

# **“DRUGS & NUISANCES”**

*A study of the phenomenon, control and effects of drug-related nuisances  
from various standpoints.*

## **SYNTHESIS**



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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study on "**Drugs & Nuisances. A study of the phenomenon, control and effects of drug-related nuisances from various standpoints**" is intended to situate the phenomenon and study its effects and their management from various viewpoints. The effects that this phenomenon has on the environment, the perspective of drug users themselves and the way in which nuisance policy is shaped in practice constitute the subject of the study.

To gain insight into (the complexity and the effects of) the nuisance phenomenon, the study used a **diverse methodology**. For this purpose, the study was split into three components, each of which was conducted by a separate study team.

**The survey of residents** -- under the direction of Professor Dr Paul Ponsaers (UGent - SVA) and conducted by Steven Lauwers (UGent - SVA) -- focused on *gaining insight into how residents of 11 study areas experience drug-related nuisances*. A quantitative method of inquiry is most appropriate for surveying the local population, as it *maximizes* the representativeness of the interviews. A *semi-structured list of questions* was used, to which 3,713 people responded. Questioning by telephone was chosen over face-to-face interviews.

**The survey of key figures** -- under the direction of Professor Dr Brice De Ruyver (UGent - IRCP) and conducted by Marjan Bodein (UGent - IRCP) -- focused on *understanding key figures' perceptions* of the theme of "drugs and nuisances." *Qualitative research* is the most appropriate method for this type of questioning. This approach aims to increase insight and understanding of the actors' interpretations of the research theme. Given that we wanted to show the greatest possible respect for the conceptions of the key figures in the *six study locations* while nonetheless conducting the interview in a logical and comparable manner, we opted for a *semi-structured interview on the basis of an interview guidebook*.

**The survey of drug users** -- under the direction of Professor Dr. Tom Decorte (UGent - ISD) and conducted by Pascal Tutteleers (UGent - ISD) and Anne Catherine Lacroix (UCL) -- was aimed at gaining insight into drug users' experience of drug-related nuisances. The methodology used encompassed an *"open focus" ethnography* in the cities of *Antwerp and Charleroi*, with the use of *participatory observations* and *informal discussions*. No effort was made to achieve "representativeness" or reach conclusions concerning the prevalence or scope of the phenomenon of "drug-related" nuisances, but rather to gain an understanding of the nature of the phenomenon on the basis of insights into drug users' understandings of themselves.

The study involved **six research locations**: **three large cities**, specifically *Brussels, Antwerp and Charleroi*; **two legal districts**, *Mons and Brugge*, with specific attention to the cities of *Mons and Ostend* respectively; and **one cross-border region**, *the Maas-Rhine Euroregion*.

The components of study with regard to residents and key figures were distributed geographically over the six research locations. **Questioning of residents** in the large cities was differentiated by different types of city neighbourhoods, for the purpose of maximizing the geographical scope of the survey. In the case of Antwerp, the focus was on the neighbourhoods around "De Coninckplein" and "Het Dokske". In Charleroi, the "*ville basse*" and central "*Marcinelle*" areas were selected. In Brussels, the problem neighbourhoods of Schaarbeek/Schaerbeek, Molenbeek and Sint-Gilles/Saint-Gilles were selected, along with a control neighbourhood in Evere.

**The survey of key figures** focused first on the six research locations and in the second place on the selected neighbourhoods from the neighbourhood survey. The **ethnographic survey** of users took place in two separate neighbourhoods in Antwerp (the area around the De Coninckplein) and Charleroi ("*la ville basse*").

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### 1. DESCRIPTION OF CONCEPTS: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NUISANCES AND DRUG-RELATED NUISANCES

None of the three study components provides the reader with a clear definition of the phenomenon of (drug-related) nuisances. This is, however, neither an omission nor an error. The research results, rather, do not allow us to formulate an adequate definition. Although at first glance, this appears problematic as concerns the interpretation of this term within the framework of new legal instruments -- such as the New Municipal Law (NGW) -- the lack of clarity of this concept is not necessarily a drawback. The relative ambiguity of the concept indeed provides for the flexibility necessary to complete differentiation on the basis of a specific local context.

(Drug-related) nuisances encompass a number of behaviours and situations perceived by individuals as unpleasant, undesirable, bothersome, annoying or threatening. The perception of drug-related nuisances differs from one population studied to the next, in particular drug users, residents and key figures, and cannot be viewed in isolation from other nuisances. Drug users are not exclusively responsible for particular nuisances in the neighbourhoods studied.

The **residents' survey** included both questions about nuisances *in a general sense* on the one hand and drug-related nuisances specifically on the other. The *general survey concerning nuisances* revealed that only 12% of residents from the various sampling areas interviewed associate drugs and nuisances, while only 4% of these nuisances are spontaneously associated with drug users. Most respondents *generally attribute the nuisance phenomenon to other social groups*. In the *specific survey concerning drug-related nuisances*, a significantly larger proportion, i.e., 14% of all respondents from the various sampling areas, indicate they are regularly bothered by one or more drug-related nuisances. It is noteworthy that in areas where people report many problematic nuisances, there are also high scores concerning specific drug-related nuisances, and vice versa. The perception of both phenomena seems to be closely linked and -- in residents' eyes -- specific drug-related nuisance phenomena are (rather implicitly) an element of the global (more explicit) nuisance phenomenon.

The **ethnographic survey** teaches us that, depending on the group being questioned, *it makes no sense to talk about "drug-related nuisances" without first talking about "nuisances"* and conducting a thoroughgoing analysis of the urban context within which these "problems" occur. Neither drug users nor non-drug users see the "nuisance" problem in black and white terms. They are of the opinion that, if the group of drug users could be wished away from the neighbourhood, the residents would still face other, "broader structural problems" in the area itself, such as the consequences of asylum policy, urban policy towards disadvantaged neighbourhoods, integration policy towards "excluded" groups, police policy, housing policy, policy on open spaces, etc.

**Key figures** (welfare, security and policy actors) consider the *group of nuisance-creators not as a homogeneous group* but as a group consisting of *various subgroups*, depending on the problem. *Nuisances and drug-related nuisances are* (in decreasing order of frequency) *attributed mainly* to foreigners, young people, illegal immigrants and people in vulnerable situations (the unemployed, marginals, fringe elements or members of the "fourth world") and people with alcohol problems. Drug users are very infrequently spontaneously cited as an important group of nuisance-creators. Drug users who give rise to "nuisance" behaviour must be seen as an element within the broader problem of concentrations of socially marginalized groups in the big cities.

**International and research literature** provides **no specific definition** of the term (drug-related) nuisance. The most frequent distinctions in research literature are between **criminal nuisances, disturbances of public order and audiovisual nuisances**, on the basis of the criterion of objectification, and between **objective and subjective nuisances**.

**Residents** were presented with a list of 40 nuisance phenomena, some related to drugs, others not. It was *not possible to assign a place within the triumvirate* (criminal, public order and audiovisual nuisances) to a number of phenomena, as the various forms of nuisance are not mutually exclusive. Nuisances caused, for example, by noise at night or fighting can be classified as both an audiovisual and public order nuisance. *The difference between objective and subject nuisances was used*, to group the different phenomena that may cause nuisances into categories that provide a clear view of the situation.

The **ethnographic survey**, upon receipt of the fieldwork, was confronted with the fact that the respondents, in Antwerp as well as Charleroi, frequently could not interpret the terms nuisance and drug-related nuisance and gave divergent answers to direct questions about the definition of the concept. We decided not to *let ourselves be guided by the distinctions described above*, but to order and structure all the stories and experiences that make up the "nuisance discussion" into as broad as possible a description of the phenomenon.

**Key figures** generally consider the term *criminal nuisance not as a drug-related nuisance, but as crime*. They perceive nuisances and crime as separate elements, but note "in the margins" that drug-related nuisances can indeed arise from drug-related crime. Drug-related nuisances are, according to the key figures, an *intrinsically subjective problem*, to which our distinctions among criminal, public-order and audiovisual nuisances cannot be applied. Criminal nuisances should be considered separately, making it possible, depending on the strategy used, to maintain the dividing line between crime and nuisance. Key figures spontaneously use the words *objective* and *subjective* when asked to define the concept of nuisance. The difference in definition of the two terms seems to depend on whether or not the phenomenon is criminal in nature.

## 2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF (DRUG-RELATED) NUISANCES AND THE EXPERIENCE OF (DRUG-RELATED) NUISANCES

We showed that it is **not relevant to distinguish drug-related nuisances from nuisances in general**. Making an explicit connection between "drugs" and "nuisance" creates a risk that nuisances will be linked exclusively to drug users.

**This association can be considered weak** from the standpoint of the three study components. The use of the term "drug-related nuisances" stigmatises the entire group of drug users, only a segment of which engages in nuisance-causing behaviour.

This is furthermore demonstrated by the **key figures' resistance to the use of this term**. Drug users are viewed first and foremost as victims and as a group that deserves extra attention because of their drug use, not because of their bothersome behaviour.

**Drug users** feel vulnerable, and the **ethnographic component** pointed to the **risk of stigmatising** one particular group as the cause of nuisances.

**Key figures** warn that projects are more and more frequently being started up as part of the effort to fight nuisances. **Welfare actors** are under pressure to become involved in fighting nuisances. The **importance of the concept of liveability** is particularly emphasized by key figures. **Security actors** view the concept of nuisance within the framework of an expansion of their package of responsibilities. This creates **confusion**, where they are concerned, about the line between nuisance and crime.

The **ethnographic study** revealed that drug users perceive current policy as being focused more on fighting the (drug-related) nuisance problem than the drug problem itself. They see a **risk that provision of assistance will be subordinated to the fight against nuisances**. Drug users are developing a significant case of **distrust of institutions**.

The **residents' survey** revealed that the more residents experience nuisances, the greater their **distrust of institutions**, the **stronger** their feelings of **insecurity** and the greater the chance they will vote for an extreme right-wing party. Distrust of institutions is closely associated with social nuisances and criminal nuisances, and somewhat more loosely with physical nuisances.

**Key figures** often cite **feelings of insecurity** and **alienation from one's own neighbourhood** as consequences of this phenomenon.

### 3. NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE (DRUG-RELATED) NUISANCE PHENOMENON

As already indicated by the foregoing, we opted for a **broad definition of the concept of (drug-related) nuisances, with specific emphases within each component of the study**.

The substantive significance of the term (drug-related) nuisance, as far as **residents** are concerned, is associated mainly with *pollution of public spaces*, in other words with (their own?) *territory* in the neighbourhood.

**Drug users** themselves define "nuisances" as being daily confronted with *distrust and lack of respect and friendship*. For them, the term nuisance has an essentially *social*, not material, significance. A nuisance, for them, is the difficulty they have in instilling trust due to the lack of respect that some users display in their relations with others. Opening oneself up to others is risky, given that they might attract "problems" in this way, and dealing with day-to-day reality for them means protecting themselves against others. The ethnographic component reveals that a nuisance is a problem with contending with public spaces and the social relations within them, creating a feeling of powerlessness, a recurring theme in all these users' comments.

**Welfare actors**, who are among the key figures questioned, consider many disturbing behaviours as *inherent to drug use*. Lying, manipulating and stealing are part of the reality within the welfare sector and are perceived as part and parcel of the junkie syndrome.

Aggression towards other users, other people and property occurs, but is not considered a nuisance until a *particular threshold is exceeded*. *Tolerance* for behaviours considered nuisance behaviours in society is greater among actors aiming to improve the welfare of drug users. *Security actors* make a sharp distinction between criminal behaviours and nuisance behaviour. Key figures concede that we cannot speak about a nuisance unless a feeling of *powerlessness and loss of control* is involved.

We view the nuisances cited by **users**, **key figures** and **residents** in terms of **three dimensions**, in particular the **urban context**, the **relationship between means and nuisance** and **individual factors on the part of "nuisance-creators"**. **Differentiated actions** may be distinguished within each dimension, **in keeping with the problem and the actor responsible**.

### 3.1 Urban context and drug-related nuisances

*The consideration of the urban context as a problem in the experience of nuisance or the specification of particular visible nuisance phenomena in specific research areas occurs repeatedly within the **different components of the study**.*

The **surveys of residents and key figures** indicate the *difference in the way nuisances are experienced and in the different levels of nuisances between urban areas and border regions*. Nuisances related to drugs within the cross-border region played no prominent role (drug users are usually not stopped by borders). In comparison with other research locations where **key figures** reported specific drug nuisance problems (distinguished by the nature and degree depending on the location), this seemed to be less clearly the case in the border region. When we refer to the border region, it should be kept in mind that only the Belgian side was studied.

The **survey of residents** revealed *significant differences concerning the scope of the nuisance and drug-related nuisance phenomenon between problematic urban areas on the one hand and other less problematic regional areas on the other*. However, it cannot be said that the general and specific (drug-related) nuisance level is determined by the degree of urbanization of the areas under study. For example, we encountered urban areas where the level of nuisance closely resembled that of the regions under study as concerns the scope. Conversely, it struck us that we encountered problematic areas in urban environments. We *cannot speak of a typical "urban" nuisance phenomenon* given that it are the same types of phenomena that cause the most or the least disturbing nuisances in urban neighbourhoods as well as in the regions. The most striking example of a problematic urban area was unquestionably the De Coninckplein in Antwerp, where residents perceived a high level of nuisance (whether or not drug-related).

It was precisely in these two neighbourhoods, the De Coninckplein and the "*ville basse*", that the **ethnographic study took place**. Both neighbourhoods serve drug users as places to be, as among the few places in the city where people can (still) meet. These neighbourhoods have acquired a central function for them. These areas are moreover characterised by a large number of passer-by who make "fleeting" use of them.

This realization is important in the light of the **residents' survey**. While the telephone survey necessarily focused on the residents of the neighbourhoods, a large number of the people who frequent these neighbourhoods remained outside the scope of the survey. This differentiates it from the **ethnographic study**, which was not limited to drug users, but also encompassed neighbourhood users. The role of the neighbourhoods studied as the *most important meeting*

*places for drug users* means that these are the only places these people still feel understood. People try to "survive" and choose a strategy in which values like friendship, respect and trust are less important than survival. The neighbourhoods studied are the only "networks" in which people can find partners and there is a growing impression that "*every man for himself*" has become the prevailing attitude.

### 3.2 Relationship between type of drug and (drug-related) nuisances

We established *no clear link between the scope of nuisances and public use of illegal drugs*. The *use of alcohol and legal drugs* and the *presence of "alcoholics"* were, however, *regularly cited in connection with particular types of nuisances*. During the **participatory observations in Antwerp and Charleroi**, we were never confronted with public and visible inhalation or injection of illegal drugs, but did observe public consumption of medications and alcohol. The excessive use of these substances facilitated boisterous discussions on the street, which were perceived by non-drug users as threatening or bothersome. Non-drug users in the neighbourhoods we studied emphasized, from a "pharmacocentric" viewpoint, that "the neighbourhood must be rid of 'these' illegal drugs", thereby demonising these substances and depersonalising the drug user.

The **key figures** indicate that the nuisances that go hand in hand with the use of illegal drugs are *not fundamentally different* from the nuisances associated with other, legal substances. *It was frequently noted that a combination of medication and alcohol caused a greater nuisance*.

Most respondents to the **general survey of residents** and the **key figures** *mainly attribute the nuisance phenomenon to other social groups, including people with alcohol problems*.

### 3.3 (Drug-related) nuisances and individual factors

Finally, there seems to be a link between the experience of (drug-related) nuisance phenomena and individual features. The **residents' survey** indicated that *hallmarks of a certain socio-demographic background, such as level of education and age, have no influence on the perception of nuisances*. On the basis of the data collected, it appears that *this was the case as concerns other individual features* (feelings of insecurity and distrust of institutions, specifically the police and the municipal administration, and voting behaviour).

It is striking that the **key figures** (security, welfare and policy actors) consider drug-related nuisances to include not only disturbing behaviour and other elements, but also nuisances affecting drug users themselves, with particular attention to the *consequences for the user's health*.

The **ethnographic survey** shows us that the drug users who were reached live in a precarious situation that each user tries to cope with as well as possible. Most, however, lack the motivation to make plans for their lives due to uncertainty about the future, society's view of them and continuous monitoring of their lifestyles. Drug users admit that their lifestyle is determined by the illegal status of drugs and that progress in this area would help them to lead more dignified and less marginalized lives.

## **4. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PHENOMENON OF (DRUG-RELATED) NUISANCES**

#### 4.1 (Drug-related) nuisances due to concentration?

The *theme of appropriation of public space and concentration of excluded groups* (including drug users) in a particular neighbourhood in relation to nuisances emerges **throughout the three components**. This is also the factor that is important in deciding whether or not to take measures or implement a policy. The discussion as to whether to implement a concentration policy or a dispersal policy arose frequently.

On the basis of the **residents' survey**, we noted that the scope of the phenomenon of (drug-related) nuisances is strongly associated with the degree to which, in the respondents' view, drug users are part of the street scene in the neighbourhood. The *'visibility'* aspect of these groups inevitably determines residents' perceptions.

**Key figures** point out another consequence of the concentration of particular groups, including drug users, in particular that these neighbourhoods quickly begin to be labelled as ghettos and that residents begin to feel *alienated* from their own neighbourhoods.

**Drug users**, on the other hand, feel that they, like any other citizens, have *the right to move about freely and to meet each other wherever they like*. (Police) policy, and here we are thinking of the *"quadrillage"* in Charleroi, limits their freedom of movement and means that they are almost forced to meet one another in a particular public area, until they are once again moved on to another location. Policy on these public areas leads to drug users increasingly retreating into "their own world", thereby making access to the "other world" more and more difficult. Policy in regards to these areas incites residents to take measures to avoid being confronted with them.

**Key figures** point to the role of *"successful" initiatives to assist drug users* in creating *concentrations of drug users* and residents' *perception of nuisances arising from them*. *Successful shelter programs create nuisances*. If drug users remain there for a long time, they constitute an ideal target for dealers. Nuisances will very probably arise around the facility. If they become too concentrated, the nuisances can become so pronounced that *liveability* suffers. Fighting these nuisances with all sorts of repressive measures will cause the target group to avoid the area and look for a new location.

#### 4.2 The phenomenon of (drug-related) nuisances as a starting point for dialogue and consultation?

The conclusions of the study component involving **key figures** indicate that the underlying visions of the various actors within the different theme, work and steering groups on drugs (and drug-related nuisances) differ sharply. We were able to conclude that specific working groups on the theme of (drug-related) nuisances had been established in different areas. On the basis of policy, it was considered desirable for the various actors and key figures within working, theme or steering groups, including street workers and beat officers, to work together. We have concluded, however, that this enforced cooperation suffers due to various tensions arising from their underlying frameworks of reference and responsibilities. On the one hand, there is a consensus among the various actors concerning the final goal to which each partner can make a contribution, in particular creating a *liveable neighbourhood* wherein nuisances are manageable. On the other, people point out the importance of diversity among the various actors in terms of their responsibilities, objectives and vision and the preservation of their individuality, in particular as concerns the theme of "(drug-related) nuisances," to which there is a measure of resistance.



When *both viewpoints are taken into account*, it is important to *engage in consultations on the basis of differences*. This *consultation* should be considered a *dynamic process* aimed at *establishing a dialogue in the neighbourhoods*. *Heterogeneity and respect for everyone's individuality* are *essential as a starting point for establishing consultation*.

**Drug users** have the feeling that they *are never involved* in policies that concern them and that it has become a case of "every man for himself", which explains their interest in solutions at interpersonal level. It was also shown that "nuisances" can be mutual but that nonetheless, drug users *do not feel called upon to speak to residents either*. The illegality of the drug scene and the associated negative stigma of being a "drug user" plays a major role here. Drug users assume a cautious and reserved attitude towards being recognized as such and towards the emphasis on structural solutions. The challenge is therefore to promote a dynamic in these neighbourhoods leading to the restoration of *dialogue* with drug users.

Of all the **residents** who indicate that they experience drug-related phenomena as a nuisance, only a *small minority confronts the "nuisance-creators" about their behaviour*. It is *not always known who causes the nuisances*. Neighbourhood residents feel *powerless* to speak directly to those who cause problems and feel that a *solution must come from "higher up"*.

**Discussions with policy, security and welfare actors** all included an *appeal for more responsibility* for those directly involved. We conclude that particular initiatives (junkie patrols, peer support projects, the Boule de Neige ("Snowball") peer project, residents' initiatives, etc.) taken at different research locations have a significant added value. The "risk group" is not only involved, but has an effective say.

#### 4.3 An integrated policy involving all actors: a task for everyone?

**Neighbourhood residents** assess nuisance policy on the basis of the visibility of the police on the street. The survey of residents revealed that people *see a role not only for the police*. 60% of respondents who see drug users in the neighbourhoods feel that not only the police, but also other institutions, such as *community work* and *assistance to drug users*, play a role in reducing drug-related nuisances. It should also be noted that people who have filed a complaint about drug-related nuisances were not so much dissatisfied with the police response; they are rather unhappy with police action concerning drug-related nuisances in general.

The **ethnographic survey** shows that a nuisance policy cannot be reduced to a police policy and that people feel that such a one-sided policy does not address the "real problems" in an urban setting. **Drug users** consider (criminal) drug policy often as a source of incomprehension and in some cases anger. The police force's policy of harassment concerning particular public areas and the policy of closing cafes frequented by drug users meant that both the neighbourhoods included in the study (the De Coninckplein and the *ville basse*) were the only places for users to meet, helped along or not by decisions to establish drug user assistance or easily accessible neighbourhood initiatives there. The Charleroi police are, it is true, more obviously present on the streets in the neighbourhood studied than the Antwerp police are on the De Coninckplein, but drug users in both Antwerp and Charleroi feel vulnerable because of their criminal records. Because these neighbourhoods are the only places they have to go and because the police concentrate their presence there, they have a better chance of being caught in the wake of conflict situations, whether or not they involve drug use. They fear that their records will be brought to light, resulting in additional conditions for probation or immediate application of a suspended or reduced sentence.

**Key figures** view management of the nuisance phenomenon as a *joint task for assistance workers, policy-makers, the police and judicial authorities, in which drug users and neighbourhood residents also have a say*. On the ground, key figures seem to be familiar with this type of thinking in all the locations. The concrete implementation of this idea, however, is often hard to spot, particularly as concerns giving drug users themselves a say.

## 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Nuisances are a phenomenon that is difficult to wish away entirely and is something that society will also have to learn to live with to some extent. Nuisances can never be entirely prevented and cannot be tackled adequately in all cases. What is important is to *work towards manageability of the nuisance phenomenon and restoration of the liveability* of a neighbourhood. Manageability is an important term as concerns nuisance policy. It emerged from the three components of the study that the experience of nuisances and a feeling of powerlessness and uncontrollability are closely associated. Just as it appears that the experience of nuisances is strongly linked to tolerance and a sense of citizenship.

### 5.1 A global nuisance policy

A fully-fledged nuisance policy has as its general objective an increase in the quality of life at neighbourhood level. This can be achieved only via integrated action carried out within all policy areas at local level. A first area is that of *spatial order and urban renewal*, in which the emphasis must be placed on keeping public areas accessible to everyone. Subsequently, attention must be given to *countering concentrations of illegality and marginalisation*, in other words prevention of the formation of ghettos. A third aspect within the context of this integrated action includes *maintenance of the environment*, which can be used to fight very apparent forms of nuisance, such as clandestine dumping of rubbish and noise. A very obvious type of nuisance includes "slumlording", decay and dilapidation; such phenomena require *housing*, as a fourth area, to be assigned a role within the integrated policy. *Welfare* is also an area that should not be forgotten within the global package of measures aimed at fighting nuisances. A fully developed welfare policy is an essential condition for a fully-fledged nuisance policy and requires a range of facilities. An effective policy furthermore presupposes the necessary *range of instruments for an appropriate reaction by governments*. Here we may cite recent developments in the area of armed administration and municipal administrative sanctions (article 135 of the NGW). The final element in this fully-fledged nuisance policy is the *criminal pillar* (cf. drugs legislation).

This nuisance policy has two components: an integrated and differentiated policy on the one hand, and the use of public spaces on the other.

### 5.2 An integrated and differentiated policy

The desirability of an integral and differentiated approach to problems has long been generally agreed upon, and the strategy concerning nuisance phenomena is no exception. Minimising nuisances requires not only an **integral**, but also a **differentiated** approach.

Taking an **integral approach** to (drug-related) nuisances is possible only if certain conditions are met, including recognition by all parties involved that a nuisance exists (cf. resistance to the concept) and willingness to use this term in consultation bodies and cooperative entities. A local integral approach can be said to exist only if all security, welfare and policy actors, on

the one hand, cooperate on the basis of their own framework of reference to make the nuisance manageable. And on the other, residents and the risk group singled out as the cause of the nuisance should not only be heard, but also have a say. A **differentiated approach** means that different measures must be taken depending on the target group or subgroup and that measures must be taken at local level. The realization that the group causing nuisances is not a single homogeneous entity naturally leads to the conclusion that different approaches must be taken *to different groups*. What works for one category could be counterproductive when it comes to another.

#### *5.2.1 A differentiated policy*

The core of the differentiated aspect, moreover, consists of a policy that is implemented **locally**, in other words, what is required is a "tailor-made policy" and a thoroughgoing analysis of the specific local context in which these "problems" arise. The framework conditions for this policy must, however, be provided by the **level above local level** as concerns financial support and associated control, and the broad legislative framework that leaves room for complementary measures at local level. An important point in the development of projects aimed at fighting nuisances is **concern for continuity**. Within the research locations, it appears that different initiatives and projects are constantly being established. What is important here is setting in motion a process to ensure the continuity of the projects, and this is always difficult due to the diverse and often temporary status of the actors involved. Coherence of measures and cooperation among the municipality, drug user assistance programs and the police and judicial authorities must be at the heart of nuisance policy. *Cooperation* is in many cases *associated with individuals and projects* and therefore sometimes quickly evaporates.

Political responsibility as concerns nuisances must be coordinated locally; this requires the creation of a specific **mandate** on the basis of which the various initiatives concerning nuisances can be coordinated. This mandate must encompass effective competencies and must be **horizontally** orientated across various areas of competency. Such a mandate can be implemented only by means of **delegation of competencies** by the mayor and aldermen and -women with responsibility for the policy areas cited above. This delegation should also be combined with the **delegation of responsibility** as concerns those who are relinquishing these competencies.

#### *5.2.2 An integrated policy*

The integrated aspect of nuisance policy is composed of dialogue and consultation. Given that the concept must be "filled in" at local level according to the needs and wishes of **all** interested local parties (not just drug users and other "excluded groups"), emphasis must be placed on restoring a **dialogue**. This approach will create greater involvement when the selected policy is subsequently implemented. Furthermore, everyone must be included to prevent the solution from being viewed as a new problem; the proposed approach must, in other words, be **supported** by all the partners. Moreover, an effort should be made to ensure that particular partners do not have to invest in areas where others have already made significant efforts.

In this dialogue, residents and risk groups can be addressed concerning greater responsibility only if they perceive that they can also implement realistic measures with the responsibility granted them. **Involved and responsible neighbourhood residents and -users** are not created by imposing one or another value of citizenship but through specific forms of participation and networks within which people can take responsibility themselves (including

by increasing autonomy, allowing people to consider themselves active "problem-solvers"; the liveability of a neighbourhood is a matter that must be approached on the basis of "co-ownership"). Involvement grows out of **equality** among the various partners in a project. It develops out of the experience of being able to exercise actual control over their own living conditions.

If the goal is to restore dialogue, and if drug users are to be allowed to have a say, the fact that drug users feel very vulnerable due to their criminal records, but see no alternative to enable them to integrate into "other worlds," must be taken into account. The stigma of the drug user and the illegality of the drug scene mean that they are very cautious and reserved about standing up for their rights.

This cooperation as concerns the nuisance phenomenon includes the **inclusion of actors** who play a role in relation to the phenomenon in order to make the **individuality** of each actor clear, and thence to develop cooperation agreements. We may conclude that positive steps are already being taken in this direction on the ground. The realisation that the *concept of "nuisance"* triggers resistance among a non-negligible number of actors has implications for consultations among various actors and for policy. A clarification of **terminological differences of opinion** is essential at the start of this consultation concerning nuisances. In addition to involving all possible partners, we believe that the **various roles must be demarcated**: *What can/may each partner do/allow within the project, and what can each expect from the others.*

### 5.3 Use of public spaces

One important aspect of the approach to nuisances is that public areas must remain accessible for everyone. A basic condition for achieving this goal is a social base of support for the use of this public space and the associated functions. This takes us back to the necessity of dialogue among all the interested parties.

The accessibility of public areas can be made much more difficult by the problem of concentration, which has two dimensions in this context. The first concerns the concentration of illegality and marginalisation. A second dimension concerns a more specific form of concentration of initiatives to help drug users. As indicated by the conclusions, the *concentration of nuisance-causing behaviours, nuisance-causing groups and successful drug user assistance programs is closely associated with the perception of nuisances.* Moreover, the concentration of initiatives to help drug users tends to confirm the status of a neighbourhood or district as a "problem area".

One important aspect as concerns fighting nuisances consists of **striking a balance** between "**concentration**" of such projects on the one hand and their "**dispersal**" on the other. Dispersal reduces the nuisance effect, but could increase it somewhere else (the waterbed effect). Dispersal of projects or initiatives to help drug users can be achieved by the establishment of satellite facilities in different (problem) areas to reduce the chance of creating nuisances.