



Editorial

The globalisation of cannabis cultivation: A growing challenge



Global patterns of cannabis cultivation have followed a fascinating development, from highly concentrated production in certain developing countries to decentralized production in almost every country around the world (UNODC, 2014). Historically, the spread of cannabis cultivation across the globe reflected the industrial utility of hemp; the widespread use of cannabis as a recreational drug did not appear until much later (Abel, 1980; Booth, 2003). It is with the emergence of modern patterns of cannabis use in the developed world that we have seen major changes in patterns of cannabis production. As demand for cannabis increased globally, fuelled by the developments of the “counter-culture” of the 1960s and 1970s, so cultivation in the developing world began to take on new dimensions. Firstly, cultivation increased in many traditional growing regions as exportation to the consumer markets of the industrialized world became an attractive option. Secondly, in response to global demand, countries such as Morocco and Mexico became large-scale producers of cannabis and major suppliers to, respectively, European and American consumers, despite not having the traditions of cannabis cultivation found in Asia, the Middle-East or the Caribbean (Goberman, 1974; UNODC, 2003; UNODC, 2005; Moreno, 1997).

A third phase in the evolution of cannabis production has been the increase in cultivation across the industrialised world. From Europe to the Americas and Oceania, import substitution in the cannabis market has been noticed in almost every developed country (UNODC, 2014; Decorte, Potter, & Bouchard, 2011). Although some small-scale cultivation probably has almost as long a history as cannabis use in the west, widespread small-scale cultivation and larger-scale commercial production only begins to appear towards the end of the twentieth century. In some countries the levels of domestic cultivation have reached the stage where self-sufficiency in cannabis markets has largely been attained (Leggett, 2006; Bouchard, 2008; Jansen, 2002).

Explanations

Contemporary cannabis cultivation takes many different forms with variations in approach identifiable both within and between different countries. Clearly, there is not a single, simple explanation for the growth of the industry in every country, and there are undoubtedly a number of factors at play. A simple typology of modern cannabis cultivation might therefore be “old” or “traditional” cultivation, occurring in the developing world for exportation to the

developed world, and “new” cultivation occurring in the developed world, primarily for domestic consumption.

Focusing on the “new”, we have argued elsewhere that the spread of cannabis cultivation can be seen as a convergence of opportunity and sustained demand for the (local) product alongside an ever growing supply of motivated offenders and relative failure of policy to prevent the spread (Bouchard, Potter, & Decorte, 2011). With knowledge and technology (grow-lights, hydroponics, etc.) gradually becoming easily available, opportunities to cultivate cannabis grew. The Internet helped make the knowledge widely available and sped up the learning process for new initiates (Bouchard & Dion, 2009; Potter, 2008). Grow guides and grow shops also facilitated the diffusion of cultivation. Person to person knowledge transfer and underground communication channels (books, magazines, word-of-mouth) were important before the advent of the Internet, but even now experienced mentors play an important role in introducing new people to cultivation (Bouchard, Alain, & Nguyen, 2009; Potter, 2010b). Development of new varieties of cannabis paralleled the developments in local production, which enhanced the reputation and the quality of domestically grown cannabis. Today the plant can be grown virtually anywhere, and the knowledge necessary to do so is equally ubiquitous.

Surely, there would be no incentives to cultivate cannabis without the assurance that there is a market for it. Worldwide trends in cannabis use have been either stable or on the rise, creating incentives for increased production (UNODC, 2014). This growth in demand parallels the growth in production in developed countries: both phenomena undeniably feed upon each other (Bouchard, 2007).

In almost all of the countries witnessing increases in domestic cannabis cultivation, one can make the simple observation *post facto* that whatever policy was in place before the rise of contemporary cultivation patterns, it has not prevented their development: cannabis cultivation has been expanding in repressive and tolerant countries alike. Of course, nuances exist in the stories of specific countries and contexts: the industry may have developed in a different form or at a different time in regime X than under regime Y. Yet, the universal nature of contemporary cannabis cultivation suggests that forces other than policies are at play, and at some point are likely to take over. Cannabis cultivation may be too easily done, with demand for the product, alongside the knowledge and techniques needed for growing, too widespread to expect anything different.

The emergence of domestic cultivation has often been described as “import substitution” and has been explained largely in economic terms (Jansen, 2002). With high levels of demand there is clearly an economic incentive behind domestic cannabis cultivation, with numerous studies citing financial motivations as a major factor driving cannabis cultivators (Hafley & Tewksbury, 1996; Weisheit, 1992; Nguyen & Bouchard, 2010; Potter, 2010b; Jansen, 2002; Kilmer, Caulkins, Pacula, MacCoun, & Reuter, 2010). However, it has also been noted that a significant number of cannabis growers in the industrialized world are motivated by non-financial, intangible, ‘ideological’ reasons (Weisheit, 1991; Potter, 2010a,b). In fact, the diversity of reasons why people grow cannabis goes way beyond the usual motivations for criminal involvement, and includes avoiding contacts with drug dealers and other criminal elements (e.g. Weisheit, 1992; Potter, 2010a,b; Decorte, 2008, 2010b), a love for growing (as well as using) the plant (see e.g. Hakkarainen & Perälä, 2011), and production of cannabis for medical use (personal or for others) (Dahl & Asmussen Frank, 2011). Avoiding the criminal market may also result from dissatisfaction with the quality of the product available on the black market (Decorte, 2010a,b). Still other growers view their involvement as a social or political message (Arana & Montañés Sánchez, 2011; Hakkarainen & Perälä, 2011; Potter, 2010b).

The motivations behind cultivation are a potentially useful differentiation, but it must be noted that profit/non-profit is not a clear dichotomy: many authors recognize the interplay between financial and other motivational drivers, with some growers having purely financial concerns, others having no interest in profit whatsoever, and many (probably most) driven by a mixture of financial and non-financial interests (Weisheit, 1991, 1992; Potter, 2010a,b).

World Wide Weed

The spread of cannabis cultivation has obvious implications for those countries where it is an emerging phenomenon, but also for those countries whose traditional position as major exporters is being undermined. An increasing number of countries have shown unease about the international treaty regime’s strictures on cannabis. Over the past decades, parties to the UN drug-control conventions have exploited flexibility within the international legislation to engage in decriminalization of possession for personal use (Bewley-Taylor, Blickman, & Jelsma, 2014). Room, Fischer, Hall, Lenton, and Reuter (2010) describe the heterogeneity and complexity of the alternative cannabis control regimes that have evolved in different countries in recent years, ranging from “depenalization” (i.e. prohibition with cautioning or diversion) and “decriminalization” (prohibition with civil penalties) to “de facto legalization” (e.g. prohibition with an expediency principle) or “de jure legalization”, and the differences in how they might be enforced. But while a number of countries have implemented reform measures aimed at controlling the use of cannabis, fewer have addressed the issue of cannabis supply.

Recently, detailed proposals for cannabis regulation were enacted in 4 US states (Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Alaska) and in Uruguay. These will provide models that may be closely observed in the future to understand the advantages and disadvantages of particular regulated supply systems. In addition to these systems, the model of ‘cannabis social clubs’ developed in countries like Spain and Belgium has been increasingly mentioned in drug policy debates (Barriuso, 2011; Kilmer, Kruthof, Pardal, Caulkins, & Rubin, 2013; Decorte, 2015). Its advocates argue that policies of non-prosecution of individuals in some countries can be equally applied to registered groups of individuals, to effectively permit a closed production and distribution system.

Whatever way forward is chosen globally, or by any individual country, no sound policy decision should be taken without knowledge of the markets involved, including the role played by cannabis cultivation – the necessary first link in any cannabis supply chain. In other words, any projections of the impact of legislative change need to be rooted in a thorough knowledge of the present. This is where academic studies of cannabis growing become important.

The earliest empirical studies on cannabis cultivation focused on large-scale, commercially oriented growers (Weisheit, 1991; Bovenkerk & Hogewind, 2002), or covered rather small samples (Hough et al., 2003). These studies often based their conclusions on police data, and may lead to false perceptions of the prevalence of different types of growers and growing operations and related criminal behaviours (Wilkins & Casswell, 2003), with important consequences for future policy choices.

Attempts to study patterns and motives of the relatively under-researched but increasingly significant phenomenon of smaller-scale cannabis cultivation soon followed. Potter (2010b) studied domestic cannabis production in the UK. His typology of growers and the variety of sizes, structures and types of cannabis distribution operations he describes resemble those identified by others. But most of the growers he studied were motivated at least in part, and often as much if not more, by ideological positions associated with cannabis itself – the plant, the drug, and what they represent socially and (sub-)culturally – than by financial incentives. Potter argued that the ideological approach to drug-dealing is increasingly competing with the criminal element and all that entails. Based on face-to-face interviews with 89 cannabis cultivators, Decorte (2010b) developed a questionnaire for use in an anonymous web survey, which resulted in a sample of 659 small-scale growers. Again, the findings suggested that small-scale or amateur home growers constitute a significant segment of the cannabis market, and pointed at important differences between the sample obtained online with those obtained through traditional methods in other studies.

After successful replications of the Belgian online survey in Denmark and Finland (Hakkarainen, Asmussen Frank, Perälä, & Dahl, 2011), and after scholars from different countries presented their work on cannabis cultivation and found their research had broad commonalities, the Global Cannabis Cultivation Research Consortium (GCCRC) was created at the 2009 annual meeting of the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy (ISSDP). A first collaboration of this consortium was the compendium *World Wide Weed*, drawing on original studies from a variety of angles, and from different countries and regions around the world (the Caribbean and Morocco from the developing world, and Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Canada, the US, Spain, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand and the UK from the global north) (Decorte et al., 2011). The collection we present here is, at least partly, a direct follow-on from that earlier work, bringing together further findings from the GCCRC and presenting them alongside a number of studies and viewpoints from other academics working in the field (sometimes literally) of cannabis cultivation.

Current research: emerging issues

Given the absence of any significant international comparative research the GCCRC developed the (semi-)standardized International Cannabis Cultivation Questionnaire (ICQ), with 35 core items designed to facilitate international comparisons of small-scale cultivation (Barratt et al., 2012). This ICQ has been successfully run in eleven industrialized countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States) producing a usable dataset of 6530 respondents.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1075242>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1075242>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)