

## **The difference is in the tomato at the end”: understanding the motivations and practices of cannabis growers operating within Belgian Cannabis Social Clubs**

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**Introduction:** Cannabis Social Clubs (CSCs) are registered non-profit organizations formed by adult cannabis users, which can be found in many countries within and beyond Europe, and have been described as a ‘middle-ground’ option for the supply of cannabis (Caulkins et al. 2015; Decorte et al. 2017; Queirolo et al. 2016). In Belgium, there are currently seven active CSCs collectively organizing the cultivation and distribution of cannabis for the personal use of their members, based on the principle of one plant per member. With this paper, we sought to improve the understanding of the motivations, role and practices of cannabis growers operating within CSCs, shedding light into the cultivation process of these organizations, a crucial aspect of their functioning as cannabis suppliers.

**Methods:** This analysis is part of a wider study focusing on the functioning of Belgian CSCs and the type of cannabis that is being supplied by those outlets, as well as the characteristics and drug use patterns of their members. In this paper, we draw particularly on data gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the directors of seven currently active Belgian CSCs (n=21) and CSC growers (n=23). This data has been complemented by additional fieldwork, including visits to the cultivation sites (n=6) of some of the aforementioned cannabis growers, as well as a review of the internal documents of those organizations (including their bylaws and growing protocols).

**Results:** This paper presents findings on the prior experience of CSC growers as cannabis cultivators, their trajectories into the CSCs, as well as their motivations to become growers within these (non-profit) organizations. CSC growers’ contractual arrangements with their respective CSCs as well as the financial compensation received are discussed. We present also an overview of CSC growing practices, including information on the number and type of plants cultivated per grow site and the quantities produced, as well as the growing techniques and equipment used.

**Discussion:** The motivations of cannabis growers in general, as well as the size of their operations have been analyzed in previous studies (Bovenkerk & Hogenwind 2002; Hough et al. 2003; Potter 2010; Weisheit 1991). Such studies have developed a range of typologies, highlighting different degrees of ‘pragmatism’, ‘entrepreneurship’ or ‘ideology’ among cannabis growers. However, despite the presence of CSCs in several countries, little is known about the growers operating within those organizations. This paper contributes to that body of literature by providing new insights into this particular group of cannabis growers. By disentangling the processes and relationship between growers and CSC managers throughout the cultivation cycle, the paper adds also to our (yet limited) knowledge of CSCs as cannabis suppliers.