<.001
Very small	13.9	28.9	9.1	6.8	3.5	11.5	18.3	14.7		
Small	32.6	34.4	26.1	31.9	43.0	35.9	30.1	31.6		
Moderate	34.7	28.9	37.0	40.8	33.7	35.5	36.6	31.1		
Large	14.9	7.3	20.9	15.2	19.8	14.3	10.8	16.8		
Very large	3.9	0.5	7.0	5.2	0.0	2.8	4.3	5.8		
Score	2.62	2.16	2.90	2.80	2.70	2.61	2.53	2.67	12.221(6)	<.001
Sd	1.02	0.94	1.05	0.96	0.83	0.96	1.05	1.10		
Heroin Dealer									84.457(24)	<.001
Very small	3.0	5.5	0.9	0.5	3.5	5.5	2.2	2.6		
Small	12.7	20.6	9.6	8.4	14.0	11.5	10.8	13.7		
Moderate	34.0	38.1	31.3	34.0	33.7	37.8	41.9	24.7		
Large	35.9	27.1	37.0	45.0	37.2	35.5	37.6	34.7		
Very large	14.3	8.7	21.3	12.0	11.6	9.7	7.5	24.2		
Score	3.46	3.13	3.68	3.60	3.40	3.32	3.38	3.64	8.982(6)	<.001
Sd	0.99	1.02	0.94	0.83	0.99	0.99	0.86	1.07		
Mean Difference	0.83	0.97	0.78	0.80	0.70	0.71	0.85	0.97		
t	28.648	15.241	11.303	10.800	6.427	11.152	8.478	11.565		
P	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		
Risk of imprisonment										
Cannabis Dealer									118.285(24)	<.001
Very small	13.3	28.0	7.0	8.4	5.8	12.4	14.0	13.2		
Small	27.4	31.7	21.7	30.9	26.7	30.0	29.0	22.6		
Moderate	33.1	31.7	31.3	30.4	29.1	35.5	36.6	37.4		
Large	20.1	7.8	29.1	23.0	34.9	16.6	15.1	20.0		
Very large	6.0	0.9	10.9	7.3	3.5	5.5	5.4	6.8		
Score	2.78	2.22	3.15	2.90	3.03	2.73	2.69	2.85	16.527(6)	<.001
Sd	1.10	0.98	1.10	1.08	1.00	1.06	1.06	1.10		
Heroin Dealer									105.108(24)	<.001
Very small	2.9	6.0	0.4	1.6	1.2	5.1	2.2	2.6		
Small	7.5	15.1	4.3	4.7	5.8	8.8	4.3	6.3		
Moderate	22.4	26.6	15.2	18.3	29.1	28.6	28.0	17.4		
Large	40.3	36.2	40.9	46.6	41.9	39.6	46.2	35.3		
Very large	26.9	16.1	39.1	28.8	22.1	18.0	19.4	38.4		
Score	3.81	3.41	4.14	3.96	3.78	3.57	3.76	4.01	14.661(6)	<.001
Sd	1.01	1.11	0.86	0.90	0.9	1.05	0.89	1.03		
Mean Difference	1.03	1.19	0.99	1.06	0.74	0.84	1.08	1.16		
t	32.393	15.183	13.863	12.876	6.620	11.938	9.550	14.185		
P	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		

Both Greece and France were the only countries in this study where cannabis use is illegal. However, according to experts, sentencing practices for cannabis supply were relatively low in France (Chapter 1). Nonetheless, in the perception of users, France comes out as even more punitive than Greece. Although Greece and France were the only countries in this study where cannabis use is illegal, Italian and British users perceived a rather tough policy towards users. Taking this into account, the formal legal status of cannabis possession for personal use does not necessarily tell much about the de facto policy, the law in action.

Whether or not cannabis in the national drug law is scheduled differently from so-called hard drugs, across all countries in this study users believed that heroin and cannabis dealers are not treated equally by law enforcement, with heroin dealers to have a higher perceived risk of arrest and imprisonment. At the same time, the perceived risk of arrest and imprisonment for dealing cannabis varies between countries with a different schedule for cannabis, as well as between countries with a non-differential drug law.

How do the findings regarding social inclusion as one of the top three priorities in the national drug policy relate to the findings on the stigma that users themselves experience, as described in chapter 4? On the one hand, social inclusion being considered a relatively high policy priority by Dutch and Portuguese users is in line with the low level of stigmatization they mentioned in chapter 4. In contrast, the Greek users, reporting social inclusion as the lowest priority for cannabis policy, felt the most stigmatized (see Chapter 4). However, the Germans, who had scored the second highest on the stigma scale in Chapter 4, did not perceive social inclusion as a low priority in German drug policy. This may be due to the fact that Germans particularly felt that cannabis users were seen as unreliable (devaluation) but did not score very differently on other aspects of stigma (discrimination and alienation), while Greek users scored high on different dimensions of stigmatization. This may suggest that, reducing devaluation, or promoting a more positive image of cannabis users (as reliable individuals) is not so much the aim of social integration in German drug policy.

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8

Conclusion and Discussion

Between stigma and normalization

In the course of the twentieth century, cannabis evolved into one of the most strictly controlled psychoactive substances across the globe. International drug conventions, prohibitionist national drug laws, and criminalization through arrests and sentencing fueled social processes labeling cannabis users as deviant, and with users experiencing social exclusion and stigmatization (Becker, 1963; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1995). However, criminalization and stigmatization did not prevent cannabis becoming the most widely used illicit drug (World Drug Report, 2019). Growing concerns about the negative consequences of cannabis prohibition catalyzed protest and calls for reform (decriminalization, legalization), while at the same time it was argued that cannabis was losing its subcultural connotation and evolved into a mainstream drug among young people, a social process that Parker et al. (1995, 1998) coined as normalization.

The concept of normalization has inspired social drug researchers and contemporary drug policy debates (Erickson & Hathaway, 2010). Initially, normalization was a more conceptual framework used to monitor how cultural attitudes and social behavior regarding illegal drugs and drug users change through time (Measham et al., 1994; Parker, 2005; Parker et al., 1998; Parker et al., 2002). More contemporary work focuses on how the notion of normalized drug use has shaped drug use practices and points to neglected aspects of normalization such as gender, ethnicity, age, patterns of use, as well as to the importance of social context in understanding normalization processes (Hathaway et al., 2016; Pennay & Measham, 2016), particularly the role of different legal contexts (Asbridge et al., 2016; Sznitman, 2008). This dissertation examined various aspects of normalization that had been neglected or under-researched, particularly the impact of legal context and cannabis policy, age, gender, and frequency of use on cannabis normalization. The general aim was to better understand the role of national drug legislation and drug policies in the stigmatization and normalization of drug use. The central question was: To what extent and how do national cannabis legislation and policies impact the stigmatization and normalization of cannabis users?

To examine the impact of national cannabis legislation and policy on the stigmatization and normalization of cannabis use, we searched for cross-national variation. For feasibility reasons, this dissertation was restricted to seven EU Member States (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom). The seven countries represented a wide variation in national cannabis policy within Europe, on a continuum from relatively liberal (The Netherlands) to punitive (Greece). In terms of national cannabis policy ('law in the books' and partly 'law in action'), variation referred to: scheduling of cannabis (whether or not in a category separate from 'hard drugs'); legal status of cannabis use and possession for personal use; and sentencing practices for dealing cannabis. In addition, the research concentrated on a consumer perspective

and primarily investigated the experiences, practices, perceptions, and opinions of cannabis users.

Cannabis festivals and protest, openness, and social acceptance

Cannabis festivals are among the most concrete manifestations of civic society protest against cannabis prohibition and calls for reform. In Chapter 2, annual cannabis festivals in four European capital cities were investigated: Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Berlin (Germany), Rome (Italy), and Athens (Greece). Three methods of data collection were incorporated: interviews with festival organizers, participant observation at festivals, and a quantitative survey among festival participants.

> *Chapter 2 & 3: Why and how are cannabis festivals organized in different European countries with different cannabis policies?*

The four festivals had similarities in aim, basic characteristics and organizational structure. All the interviewed local organizers claimed that the festivals had an activist identity, and their main aim was to end cannabis prohibition, to support cannabis policy reform in their country, and to celebrate cannabis culture simultaneously. Notwithstanding common features, the festivals also reproduced local, social, and cultural characteristics. In Amsterdam and Athens, the festivals were licensed as a cultural event (music festival), in Berlin and Rome as a political event, a rally with music. Although music was played at all four festivals, it was the most dominant feature at the two-day festival in Athens. A striking difference in the nature of the festivals was found in the political tone and character. Despite the relatively punitive cannabis policy in Greece, apart from the banners and flags supporting cannabis legalization that were present at all four festivals, the level of politicization was lowest in Athens, even if the official name was “Protestival”. In contrast, politicization was most visible and heard in Berlin, with the inclusion of many speakers and the participation of several left-wing and liberal political parties (representing a coalition that had agreed to strive for partial decriminalization of cannabis).

In the festival survey (n = 1,355), participants most often reported “protest/activism” or “entertainment/leisure” as their main reason for participating in the cannabis festival, followed by “curiosity”, “to meet people /to socialize”, and “to use cannabis”. Yet, and largely in line with the field observations, the main reasons for participation varied between the four festivals. Protest was the most prominent reason in Berlin and Rome, followed by entertainment, and using cannabis, respectively. Protest was about equally prevalent in Athens, yet less prominent than entertainment. In contrast, entertainment was the primary reason in Amsterdam, where protest scored second, albeit at a much lower level than in the other festivals.

In Chapter 3, the role of cannabis festivals was further explored in another survey that was conducted among young adult cannabis users from the same four countries, as well as from three more European countries on the continuum between relatively liberal and most punitive cannabis policy but without an annual large-scale cannabis festival in the capital city (nor any other city). Portugal was included as the second country with a relatively liberal cannabis policy next to the Netherlands; the United Kingdom as the third country with an intermediately punitive cannabis policy, next to Germany and Italy; and France as the second country with a relatively punitive cannabis policy, next to Greece. This user survey (n = 1,225) engaged users who had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country of residence as well as non-attendees who had never done so. As expected, given the differential existence and scale of cannabis festivals across Europe, attendance varied strongly, ranging from only a few French respondents having previously attended a cannabis festival in their country, to one in ten participants in the UK, and a substantial minority of the Greek sample. It appears that there is no simple, one-directional relationship between the punitiveness of cannabis policy and the presence of cannabis festivals in a country. Large-scale cannabis festivals are organized along the entire continuum from liberal to punitive. At the same time, countries with more or less similar cannabis policies can differ greatly from each other, for example Greece and France.

In the user survey (Chapter 3), the respondents from Germany, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands who had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country, predominantly mentioned the same main reasons for attendance as the participants in the festival survey. Protest was the number one reason in Germany and Italy, and entertainment was on top in the Netherlands and Greece, followed by protest. In case they ever went or in the near future would go to a cannabis festival in their country, respondents from France most often opted for curiosity as their main reason for attendance, followed by protest, while respondents from the UK and Portugal primarily chose entertainment, followed by curiosity.

In conclusion, cannabis festivals typically combine (i) a historical role as a space for social protest and resistance linked to more organized movements for social change (Sharpe, 2008), and (ii) a more contemporary role as a place for entertainment, which in recent years has become the core of festivalization in the cultural urban landscape (Doğan, 2011). Yet, the importance of each component varies between countries. Relative to other countries, protest was a less prominent reason for festival attendance in the two countries with the most liberal cannabis policy (Portugal and the Netherlands). This suggests that the liberalization of cannabis may lower the support for protest, while at the same time it may generate more space for the celebration of cannabis culture. Nonetheless, in general, an unambiguous association cannot be claimed between the stringency of national cannabis policy and cannabis users' motivation to participate in a cannabis festival, where the stricter the national cannabis policy is the more likely users are to attend a cannabis festival for protest.

Chapter 2 & 3: How do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies perceive the contribution of cannabis festivals to cannabis policy reform, and de-stigmatization, normalization, and social acceptance of cannabis users?

The local organizers in the four capital cities (Chapter 2) believed that the festivals strive to participate in the political process and try to influence public opinion in favor of cannabis legalization, and intend to contribute positively to the societal acceptance of cannabis users. The empirical findings in this thesis do not allow firm, general conclusions on the contribution of cannabis festivals to cannabis policy reform. Nonetheless, the German case may point to an important condition. It is reasonable to assume that the embedded political character of the festival in Berlin (and similarly of cannabis festivals in other German cities (Skliamis & Korf, 2018), including the presence and involvement of political parties, has not only been supportive of the idea of protest, but has also been conducive to the move from a purely activist path to mainstream politics. The participation of political parties can provide an element of political legitimacy to a protest and translate into solid political demands. As such, it was not wholly unexpected that the new German government -with a coalition of parties that, when they were still in the opposition, were also present at cannabis festivals in recent years- announced the future legalization of cannabis when it took office at the end of 2021.

It has been argued that openness about one's cannabis use may be guarded to avoid the threat of sanctions from authorities, or loss of status, or offensive disapproval from non-users (Hammersley et al., 2001; Hathaway, 2004). Research indicates that cannabis users hide their use most often from family and co-workers (Asbridge et al, 2016; Hathaway et al., 2011). When asked in the festival survey (Chapter 2) whether they would let their colleagues at work or their fellow students know that they attended the cannabis festival, a large majority replied in the affirmative. Similarly, most respondents in the user survey (Chapter 3) said that they would not hide, neither now nor in the future, that they attended a cannabis festival from fellow students or co-workers. The openness regarding attendance may be seen as a step towards de-stigmatization and normalization, where social acceptance by non-users and wider society constitutes an important aspect of normalization (Parker et al., 2002). Remarkably, in both surveys there were no significant differences between countries in the prevalence of openness. In other words, the findings did not confirm the hypothesis that cannabis users from countries with a strict cannabis policy would be less open about their attendance at cannabis festivals, as compared to users from countries with a more liberal policy. Moreover, the findings seem to downgrade the importance of the legal context and national cannabis policy on an individual's openness about their attendance of cannabis festivals. Still, it is noteworthy that in each of the seven countries included in this thesis, there were cannabis users who did not want to tell their colleagues at work

or their fellow students about their festival attendance. This could be understood as an indication of fear of stigma. Compared to participants in the festival survey and festival attendees in the user survey, users who had never been at a cannabis festival in their country (non-attendees) were less inclined to be open in case they would go in the near future. Furthermore, some respondents in the user survey preferred not to say whether or not they had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country, amounting to almost one in ten German respondents.

Looking beyond the micro-level of fellow students and colleagues to the contribution of cannabis festivals to de-stigmatization and normalization in wider society, a large majority of respondents in the festival survey thought that the festival they attended positively affects the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis users. In each of the four cities, only a very small minority of respondents in the festival survey thought that the cannabis festival affected acceptance in a negative way. In the user survey, respondents were more ambivalent. Four out of every ten respondents believed that the festivals would contribute in a positive way, three out of ten thought cannabis festivals would contribute negatively to the societal acceptance of cannabis, and another three out of ten said that they did not know. However, festival attendants in the user survey were much more positive than respondents who had never been at a cannabis festival in their country, albeit it not as often as participants in the festival survey. This indicates that the participation and experience at cannabis festivals are conducive to perceptions of the role of these festivals in the normalization of cannabis users. As far as cross-national differences in perceived contribution of cannabis festivals to the societal acceptance of cannabis users were found, they could not simply be linked to punitiveness of national cannabis policy. Differences in the perception were more strongly associated with user characteristics, particularly the frequency of cannabis use.

Cannabis users and stigma

Normalization and stigmatization can be understood as complementary social processes. Openness about one's cannabis use may be more difficult with increasing stigmatization. Not being open about participation in a cannabis festival may be considered as an expression of the fear of becoming stigmatized. Stigmatization is a multifaceted phenomenon, as it refers to individuals, groups, and society at large. In Chapter 4, the principal emphasis was on the cannabis users' perceived and self-stigma, rather than focusing on the opinion that society has about cannabis users (public stigma). Perceived stigma refers to an individual's awareness of a prevalent attitude or negative stereotype, while self-stigma refers to internalization and self-adoption of such an attitude (Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Guarneri et al., 2019; Livingston & Boyd, 2010; Pattyn et al., 2014). The hypothesis was that a strict cannabis policy contributes to an increased degree

of stigmatization, whereas a liberal cannabis policy contributes to de-stigmatization and normalization.

Chapter 4: To what extent and how do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies perceive experience, and respond to stigma?

Three dimensions of experienced stigma were investigated: discrimination, perceived devaluation, and alienation (cf. Ahern et al., 2007). In the user survey, discrimination referred to whether respondents had experienced rejection by friends and family that was attributed to cannabis use. Perceived devaluation, a facet of perceived stigma, occurs when cannabis users believe that most people in the general public endorse common negative stereotypes about them. In the user survey, respondents were asked whether they think that most people believe that cannabis users are unreliable and dangerous. Alienation is about internalizing views that are expressed in negative stereotypes about cannabis users as marginalized members of society (cf., Ritsher et al., 2003) and focuses on the users' responses to stigmatization, either passive (avoid people because they might look down on you because of cannabis use), or active (feeling that they have to prove themselves because of their cannabis use).

From these three dimensions of stigmatization, discrimination scored the lowest, with only one in every six participants in the user survey reporting that they have been rejected by friends, and even less reporting being rejected by family. Next, alienation took an intermediate position. One out of every four respondents said that they avoid people because others might look down on them due to their cannabis use, and a little less reported that they felt the need to prove themselves because of their cannabis use. Finally, perceived devaluation was the most frequently reported dimension of stigma, with almost half of the respondents having stated that people think that cannabis users are unreliable, and one in four having reported that most people believe that someone who uses cannabis is dangerous. This confirms that cannabis users are still associated with negative stereotypes, mainly because of the unreliability that in the literature on stigma and cannabis users has been associated with laziness, amotivation, and irresponsibility (Meier & White, 2018; Mikos & Kam, 2019; Mortensen et al., 2019). The three dimensions taken together in a general stigma score showed a low to moderate degree of stigmatization (average summed score = 1.56 in a range of 0-6). This indicates that cannabis users in this thesis did not experience a high degree of stigmatization.

Notwithstanding similarities across countries, the regression analysis, when controlling for sociodemographic variables and cannabis use frequency, indicated significant cross-national differences. On the dimension of discrimination, Dutch users were the least rejected by friends, Greeks were the most, notably followed by Germans. On the dimension of alienation, no cross-national

differences were found in predicting avoidance, but Dutch participants were least likely to state that they had to prove themselves. Again, as hypothesized, Greece was the strongest predictor. Regarding the dimension of perceived devaluation, the regression analysis indicated that users from France, Germany, and Italy were more likely to say that most people believe that cannabis users are dangerous than Dutch respondents. Also, participants from all other countries were more likely than the Dutch to report that people think that cannabis users are unreliable, where Germany was the strongest predictor.

For the general stigma score, compared to the Netherlands, respondents from all other countries showed significantly higher levels of stigmatization. Cannabis users from Portugal, the other country with a relatively liberal cannabis policy, were the first to follow the Dutch. Italy and the UK took an intermediate position, while at the other end of the cannabis policy continuum, in Greece and France, the level of stigmatization was among the highest. Overall, these findings were supportive of the hypothesis that a strict cannabis policy contributes to an increased degree of stigmatization, whereas a liberal cannabis policy contributes to de-stigmatization and normalization. However, Germany deviated from the overall pattern, as German and Greek users reported equally high degrees of stigma. Notably, the comparatively high German stigma score was particularly reflected in the dimension of perceived devaluation (cannabis users being seen as unreliable). As suggested in Chapter 4, one explanation could be that German users were more aware of the illegal status in their country due to the lively political debates on decriminalization and legalization, and/or the proximity to the Netherlands and its coffeeshop policy. Another, maybe complementary explanation might be that German cannabis users are more sensitive to privacy and critique on personal lifestyle. German users not only had more reports of being rejected by friends on average, in Chapter 3 they were also the least likely to want to admit to friends that they had been to a cannabis festival.

In sum, cannabis users experienced some stigmatization but mainly it had to do with their perceptions of how most people view them (perceived devaluation). Differences in the experience of discrimination, alienation, and perceived devaluation showed that stigma comes in complex forms. Diverging perceptions and experiences on the three dimensions demonstrated that not all users experience the same type or degree of stigma. Thereby, this thesis illustrates once again that cannabis users do not constitute a homogenous category (cf. Duff et al., 2012; Liebregts, 2015; Miles, 2014). The cross-national similarities and differences in cannabis-related stigma that resulted from the comparative analysis largely support a core element of the normalization thesis, namely that societal-level normalization encompasses liberal shifts in drug policy (Parker, 2005). However, in the presented research, even though stigmatization was lowest in countries with the more liberal cannabis policies in Europe, stigmatization was not fully absent.

Cannabis use, settings and self-regulation rules

Cannabis normalization concerns both society as a whole (macro level) and individual cannabis users (micro level). Chapters 2 and 3 explored whether cannabis users would be open with their close environment of friends and colleagues about their participation in a cannabis festival (social acceptance at the micro level), and whether they believe that these festivals have an impact on the societal acceptance of cannabis at the macro level. Chapter 4 examined the micro level further and looked into the perceived and self-stigma that cannabis users experience. In Chapter 5, the user perspective was further explored. The general purpose was to shed more light on the normative context in which cannabis use occurs. Within the conceptual framework of normalization, the user dimension describes how users regulate their cannabis use in their daily lives and concerns informal mechanisms that define cannabis use norms, rules of conduct, and practices (Decorte et al., 2003; Parker, 2005; Reinarman & Cohen, 2007), or what Zinberg (1984) called 'social sanctions' (whether, when, and how cannabis should be used) and 'social rituals' (patterns of behavior). More specifically, Chapter 5 investigated the role of social and physical settings in cannabis use (where, when, and with whom to use or not to use cannabis), as well as specific rules that users apply regarding cannabis consumption.

> *Chapter 5: To what extent and how do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies practice (self-regulate) cannabis use in everyday life?*

As to the social setting surrounding cannabis use, the findings indicated that cannabis was more likely to be used in social company (friends, partner, and peers) than when being alone. Also, it was commonly used in various physical settings, indoor or outdoor, yet most often in private settings. Contrariwise, cannabis use in 'risk-taking settings' (i.e., in a car as a driver or passenger and in school or at the workplace) was uncommon. These results show that many cannabis users set boundaries to regulate or to control their use and to ensure that it takes place in a way that does not interfere with other aspects of their daily lives (cf. Erickson et al., 2010; Lau et al., 2015). The fact that many users reported avoiding risky settings may imply that they avoid interference of their use in their daily life, and this could be considered as a form of self-regulation. Through restricting use to appropriate times and places, a social stigma might be avoided or minimized, albeit that preference for certain physical settings could be driven stronger by discretion and respect towards non-users, than by the threat or fear of stigmatization (Duff et al., 2012).

Regarding rules that users adopt and practice, the most frequently reported set of rules was defined as 'setting avoidance' and referred to situations where they *never* use cannabis, namely in the presence of children or parents/relatives and before or during work/study. This finding was consistent with previous Canadian research (Duff et al., 2012; Hathaway at al., 2011), and

confirmed that many cannabis users are concerned with responsible use (Erickson et al., 2010). Also, it demonstrated the importance that many cannabis users attach to discretion (Erickson et al., 2010; Lau et al., 2015) and/or to achieving or maintaining a good level of study and work performance by drawing a line between 'school time' or 'work time' and 'leisure time' (Duff et al. 2012). The second most often practiced set of rules of use was labeled 'comfort'. These rules refer to situations *in favor of* use and place cannabis use in a recreational context of leisure; restricting use to certain times (e.g., only after work or study) or situations (e.g., when financially affordable or when in a good mood) can serve as a risk-management strategy to counter stigma. 'Risk avoidance' ranked third. This concerns rules for *never* using cannabis. Risk avoidance rules comprise moderating quantity ('never more than 2 joints') and not using when stressed, or in the presence of colleagues or non-users. These findings confirmed previous research that showed that moderation of the frequency and volume of cannabis use is a structural factor that determines controlled use (Duff et al., 2012). However, cannabis use in the presence of non-users or colleagues could violate societal norms and thus pose risks to users, such as social disapproval, stigma, and status loss (Hammersley et. al., 2001; Hathaway, 2004).

Regression analysis revealed both cross-national similarities and differences. Irrespective of national cannabis policy, using cannabis in private settings was equally predominant across the seven countries in this thesis, as were setting avoidance rules. This supports the idea that discretion is a collective effort among cannabis users (Duff et al., 2012), either as a mechanism to minimize the risk of social disapproval or to emphasize respect of and courtesy towards non-users (Erickson et al., 2010; Lau et al., 2015). Overall, self-regulation was highest in the country with the most liberal cannabis policy in this thesis (The Netherlands). This indicates that liberalization does not automatically lead to chaotic or otherwise problematic use as critics of the policy have predicted, as the diminishing formal control (law enforcement) is accompanied by the increased importance of informal norms and stronger self-regulation. Compared to the Netherlands, using cannabis in risk-taking settings was more prevalent in all other countries, except for Germany. In addition to that, Germans were more likely to avoid risks related to cannabis use. These findings may be linked to the results in Chapter 3 indicating that German users were more hesitant to report whether they attend a cannabis festival, and Chapter 4 (stigma) showing that Germans reported a relatively high level of perceived devaluation. It can be argued that as a response to that perceived devaluation, German users set more restrictions regarding their use in risk-taking settings. This may also explain why Germans were most likely to use cannabis in the company of their partner or friends. Interestingly, overall, not only Greece but also Portugal differed most from the Netherlands, as in both countries cannabis was most likely to be used in risk-taking and public settings, and least likely in a social company. The comparatively low likelihood of cannabis being used in social company in Greece may be linked to the relatively high levels of stigma among Greek users, particularly in terms of feeling discriminated against by friends (Chapter 4).

However, that does not explain the similarities between Greece and Portugal, where cannabis policy is relatively liberal, and users experience a relatively low degree of stigma. A possible explanation might be related to the contextual role of cannabis use 'normality' in a country (Sznitman et al., 2015). While cannabis prevalence rates are around the EU average (lifetime use adults 27.4%, last year use young adults 14.4%) for Germany, the Netherlands and UK, and above average for France and Italy, they are among the lowest in Portugal and Greece (EMCDDA, 2021a). According to the normalization thesis, societal acceptance of drug use is generally accompanied by increased prevalence rates (Parker et al., 1998).

In conclusion, many cannabis users assess a range of aspects with regard to whether, when, where, and with whom to use cannabis and accordingly they set self-regulation rules to ensure that their cannabis use takes place in a way that does not interfere with other aspects of their daily lives. It also appears that many cannabis users are concerned with responsible use, and their preference for certain settings of use and avoidance of other settings could be driven more by discretion and respect towards non-users than by the threat or fear of stigmatization. The frequent application of risk avoidance rules indicates that moderation of the frequency and volume of use is a factor that determines normalized use. It appears that differences in the societal and cultural accommodation of cannabis use is more important in understanding risk management in terms of cannabis use settings and self-regulation rules than cross-national differences in cannabis policy. This does not necessarily mean the legal status of cannabis does not matter. Possibly, in countries with more punitive policies than the EU member states in this thesis, the policy might have a stronger impact on how users regulate their use.

The findings in Chapter 5 support the view that the assessment and management of risks associated with cannabis use is central to cannabis normalization (Duff & Erickson, 2014). As will be discussed in a section later on, Chapter 5 also indicated substantial differences between daily and less frequent cannabis users in setting selectivity and self-regulation rules.

Sources of cannabis acquisition and purchase

In Chapter 6, the focus shifted to another crucial element of the user perspective: how and where do they obtain cannabis (hash or herbal cannabis)? The main purpose was to gain insight into the acquisition of cannabis and to investigate whether acquisition methods and supply sources were associated with national cannabis policy. According to a leading founder of the normalization thesis, one of the core dimensions is increased availability and accessibility (Parker, 2005). More recently, it has been claimed that the normalization of cannabis use has extended to encompass a normalization of cannabis supply, especially recreational supply within friendship networks (Coomber et al., 2016).

Chapter 6: How do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies acquire and where do they buy cannabis?

The vast majority of participants in the user survey found the access to cannabis in their country easy, often as very easy. However, perceived availability varied across countries, from being easiest in the country with the most liberal cannabis policy (the Netherlands) to least easy in the country with the most repressive cannabis policy in this thesis (Greece). While more than nine in every ten Dutch users reported very easy access, this dropped to less than four in every ten Greeks. Yet, across all of the countries in this study, the vast majority of participants perceived access to cannabis to be fairly or very easy.

In line with previous research (Trautmann et al., 2013), buying cannabis yourself was by far the most popular way to acquire cannabis, reported by at least six in ten respondents in each of the seven European countries in this thesis. Yet, it was significantly more often reported by the Dutch users, and this can largely be explained by having broad access to cannabis through the tolerated sale of cannabis in coffeeshops (see later on in this paragraph). At substantial distance, the next common mode of acquisition was to have a friend buy cannabis with the respondents' money. The popularity of this method confirms the importance of the role of a 'broker' among cannabis users (Hough et al., 2003; Lenton et al., 2015), as it can be understood as a convenient and comfortable mode of cannabis transaction, creating a safe distance between users and dealers (Hathaway et al., 2018; Potter, 2009). The third most prevalent method to acquire cannabis was to get it for free. Sharing and gift-giving among peers may be seen as a 'social nicety' or even an 'unwritten rule' among cannabis users (Duffy et al., 2008) that reflects norms of reciprocity and sharing in cannabis use experience (Hathaway et al., 2018). The fourth strategy were 'group buys', with an individual buying cannabis on behalf of friends or acquaintances. In addition to being 'a social thing' a group buy may also be economically motivated, as purchasing a larger quantity to fulfill the group's supply requirements might reduce the cost (Moyle & Coomber, 2019). Finally, only a small minority grew their own cannabis. On the one hand, the latter supports earlier findings that domestic cultivation is practiced by users all across Europe (Potter et al., 2011); on the other hand, the relatively low figure also confirms that home growing is not a very common method to acquire cannabis (Belackova et al., 2019; Trautmann et al., 2013).

For users that bought their own cannabis, the most common source was via friends, at distance followed by the less common sources of street dealers, home dealers, and delivery services. In other words, closed markets (friends and home dealers) were more important than open and semi-open markets. Dutch buyers were the exception to the rule of buying in closed markets, as coffeeshops (open market) were by far the most dominant place to buy cannabis. A strong

preference for coffeeshops has also been reported in the 2018 national household survey, where 95.5% of last year users in the Netherlands who buy their own cannabis reported that they (also) do so in coffeeshops (NDM, 2020).

The buying from friends as the most popular source of supply indicates the principal role of friends as sellers and is also in line with recent cannabis retail studies (Chatwin & Potter 2014; Grigg et al., 2015; Hathaway et al., 2018; Lenton et al., 2015; Vlaemynck, 2013). Buying from friends has been characterized as a convenient and cost-effective option for acquiring cannabis (Moyle, 2013; Rossi, 2020) and it has been suggested that cannabis users apply this method because it minimizes potential risks, such as direct contact with 'real' dealers (Caulkins & Pacula, 2006; Coomber & Turnbull, 2007; Potter, 2009). This finding about buying behavior together with the previous findings about the role of friends in the process of cannabis acquisition confirm the significant role of social supply (Coomber & Moyle, 2014; Taylor & Potter, 2013) across Europe.

Nevertheless, street dealers and home dealers ranked at second and third place as the prime suppliers for buyers. Although street markets used to be very popular, they have been described as threats to personal safety as they are more susceptible to violence than closed markets (Barratt et al., 2016; Harocopos & Hough, 2005; Reuter, 2009) and as riskier because both sellers and buyers expose themselves to law enforcement in public spaces (Tzanetakis, 2018). However, Chapter 6 showed that street dealers are still relevant to the retail cannabis market. This may be explained by the traditional advantages of street selling, such as the openness of the setting to buyers, ease of locating buyers and sellers, lack of need for a prior introduction to the seller, and in having only a few barriers to access (May & Hough, 2004; Sandberg, 2008). In contrast to the open street market, home dealing can be understood as a segment of the closed market as home dealers only sell cannabis to selected customers, not to strangers. Home dealing is usually considered safer than street dealing as it takes place in a private place (Rossi, 2020).

The findings in Chapter 6 also suggest that in the case of cannabis more traditional methods (street dealing and home dealing) are still more prevalent than delivery services (whereby customers order by phone, WhatsApp, etc.). Also, the very low prevalence of buying through the internet confirms that only a small proportion of cannabis users have transitioned to cryptomarkets (Décary-Hétu et al., 2018). One explanation could be that cryptomarkets represent only a tiny fraction of the drug trade (Aldridge & Decary-Hétu, 2016; Trautmann et al., 2013). Also, it can be argued that access to the dark web requires access to computers and technological skills that many users don't have (Décary-Hétu et al., 2018; Demant et al., 2018).

Cross-national comparison revealed both similarities and differences between countries with different cannabis policies. Overall, Dutch participants showed a different pattern in cannabis acquisition and purchase to those from other countries. Not only did they report the easiest access to cannabis, in regression analysis they were also the most likely to buy cannabis

themselves and differed in various other aspects of obtaining cannabis and buying behavior, particularly the dominance of coffeeshops as the supply source. Compared to Dutch users, Greeks not only had the least easy access to cannabis, they were also the most likely to let friends buy cannabis for them with their money and obtain cannabis through group buys, and among buyers, Greeks most often bought from friends and home dealers. In other words, in the Netherlands, the country with the most liberal cannabis policy in this study, users were most strongly oriented towards an open cannabis market, while in Greece, the country with the most punitive cannabis policy, users leaned strongest on a closed market and social supply. However, findings from other countries do not support a unidirectional link with punitiveness. For example, similarly to Greek users, respondents from relatively liberal Portugal, were also more likely to buy from friends. Also, participants from France and the United Kingdom, where cannabis policy is relatively punitive, had the highest odds for buying from street dealers (open market) and relatively low odds for buying from home dealers (closed market).

In conclusion, the easy access to cannabis by the vast majority of participants supports one of the core dimensions of the normalization thesis, that is the increased availability and accessibility that comes with normalization (Parker, 2005). Within and across countries, users acquire cannabis in various ways and buyers purchase it from various sources, representing a mixture of open, closed, and semi-open retail markets, as well as a combination of commercial and non-commercial supply methods. The easy access to cannabis and the multiple supply methods and sources may be understood as signs of a normalized retail market. The findings in Chapter 6 confirm the significant role of social supply (Coomber & Moyle 2014; Taylor & Potter 2013) or recreational supply within friendship networks (Coomber et al., 2016) across Europe.

Yet, the findings also indicate that cannabis users generally prefer to buy their own cannabis. Although cross-national differences in cannabis acquisition were not unidirectionally linked with punitiveness of national cannabis policy, the Dutch coffeeshops in this study, together with the swift change from illegal to legal supply sources after cannabis legalization in Canada (Rotermann, 2020) strongly suggests that, if they would have the choice, most cannabis users would strongly prefer to buy cannabis in an open regulated or legal market.

The role of national cannabis policy: country profiles

Various chapters looked at cross-national similarities and differences in experiences, practices, and perceptions of cannabis users from seven European countries with different cannabis policies. Based on the legal status of cannabis and the law enforcement approach towards cannabis (de jure, and partially de facto), these countries were placed on a continuum, ranging from relatively liberal (the Netherlands) to most punitive (Greece). In the case of cross-national differences found in the regression analysis, the Netherlands was often the most distinct. Greek users were

regularly found to be the most different from the Dutch users, yet not always. This section aims to synthesize the findings related to stigmatization, cannabis use self-regulation, and cannabis acquisition, and, if possible, to translate them into country profiles.

One explanation for the mixed findings in the cross-national comparisons could be that perhaps the actual variation in punitiveness of cannabis policy, particularly 'cannabis policy in action', was not sufficiently reflected in the continuum from liberal to punitive that was outlined in Chapter 1, and applied in subsequent chapters. Therefore, Chapter 7 took a different angle and focused on how cannabis users perceive drug policy, and more specially cannabis policy, in their country.

Chapter 7: How do cannabis users in different European countries with different cannabis policies perceive drug policy, and more specifically cannabis policy, in their country? How do they evaluate the punitiveness of drug policy and law enforcement practice in their country?

National drug policies are multidimensional and combine law enforcement with other perspectives—at least on paper. In Chapter 7, according to the user survey participants, the highest drug policy priority in their country was given to drug prevention and education and arresting drug dealers, followed by providing drug addicts access to treatment and reducing the risk of HIV and Aids among injecting drug users. Across countries, the lowest drug policy priority was reducing theft committed by drug addicts, reducing the risk of drug overdose, and the social integration/rehabilitation of drug addicts. As to the stringency of national drug policy, the average perception of drug policy was moderate-tough towards users and somewhat tougher towards drug dealers. As to the law enforcement policy towards cannabis dealers in their country, both the average perceived risk of arrest and the average perceived risk of imprisonment for arrestees were close to moderate. In each of the seven countries, perceived risks for heroin dealers were higher, with a moderate-large risk of arrest, and a close-to-large risk of imprisonment.

Users' perceptions varied both within and across countries. In the regression analysis, when controlling for age, gender, and frequency of cannabis use, the contrasts in drug policy perception were greatest between Dutch and Portuguese on the one hand and French and Greek cannabis users on the other. Users from the three other countries occupied an intermediate position.

- *Dutch* users and *Portuguese* users perceived the lowest punitiveness towards drug dealers, the softest drug policy towards both users and dealers, and the lowest drug policy priority for arresting drug dealers, but the highest drug policy priority for social integration.
- *French* users took the opposite position to the Dutch and Portuguese on all these aspects. They perceived the highest punitiveness towards drug dealers, and the toughest

drug policy towards both users and dealers. *Greek* users showed a more mixed picture; they perceived a less punitive law enforcement approach towards drug dealers, but the highest drug policy priority for arresting drug dealers. Both Greek and French users considered social integration to be the lowest drug policy priority.

- Participants from the *United Kingdom* were closer to French and Greek users; they perceived a relatively punitive and tough approach, with social integration being a relatively low policy priority.
- This was followed by *German* users, with a similar perception of punitiveness and toughness in drug policy towards users and dealers, but perceived a relatively low drug policy priority for arresting drug dealers and a medium priority for social integration. Overall, *Italian* users took an intermediate position in terms of punitiveness towards drug dealers, perceived a relatively tough policy towards users, and an average priority in social integration.

To summarize, cannabis users' perceptions of the punitiveness of drug policy in their country were largely in line with what was to be expected from the diversity in the legal status of cannabis and the law enforcement approach towards cannabis, as is briefly outlined in Chapter 1. The perceptions of the Dutch and Portuguese cannabis users confirmed the placement of their country on the liberal edge of the continuum, and the perceptions of the users from Greece and France confirmed its placement at the other end, with strict and punitive drug policies. Both Greece and France were the only countries in this thesis where cannabis use is illegal. Although, according to experts, sentencing practices for cannabis supply were relatively low in France (Chapter 1), overall, in the perception of users, France came out as even more punitive than Greece.

Remarkably, the formal legal status of cannabis possession for personal use does not appear to inform much about the de facto policy, the law in action at consumer level. Although Greece and France were the only countries in this thesis where cannabis use is illegal, Italian and British users perceived a rather tough policy towards users. Also, whether or not cannabis in the national drug law is scheduled differently from so-called hard drugs such as heroin, appears not to say much about the law enforcement approach towards drug dealers. Across all seven countries, the users believed that heroin and cannabis dealers are not treated equally by law enforcement, with heroin dealers having a higher perceived risk of arrest and imprisonment. The perceived risk of arrest and imprisonment for dealing cannabis varied between countries with a different schedule for cannabis, as well as between countries with a non-differential drug law.

Turning back to the role of cannabis policy in (de-)stigmatization and normalization, the table on the next page provides a concise overview of stigmatization, settings of use, self-regulation

rules, and cannabis supply methods per country that resulted from regression analysis in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In the columns, in accordance with Chapter 7, countries are placed from most liberal (the Netherlands and Portugal) to most punitive (France and Greece), with Italy, Germany, and the UK in the middle. In the rows, countries are rank-ordered according to the odds in regression analysis, with the Netherlands as the reference country. In most cases, the higher the rank-order, the bigger the difference from the Netherlands.

Table 1 Overview stigmatization, cannabis use and acquisition by country

COUNTRY	NL (ref)	PT	IT	GE	UK	FR	GR
STIGMATIZATION USERS							
Discrimination by Friends	Lowest	~	~	6	~	~	7
Discrimination by Family	Intermediate	~	~	~	~	~	~
Devaluation: Dangerous	Lowest	~	5	6	~	7	~
Devaluation: Unreliable	Lowest	2	6	7	5	3	4
Alienation: Avoidance	Intermediate	~	~	~	~	~	~
Alienation: Prove oneself	Lowest	4	5	6	3	~	7
Stigma (sum score)	Lowest	2	3	7	4	5	6
CANNABIS USE SETTING							
Risk taking	Lowest	7	3	~	4	5	6
Private Setting	Intermediate	~	~	~	~	~	~
Public Setting	Lowest	7	~	~	~	~	6
Social Company	2nd Highest	1	~	7	~	~	2
CANNABIS USE RULES							
Risk Avoidance	Lowest	~	~	7	~	~	6
Comfort	Intermediate	7	~	~	~	~	~
Setting Avoidance	Intermediate	~	~	~	~	~	~
CANNABIS ACQUISTION							
Bought myself	Highest	6	1	4	5	3	2
Friend bought it		5	6	2	2	4	7
Got it for free	Intermediate	~	~	~	2	3	1
Group buy	Intermediate	~	~	~	1	~	7
CANNABIS BUYING: SOURCE							
Friends	Lowest	6	5	4	2	3	7
Street Dealer	Lowest	5	4	2	6	7	3
Home Dealer	Lowest	4	6	5	3	2	7
Delivery	Lowest	4	3	5	6	7	2
Grower	Lowest	~	~	7	6	~	~

~ similar to the Netherlands (n.s.) 1 = lowest odd 7 = highest odd

In some cases, no statistically significant differences between countries were found, as was the case with two dimensions of stigmatization (discrimination by family and alienation: avoidance), and two aspects of cannabis self-regulation (use in private settings and setting avoidance rules).

This could mean that cannabis policy has no impact on this type of behavior, that it is largely resistant to policy, or that it concerns a sort of universal norm or standard – at least European or Western. More or less the same might apply to cases where only one or two of the seven countries scored differently, such as the slightly higher likelihood of applying comfort rules among cannabis users in Portugal, or the slightly higher likelihood of buying cannabis from growers by users from Germany and the UK. On the other hand, users from the two most liberal countries (the Netherlands and Portugal) were generally least likely to feel stigmatized, whereas users from the two countries with the most repressive policy, quite often differed most or second most from the Netherlands (e.g., stigmatization, methods of cannabis acquisition, and buying cannabis). Compared with other countries in the analysis, users in:

- *Greece*: had the highest likelihood of discrimination by friends and alienation (prove oneself); second highest odds with stigma sum score; second highest likelihood of cannabis use in risk taking settings and public settings; highest likelihood of getting cannabis from friends who bought it or through a group buy; highest odds with buying from friends or home dealers.
- *France*: had the highest odds of devaluation (users perceived as dangerous); and the highest odds of buying from friends or home dealers.

Although the contrast between the Netherlands and Portugal on the one hand and Greece and France on the other could be interpreted as indicative of the impact of the punitiveness of national cannabis policy, other findings point to a less direct, and more complex association. In addition to the similarities between Portuguese and Dutch users, there were also some striking differences, for example, in the settings of cannabis use and in buying cannabis. In the absence of coffeeshops or other regulated supply sources at the consumer level, a pattern in buying behavior different from users in the Netherlands should not be a surprise. Nonetheless, similarities in buying cannabis and some other cannabis related behavior between Portuguese and Greek users do not support the punitiveness hypothesis. As suggested before (see section 'Cannabis use, settings, and self-regulation rules'), the contextual role of cannabis use 'normality', namely relatively low prevalence, may offer a better explanation.

While, in line with Chapter 7, Italy, Germany and the UK, often took an intermediate position, the country profiles were not always unambiguous and consistent with the punitiveness hypothesis. This was particularly true of the comparatively high level of stigmatization as perceived by German users (see section 'Cannabis users and stigma'). Could this be related to the findings on social inclusion as a top three policy priority in the national drug policy? On the one hand, the relatively high priority on social inclusion that Dutch and Portuguese users perceived in their country is in line with the low level of stigmatization they reported. Contrarily, the Greek users,

reporting social inclusion as having the lowest priority, were the second most stigmatized. However, the Germans, scoring highest on the stigma scale, did not perceive a low priority to social inclusion in the national drug policy. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that Germans particularly felt that cannabis users were seen as unreliable (devaluation). It is a reasonable assumption that reducing devaluation or promoting a more positive image of cannabis users (as reliable individuals) is not the intended aim of social integration in German drug policy.

In conclusion, the contrasting findings between the Netherlands and Portugal on the liberal side and Greece and France on the repressive side in cannabis policy—with Italy, Germany, and the UK in-between—provide conditional empirical support for the hypothesis that the level of punitiveness impacts the stigmatization of cannabis users and cannabis-related behavior. On the other hand, some aspects of stigmatization and cannabis self-regulation were not related to cross-national differences in punitiveness, which could indicate that they are not so sensitive to national drug policy, or represent a kind of normative cultural standard in Europe. In addition, there were some anomalies—taking the stigmatization in Germany or similarities in cannabis use and acquisition between Portugal and Greece as examples. This suggests that the legal context and the impact of national drug policy may be overvalued in understanding cannabis users' behavior and practices. This supports the idea that the exploration of the impact of cannabis policy on users should not be restricted to the legal context, but needs to incorporate other factors that build a broader picture.

The role of gender, age and frequency of cannabis use

In search of a differentiated understanding of normalization, in regression analyses this thesis not only compared countries with different cannabis legislation and policies, but also investigated the role of gender, age, and frequency of cannabis use.

In both the festival survey and the user survey, male respondents were much more often daily users ($\geq$ 20 days in the past 30 days) than females. This gender difference in frequency of cannabis use is in line with the general picture of cannabis use among young adults in Europe (EMCCDA, 2019). Since regression analyses exposed differences between daily and non-daily users that were often so strong, they potentially could have overshadowed the possible role of gender in predicting various aspects of stigmatization and normalization.

No gender differences were found with regard to protest as the main reason for cannabis festival attendance, openness about festival participation, and the perceived contribution of the festivals to the societal acceptance of cannabis (Chapter 2 and 3). This contradicts previous research stating that cannabis use is more socially acceptable among males than females (Hemsing & Greaves, 2020), with women also reporting lower odds of positive cannabis acceptability attitudes (Kolar et al., 2018). Moreover, in Chapter 4, no gender differences were found in cannabis-

related stigma as a whole. Yet on one dimension of stigma (devaluation), male users were more likely than female users to feel that in their country, cannabis users are seen as dangerous and as unreliable. The latter might be explained by the findings in Chapter 5, that with respect to the physical setting of use showing that men were more likely than women to use cannabis in risk-taking settings, such as in a car, at work/school or university. Conversely, female users were more likely to avoid settings that include risks such as cannabis use with non-users, with colleagues, or use when they are stressed. These results confirm that male cannabis users tend to engage in riskier substance use behaviors (Hemsing & Greaves, 2020), including driving under the influence of cannabis (Dubois et al., 2015; Earle et al., 2020; Jones et al. 2016). In the literature that explores masculinity and femininity regarding drug use, increased risk-taking behavior has been associated with adherence to dominant masculine norms (Wilkinson et al. 2018). As to the social setting of cannabis use (Chapter 5), female users were more likely to use cannabis in the company of peers and partners, while male users were more likely to use solitary. However, there were no gender differences regarding use in private or public spaces (e.g., street, park, nightlife). This warrants the attention, as in the past the use of public space has been widely discussed in studies on the daily lives of men and women (McDowell, 1999; Ortiz et al., 2004) and in feminist discourses about public space as a gendered arena (Scraton & Watson, 1998). It could be argued that the lack of gender differences regarding cannabis use in private or public spaces is just another indication of the weakening of the traditional public space/private space dichotomy (cf. Kerber, 1988; Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006) and a confirmation that women have advanced a great deal within the public sphere, enforcing the rhetoric of gender equality (Bach & Rodier, 2014; Bondi & Domosh, 1998; Davidson et al., 2020). On the other hand, investigation of the methods of cannabis acquisition (Chapter 6) identified gender differences that were more in accordance with traditional masculine norms (cf., Wilkinson et al., 2018). Although it was generally easy to obtain cannabis within 24 hours for both men and women in the user survey, male users were more likely to buy their own cannabis, while female users were more likely to obtain cannabis through a friend who bought it for them with their money, or to get it for free. This confirms that attitudes related to cannabis purchase (direct buy versus indirect buy and free acquisition) are gendered (Bennett & Holloway 2019; Hathaway, 2004; Hathaway et al. 2018; Warner et al. 1999). Female users may prefer alternatives to directly buying in the illegal market because they tend to be less less associated with threats to personal safety and risk of physical violence (Barratt et al. 2016). Yet when women buy cannabis, they do this equally often as men in group buys, from friends, street dealers, or delivery services. To conclude, cannabis related differences between male and female users still exist but are not omnipresent. The absence of differences in aspects like cannabis accessibility or cannabis-related stigmatization may be related to changes in gender roles over time and with the wider concept of cannabis normalization. However, other findings are in line with previous studies which show that gender is one among many differences that shape

drug experiences (Campbell & Herzberg, 2017), particularly cannabis-related experiences, patterns of cannabis use, and attitudes (Hathaway et al., 2018; Hemsing & Greaves, 2020).

Age was another characteristic which the regression analyses identified as having an impact on some cannabis user's perceptions, experiences, or practices, but not on others. Findings in Chapter 2 and 3 indicated that younger cannabis festival participants were less motivated by protest, while with increasing age participants were more likely to attend for protest. One explanation could be that in the course of adulthood, cannabis users, whether because of more social responsibilities or based on personal experience, become more afraid of the negative consequences of repressive cannabis policies such as legal sanctions and stigma (Hathaway et al., 2011) and are more inclined towards activism for legalization. Alternatively, it could be that young people today tend to be less concerned about cannabis legalization. They may believe that cannabis is available anyway, so they might see no profound reason to protest. On the other hand, studies show that young people are still interested to engage in activism and protest (Dalton, 2009; Earl et al. 2017), although maybe less through cannabis festivals and more in other ways, for example the usage of social media and Internet (Maher & Earl, 2016; Velasquez & LaRose, 2014). The age difference may also reflect changes in the meaning of attending a cannabis festival during the life course, from a predominantly casual activity in the recreational sphere during adolescence and emerging adulthood, into an activity that becomes attached with other characteristics besides entertainment, such as an embedded political dimension referring to the cannabis policy reform. Age was also associated with openness about festival attendance. Younger cannabis users were more likely to tell their colleagues at work or their fellow students that they attended a cannabis festival than older ones. From the perspective of normalization thesis, this reflects differences across generations in the cultural accommodation of cannabis use. It could be argued that the participants grew up in an era where the meaning of drug use has changed from one which is associated with stigma, to one which is associated with normality (Sznitman, 2008) and broader cultural acceptance of cannabis (Forsyth & Copes, 2014). It can thus be assessed that younger cannabis users were more likely to view attendance at cannabis festivals as a more normalized experience to be shared with others rather than a stigmatized activity that they would attempt to hide. On the other hand, as before with the role of protest as the main reason for festival participation, an explanation for the lower level of openness among the older users could be that, because of more social responsibilities (e.g., job, family), they are more afraid of negative responses such as stigma (Hathaway et al.,2011). However, Chapter 4 did not provide any empirical support for the latter line of reasoning, as stigma—including the subdimensions discrimination, alienation, and perceived devaluation—was not associated with age. Alternatively, in Chapter 5, age did play a role in understanding differences in some self-regulation rules and the social/physical settings where cannabis is used. The older the cannabis users were, the more likely they were to apply rules to avoid risks such as cannabis use with non-users, with colleagues, or use when

they are stressed. At the same time, they were more likely to use cannabis in solitude. Conversely, young users were more likely than older users to take cannabis in the company of peers and partners, and in a larger variety of settings, both private and public. In other words, findings confirmed that young people tend to be more open or less selective in their use (cf. Parker et al., 1998, 2002) and practice cannabis use more as a social activity (Anderson et al., 2015; Patrick et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2007). Remarkably, age did not play much of a role in explaining differences in the methods of cannabis acquisition and sources of cannabis supply. The only statistically significant association was that the older the users the less likely they were to buy cannabis from street dealers. This reduced preference for the open market of street dealers might be related to strategically 'reasoned choices' that make drug use fit better in the context of adulthood everyday lives (Osborne & Fogel, 2008; Williams & Askew, 2016). It could also be that cannabis-related practices are consistent with the adult roles and responsibilities that come with maturation and aging (Osborne & Fogel 2008; Shiner 2009; Williams & Askew 2016). To sum up, age was not associated with the perceived stigmatization of cannabis users, and it appeared to play a limited role in understanding differences in how, where, and from whom users acquire cannabis. This, and the multiple methods of acquisition and variation in buying, are suggestive of the normalization of cannabis users. On the other hand, the differentiation in age with regard to openness, and self-regulation practices and rules for cannabis use reinforces the view that there is a need for an extension of the normalization thesis scope from adolescence into adulthood (Pennay & Measham, 2016).

Compared to gender and age, there were many more associations with the frequency of use (daily users vs. non-daily users). In Chapters 2 and 3, daily cannabis users were more likely to report "protest/activism" as their main reason to attend a cannabis festival. Compared to non-daily users, daily users were also more open to telling their colleagues or fellow students that they attended a cannabis festival (or would do so in the future), and were more positive about the contribution of cannabis festivals to the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis. It can be argued that, with more frequent use, cannabis users would benefit more from legalization. Assuming that cannabis is a more important aspect in the self-defined identity of daily users (cf. Liebregts et al., 2015), they may be more inclined to consider cannabis use as an inalienable civil right—a right that calls for protest and activism. In the same vein, the centrality of cannabis in their self-defined identity could explain why they are more open about their use and related activities and why they were more optimistic about the contribution of cannabis festivals to destigmatization. However, it could also be argued that daily users have much more to gain than less frequent users, as they felt much less socially accepted. In Chapter 4, the frequency of cannabis use was a strong predictor of stigmatization, with daily users experiencing a much higher degree of stigma than non-daily users. Daily cannabis users were more likely to have been rejected by friends (discrimination); to report that most people think that cannabis users are

unreliable (perceived devaluation); and to experience alienation (avoidance and proving themselves because of their cannabis use) than non-daily users. This confirms previous studies concluding that cannabis-related stigma is often associated with patterns of cannabis use and particularly with a higher frequency of cannabis use (Hathaway, 2004; Kolar et al., 2018). In Chapter 5, frequency of use was significantly associated with settings of use and self-regulation rules. Daily users were more likely to use in private, public, and risk-taking settings, but less likely to use in social company than non-daily users. Also, daily cannabis users were less likely to apply risk avoidance and setting avoidance rules, while they were more inclined to apply rules favoring comfort. All in all, these findings indicate that daily users are less selective in where they use cannabis and may focus less on risk-management strategies. Setting selectivity and self-regulation rules are important ingredients for the social and cultural accommodation of cannabis use, and conducive to minimizing or eliminating stigma (Duff & Erickson, 2014). In Chapter 6, compared to less frequent users, daily users reported easier access to cannabis and were much more likely to buy cannabis themselves. Alternatively, non-daily users were more likely to obtain cannabis for free or from a friend who bought it for them with their money. Finally, among buyers, as compared to non-daily users, daily users had higher odds of buying cannabis from home dealers, which might reflect a higher level of privileged access. In other words, daily users appear to be less involved in social supply and more oriented towards closed markets (home dealers, domestic cultivation). To conclude, daily users differed considerably in many aspects from non-daily users. On the one hand they were more activistic and optimistic about the contribution of cannabis festivals to de-stigmatization and the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis users. On the other hand, it could be argued that their own behavior is at odds with normalization. Since they were less selective in how and where they use and acquire cannabis, and appeared to focus less on risk-management strategies than less frequent users, the behavioral norms and practices of daily users at the micro level may hinder rather than favor the normalization of cannabis at the macro level through the cultural accommodation and societal acceptance of cannabis users.

Cannabis normalization and contemporary challenges of normalization thesis

From the mid-1990s onwards, the concept of normalization has inspired the international community of social drug researchers (Pennay & Measham, 2016), and fueled discussions in contemporary drug policy debates (Erickson & Hathaway, 2010). Normalization as developed in the first research wave (Measham et al., 1994; Parker et al., 1998; Parker et al., 2002; Parker, 2005) could be seen more as a conceptual framework to monitor how cultural attitudes and social behavior regarding illegal drugs and drug users change through time (Parker, 2005). In various countries, cannabis was described as the most normalized illicit drug (Duff et al., 2012; Korf, 2006; Lee &

Kirkpatrick, 2005; Osborne & Fogel, 2007; Parker et al., 1995; Sznitman et al., 2013). While the first wave studies mostly focused on whether normalization has occurred or not, more recent work has turned the emphasis on the processual aspects of normalization, on how the notion of normalized drug use has shaped drug use practices. They explore neglected aspects of normalization such as the sociodemographic characteristics of users and patterns of use and point to the importance of social context in understanding processes of normalization (Asbridge et al., 2016; Hathaway et al., 2016; Pennay & Measham, 2016). With regard to the social context, normalization theory has been criticized as it does not distinguish between countries with different legal contexts (Asbridge et al., 2016). The exploration of legal context in processes of normalization appears quite important (Sznitman, 2008), especially when we consider that during the first wave studies Parker (2005) identified the more liberal policy shifts as an indicator of normalization.

Following recent theoretical developments (cf. Pennay & Measham, 2016), this dissertation looked upon aspects of normalization that had been neglected in the first wave studies, and aimed at a more ‘‘differentiated’’ understanding of normalization (Shildrick, 2002). One approach was to investigate the impact of cannabis policy on cannabis normalization, and compare countries with different policies (cf. Sznitman et al., 2013). In addition, the focus was on micro-level aspects of normalization (Duff et al., 2012; Pennay & Moore, 2010; Sznitman, 2008) by investigating the perspective of users and including demographics and frequency of use in the analysis. We examined cannabis-related stigmatization, policy perceptions, and cannabis related practices, including the specific settings (when, where, with whom) in which cannabis is used, and how and where they acquire cannabis. As in prior research, we studied neglected aspects of normalization such as gender (Duff et al., 2012; Hathaway et al., 2016) and age (Erickson & Hathaway, 2010), and contexts of cannabis use (Asbridge et al., 2016; Hathaway et al., 2016; Measham & Shiner, 2009), and also differentiated between frequent and non-frequent cannabis users. Finally, we investigated users’ choices related to the retail cannabis markets, one of the most neglected aspects of normalization.

The findings in this dissertation support indications of normalization. First, in general, cannabis users did not consider the cannabis policy towards users in their country as (very) tough, supporting the argument that drug policy is related to normalization (Sznitman, 2008). Second, regarding stigma, cannabis users generally experienced a low degree of self-stigmatization and mainly reported perceived devaluation. The analysis that compared countries with different levels of punitiveness conditionally confirmed the hypothesis that de-stigmatization is associated with a more liberal cannabis policy. (Germany appeared to be the exception). Third, cannabis users applied self-regulation rules regarding physical and social settings, situations, and times, many of them avoided risks and practiced norms that show respect to non-users. These findings are in line with previous studies that showed that moderate, controlled, and responsible use, is related to the normalization of cannabis use (e.g., Duff et al., 2012; Erickson et al., 2010;

Hathaway et al., 2011; Lau et al., 2015). Fourth, respondents generally reported easy access to cannabis in their country, which supports one of the core dimensions of the original normalization thesis, namely the increased availability and accessibility (Parker, 2005; Parker et al., 2002). Within and across countries, users acquired cannabis in various ways and buyers purchased it from various sources, representing a mixture of open, closed, and semi-open retail markets, as well as a combination of commercial and non-commercial supply methods. The easy access to cannabis and the multiple supply methods and sources, together with the important role of social supply, support claims that the normalization of cannabis use has extended to encompass a normalization of cannabis supply, especially recreational supply within friendship networks (Chatwin & Potter, 2014; Coomber et al. 2016; Coomber & Moyle, 2014; Hathaway et al. 2018).

While several empirical findings in prior chapters support indications of the normalization thesis, the conclusions go beyond a simplistic conception, confirm that normalization is not a static concept or a theory of drug use (Parker, 2005), and support the need for a more nuanced, ‘‘differentiated’’ understanding of normalization (Pennay & Measham, 2016). Along with differences between cannabis users from different countries that could be linked to the stringency of national cannabis policy, there were cross-national differences between users that did not show a pattern that could unambiguously be understood in terms of differences in levels of punitiveness. Also, there were some striking similarities in cannabis users' norms, behavior, and perceptions from countries with different cannabis policy. In other words, findings in this thesis also suggest that in the cannabis normalization discourse, the legal context may be overvalued in understanding cannabis use and cannabis users. Therefore, taken as a whole, the findings indicate that normalization is not only about drug policy, and it may be more affected by changes in the social and cultural accommodation of cannabis (Chatwin, 2016) and/or different levels of prevalence of cannabis use (Sznitman et al., 2015).

The fact that in this study not all cannabis users were or felt equally stigmatized confirmed the idea that cannabis users do not constitute a homogenous category (Duff et al., 2012; Liebregts, 2015; Miles, 2014). Differences we found in age and gender support the call for deeper understanding of these aspects of normalization (Duff et al., 2012; Pennay & Moore, 2010). Differences found between age groups suggest that younger and older generations may be affected differently by processes of normalization. Differences between male and female users indicate that cannabis use is not normalized equally across the gender spectrum. On the other hand, several cannabis-related aspects did not differ by age or gender, while many more differences were associated with frequency of use.

Methodological challenges and recent developments in cannabis policy

Social drug research is almost impossible without limitations. In this thesis, some limitations stem from theoretical delineation, such as the user's perspective. Consequently, this thesis does not, for example, provide empirical insights into the extent to which or how wider society stigmatizes or socially accepts cannabis use and users, and the criminological view of the cannabis market does not surpass the retail level. Other limitations are methodological in nature. As mentioned repeatedly in prior chapters, the main methodological limitation was that both the cannabis festival survey and the user survey were convenient, not normative samples. Without a doubt, especially in the case of the user survey, probability sampling based on a random selection of users in the general population would have been preferable, as it is more advantageous in terms of scientific merit and generalizability, and is representative of the target population (Jager et al., 2017). However, such an approach was at stake with feasibility. Given the prevalence of last year cannabis use among young adults (14.4% on average in the EU, but only 4.5% in Greece and 8.0% in Portugal; EMCDDA 2019), a large sample would be needed to generate statistically representative data about stigma, normalization, self-regulation rules, and cannabis acquisition and buying behavior in each of the seven countries of our study. As is quite common in studies that involve drug users, convenience sampling was chosen as a pragmatic solution, in this case with a minimum number of respondents for each country and a quota with regard to the gender and age distribution. A crucial advantage was that coffeeshops in the Netherlands offered a unique opportunity to find a large number of current cannabis users living in one of the seven European countries within a manageable time frame. In retrospect, it was a lucky coincidence that the fieldwork and survey were completed before the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in Europe. It is quite likely that cannabis users in Dutch coffeeshops represent a selective segment of the cannabis using population, in particular more frequent users, as was illustrated by the relatively high proportion of daily users. However, that was the case for each of the seven countries. As a whole, the user survey sample was diverse in age, gender, and other socio-demographic characteristics, as well as in cannabis use frequency, and thereby allowed for comparative cross-national analysis.

We did not take into consideration the changes in the medical cannabis sector around the globe, and particularly within the EU. In recent years, cannabis products, including herbal cannabis and cannabis oils, with low levels of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), are not controlled under drug laws in some countries and are legally available in some EU markets (EMCDDA, 2020b). During the research period (2016-2021), Italy, Germany, United Kingdom, Portugal, and Greece legalized medical cannabis in some forms. In March 2021, France's government launched a two-year nationwide experiment with medical cannabis with a view to its eventual legalization. The

Netherlands, since 2003, was the first country to legalize medical cannabis. Although the recent policy developments regarding medical cannabis might affect cannabis normalization, the nature of this study did not provide the appropriate ground for exploring this aspect and embedding a related discussion.

This research was carried out in a transition period not only for the medical use of cannabis but also for cannabis policies. While within the UN drug control framework cannabis still remains illegal, in recent years, at a national or state level, an increasing number of jurisdictions have introduced a more liberal cannabis policy, shifting away from the punitive approach that had been the norm in past decades. Significant changes took place in the southern and northern parts of the Americas. In 2012, Colorado became the first state that legalized cannabis, despite cannabis federal prohibition. Since then, and as of the beginning of 2022, eighteen states and Washington D.C. have legalized cannabis. In 2013, Uruguay became the first country in the world to legalize recreational cannabis, followed by Canada that became the first G7 country to do so in 2018.

In the European Union, with a narrow focus on the countries investigated in this dissertation, there were two notable examples that demonstrate an intention for liberal shifts in policy. First, in the Netherlands, a state experiment program for cannabis cultivation and distribution was introduced in 2018 aiming to regulate coffeeshops' supply ('the back door'). Second, In Italy, on December 19, 2019, the Supreme Court of Cassation (Italian: *Corte Suprema di Cassazione*) which is the highest court of appeal or court of last resort in Italy, ruled a landmark decision that decriminalized small-scale home cultivation for the exclusive use of the grower. However, after this court decision, the official legislation still remains unclear.

At the time of the completion of this dissertation there was a series of legislative developments and political announcements that gave a new color to the map of cannabis legalization in the European Union. Towards the end of 2021, Malta and Luxembourg announced that they will change their cannabis law, and under strict regulations allow adult residents to cultivate up to 4 cannabis plants per household, while Malta also will allow them to form non-profit cannabis associations, known as Cannabis Social Clubs (EMCDDA, 2021b). The move to allow limited home cultivation is quite similar to what is allowed already in Spain and in The Netherlands, and is similar to the direction that was given by the Supreme Court's decision in Italy. In the United Kingdom, small-scale domestic cultivation for personal use might not be prosecuted, could receive a Band C fine, or in the worst case scenario, a medium level community service order can be imposed. Cannabis from home cultivation was one of the options in this research when participants in the user survey were asked how they acquire cannabis (Chapter 6), but the findings showed that home cultivation was not among the popular acquisition methods. Nevertheless, neither Malta or Luxembourg was included in this dissertation.

A game-changing move came towards the end of 2021 in Germany, by the new-elected German Government coalition of Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens and the Free Democrats (FDP). The newly formed coalition announced plans to legalize cannabis through establishing a regulated market for the adult sale and consumption of cannabis, making Germany the second G7 country to legalize cannabis. Although there is still much that is unclear about how this legislation will take shape, it certainly promises challenges for future research.

Epilogue

Cannabis users appear to be better off in countries with a liberal rather than a repressive cannabis policy. The Netherlands differentiating frequently with the six other European countries, and the contrasts found between cannabis users from the Netherlands and Portugal on the liberal side of cannabis policy and from Greece and France on the repressive side, provide conditional empirical evidence that the level of punitiveness impacts the stigmatization of cannabis users and processual aspects of cannabis normalization. Dutch users showed significantly lower levels of stigmatization, while they were also the most dedicated in following self-regulation rules. This indicates that liberalization and de-stigmatization do not automatically lead to chaotic or otherwise problematic use as critics of the policy had predicted, as diminishing formal control (i.e., law enforcement) is accompanied by the increased importance of informal norms and stronger self-regulation. The strong preference for coffeeshops as a main source of cannabis supply confirms the Dutch cannabis users' preference for an open regulated retail market. These findings are strong indicators of a social process in accordance with the Dutch national drug policy that, already prior to the introduction of the normalization thesis by British sociologists, aimed at cannabis de-stigmatization and the normalization of users (ISAD, 1985; de Kort, 1995; van Vliet, 1990; van de Wijngaart, 1991).

Other aspects of stigmatization, cannabis self-regulation, and cannabis acquisition and buying practices indicate that normalization can also be a social process that evolves relatively autonomously, across borders, and rather independently from national drug policies (cf. Korf, 2010). These aspects were not associated with the level of punitiveness of cannabis policy, which could indicate that they are not so sensitive to differences in national drug policy, or represent a kind of normative cultural standard across Europe. This suggests that with some aspects of normalization, a broader societal and cultural accommodation of cannabis use and/or a kind of international cannabis user culture is more influential than cross-national differences in cannabis policy. In this respect, normalization is not only about drug policy, it is also affected by changes and developments in the social and cultural accommodation of cannabis in societies that live under different laws.

A differentiated approach to normalization should not be restricted to the legal context, but needs to incorporate other factors that build the broad picture. It appeared that cannabis-related gender differences are still existent but are not omnipresent. Although the absence of differences in aspects like cannabis accessibility or cannabis-related stigmatization may result from changes in gender roles over time, other findings suggest that gender is one among many differences that affect processual aspects of normalization. Similarly, age was not associated with the perceived stigmatization of cannabis users, and it appeared to play only a limited role in understanding differences in cannabis acquisition. However, within the age range 18-40, older users were more selective and careful with regard to self-regulation practices and rules than younger ones.

Compared to gender and age, frequency of use was a much stronger predictor of stigmatization and normalization. In many aspects, daily users differed considerably from non-daily users. Findings revealing that daily users are more likely to feel stigmatized compared to non-daily users are complementary in supporting the idea that daily users' behavior is at odds with normalization. Since they were less selective in how and where they use and acquire cannabis, and appeared to focus less on risk-management strategies than less frequent users, the behavioral norms and practices of daily users at the micro level may hinder rather than favor the normalization of cannabis at the macro level through the cultural accommodation and societal acceptance of cannabis users.

Nonetheless, it should be noted, that daily cannabis use does not inextricably translate to problematic use. Moreover, it can be argued that, similar to normalized substances like alcohol, cannabis normalization comes with a proportion of frequent users. Thus understood, normalization in terms of societal acceptance does not exclusively lead to moderate or non-problematic use.

To conclude, in addition to the impact of punitiveness on the stigmatization of cannabis users and some aspects of cannabis normalization, this dissertation concludes that there are also universal social and cultural components that converge in cannabis normalization independently from the national cannabis policy. This common omnipresent process may be a repercussion of sociocultural changes in a globalized context that shape the cannabis user culture as well as societal norms about cannabis and users. Future research could investigate whether the ramifications of the rapidly changing global landscape in cannabis policy and the cross-border evolution in societal attitudes towards cannabis diminish the impact of national policies.

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9

Summary

Background, aim and methods

In the course of 20th century, cannabis evolved into one of the most strictly controlled psychoactive substances, being subject to international UN drug conventions and prohibitionist national drug laws. Criminalization through arrests and sentencing fueled the stigmatization of cannabis users, but did not prevent cannabis becoming the most commonly used illicit drug worldwide. Growing concerns about the negative consequences of cannabis prohibition catalyzed protest and calls for decriminalization or legalization. On the other hand, scholars argued that cannabis had been losing its subcultural connotation and had evolved into a de-stigmatized mainstream drug – a social process that was coined as normalization. However, whether and how such a normalization has become a common and global feature is subject to scholarly debate, not in the least because strong cross-national differences in national cannabis laws and policies, even within the EU.

The aim of this dissertation was to better understand the role of national drug legislation and drug policies in the stigmatization and normalization of drug use. The focus was on cannabis, not only because it was the most widely used illicit drug, but also the core substance in the opposition to the UN international drug conventions. The central question was: To what extent and how do national cannabis legislation and policies impact the stigmatization and normalization of cannabis users? This overarching question was translated into more specific research questions aiming to investigate protest, stigma, and normalization. We chose to concentrate on a consumer perspective, and primarily research the experiences, practices, perceptions, and opinions of cannabis users.

To study the impact of national cannabis policy, capturing cross-national variation was central to research design. The first empirical part of the research (Chapter 2) was conducted at cannabis festivals in the capital cities of four EU Member States: Amsterdam (the Netherlands), Berlin (Germany), Rome (Italy), and Athens (Greece). The selected countries fairly represented the variation in national cannabis policy within the EU, as well as having geographical spread across Europe. In each capital city, we used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods: interviews with local organizers of the cannabis festivals, participant observations at the festivals, and a survey with a short questionnaire among festival participants (n = 1,355 respondents in total). The second empirical step (Chapters 3 to 7) was a survey with a longer questionnaire that was delivered to young adult last year cannabis users (18–40 years) residing in one of the four EU countries, as well as users from three other European countries (France, Portugal, and the UK – all three without an annual large-scale cannabis festival in the capital city, nor any other city). Respondents (n = 1,225 in total) in this user survey were recruited and interviewed inside or in the vicinity of coffeeshops (i.e., close to the entrance) in the Netherlands. Together, the seven

countries selected for our study represent the maximum variation in national cannabis policy within Europe, on a continuum from relatively liberal (The Netherlands) to punitive (Greece).

Protest

Cannabis festivals are among the most concrete manifestations of civic society protest against cannabis prohibition and calls form reform. Chapter 2 explored the aims, background, and structure of cannabis festivals in the capital cities of four European countries. The four festivals had similarities in aim, basic characteristics and organizational structure. All the interviewed local organizers claimed that the festivals had an activist identity, and their main aim was to end cannabis prohibition, to support cannabis policy reform in their country, and simultaneously to celebrate cannabis culture. Notwithstanding common features, the festivals also reproduced local, social and cultural characteristics. A striking difference in the nature of the festivals was found in the political tone and character. Despite the relatively punitive cannabis policy in Greece, the level of politicization was lowest in Athens. In contrast, politicization was most visible and heard in Berlin, with many speakers and the participation of several left-wing and liberal political parties. In the festival survey, participants most often reported "protest/activism" or "entertainment/leisure" as their main reason for participating in the cannabis festival. Yet, and largely in line with the field observations, main reasons for participation varied between the four festivals. Protest was the most prominent reason in Berlin and Rome. Protest was about equally prevalent in Athens, yet less prominent than entertainment. In contrast, the latter was the primary reason in Amsterdam, where protest scored second, albeit at a much lower level than in the other festivals.

In Chapter 3, the role of cannabis festivals was further explored in the user survey that was held among cannabis users from the seven European countries. The user survey engaged users who had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country of residence (attendees) as well as non-attendees who had never done so. In the user survey, the respondents from Germany, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands who had ever attended a cannabis festival in their country, predominantly mentioned the same main reasons for attendance as the participants in the festival survey. Protest was the number one reason in Germany and Italy, entertainment was on top in the Netherlands and Greece, followed by protest. In sum, cannabis festivals typically (i) a historical role as a place for social protest and resistance linked to organized movements for social change, and (ii) a more contemporary role as a place for entertainment. Relative to other countries, protest was a less prominent reason for festival attendance in the two countries with the most liberal cannabis policy (Portugal and the Netherlands). This suggests that liberalization of cannabis may lower the support for protest, while at the same time it may generate more space for celebration of cannabis culture. Nonetheless, in general, an unambiguous association cannot be claimed between the stringency of national cannabis policy and cannabis users' motivation to

participate in a cannabis festival, where the stricter the national cannabis policy is, the more likely users are to a cannabis festival for protest.

When asked in the festival survey whether they would tell their colleagues at work or their fellow students that they attended the cannabis festival, a large majority replied in the affirmative. Similarly, most respondents in the user survey said that they would hide, neither now nor in the near future, that they attended a cannabis festival from fellow students or co-workers. Looking beyond the micro-level of fellow students and colleagues to the contribution of cannabis festivals to de-stigmatization and normalization of cannabis in wider society, a large majority of respondents in the festival survey thought that the festival they attended positively affected the social and cultural acceptance of cannabis users. In the user survey, respondents were more ambivalent. However, festival attendants in the user survey were much more positive than respondents who had never been at a cannabis festival in their country. This indicates that the participation and experience at cannabis festivals are conducive to perceptions of the role of these festivals in the normalization of cannabis users. As far as cross-national differences in perceived contribution of cannabis festivals to the societal acceptance of cannabis users were found, they could not simply be linked to punitiveness of national cannabis policy. Differences in perception were more strongly associated with user characteristics, particularly the frequency of cannabis use.

Stigma

Stigmatization is a multifaceted phenomenon, as it refers to individuals, groups, and society at large. In Chapter 4 the principal emphasis was on the user perspective, rather than on the opinion that society has about cannabis users (public stigma). Three dimensions of cannabis-related stigma were investigated (discrimination, perceived devaluation and alienation). In the user survey, discrimination referred to whether respondents had experienced rejection by friends or family that was attributed to cannabis use. Perceived devaluation referred to whether they thought that most people in the general public believe that cannabis users are unreliable or dangerous. Alienation was about user's responses to internalized negative stereotypes about cannabis users, either passively (avoid people because they might look down on you), or actively (feel that you have to prove yourself). The three dimensions taken together in a general stigma score (sum score) showed a low to moderate degree of stigmatization. This indicated that cannabis users in this dissertation did not experience a high degree of stigmatization. Compared to the Netherlands, respondents from all other countries showed significantly higher levels of stigmatization. Cannabis users from Portugal, the other country with a relatively liberal cannabis policy, were the first to follow the Dutch. At the other end of the cannabis policy continuum, in Greece and France, the level of stigmatization was among the highest. Overall, the findings were supportive to the hypothesis that a strict cannabis policy contributes to an increased degree of

stigmatization, whereas a liberal cannabis policy contributes to de-stigmatization and normalization. However, Germany deviated from the overall pattern, as German and Greek users reported equally high degrees of stigma.

In sum, cannabis users experienced some stigmatization but mainly it had to do with their perceptions of how most people view them (perceived devaluation). Differences in experiences of discrimination, alienation and perceived devaluation showed that stigma comes in complex forms. Diverging perceptions and experiences on the three dimensions demonstrated that not all users experience the same type or degree of stigma. Thereby, this thesis once more illustrated that cannabis users do not constitute a homogenous category. The cross-national similarities and differences in cannabis-related stigma that resulted from the comparative analysis largely supported a core element of the normalization thesis, namely that at societal level normalization encompasses liberal shifts in drug policy. However, even though stigmatization was lowest in countries with the more liberal cannabis policies in Europe, stigmatization was not fully absent. In addition to national cannabis policy, cannabis use frequency strongly explained differences in stigmatization, with daily users experiencing a much higher degree of stigma than non-daily users.

Normalization

According to the normalization thesis, cannabis normalization concerns both society as a whole (macro level) and the individual level (micro level). Chapters 2 and 3 explored cannabis user's openness with their close environment about their participation in a cannabis festival (social acceptance at the micro level), and whether they believed that these festivals have an impact on the societal acceptance at the macro level. Chapter 4 examined the micro level further by looking into the stigma that cannabis users perceive and experience. In Chapter 5, the user perspective was further explored.

In Chapter 5, the general purpose was to shed more light on the normative context in which cannabis use occurs. The focus was on the extent to which and how cannabis users practice normalization and self-regulation of cannabis use in everyday life. We investigated the role of social and physical settings in cannabis use, as well as specific rules that users apply regarding cannabis consumption. As to the social setting, the findings indicated that cannabis was more likely to be used in social company than when being alone. Cannabis was commonly used in various physical settings, yet most often in private settings. Contrarily, cannabis use in risk-taking settings, such as in a car and in school or at the workplace, was uncommon. It appeared that many cannabis users assess a range of aspects with regard to whether, when, where, and with whom to use cannabis and accordingly they set self-regulation rules to ensure that their cannabis use takes place in a way that does not interfere with other aspects of their daily lives. It also appeared that

many cannabis users are concerned with responsible use, and their preference for certain settings of use and avoidance of other settings could be driven more by discretion and respect towards non-users than by the threat or fear of stigmatization. The frequent application of risk avoidance rules indicated that moderation of the frequency and volume of use is a factor that determines normalized use.

Regression analysis revealed both cross-national similarities and differences. For example, irrespective of national cannabis policy, using cannabis in private settings was equally predominant across the seven countries in this dissertation, as were rules to avoid certain types of settings. Although overall self-regulation was highest in the most liberal country (The Netherlands), differences in the societal and cultural accommodation of cannabis use appeared to be more important in understanding risk management in terms of setting of cannabis use and self-regulation rules than cross-national differences in cannabis policy. Furthermore, the setting of cannabis use and self-regulation rules were strongly associated with frequency of use. Daily users were less selective in choosing settings of use and less strict in self-regulation rules.

In Chapter 6, the focus shifted to another crucial element on the user perspective of normalization: how and where do they obtain cannabis? The vast majority of participants in the user survey found the access to cannabis in their country easy, often as very easy. However, perceived availability varied across countries, from being easiest in the country with the most liberal cannabis policy (the Netherlands) to least easy in the country with the most repressive cannabis policy in this thesis (Greece). Buying cannabis yourself, was by far the most popular way to acquire cannabis. Yet, it was significantly more often reported by the Dutch users, and this can largely be explained by the broad access to cannabis through the tolerated sale of cannabis in coffeeshops. At substantial distance, the next common mode of acquisition was to have a friend buy cannabis with the respondents' money. The popularity of this method confirmed the importance of the role of a 'broker' among cannabis users. As far as users bought their own cannabis, in order of popularity, the most common source was via friends, at distance followed by the less common sources of street dealers, home dealers, and delivery services. In other words, closed markets (friends, home dealers) were more important than open and semi-open markets. Dutch buyers were the exception to the rule of buying in closed markets, as coffeeshops (open market) were by far the most dominant place to buy cannabis.

The buying from friends as the most popular source of supply indicated the principal role of friends as sellers, and demonstrated the significant role of social supply. Nevertheless, street dealers ranked at second place as the prime suppliers for buyers, showing that street dealing is still relevant to the retail cannabis market. The findings also suggested that in the case of cannabis more traditional methods (street dealing and home dealing) are still more prevalent than delivery services (whereby customers order by phone, WhatsApp, etc.). Also, the very low

prevalence of buying through the internet confirmed that only a small proportion of cannabis users have transitioned to cryptomarkets.

Cross-national comparison, revealed both similarities and differences between countries with different cannabis policies. Overall, Dutch participants showed a different pattern in cannabis acquisition and purchase to those from other countries. Not only did they report the easiest access to cannabis, in regression analysis (controlling for demographic variables and cannabis use frequency) they were also the most likely to buy cannabis themselves and differed in various other aspects of obtaining cannabis and buying behavior, in particular the dominance of coffeeshops as a supply source. Compared to Dutch users, Greeks had not only the least easy access to cannabis, they also were the most likely to let friends buy cannabis for them with their money and obtain cannabis through group buys, while among buyers, Greeks most often bought from friends and home dealers. In other words, in the Netherlands, the country with the most liberal cannabis policy in this dissertation, users were strongest oriented towards an open cannabis market, while in Greece, the country with the most punitive cannabis policy, users leaned strongest on a closed market and social supply. However, findings from other countries did not support a unidirectional link with punitiveness.

The easy access to cannabis in the country of residence by the vast majority of participants in the user survey and the multiple supply methods and sources may be understood as signs of a normalized retail market. At the same time, the diversity in cannabis acquisition, depending on gender, age, and frequency of cannabis use, were supportive to a differentiated normalization at the cannabis retail market. Also, the findings in Chapter 6 confirm the significant role of social supply or recreational supply within friendship networks. Yet, the findings also show that many cannabis users prefer to buy their own cannabis. Although cross-national differences in cannabis acquisition were not unidirectionally linked with punitiveness of national cannabis policy, the role of Dutch coffeeshops in this dissertation, together with the swift change from illegal to legal supply sources after legalization in North-America suggested that, if they would have the choice, most cannabis users would strongly prefer to buy cannabis in an open regulated or legal market.

Users' perceptions of cannabis policy in their country

Chapters 2 to 6 looked at cross-national similarities and differences in experiences, practices and perceptions of cannabis users from European countries with different cannabis policies. Based on the legal status of cannabis and the law enforcement approach towards cannabis (de jure, and partially de facto), the seven countries were placed on a continuum, ranging from relatively liberal (the Netherlands) to relatively punitive (Greece). Chapter 7 took a different angle and focused on how cannabis users perceive drug policy, and more specially cannabis policy, in their country. In particular, we examined what cannabis users perceive as the main drug policy

priorities and how they evaluate the punitiveness of cannabis policy and law enforcement practice in their country. Users' perceptions varied both within and across countries. In the regression analysis, when controlling for age, gender, and frequency of cannabis use, the contrasts in drug policy perception were greatest between Dutch and Portuguese on the one hand and French and Greek cannabis users on the other. Users from the other three countries occupied an intermediate position. Cannabis users' perceptions of punitiveness of drug policy in their country were largely in line with was to be expected from the diversity in the legal status of cannabis and the law enforcement approach towards cannabis, as was briefly outlined in Chapter 1. The perceptions of the Dutch and Portuguese cannabis users confirmed the placement of their country on the liberal edge of the continuum, and the perceptions of the users from Greece and France confirmed the position of their country at the other end, with strict and punitive drug policies.

The role of cannabis policy

In Chapter 8 we concluded that, the findings in the chapters 2 to 7 taken together, cannabis users appear to be better off in countries with a liberal rather than a repressive cannabis policy. The Netherlands frequently differentiating from the six other European countries, and the contrasts found between cannabis users from the Netherlands and Portugal on the liberal side and from Greece and France on the repressive side in cannabis policy, provide conditional empirical evidence that the level of punitiveness impacts stigmatization of cannabis users and processual aspects of cannabis normalization.

Other aspects of stigmatization, cannabis self-regulation, cannabis acquisition and buying practices pointed into the direction that normalization can also be a social process that evolves relatively autonomously, across borders and rather independently from national drug policies. These aspects were not associated with the level of punitiveness of cannabis policy, which could indicate that they are not so sensitive to differences in national drug policy, or represent a kind of normative cultural standard across Europe. This suggested that with some aspects of normalization, a broader societal and cultural accommodation of cannabis use, and/or a kind of international cannabis user culture is more influential than cross-national differences in cannabis policy. In this respect, normalization is not only about drug policy, it is also affected by changes and developments in social and cultural accommodation of cannabis in societies that live under different laws.

A differentiated approach to normalization should not be restricted to the legal context, but needs to incorporate other factors that build the broad picture. It appeared that cannabis related differences between male and female users are still existent but are not omnipresent. Although the absence of differences in aspects like cannabis accessibility or cannabis-related stigmatization may result from changes in gender roles over time, other findings suggest that gender is one

among many differences that affect processual aspects of normalization. Age appeared to play only a limited role in understanding differences in, for example, cannabis acquisition. However, within the age range 18-40, older users were more selective and careful with regard to self-regulation practices and rules than younger one. Thus, younger and older generations of cannabis users may be affected differently by processes of normalization.

Compared to gender and age, frequency of use was a much stronger predictor of stigmatization and normalization. In many aspects, daily users differed considerably from non-daily users. Findings revealing that daily users were more likely to feel stigmatized compared to non-daily users are complementary in supporting the idea that daily users' behavior is at odds with normalization. Since they were less selective in how and where they use and acquire cannabis, and appeared to focus less on risk-management strategies than less frequent users, the behavioral norms and practices of daily users at the micro-level may hinder rather than favor the normalization of cannabis at the macro level through the cultural accommodation and societal acceptance of cannabis users.

To conclude, in addition to the impact of punitiveness on stigmatization of cannabis users and some aspects of cannabis normalization, there are also universal social and cultural components that converge in cannabis normalization rather independently from the national cannabis policy. This common omnipresent process may be a repercussion of sociocultural changes in a globalized context that shape the cannabis user culture as well as societal norms about cannabis and cannabis users.

10

Samenvatting

Achtergrond, doel en methode

In de loop van de 20e eeuw ontwikkelde cannabis zich tot een van de strengst gecontroleerde categorie psychoactieve stoffen, onderworpen aan internationale VN-drugsverdragen en prohibitionistische nationale drugswetgeving. Criminalisering door arrestaties en veroordelingen wakkerde de stigmatisering van cannabisgebruikers aan, maar voorkwam niet dat cannabis wereldwijd de meest gebruikte illegale drug werd. Groeiende bezorgdheid over de negatieve gevolgen van het cannabisverbod zette aan tot protest en pleidooien voor decriminalisering of legalisering. Anderzijds betoogden wetenschappers dat cannabis haar subculturele connotatie had verloren en was geëvolueerd tot een gedestigmatiseerde mainstream drug - een sociaal proces dat werd betiteld als normalisatie. Of en hoe een dergelijke normalisering een algemeen geldig en wereldwijd kenmerk is geworden, is echter onderwerp van wetenschappelijk debat, niet in de laatste plaats vanwege sterke grensoverschrijdende verschillen in nationale cannabiswetten en -beleid, zelfs binnen de EU.

Het doel van dit proefschrift was om de rol van nationale drugswetgeving en drugsbeleid in de stigmatisering en normalisatie van drugsgebruik beter te begrijpen. De focus lag op cannabis, niet alleen omdat het de meest gebruikte illegale drug was (en is), maar ook de drug is die centraal staat in het verzet tegen de internationale drugsverdragen van de VN. De centrale vraag was: In hoeverre en hoe beïnvloeden nationale cannabiswetgeving en -beleid de stigmatisering en normalisatie van cannabisgebruikers? Deze overkoepelende vraag werd vertaald in meer specifieke onderzoeksvragen gericht op het onderzoeken van protest, stigma en normalisatie. We kozen ervoor om ons te concentreren op een consumentenperspectief en vooral onderzoek te doen naar de ervaringen, praktijken, percepties en meningen van cannabisgebruikers.

Teneinde de invloed van nationaal cannabisbeleid te bestuderen, was variatie in beleid tussen landen een belangrijk thema in het onderzoeksdesign. Het eerste empirische deel van het onderzoek (hoofdstuk 2) werd uitgevoerd op cannabisfestivals in de hoofdsteden van vier EU-lidstaten: Amsterdam (Nederland), Berlijn (Duitsland), Rome (Italië) en Athene (Griekenland). De geselecteerde landen vertegenwoordigden heel aardig de variatie in het nationale cannabisbeleid binnen de EU, evenals de geografische spreiding over Europa. In elke hoofdstad hanteerden we een combinatie van kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve methoden: interviews met lokale organisatoren van de cannabisfestivals, participerende observaties op de festivals en een survey met een korte vragenlijst onder festivaldeelnemers (n = 1.355 respondenten in totaal). De tweede empirische stap (hoofdstukken 3 tot en met 7) was een survey met een langere vragenlijst onder jongvolwassen cannabisgebruikers (18-40 jaar; minstens laatste 12 maanden nog gebruikt) woonachtig in een van de vier EU-landen wonen, evenals gebruikers uit drie andere Europese landen (Frankrijk, Portugal en het VK – alle drie zonder een jaarlijks grootschalig cannabisfestival in de hoofdstad, noch enige andere stad). Respondenten (n = 1.225 in totaal) in

dit gebruikersonderzoek werden gerekruteerd en geïnterviewd in of nabij coffeeshops (d.w.z. dicht bij de ingang) in Nederland. Samen vertegenwoordigen de geselecteerde zeven landen de maximale variatie in nationaal cannabisbeleid binnen Europa, op een continuüm van relatief liberaal (Nederland) tot streng (Griekenland).

Protest

Cannabisfestivals behoren tot de meest concrete manifestaties van maatschappelijk protest tegen het cannabisverbod en oproepen tot hervorming. Hoofdstuk 2 onderzocht de doelstellingen, achtergrond en structuur van cannabisfestivals in de hoofdsteden van vier Europese landen. De vier festivals hadden overeenkomsten in doel, basiskenmerken en organisatiestructuur. Alle geïnterviewde lokale organisatoren stelden dat de festivals een activistische identiteit hadden en dat hun belangrijkste doel was om een einde te maken aan het cannabisverbod, om de hervorming van het cannabisbeleid in hun land te ondersteunen en tegelijkertijd de cannabiscultuur te vieren. Ondanks gemeenschappelijke kenmerken, weerspiegelden de festivals ook lokale, sociale en culturele kenmerken. Een opvallend verschil in de aard van de festivals betrof de politieke toon en het karakter. Ondanks het relatief punitieve cannabisbeleid in Griekenland had het festival in Athene de minst gepolitiseerde uitstraling. Daarentegen was de politisering het meest zichtbaar en vertolkt in Berlijn, met veel sprekers en de deelname van verschillende linkse en liberale politieke partijen. In de festivalsurvey noemden deelnemers meestal "protest / activisme" of "entertainment / vrije tijd" als hun belangrijkste reden om deel te nemen aan het cannabisfestival. Niettemin, en grotendeels in lijn met de veldobservaties, varieerden de belangrijkste redenen voor deelname tussen de vier festivals. Protest was de meest prominente reden in Berlijn en Rome. Protest werd ongeveer even vaak genoemd in Athene, maar was toch minder prominent dan entertainment. Daarentegen vormde dat laatste de voornaamste reden in Amsterdam, waar protest op de tweede plaats kwam, zij het op een veel lager niveau dan op de andere festivals.

In hoofdstuk 3 werd de rol van cannabisfestivals verder onderzocht in de survey die werd gehouden onder cannabisgebruikers uit de zeven Europese landen. Deze survey besloeg zowel gebruikers die ooit een cannabisfestival in hun land van verblijf hadden bijgewoond (bezoekers) en niet-bezoekers, die dit nog nooit hadden gedaan. In de gebruikerssurvey noemden de respondenten uit Duitsland, Griekenland, Italië en Nederland die ooit een cannabisfestival in hun land hadden bijgewoond, voornamelijk dezelfde hoofdredenen voor deelname als de deelnemers aan de festivalsurvey. Protest was de belangrijkste reden in Duitsland en Italië, entertainment stond bovenaan in Nederland en Griekenland, gevolgd door protest. Kortom, cannabisfestivals hebben meestal (i) een historische rol als een plek voor sociaal protest en verzet gekoppeld aan georganiseerde bewegingen voor sociale verandering, en (ii) een meer

hedendaagse rol als een plek voor entertainment. In vergelijking met andere landen was protest een minder prominente reden voor festivalbezoek in de twee landen met het meest liberale cannabisbeleid (Portugal en Nederland). Dit suggereert dat liberalisering van cannabis de steun voor protest kan verminderen, terwijl het tegelijkertijd meer ruimte kan genereren voor het vieren van de cannabiscultuur. Niettemin kan in het algemeen geen eenduidig verband worden geclaimd tussen de strengheid van het nationale cannabisbeleid en de motivatie van cannabisgebruikers om deel te nemen aan een cannabisfestival. Het is dus niet simpelweg: hoe strenger het nationale cannabisbeleid, hoe groter de kans dat gebruikers naar een cannabisfestival gaan om te protesteren.

Op de vraag in de festivalsurvey of ze hun collega's op het werk of hun medestudenten zouden vertellen dat ze het cannabisfestival bijwoonden, antwoordde een grote meerderheid bevestigend. Evenzo zeiden de meeste respondenten in de gebruikerssurvey dat ze, zowel nu als in de nabije toekomst, niet voor medestudenten of collega's zouden verheimelijken dat ze een cannabisfestival bijwoonden. Verder kijkend dan het microniveau van medestudenten en collega's, met de blik gericht op de bijdrage van cannabisfestivals aan de-stigmatisering en normalisatie van cannabis in de samenleving als geheel, dachten verreweg de meeste respondenten in de festivalsurvey dat het festival dat ze bijwoonden een positieve invloed had op de sociale en culturele acceptatie van cannabisgebruikers. In de gebruikerssurvey waren de respondenten ambivalenter. Festivalbezoekers in de gebruikerssurvey waren echter veel positiever dan respondenten die nog nooit op een cannabisfestival in hun land waren geweest. Dit wijst erop dat de deelname en ervaring op cannabisfestivals bijdragen aan een optimistischer kijk op de rol van dergelijke festivals in de normalisatie van cannabisgebruikers. Voor zover er verschillen tussen landen werden gevonden in de gepercipieerde bijdrage van cannabisfestivals aan de maatschappelijke acceptatie van cannabisgebruikers, konden deze niet eenvoudigweg worden gekoppeld aan de punitiviteit van het nationale cannabisbeleid. Verschillen in perceptie waren sterker geassocieerd met gebruikerskenmerken, met name de frequentie van cannabisgebruik.

Stigma

Stigmatisering is een fenomeen met meerdere kanten, omdat het verwijst naar individuen, groepen en de samenleving als geheel. In hoofdstuk 4 lag de nadruk vooral op het gebruikersperspectief, in plaats van op de mening die de samenleving heeft over cannabisgebruikers (publiek stigma). Drie dimensies van cannabis-gerelateerd stigma werden onderzocht (discriminatie, gepercipieerde devaluatie en vervreemding). In de gebruikerssurvey had discriminatie betrekking op of respondenten afwijzing door vrienden of familie hadden ervaren die verband hield met hun cannabisgebruik. Gepercipieerde devaluatie betrof de vraag

of ze dachten dat de meeste mensen in de maatschappij geloven dat cannabisgebruikers onbetrouwbaar of gevaarlijk zijn. Vervreemding ging over de reacties van gebruikers op geïnternaliseerde negatieve stereotypen over cannabisgebruikers, hetzij passief (mensen vermijden omdat ze op je neerkijken), of actief (het gevoel hebben dat je jezelf moet bewijzen). De drie dimensies werden samengevat in een algemene stigmascore (somscore) en die liet een lage tot matige mate van stigmatisering zien. Dit gaf aan dat cannabisgebruikers in dit proefschrift geen hoge mate van stigmatisering ervoeren. Vergeleken met Nederland vertoonden respondenten uit alle andere landen significant een hogere mate van stigmatisering. Cannabisgebruikers uit Portugal, het andere land met een relatief liberaal cannabisbeleid, kwamen volgden Nederland op de tweede plaats. Aan de andere kant van het cannabisbeleidscontinuüm, in Griekenland en Frankrijk, behoorde de mate van stigmatisering tot de hoogste. Over het algemeen ondersteunden de bevindingen de hypothese dat een strikt cannabisbeleid bijdraagt aan een hogere mate van stigmatisering, terwijl een liberaal cannabisbeleid bijdraagt aan de-stigmatisering en normalisatie. Duitsland week echter af van het algemene patroon, omdat Duitse en Griekse gebruikers een even hoge mate van stigma rapporteerden.

Kortom, cannabisgebruikers ervoeren enige mate van stigmatisering, maar die had vooral te maken met hun percepties van hoe de meeste mensen hen zien (waargenomen devaluatie). Verschillen in ervaringen met discriminatie, vervreemding en waargenomen devaluatie toonden aan dat stigma in complexe vormen voorkomt. Uiteenlopende percepties en ervaringen over de drie dimensies lieten zien dat niet alle gebruikers hetzelfde type of mate van stigma ervaren. Daarmee illustreerde dit proefschrift eens te meer dat cannabisgebruikers geen homogene categorie vormen. De cross-nationale overeenkomsten en verschillen in cannabis-gerelateerd stigma die naar voren kwamen uit de vergelijkende analyse ondersteunden grotendeels een kernelement van de normalisatiethese, namelijk dat normalisatie op maatschappelijk niveau samengaat met liberale verschuivingen in het drugsbeleid. Hoewel stigmatisering in Europa het laagst was in landen met liberaler cannabisbeleid, was stigmatisering daar echter niet volledig afwezig. Naast het nationale cannabisbeleid verklaarde de frequentie van cannabisgebruik sterk de verschillen in stigmatisering, waarbij dagelijkse gebruikers een veel hogere mate van stigma ervaren dan niet-dagelijkse gebruikers.

Normalisering

Volgens de normalisatiethese heeft cannabisnormalisering betrekking op zowel de samenleving als geheel (macroniveau) als op het individuele niveau (microniveau). In hoofdstuk 2 en 3 werd ingegaan op de openheid van cannabisgebruikers in hun naaste omgeving over hun deelname aan een cannabisfestival (maatschappelijke acceptatie op microniveau) en of zij geloofden dat

deze festivals een impact hebben op de maatschappelijke acceptatie op macroniveau. Hoofdstuk 4 onderzocht het microniveau verder door te kijken naar het stigma dat cannabisgebruikers waarnemen en ervaren. In hoofdstuk 5 werd het gebruikersperspectief verder uitgediept.
In hoofdstuk 5 was het algemene doel om meer licht te werpen op de normatieve context waarin cannabisgebruik plaatsvindt. De focus lag op de mate waarin en de wijze waarop cannabisgebruikers normalisering en zelfregulering van cannabisgebruik in het dagelijks leven toepassen. We onderzochten de rol van de sociale en fysieke omgeving bij cannabisgebruik, evenals specifieke regels die gebruikers toepassen met betrekking tot cannabisgebruik. Wat de sociale omgeving betreft, gaven de bevindingen aan dat cannabis vaker werd gebruikt in sociaal gezelschap dan in hun eentje. Cannabis werd vaak gebruikt in verschillende fysieke omgevingen, maar meestal in privé-omgevingen. Daarentegen was cannabisgebruik in risicovolle omgevingen, zoals in een auto en op school of op het werk, ongewoon. Veel cannabisgebruikers bleken meerdere aspecten af te wegen met betrekking tot de vraag of, wanneer, waar en met wie al dan niet cannabis te gebruiken. In lijn daarmee hanteren ze zelfreguleringsregels om ervoor te zorgen dat hun cannabisgebruik niet op gespannen voet staat met andere aspecten van hun dagelijks leven. Ook bleken veel cannabisgebruikers bezig te zijn met verantwoord gebruik, en hun voorkeur voor bepaalde gebruikssettings en het vermijden van andere settings zou eerder kunnen voortvloeien uit discretie en respect voor niet-gebruikers dan het gevolg zijn van dreiging of angst voor stigmatisering. De frequente toepassing van regels om risicosituaties te vermijden gaf aan dat matiging qua frequentie en hoeveelheid een bepalende factor is bij genormaliseerd gebruik.

Regressieanalyse bracht zowel cross-nationale overeenkomsten als verschillen aan het licht. Zo bleek bijvoorbeeld, ongeacht het nationale cannabisbeleid, het gebruik van cannabis in privé-settings in alle zeven landen in dit proefschrift even dominant, net als regels om bepaalde soorten settings te vermijden. Hoewel over het geheel genomen de mate van zelfregulering het hoogst was in het meest liberale land (Nederland), bleken verschillen in de maatschappelijke en culturele inbedding (accommodatie) van cannabisgebruik belangrijker te zijn bij het begrijpen van risico-management in termen van gebruikssettings en zelfreguleringsregels dan verschillen tussen landen in cannabisbeleid. Bovendien hingen gebruikssetting en zelfreguleringsregels sterk samen met gebruiksfrequentie. Dagelijkse gebruikers waren minder selectief bij hun keuze van gebruikssetting en minder strikt wat betreft zelfreguleringsregels dan degenen die minder vaak gebruikten.

In hoofdstuk 6 verschoof de focus naar een ander belangrijk aspect van normalisering vanuit gebruikersperspectief: hoe en waar verkrijgen ze cannabis? De overgrote meerderheid van de deelnemers aan de gebruikerssurvey vond dat ze in hun land gemakkelijk, vaak zelfs heel gemakkelijk aan cannabis konden komen. De gepercipieerde verkrijgbaarheid varieerde echter van land tot land, van het gemakkelijkst in het land met het meest liberale cannabisbeleid

(Nederland) tot het minst gemakkelijk in het land met het meest repressieve cannabisbeleid in dit proefschrift (Griekenland). Zelf je eigen cannabis kopen was veruit de populairste manier om aan cannabis te komen. Toch gold dit significant vaker voor de Nederlandse gebruikers, en dit kan grotendeels worden verklaard door de ruime beschikbaarheid in de vorm van gedoogde verkoop van cannabis in coffeeshops. Op flinke afstand stond op de tweede plaats om aan cannabis te komen: een vriend cannabis te laten kopen met het geld van de respondenten. De populariteit van deze manier bevestigde het belang van de rol van 'brokers' onder cannabisgebruikers. Voor zover gebruikers hun eigen cannabis kochten, was, in volgorde van populariteit, de meest voorkomende bron via vrienden, op afstand gevolgd door de minder gebruikelijke bronnen van straatdealers, thuisdealers en 06-dealers/bezorgdiensten. Met andere woorden, gesloten markten (vrienden, thuisdealers) waren belangrijker dan open en halfopen markten. Nederlandse kopers waren de uitzondering op de regel van het kopen op gesloten markten, omdat coffeeshops (open markt) veruit de dominantste plek waren om cannabis te kopen.

Het kopen van vrienden als de meest populaire bron van aanschaf duidde op een hoofdrol voor vrienden als verkopers, en illustreerde de belangrijke rol van ‘social supply’ of ‘social dealing’. Niettemin stonden straatdealers op de tweede plaats als de belangrijkste leveranciers voor kopers, hetgeen aantoont dat straatdealen nog steeds relevant is voor de cannabismarkt. De bevindingen wezen er ook op dat in het geval van cannabis meer traditionele methoden (straathandel en thuishandel) nog steeds vaker voorkomen dan bezorgdiensten (waarbij klanten telefonisch, via WhatsApp, enz.) bestellen. Ook het heel weinig voorkomen van kopen via internet bevestigde dat slechts een klein deel van de cannabisgebruikers is overgestapt naar cryptomarkten.

Cross-nationale vergelijking liet onthulde zowel overeenkomsten als verschillen tussen landen met een verschillend cannabisbeleid. Over het algemeen vertoonden Nederlandse respondenten een ander patroon in het verkrijgen van en de aankoop van cannabis dan die uit andere landen. Niet alleen rapporteerden zij de gemakkelijkste toegang tot cannabis, in regressieanalyse (controlerend voor demografische variabelen en frequentie van cannabisgebruik) waren ze ook het meest geneigd om zelf cannabis te kopen en verschilden ze op meerdere andere aspecten van het verkrijgen van cannabis en koopgedrag, in het bijzonder de dominante rol van coffeeshops bij het kopen van cannabis. Vergeleken met Nederlandse gebruikers hadden Grieken niet alleen de minst gemakkelijke toegang tot cannabis, ze waren ook het meest geneigd om vrienden met hun geld cannabis voor hen te laten kopen en om aan cannabis te komen via groepsaankopen, terwijl Grieken onder de kopers het vaakst kochten van vrienden en thuisdealers. Met andere woorden, in Nederland, het land met het meest liberale cannabisbeleid in dit proefschrift, waren gebruikers het sterkst gericht op een open cannabismarkt, terwijl in Griekenland, het land met het strengste cannabisbeleid, gebruikers het sterkst leunden op een

gesloten markt en sociaal aanbod. Echter, de bevindingen over gebruikers uit andere landen ondersteunden niet een eenduidig, uni-directioneel verband met punitiviteit in cannabisbeleid. De gemakkelijke toegang tot cannabis in het woonland voor de overgrote meerderheid van de respondenten in de gebruikerssurvey en de verschillende manieren om aan cannabis te komen en verkoopbronnen kunnen worden beschouwd als tekenen van een genormaliseerde retailmarkt. Tegelijkertijd ondersteunde de diversiteit in cannabisaanschaf, samenhangend met gender, leeftijd en gebruiksfrequentie, het beeld van een gedifferentieerde normalisatie op de cannabisretailmarkt. Ook bevestigen de bevindingen in hoofdstuk 6 de belangrijke rol van 'social supply' of 'recreatieve aanschaf' binnen vriendschapsnetwerken. Toch geven de bevindingen ook aan dat veel cannabisgebruikers er de voorkeur aan geven om zelf hun eigen cannabis aan te schaffen. Hoewel verschillen tussen landen in hoe gebruikers cannabis verkrijgen niet eenduidig in een bepaalde richting verband hielden met de punitiviteit van het nationale cannabisbeleid, suggereert de rol van Nederlandse coffeeshops in dit proefschrift, samen met de snelle overgang van cannabis kopen bij illegale naar legale verkopers na legalisering in Noord-Amerika, dat, als ze de keuze zouden hebben, de meeste cannabisgebruikers er sterk de voorkeur aan zouden geven om cannabis te kopen op een open, gereguleerde of legale markt.

Percepties van gebruikers van het cannabisbeleid in hun land

In de hoofdstukken 2 tot en met 6 werd gekeken naar cross-nationale overeenkomsten en verschillen wat betreft ervaringen, gedrag en percepties van cannabisgebruikers uit Europese landen met een verschillend cannabisbeleid. Op basis van de wettelijke status van cannabis en de rechtshandhavingsaanpak ten aanzien van cannabis (de jure en gedeeltelijk de facto), werden de zeven landen op een continuüm geplaatst, variërend van relatief liberaal (Nederland) tot relatief punitief (Griekenland). Hoofdstuk 7 had een andere invalshoek en richtte zich op hoe cannabisgebruikers het drugsbeleid, en meer in het bijzonder het cannabisbeleid, in hun land ervaren. In het bijzonder onderzochten we wat cannabisgebruikers zien als de belangrijkste prioriteiten van het drugsbeleid en hoe zij de strengheid (punitiviteit) van cannabisbeleid en handhaving in hun land beoordelen. De percepties van gebruikers varieerden zowel binnen als tussen landen. In regressieanalyse (controlerend voor leeftijd, geslacht en gebruiksfrequentie) waren de contrasten in de perceptie van het drugsbeleid het grootst tussen Nederlanders en Portugezen aan de ene kant en Franse en Griekse cannabisgebruikers aan de andere kant. Gebruikers uit de andere drie landen namen een tussenpositie in. De percepties van cannabisgebruikers over de strengheid van het drugsbeleid in hun land kwamen grotendeels overeen met wat te verwachten was van de diversiteit in de wettelijke status van cannabis en de handhavingspraktijk van cannabis, zoals kort werd geschetst in hoofdstuk 1. De percepties van de Nederlandse en Portugese cannabisgebruikers bevestigden de plaatsing van hun land aan de

liberale kant van het continuüm, en de percepties van de gebruikers uit Griekenland en Frankrijk bevestigden de positie van hun land aan de andere kant, met een strikt en punitief drugsbeleid.

De rol van cannabisbeleid

In hoofdstuk 8 concludeerden we dat, de bevindingen in de hoofdstukken 2 tot en met 7 samengenomen, cannabisgebruikers beter af lijken te zijn in landen met een liberaal in plaats van een repressief cannabisbeleid. Nederland onderscheidde zich vaak van de zes andere Europese landen, en de contrasten tussen cannabisgebruikers uit Nederland en Portugal aan de liberale kant en van Griekenland en Frankrijk aan de repressieve kant in het cannabisbeleid, leveren conditioneel empirisch bewijs dat de mate van punitiviteit van invloed is op stigmatisering van cannabisgebruikers en procesmatige aspecten van cannabisnormalisatie.

Uit andere aspecten van stigmatisering, zelfregulering van cannabis, cannabisaanschaf en manieren van cannabisaankoop rees het beeld dat normalisatie ook een sociaal-maatschappelijk proces kan zijn dat zich relatief autonoom ontwikkelt, over landsgrenzen heen en tamelijk los van het nationale drugsbeleid. Deze aspecten hingen niet samen met punitiviteit in cannabisbeleid, wat erop zou kunnen wijzen dat ze niet zo gevoelig zijn voor verschillen in nationaal drugsbeleid, of dat ze een soort normatieve culturele standaard in heel Europa weerspiegelen. Dit deed vermoeden dat voor sommige aspecten van normalisatie, een bredere maatschappelijke en culturele accommodatie van cannabisgebruik en/of een soort internationale cannabisgebruikerscultuur van grotere invloed is dan transnationale verschillen in cannabisbeleid. Zo beschouwd draait het bij normalisatie niet alleen om drugsbeleid, maar is er ook de invloed van veranderingen en ontwikkelingen in de sociale en culturele accommodatie van cannabis die plaatsvinden onverlet verschillen in wetgeving tussen landen.

Een gedifferentieerde benadering van normalisatie dient niet beperkt blijven tot de juridische context, voor een volledig beeld moeten ook andere factoren meegenomen worden. Zo bleken er nog steeds cannabisgerelateerde verschillen te bestaan tussen mannen en vrouwen, maar niet alomtegenwoordig te zijn. Hoewel het ontbreken van verschillen wat betreft bijvoorbeeld de verkrijgbaarheid van cannabis of cannabisgerelateerde stigmatisering het resultaat kan zijn van veranderingen in genderrollen die in de loop der tijd hebben plaatsgevonden, wijzen andere bevindingen erop gender een van de vele verschillen is die van invloed zijn op procesmatige aspecten van normalisatie. Leeftijd bleek slechts een beperkte rol te spelen bij het verklaren van verschillen in bijvoorbeeld cannabisaankoop. Binnen de leeftijdsrange 18-40 jaar waren oudere gebruikers echter selectiever en voorzichtiger wat betreft zelfreguleringspraktijken en -regels dan jongere. Normalisatieprocessen kunnen dus voor jongere generaties cannabisgebruikers anders uitpakken dan voor oudere.

In vergelijking met gender en leeftijd was de gebruiksfrequentie een veel krachtiger voorspeller van stigmatisering en normalisatie. In veel opzichten verschilden dagelijkse gebruikers aanzienlijk van niet-dagelijkse gebruikers. Onderzoeksresultaten waaruit blijkt dat dagelijkse gebruikers zich eerder gestigmatiseerd voelden dan niet-dagelijkse gebruikers dragen bij aan het idee dat het gedrag van dagelijkse gebruikers op gespannen voet staat met normalisatie. Omdat ze minder selectief waren in hoe en waar ze cannabis gebruiken en verkrijgen, en minder gefocust waren op strategieën ter vermijding of vermindering van risico's bij cannabis dan niet-dagelijkse gebruikers, kunnen de gedragsnormen en -praktijken van dagelijkse gebruikers op microniveau de normalisering van cannabis door de culturele accommodatie en maatschappelijke acceptatie van cannabisgebruikers op macroniveau eerder belemmeren dan bevorderen.

Tot slot, naast de invloed van punitiviteit op stigmatisering van cannabisgebruikers en sommige aspecten van cannabisnormalisatie, zijn er ook universele sociale en culturele componenten die samenkomen in cannabisnormalisatie, die tamelijk onafhankelijk zijn van nationale cannabisbeleid. Dit in meer algemene zin plaatsvindende proces lijkt een repercussie te zijn van sociaal-culturele veranderingen in een geglobaliseerde context die vormgeven aan zowel de cannabisgebruikerscultuur als aan maatschappelijke normen over cannabis en cannabisgebruikers.

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Publications

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Contribution of co-authors:

D.J. Korf (supervisor/promotor) provided guidance, feedback and comments in chapters 2, 4, 5, and 6. A. Benschop contributed to the statistical analysis in chapters 4 & 5. N. Liebregts provided comments and contributed to the interpretation of the results in chapter 5.

Related to this thesis:

Skliamis, K., & Korf, D. J. (2018). An exploratory study of cannabis festivals and their attendees in two European cities: Amsterdam and Berlin. *Journal of psychoactive drugs*, *50*(2), 105-113.

Skliamis, K. (2016). *Κάνναβη: Νομιμοποίηση και ρύθμιση* [Cannabis: Legalization and Regulation]. Potamos Publisher. ISBN/ISSN: 978-960-545-066-3.