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Institutional Responses to Drug Demand in Central Europe

An Analysis of Institutional
Developments in the Czech Republic,
Hungary, Poland and Slovenia

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Understanding the crucial link between institutional contexts and drug problems is germane to the process of developing appropriate drug policies and drug demand reduction strategies. However, this link is too often taken for granted. Still most drug-related research has relied primarily on epidemiological, bio-medical or clinical approaches, ignoring the social contexts in which drug use finds its causes and where its consequences are most visible and hardest felt. No countries than the states of Central and Eastern Europe demonstrate better that the drug problem is a social problem and that its causes emerge from a broad array of social factors. The social perspective is considered essential for the development of effective drug policies and demand reduction strategies.

This publication analyses in both a country-oriented and comparative manner the main features of institutional settings towards the drug problem. Research carried out in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia has shown that changed policy perceptions and attitudes towards drugs and related problems have had a considerable impact on the tasks, which different institutions had to confront. The establishment of new organisations, particularly of a non-governmental nature, as well as the growing importance of networks reflect the changed institutional environment, needed to effectively counteract drug-related problems. It might still be too early to evaluate whether these changes have had a positive effect on the drug situation in these countries. However, the research results demonstrate undoubtedly the need to continue to place the social contexts in which drug use takes place at the heart of research. Without this, it will be impossible to develop effective institutional responses towards one of the most important problems we presently are confronted with.

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