



## Multi-city Study on Quantities and Financing of Illicit Drug Consumption

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Commissioned by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research carries out a research project to examine the per capita consumption of selected illegal substances – heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy and cannabis – as well as the expenses for drug consumption on the consumer side. The fieldwork comprises 200 face-to-face interviews with consumers of the abovementioned substances. This pioneering study represents an important building block for UNODC's aim of estimating the dimension of illegal drug markets. Its duration will be two years and it will be conducted in six European cities: Amsterdam, London, Prague, Turin, Warsaw and Vienna. The project is funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

### A choice of “well-known” and “topical” research problems

The study starts from the insight that the per capita consumption of illegal drugs can not be assessed through representative population surveys: the consumption of drugs is an illegal activity and its consumers – in particular those that take drugs more often as well as regularly – represent “hidden populations” that can only be insufficiently depicted in representative data collections. But even when approaching drug consumers and their habits with other research methods, one does not come to representative results: different groups of drug consumers are – in a given and limited period of investigation – only accessible in differing ways.



The fluctuating quality of illegal substances – depending on the market situation and the distribution segment (street trading, several levels of wholesale trade), they contain varying shares of active substances (from no to a high share of active substances) as well as admixtures to differing extents – represents an equally well-known problem,

A problem that only became more visible in the course of the study, is the trend towards “multiple consumption”, i.e. not only comprising all kinds of illegal substances but also legal drugs that are partially acquired in illegal ways: besides alcoholic beverages this mainly concerns psycho-pharmaceuticals prescribed by medical doctors but also substitution substances acquired on the black market that are being consumed instead according to the need for and availability of illegal drugs. Hence, it is hardly possible to determine an average or typical requirement for particular drugs since consumption becomes more flexible as far as substances, frequencies, amounts and also modes of consumption are concerned. On the basis of present field experiences we may hypothesize that (increasingly?) the consumption of illegal substances is being less determined by the good itself than by expenses: per day consumption of drugs depends on what one can acquire (more or less by chance?) for a particular fix amount of money. In the context of the current project, it will not be possible to examine this hypothesis that counteracts the classical concepts of addiction and implicates an at least basically controlled budgeting on the part of drug consumers. However, it may be regarded as one of the many interesting research questions that have risen in the course of this study.

## Research Design

In a first step city reports were composed, describing as “thick” as possible the drugs and drug combinations consumed in each research site during the last 5 to 10 years, the drug consumers and the consumption patterns inclusive their social contexts. Manifold sources were used: epidemiological surveys, statistics and estimates, quantitative and qualitative studies and reports. Additionally face to face interviews with diverse drug professionals were carried out to enhance the understanding of the respective city’s drug situation.

The second step consisted of 100 face to face interviews with frequent consumers of heroin and/ or cocaine and/ or amphetamines selected on the basis of the “thick city reports” along a common questionnaire. As the time for the study is limited, it was agreed on using the municipi-



pal drug services – inclusive substitution programmes and also inclusive prisons - as main gateways to the interviewees, what means that certain groups of drug consumers were favoured: those in need of special services and making use of them, inclusive consumers who were actively submitted to their care and their controls. In other words: favoured were socially disintegrated drug consumers and/ or those who had developed socially disintegrated consumption patterns. To raise the heterogeneity of the sample as many different services as possible were contacted.

In some research sites - e.g. Turin and Vienna – it proved to be difficult to find drug consumers belonging to the target group. In both cities frequent consumption of heroin, cocaine and amphetamines – not at least because of the costs – seems to have moved to socially integrated milieus, whereas the marginalized drug consumers turned to other drugs as for instance psycho pharmaceuticals and substitution substances.

The city results of the interviews with frequent consumers of heroin, cocaine and amphetamines provide with a first impression how much the drug consumption, the consumption patterns – inclusive the quantities used – and the consumption contexts differ in Europe. To develop a better understanding a detailed comparative analysis of the results on the basis of the city reports is needed, which will be carried out along selected topics.

In a third step another 100 interviews will be carried out with occasional consumers of cannabis and/or ecstasy and/or cocaine and/or amphetamines. The second target group thus will consist of socially integrated drug users and/or of persons using drugs in a socially integrated way. To raise the heterogeneity of this sample the interview partners will be contacted in a variety of contexts: At raves, parties and other “events”, at “recreational facilities” as discotheques, restaurants and bars and finally via private networks.

## Results

The main findings will be available at the end of 2007/ beginnings of 2008. They will include a comparative analysis of the municipal drug policies and drug scenes, the social position of the socially disintegrated and integrated drug consumers along objective and subjective dimensions, the disintegrated and the recreational consumption patterns, the role substitution programmes and drugs play within the disintegrated consumption patterns, the quantities and qualities of the drugs in question, of their purity and the main sources. The last chapter will deal with average costs and average consumption frequencies and quantities in the six sites.



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