

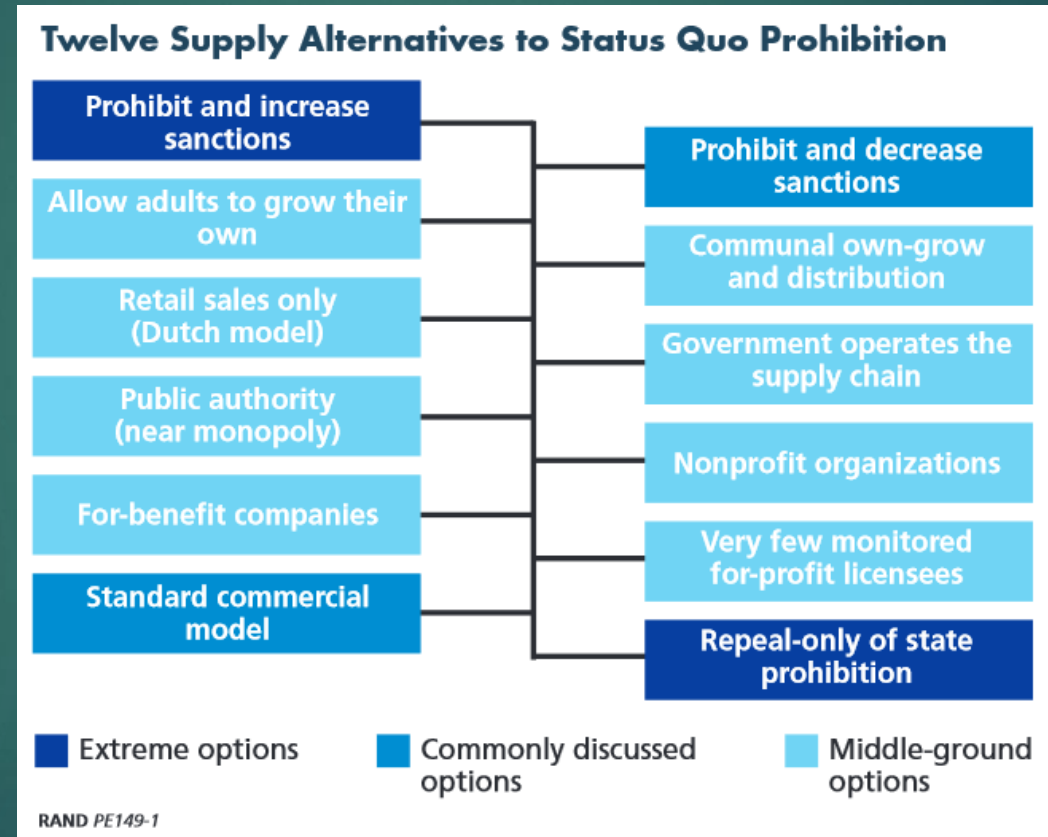
How to regulate Cannabis Social Clubs

ANALYZING THE EXPERIENCES IN SPAIN,
BELGIUM AND URUGUAY

What are Cannabis Social Clubs (CSCs)?

- ▶ (Legal) associations of cannabis users
- ▶ Collective cultivation of cannabis, in a private space
- ▶ Non-profit
- ▶ Limited amounts, covering personal consumption by its (registered) members
- ▶ For adults
- ▶ For people who are cannabis users prior to joining a CSC
- ▶ For recreational and/or medical use

CSCs: a 'middle-ground' option for the supply of cannabis?



From: Caulkins et al. (2015). *Options and issues regarding marijuana legalization*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

Learning from current experiences

- ▶ Lack of research into the CSC model
- ▶ Spain (ES), Belgium (BE) and Uruguay (UY) as key settings
- ▶ Reports of CSCs elsewhere too:
 - ▶ In Europe (Slovenia, the Netherlands, France, UK, Switzerland, Italy)
 - ▶ In South America (Argentina, Colombia)



Created with mapchart.net ©

Methodology

- ▶ Post-ISSDP 2015 collaborative work among research teams in three countries:
 - ▶ SPAIN: Constanza Sánchez Avilés & Òscar Parés Franquero
 - ▶ BELGIUM: Tom Decorte & Mafalda Pardal
 - ▶ URUGUAY: Rosario Queirolo & Maria Fernanda Boidi
- ▶ Independently conducted local studies in each country, with slightly different research designs including:
 - ▶ Document and literature review (ES, BE, UY); media analysis (ES, BE); interviews with CSC representatives and other stakeholders (ES, BE, URY)
 - ▶ Data collection since 2014 (ES, BE); between March-August 2015 (URY)

The domestic legal frameworks

SPAIN

- **NOT REGULATED**
- CSCs explore grey zone in domestic legislation (personal use)
- Several legislative initiatives at the regional level (Catalonia, Basque Country and Navarra) and local level but generally barred by central government
- Court proceedings with mixed results

BELGIUM

- **NOT REGULATED**
- CSCs explore grey zone in domestic legislation (personal use)
- No legislative initiatives to date
- Court proceedings with mixed results

URUGUAY

- **LEGAL AND REGULATED**
- Cannabis Law (19.172) from 2013 regulates the production and distribution of cannabis for UY nationals
- Cannabis clubs are one of the supply options foreseen and regulated

CSC practices in ES, BE and UY: establishment of a CSC

Country	SPAIN	BELGIUM	URUGUAY
Establishment			
Formal registration	National registry of associations	National registry of associations	Registry Office at the Ministry of Education Registry with IRCCA
Official legal form	Non-profit association	Non-profit association	Non-profit association
Number of people needed to start	3	3	15
Location	Differences across municipalities		At least 150 meters from education and treatment centers At least 1km from other CSCs
Federations and self-regulatory practices	Several federations Good practice codes	No federation Good practice code	No federation (but some joined the Federation of Cannabis Growers)

CSC practices in ES, BE and UY: house rules and internal organization

Country	SPAIN	BELGIUM	URUGUAY
House rules and internal organization			
Membership criteria	At least 18 or 21 years old Sign membership form Prior regular cannabis users Introduced by an existing member Only Spanish residents (but in Barcelona tourists have also joined CSCs)	At least 18 or 21 years old Sign membership form Prior cannabis users Only Belgian residents Awareness of Belgian legislation Membership of one club only	At least 18 years old Registered in IRCCA database as users acquiring cannabis through a club Introduced by an existing member Membership of one club only
Membership by medicinal users	Medicinal users accepted No specific requirements	Medicinal users accepted In some cases based on medical prescription and/or medical file New CSCs exclusively for medical users	Medicinal users accepted No specific requirements
Minimum/maximum number of members	No limit applied CSCs up to thousands of members	No limit applied CSCs up to over 200 members	15-45 members
Membership fees	Annual fee Between 10-30 euro	Annual fee Approximately 25 euro	Monthly fee 26 – 92 dollars (includes up to 40 grams of cannabis)
Cannabis consumption at the CSC	Yes	No	Yes
Advertising	No Internal communication with members	No Internal communication with members	No Internal communication with members

CSC practices in ES, BE and UY: management and decision-making

Country	SPAIN	BELGIUM	URUGUAY
Management of CSCs			
Decision-making structure	Board of Directors At least annual general assembly meeting (sometimes pro forma) Different management styles Paid staff is common	Board of Directors At least annual general assembly meeting (sometimes pro forma) Different management styles CSCs rely mostly on volunteer work from members	Board of Directors General assembly rarely meets Management mainly by a few members CSCs rely mostly on volunteer work from members
Profit vs. Non-profit	Non-profit	Non-profit	Non-profit

CSC practices in ES, BE and UY: cannabis cultivation

Country	SPAIN	BELGIUM	URUGUAY
Cannabis cultivation			
Planning of production	Based on consumption estimate by the members	One plant per member Each plant receives a 'grow card' identifying ownership	Up to 99 flowered plants at a time
CSC growers	Mix of hired growers and members Some clubs buy also from black market	Members of the clubs	Members of the clubs
Location and size of cultivation sites	Larger clubs may have more than 1.000 plants per site	Indoor cultivation Several (small) cultivation sites	Indoor and outdoor cultivation
Plants cultivated per club/member	No limit	1 plant per member	Max 99 flowered plants per club (at a time)
Types of products / strains of cannabis	Various cannabis products Various strains	Mainly herbal cannabis Various strains	Herbal cannabis only Various strains
Quality control	Rarely tested	Rarely tested Growing protocol	Rarely tested Crop Plan

CSC practices in ES, BE and UY: cannabis distribution

Country	SPAIN	BELGIUM	URUGUAY
Cannabis distribution			
Frequency of distribution	During opening hours of the club No prior notice needed	Mainly at exchange fairs (every 2-3 months), but different practices within medical clubs	Different modes of distribution: after harvest; monthly delivery; on demand
Quantity limits	60 – 90 grams / per month (approx 3 gr/day)	10 – 30 grams /per month	480 grams / per year (40 gr/per month)
Price per gram	4,5 – 15 euro / gram	5 – 8 euro / gram	In most cases, included in membership fee
Additional information provided upon distribution	Not common (only by a few federated clubs)	Information flyer, house rules, safe use tips	Some provide information about responsible consumption and harm reduction strategies

CSC practices in ES, BE and UY: profile of the CSC

Country	SPAIN	BELGIUM	URUGUAY
Public Profile			
Media strategy	Most low profile Federated clubs have more public profile	Both low profile and high profile	Both low profile and high profile
Voice opinions on regulation	Yes, mainly through the federations	Yes, some clubs	Yes, some stemmed from pro cannabis liberalization organizations

Conclusions

- ▶ Similarities and differences among CSCs' practices: pointers for future regulation?
- ▶ Need to balance between adequate governmental control...
 - ▶ Regulating formal registration of CSCs and members (including membership criteria)
 - ▶ Introducing limits to numbers of members and quantities produced and supplied
 - ▶ Enhancing quality control and financial accountability
- ▶ ...and self-regulatory efforts by the CSCs
 - ▶ On decision-making structure, membership fees, hiring staff, forming federations, etc.

Conclusions

- ▶ Mixing up medical and recreational cannabis: is this a good idea?
- ▶ Blind spots about the model remain
 - ▶ How has the CSC model been implemented in other contexts?
 - ▶ What are the views and experiences of the members of the CSCs?
 - ▶ What are the views and experiences of the cannabis growers collaborating with the CSCs?
 - ▶ ...

Thank you!

- ▶ For further information please contact us at:

tom.decorte@ugent.be

mafalda.pardal@ugent.be

- ▶ Some of our publications:

Decorte, T. (2015). Cannabis Social Clubs in Belgium: organizational strengths and weaknesses, and threats to the model. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 26(1), 122-130.

Decorte, T. and Pardal, M. (in press). Cannabis Social Clubs in Europe: Prospects and Limits. In: Colson, R. & Bergeron, H. (eds.). *European Drug Policies: The Challenges of Reform*. Routledge.

Pardal, M. (2016). Cannabis Social Clubs through the lens of the drug user movement. *Tijdschrift over Cultuur & Criminaliteit*, 6(2), 47-58.

Pardal, M. (2016). Cannabis Social Clubs in Belgium: growing in a legal haze? *GERN Research Paper Series*, nr 4. Antwerp: Maklu.