

FROM HARM REDUCTION TO USE REDUCTION

The development of Danish cannabis policy

ABSTRACT

Cannabis control is a dilemma for public policy; there are no solutions to the problem of cannabis use and sales, only outcomes of more or less desirable characteristics. Preferences for types of outcomes changed in Denmark around 2001, from a focus on harm reduction towards prioritizing use reduction. The change in cannabis policy has been most visible as regards control with the open market in Christiania. After a long period of begrudging tolerance with retail-sales in the area, police cracked down on the market in 2004. At a first glance this change in policy appears to have been associated with a change of government.

Using the case of Christiania as an example of cannabis policy outcomes, this chapter demonstrates how policy towards illicit drugs is not only borne by ideological preferences. The problems associated with the normalization of cannabis had been growing markedly in the years leading up to the change. Therefore the balance between costs and benefits in the harm reducing policy applied prior to 2001 had shifted with the increase in prevalence in the 1990s. This affected the problems associated with the open cannabis market and therefore also prompted the decision to change policy.

KEYWORDS: Cannabis, control, policy, harm reduction, use reduction, Denmark