

SUMMARY

In January 2001 the municipality of Venlo launched Hektor, a drug nuisance project. In order to achieve a substantial reduction in (soft) drug criminality and drug-related nuisance a policy was developed. The policy's aim is threefold. In the first place it wishes to tackle drug-related nuisance and criminality through the enforcement plan. In the second place it aims at gaining control over real estate owned by malafide owners by means of the so-called real estate plan. Finally the policy aspires to establish alterations in the current coffeeshop policy, in particular an increase in the number of coffeeshops on the outskirts of the municipality of Venlo. The Ministry of Justice, subsidizer of the project, commissioned INTRAVAL, bureau for social-scientific research and consultancy, to develop indicators to monitor drug nuisance in Venlo and to record its changes. INTRAVAL was also requested to carry out a so-called baseline assessment.

First of all specific indicators to determine the Hektor results were chosen. Then the way to assess these indicators was examined. Subsequently, in order to carry out the baseline assessment indicators to be used in this assessment were selected and tested. Files of the municipality of Venlo, police, justice department, and tax department as well as records of periodically performed household surveys in the inner city of Venlo have provided data for this baseline assessment. Furthermore, additional research was conducted into the perception of nuisance in the inner city, into sites where drug trafficking takes place and into the number of visitors of the points of sale. A detailed report on how this additional study was set up and carried out was published separately (Snippe, et al. 2002).

As to where the indicators are concerned a distinction was drawn between efforts and results. It is commonly known that increased deployment of police leads to more arrests of suspects, more charges, more convictions and fewer troublemakers in the streets. Insight in the changes of drug nuisance by monitoring the efforts made, however, does not automatically imply that judgment can be passed on the results, meaning the changes in the scope of the drug problem in Venlo. The want for information needed in the assessment of the efforts made in the Hektor project was largely supplied. It was only occasionally and with regard to certain questions that information was not available. Additional research and extensive analyses of police files also largely supplied the want of information needed to monitor changes in the findings of the Hektor project. Once again it was only with regard to certain questions that information was lacking. However, those data available for the newly developed indicators are sufficiently reliable, valid and up-to-date.

The situation in Venlo seems to diverge strongly from that in other municipalities in border areas coping with drug nuisance. Compared with other municipalities the nuisance is considerable and is concentrated in only a small area in the inner city. Moreover, the nature of trafficking in soft drugs here shares characteristics with the trafficking in hard drugs elsewhere in the country. Within the scope of this research the reason for this erratic picture cannot be identified. The continuous influx of great numbers of German visitors from just across the border seems to have a considerable impact on the great demand for soft drugs in Venlo. The impact of trafficking in soft drugs and all that it entails is disproportionately big in the inner city of Venlo, especially when compared with

other medium-sized municipalities in the Netherlands with a comparable retail trade service area.

Finally, the collected data give an impression of the situation in 2000, i.e. before Hektor was launched, and of 2001, Hektor's first year. For actual insight in the changes taking place during the Hektor project the data need to be collected periodically in the time to come. The Ministry of Justice intends to have at least a final assessment done at the end of the project. Moreover, periodic assessments allow for amendments in the project whenever considered necessary.