

CANNABIS COFFEESHOPS, DRUG TOURISM, NUISANCE  
AND ILLEGAL DEALING IN SOFT DRUGS, 2014

IN-DEPTH STUDY IN FIVE DUTCH COMMUNITIES

**ENGLISH SUMMARY**

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## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Dutch government recently adopted more restrictive policies affecting cannabis ‘coffeeshops’. This report presents findings from the second stage of a research study we carried out to further assess the ramifications of the new policies. The two-part study documented coffeeshop tourism (non-residents buying cannabis in coffeeshops) and soft drug tourism (non-residents buying cannabis outside coffeeshops), soft drug-related nuisance, illegal sales of cannabis to drug users outside of coffeeshop settings, and drug running, as well as mapping the geographical distribution of such phenomena and identifying any trends in 2014.

In the first stage of the study, we compiled nationwide law enforcement statistics based on police-recorded incidents of drug nuisance, soft drug possession and soft drug dealing, as well as soft drug offences dealt with by prosecution services. After analysing those figures at national and regional levels, we collected more detailed data in a broad-based sample of 31 large, middle-sized and small ‘coffeeshop municipalities’ throughout the country (local authorities that allow the sale of cannabis products in coffeeshops). The data were further supplemented with information obtained in interviews with local experts – municipal and police officials knowledgeable about local soft drug markets. The findings of the first stage were reported in mid-2015 (Benschop, Wouters & Korf, 2015). Here is a brief summary of those findings:

- Coffeeshop and soft drug tourism was virtually nonexistent in large parts of the central, western and northern Netherlands. Coffeeshop tourists were found almost exclusively in Amsterdam and in eastern areas bordering on Germany. Soft drug tourists were observed in southern regions near the Belgian border.
- In many of the communities studied, there was little or no evidence of illegal soft drug dealing outside of coffeeshop settings (street dealers, mobile dealers, home-based dealers, or dealers operating in shops, pubs or dance clubs; no Internet dealing was reported at all). In places where illegal dealing was found, the dealers were mostly targeting local users, except in a few localities in southern border areas where street dealers targeted non-residents of the Netherlands who were not allowed to buy in coffeeshops.
- Drug runners were observed almost exclusively in certain southern border communities, often in association with nearby street dealers selling to non-residents banned from coffeeshops.
- Little or no nuisance from coffeeshops was reported in most communities. Most of that was blamed on traffic or parking problems. In some southern areas, it was due to drug runners or dealers who ‘intercepted’ non-residents as they approached coffeeshops.
- Police statistics on nuisance incidents varied widely by location; seasonal fluctuations were also common. The recorded statistics were broadly consistent with the impressions of the local experts we interviewed and provided some, albeit imprecise, indications of soft drug-related nuisance.

In the second stage of the study, we performed a more in-depth investigation in a selection of 5 of the 31 local authorities in the sample from the first stage. We collected more extensive data there, including ‘street knowledge’ gathered in local fieldwork. In choosing the five communities, we sought to ensure a geographical spread as well as variation in terms of population size, local implementation of residency requirements, and the levels of coffeeshop and soft drug tourism, coffeeshop nuisance and

illegal soft drug sales (based on the recorded statistics and local expert interviews analysed in the first stage). The five local authorities did not form a representative sample of all Dutch coffeeshop municipalities; southern localities were especially overrepresented. Our in-depth study is a case study to investigate more closely and distinguish local variations in the broad phenomena identified in the first stage – in particular in the phenomenon of soft drug-related nuisance.

The purpose of the fieldwork we performed in the communities selected for in-depth investigation was to gather street knowledge that could supplement and refine the law enforcement statistics obtained in the first stage. Whereas the previous data was collected and analysed at the level of the local authorities, the second stage focused more specifically on local communities and neighbourhoods within them. In consultation with municipal and police officials, we identified ‘hotspots’ within each local authority: locations, public squares, streets or neighbourhoods where soft drug-related nuisance was concentrated. Our emphasis was on public nuisance (rather than on specific activities like illegal dealing), because nuisance was the phenomenon that showed the greatest geographical variation in the first stage of the study, and moreover because the police nuisance statistics needed further clarification. Whilst illegal dealing might be one source of nuisance, other incidents of nuisance might arise from coffeeshops, street tokers, drug runners, coffeeshop tourists or soft drug tourists.

A total of eight hotspots were observed within the five local authorities. In each hotspot, we conducted interviews with local experts, fieldwork consisting of observations and informal conversations with relevant informants, and surveys of neighbourhood people.

In the box below, we give brief descriptions of the local authorities and the hotspots selected for the in-depth study, and we briefly summarise the types of nuisance reported by experts and field researchers there and the results of the neighbourhood surveys. We then go on to discuss similarities and differences between the types of hotspots, the forms of nuisance prevalent there and the law enforcement measures that were in place. We describe the various ways in which nuisance was reported to and recorded by local officials. Conclusions are summarised in the final section of the chapter.

#### **Local authority I – loitering youth**

A small local authority in the northwest Netherlands, with a small, centrally located town and a large surrounding rural area. The town had one coffeeshop. No residence requirement was in place. Statistics and expert information obtained in the first stage of the study indicated little coffeeshop tourism, little nuisance associated with the coffeeshop, and low to moderate levels of illegal soft drug dealing outside the coffeeshop.

The hotspot was a public square with a library, where loitering youth were a source of nuisance. Soft drug use or dealing did not play any major role in the nuisance problems. The coffeeshop was not located near the hotspot and no nuisance from coffeeshop tourists was observable.

The neighbourhood survey found few traffic or parking problems. A very small number of local people (2%) reported experiencing serious nuisance from cannabis smoking on the street, particularly in the summer, on afternoons and evenings, and on weekdays. There were virtually no reports of drug runners, dealers, coffeeshop tourists or soft drug tourists.

#### **Local authority II – street dealing and substance-dependent homeless people**

A medium-sized local authority in the eastern Netherlands, consisting of a town with ten coffeeshops and several surrounding villages. Non-residents were not banned from coffeeshops. The first stage of the study had found considerable coffeeshop tourism but relatively little nuisance from coffeeshops; there were low to moderate levels of illegal dealing.

The hotspot we studied was a newly created public square between the railway station and a street leading to the town centre (both of which had previously been hotspots). Several coffeeshops were located at or near the hotspot. The nuisance experienced in the hotspot stemmed primarily from loitering street dealers (or people presumed to be such) and from homeless people loitering about.

Half of the respondents to the neighbourhood survey reported nuisance from poor traffic circulation and one quarter reported parking nuisance. Most respondents occasionally saw people smoking cannabis in public places, but only 6% experienced serious nuisance from them. Many people reported smelling cannabis smoke near a coffeeshop, but they generally did not perceive it as a nuisance. Little or no noise nuisance from coffeeshops was reported. About one third of respondents had spotted drug runners and dealers in the neighbourhood; 12% experienced serious nuisance from runners and 6% from dealers. Some 4% of those surveyed reported serious nuisance from presumed coffeeshop tourists and 5% from presumed soft drug tourists.

### **Local authority III – coffeeshop customers and homeless people**

A medium-sized local authority in the southern part of the Netherlands, where a residency requirement was observed in practice but was not yet officially part of local policy. A centrally located town with five coffeeshops was surrounded by more than ten smaller villages. The quantitative and qualitative data we obtained in the first stage indicated little coffeeshop tourism, moderate coffeeshop nuisance, and low to moderate illegal soft drug dealing.

We investigated two hotspots here: (A) a street leading to the town centre in which two coffeeshops and a homeless centre were located; and (B) a residential area with a coffeeshop. The main kind of nuisance reported in both hotspots was the driving and parking behaviour of coffeeshop customers; in hotspot A, nuisance was also experienced from loitering homeless people and young pot smokers on the streets.

Half of the respondents in the neighbourhood surveys reported nuisance from traffic congestion and illegal parking. The majority observed cannabis smokers on the streets, but only 7% perceived them as a serious nuisance. Most respondents reported no nuisance from odours or noise associated with coffeeshops. Few had observed drug runners or dealers, but 3% to 4% perceived them as a serious nuisance the year round. Notwithstanding the residency requirement for coffeeshops, many respondents believed they saw coffeeshop tourists in the vicinity, but they generally experienced no nuisance from them. Nor was nuisance reported from soft drug tourism.

### **Local authority IV – drug runners, car traffic, loiterers and frequent complaints**

A medium-sized local authority in the southern part of the country, with one major town and five surrounding villages. The town had eight coffeeshops. A residency requirement was in place, but enforcement had a low priority. The first stage of our study found little current evidence of coffeeshop tourism or coffeeshop-related nuisance, but relatively large numbers of drug runners were said to be active.

Hotspot A was a street leading to the town centre, and serious nuisance from drug runners was reported there in the vicinity of two coffeeshops. Hotspot B was a street with a row of shops and parking spaces, located between the town centre and a working-class district. Businesses included a coffeeshop and a busy football pub. Forms of nuisance were varied: car traffic, noise, loiterers and 'shady characters'.

Traffic and parking problems formed a source of nuisance for 40% to 50% of the respondents in the neighbourhood surveys. As in local authority III, the use of soft drugs was often seen on the streets, but only a small minority of 7% perceived it as a serious nuisance. Coffeeshops caused little nuisance from stench or noise. Nearly half of respondents (44%) observed drug runners, and 6% saw them as a serious nuisance. Soft drug dealers were even more commonly observed (by 56%), and 9% reported high nuisance from them. Presumed coffeeshop and soft drug tourists were seen as a serious nuisance by 4% and 8% respectively.

### **Local authority V – persistent drug running and a neighbourhood in transition**

A large city on the southern border, hosting fourteen coffeeshops. A residency requirement was strictly enforced. Despite that, some of the former coffeeshop tourists were still travelling to the city, and the first stage of the study had shown that many drug runners and other sorts of illegal drug enterprisers were active.

Hotspot A was a street leading to the city centre. The area was 'in transition' from a quiet working-class community to a lively urban neighbourhood. It had one coffeeshop. Hotspot B was a boulevard at the edge of the city centre with four coffeeshops. Both hotspots had to cope with the blatant, pushy activities of groups of drug runners.

Relatively few respondents to the neighbourhood surveys (about 25%) reported traffic or parking nuisance; only a small proportion (4%) experienced serious nuisance from pot smokers on the streets, and little or no nuisance from coffeeshops was perceived. Drug runners and dealers had been seen by many respondents, and one in ten found them a serious source of nuisance. Less nuisance was reported from presumed coffeeshop tourists and soft drug tourists (with 5% and 7% reporting serious nuisance).

## Types of hotspots

All the hotspots we observed were either adjacent to the traditional town centres, at the edge of the central district or along streets used to reach the attractive town centre. They were often located just outside the main shopping area, in streets or squares with more parking available.

Five of the hotspots were in shopping streets where traditional (Dutch) shop owners had gradually made way for newer (multicultural) businesses. One or more coffeeshops were located there, as well as pubs and restaurants. It is worth noting that a quarter to a third of the premises in some hotspots had been vacant for some time. In three of these (IV-A, IV-B and V-A), vacant premises and new businesses were explicitly spotlighted by the interviewed experts, with accompanying speculations about possible drug dealing and money laundering activities.

The remaining three hotspots were in residential districts, either on public squares or segments of streets, most of which had few or widely spaced shop premises. In all hotspots there was a mixture of residential housing and small-scale businesses and shops (most of whose proprietors did not live on the premises).

## Nuisance

In terms of public nuisance, there were some similarities between the hotspots we studied, but there were also differences. Both the scale and the visibility of the nuisance could vary, local experts said. In half of the hotspots (I, II, IV-A and V-B), the nuisance phenomenon was attributable to a single, readily identifiable group. Nuisance in other hotspots was more diffuse, with less consensus about the nature of the nuisance and about which groups were causing it. The people confronted by the nuisance might also have different perspectives on it. Some residents experienced nuisance at night after coming home from work, whereas many shopkeepers would have already left the area by then.

## Coffeeshops

One focus in our fieldwork during the in-depth stage of the study was on whether nuisance actually occurred in and around coffeeshops. We therefore queried stakeholders about the types of nuisance that arose most frequently. In our observations, we focused on the behaviour of nuisance makers. Interviews and informal conversations with local experts, neighbourhood residents and shopkeepers revealed that, on the whole, coffeeshops and their customers were seldom if ever viewed as causes of nuisance. Coffeeshop customers were not noisy, they did not hang around outside, no loud music was played, and there was almost never any quarrelling. Police and local officials confirmed that no intolerable behaviour normally took place that could 'objectively' give reason to make a nuisance report. By and large, relations with coffeeshop proprietors in hotspots were good. One problem was that

some customers double-parked their cars for a quick dash into a coffeeshop to buy cannabis, sometimes even playing loud music in their cars. Some coffeeshops tried to monitor their customers' behaviour by installing surveillance cameras outside. People who violated the rules received warnings. Some coffeeshops did this more consistently than others. Residents living around hotspot IV-B were the ones who aired the most criticism of coffeeshop customers. Local experts had detected a growing discontent in this predominantly ethnic Dutch working-class district against certain groups with minority ethnic backgrounds.

In local authorities IV and V, the implementation of residency requirements had led to drastic declines in the numbers of coffeeshop customers, and a corresponding alleviation of weekend parking problems around the hotspots.

### Drug runners and dealers

A significantly more serious source of nuisance in the vicinity of coffeeshops was the persistent activity of groups of drug runners (in towns where they operated). Drug runners were most active and visible in local authorities IV and V, where the residency requirement for coffeeshop customers was still enforced. In local authority III, which also observed a residency requirement, no drug runners appeared to be active. A few survey respondents in that town reported having seen them at some time, but our interviews, conversations and observations in the two local hotspots turned up no evidence for drug runners whatsoever.

The drug runners in local authorities IV and V hung around day and night at strategic locations near a coffeeshop. They kept a lookout in car parks, near parking meters, bus shelters or street benches, in front of closed businesses, or blatantly right in front of the coffeeshop. Some runners were more selective than others in whom they approached. Some accosted practically everyone walking by, whilst others zeroed in mainly on cars with foreign licence plates. Drug runners operated alone or in small groups, and sometimes in shifts. Most began work in late morning and continued as long as the coffeeshop was open. Expert informants in local authorities IV and V reported that drug runners and street dealers were already active there before the residence requirement was introduced. After that caused the bulk of the former coffeeshop tourists to stay away, drug runners became more conspicuous in the streetscape. Due to the active local enforcement policies, however, they now had to cover longer distances. Most transactions took place not at the first point of contact, but in the surrounding streets, alleys, entranceways and blind spots (outside the range of surveillance cameras), or even further away. Many drug runners were in their twenties and did not live in the towns where they operated. In one town we studied, most came from other parts of the country. Some groups of drug runners were extremely pushy.

Although respondents in all of our local surveys reported to a greater or lesser extent seeing soft drug dealers in their neighbourhoods, our interviews and fieldwork found immediate indications for street dealing only in hotspots I and II. In local authorities IV and V, the drug runners led customers to dealers some distance away from the hotspots. It may seem paradoxical that some or many respondents in those towns reported seeing street dealers, but the distinction between dealers and runners is not always clear. Both approach passers-by on the streets, but runners do not actually sell drugs and merely lead customers to dealers elsewhere. Street dealers do sell drugs. The difference is not always apparent to outsiders, and in terms of the perceived nuisance it is also immaterial. Police reported that drug dealers did not show their faces in the hotspots in local authorities IV and V. Drug runners were intimately entwined in the street trade in drugs, but if stopped or detained by police

they were seldom caught with drugs on their bodies. As a consequence, such police actions would not have been recorded in the statistics as soft drug possession or dealing.

No evidence of mobile soft drug dealers, home-based dealers or dealers operating in shops, pubs or dance clubs was found in any of the hotspots we investigated.

### Coffeeshop and soft drug tourists

Little nuisance was generally reported involving non-residents of the Netherlands who purchased soft drugs in coffeeshops or elsewhere – if indeed such customers were present in the hotspots studied. Non-residents who approached passers-by and asked them to buy drugs for them in a coffeeshop were reported in only one hotspot (IV-A). No mention was made of such incidents in the five other hotspots where non-residents were banned from coffeeshops (III-A/B, IV-B and V-A/B). In the hotspots where no residence requirement was in place (I and II), coffeeshop tourists were explicitly reported not to be a source of nuisance.

### Other nuisance makers

Nuisance was also experienced from groups of people who were not directly or indirectly associated with coffeeshops or illegal street trade in soft drugs. These groups were far more stationary than drug runners, hanging about longer in the same place. They included groups of ethnic Dutch loitering youth (hotspot I) – who made noise at various times of the day (e.g. riding motor scooters, shouting or playing music), littered the streets (with cigarette ends, drink cans and weed bags) and committed vandalism (burning holes in things, destroying property, spraying graffiti). In hotspot II, it was mainly young adults from minority ethnic backgrounds who made noise and hassled neighbourhood residents and passers-by, especially in fine weather or during summer months. Residents felt unsafe and shopkeepers feared loss of business. In hotspots III-B and IV-B, nuisance came mainly from speeding or illegally parked cars, which had united neighbourhood residents around a petition protesting against traffic hazards and nuisance. Nuisance in IV-B also came from football fans and pubgoers on the streets at night. In hotspots III-A and V-A, it was similarly difficult to blame local nuisance on coffeeshops alone. Since the streets there had morphed into café and nightlife locations, most complaints were about noise from groups of adolescents and students.

Homeless people, street people and alcoholics were further groups that qualified as nuisance makers in several towns (II, III, IV and V). They caused squalor, smudged shop windows, drank alcohol and urinated outdoors, staggered down the streets and even stole things. Though this was not a very edifying scene, the group seemed to evoke more compassion. They were simply considered part of the streetscape.

### Changes in the scale of nuisance

Our in-depth study was carried out in the summer of 2015, but the hotspots had been there during the first stage of our study in 2014. There was some variation between hotspots in terms of whether nuisance levels had changed in a year's time. In local authority I, nuisance from loitering youth was more serious in the summer of 2015 than in 2014, when several 'notorious' nuisance makers had been behind bars. In local authority II, the nuisance level was lower in 2015. A group of drug dealers had been arrested, and loiterers were behaving better after police intervention. In local authority III, nuisance had shifted from one hotspot to the other due to the temporary closure of a coffeeshop. Few changes had occurred in local authority IV. In local authority V, nuisance levels had been gradually decreasing over a longer period of time.

Nuisance might also fluctuate cyclically by time of day, week or year. Survey respondents highlighted evenings, weekends and summer months as peak periods, although that type of nuisance mainly involved alcohol and drug users on the streets. Key time factors for nuisance that emerged from expert interviews, informal conversations and observations were evening and nighttime hours, weekly shopping nights, weekends, special shopping or event weekends, and 'nice weather'. Nuisance from drug runners was the only type that appeared to be less cyclical. Had we conducted our in-depth study in the winter rather than the summer months, there would have been far less observable nuisance.

## Law enforcement and other measures

Professionals whose work related to local hotspots informed us that integrated strategies were in place for each hotspot and that reporting lines were short. All those we spoke to basically judged this positively, as people could readily contact one another and regular consultations about nuisance took place. In one local authority (V), a dedicated team had been established by police to combat drug-related nuisance problems.

Measures including exclusion orders, bans on assembly and camera surveillance were employed in connection with several of the hotspots (I, I, III-A, IV-A, V-A, V-B). Local experts reported good experiences with banning small gatherings of people at some hotspots. At other locations, however, such measures were more of a dilemma, especially when public squares were involved that were designed to bring people together. Experiences with individual exclusion orders depended on the types of nuisance makers banned (drug runners were mobile anyway and could be replaced by other individuals) and whether alternative locations were available (a displacement or waterbed effect; see Bernasco, Elffers & Bruinsma, 2006). In locations where camera surveillance had been installed, most experts reported that the visibility of the nuisance had decreased.

In five of the eight hotspots we investigated (I, II, III-A, IV-B, V-B), signs had been erected to inform people of the prevailing bans. Some defined the area as a quiet zone, where gatherings were also prohibited; others announced alcohol ban zones. This at any rate increased awareness of the prohibitions in place there.

Some interventions altered the physical characteristics of hotspots. Stronger lighting had been installed in hotspot III, and alterations had been made to prevent people sitting on the backs of benches, thus making them less attractive for loiterers. A public square in hotspot IV-B had been revamped, and this had been one factor in curbing nuisance. An alley where drug dealing had been taking place in hotspot IV-A had been closed off, and a passageway in hotspot I was closed off at night. In hotspot III, similar plans existed to erect a glass partition to shield off a covered youth hangout area.

In four of the eight hotspots we observed (III-A, III-B, IV-B, V-B), measures introduced by coffeeshops had also had significant impacts. A number of coffeeshops monitored their own environs. One proprietor used cameras to survey the area and intervened if drug dealers were spotted. Door attendants from some coffeeshops made rounds through the neighbourhood, admonishing nuisance makers. Drivers who parked their cars illegally were refused coffeeshop entry, and drug runners were put on coffeeshop 'blacklists'. Such measures had not been taken everywhere, however; some coffeeshops did not seem too concerned about nuisance in the area.

## Reporting nuisance

Businesses in the vicinity of hotspots reported nuisance mainly in the daytime hours. In cases of persistent nuisance, they could often rely on swift connections with community police teams or community support officers. Businesses were also in touch with one another. Neighbourhood residents phoned police in both daytime and nighttime hours if nuisance makers gathered in groups, harassed passers-by or engaged in vandalism. In two hotspots (IV-A and V-B), the reported nuisance was associated largely with the behaviour of groups of drug runners. In other hotspots, there was a spectrum of nuisance, caused by different types of nuisance makers. Municipal and police officials and other local experts we spoke to did not view all complainers through the same lens. Members of neighbourhood alliances and local business associations did not always agree with one another. Some people viewed a good deal of the nuisance as something simply inherent to urban life, whereas others saw nuisance as a threat to the neighbourhood or to their 'own culture'. Police and local authority officials were well aware that people who reported nuisance might have different motives for doing so. Whilst they were convinced that most complainers were devoted to their neighbourhood and that the reported nuisance was real, they also believed that some people tended to exaggerate the problems.

## Recording nuisance

Channels for reporting nuisance were not the same for every hotspot, and the official means of recording nuisance were more varied still. In some places, people reporting nuisance were to phone the police non-emergency number (0900 8844); in other places they could directly contact their community police officer or municipal surveillance service; in others, they were to phone the local authority. One town (V) had a special drugs reporting line, a joint project of the local authority and the police department, with which both public officials and the general public expressed satisfaction. Nuisance could also be reported via the Internet to either the police or the local authority. In a hotspot in one town (IV-B), it had been unclear for some time where people were to report nuisance, as the area came under the jurisdictions of two different community police teams. The problem had been recently resolved. The process of reporting nuisance could be a time-consuming effort, especially if the general police switchboard had to be contacted. Callers then had to re-explain entire situations with which the community police team was already familiar; that could easily take half an hour.

When nuisance complaints arrived at police departments, they could be recorded in different fashions, even varying for one and the same hotspot. Whether a complaint was recorded as alcohol- or drug-related public nuisance (Enforcement Database code E38) depended on the person recording it and on whether they could readily find an appropriate category in the police recording system. This could result either in underrecording (as when nuisance complaints were recorded under inappropriate codes) or in overrecording (as when non-relevant cases were recorded as nuisance incidents, or when duplicate records of the same incident were made).

Around several of the hotspots, local authorities and police organised meetings for residents and local businesses to encourage them to continue reporting nuisance. In places where no reduction in nuisance levels is evident, public confidence in the effectiveness of police efforts may be jeopardised and people become demotivated to report nuisance. At some hotspots, however, police efforts to curb nuisance had resulted in lower numbers of complaints.

## Conclusions

In the second stage of our study of nuisance and 'tourism' associated with cannabis coffeeshops and soft drugs in the Netherlands, we investigated in more detail the problems with public nuisance in five Dutch 'coffeeshop municipalities'. This in-depth study confirmed, clarified and refined conclusions reached in the first stage of the study regarding the extent of soft drug-related nuisance and its variations. A particularly significant finding was the local specificity of the types and scale of the nuisance, the types of people causing it, and the perceptions of nuisance in local populations. This means that the findings of the in-depth study of the five local authorities cannot automatically be extrapolated to other coffeeshop municipalities in the Netherlands, whose number is now almost one hundred. Some similarities did nonetheless emerge, and officials in other places may well recognise some of the phenomena we highlight.

Soft drug-related nuisance is often concentrated around public squares and thoroughfares adjacent to town centres. Usually one or more cannabis coffeeshops are located there, amongst residential housing, shops, pubs and restaurants.

Nuisance that is directly connected to soft drugs manifests itself in two different forms. First, coffeeshop customers may cause traffic and parking problems. Second, drug runners who hang about near coffeeshops may cause irritation. The latter are present only in towns that ban non-residents of the Netherlands from buying cannabis in coffeeshops (though not in all such towns). Drug runners were reportedly active before the Dutch residency requirement was introduced.

Other forms of nuisance that occur in and around hotspots are only indirectly related to soft drugs, or are entirely unrelated. The fact that some people smoke cannabis on the streets is part of a broader pattern of behaviour that includes loitering, noise, vandalism and hassling passers-by, and which makes people feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Many nuisance complaints pertain to nightlifers, homeless people and loiterers who do not take soft drugs at all. Nor are coffeeshop customers the only motorists who drive recklessly and double-park their cars. And some residents may feel uncomfortable mainly just because certain kinds of people are present in their neighbourhoods.

Behind the recorded law enforcement statistics we reported in the first stage of our study lies a broad palette of nuisance from soft drugs and other causes. It was striking how many local experts remarked that statistics 'don't say everything'. To some extent that is indeed justified, since incidents may be overrecorded or underrecorded, and short-term fluctuations may occur in connection with recent police operations or neighbourhood meetings. However, peaks in nuisance statistics also correspond to genuine peaks in nuisance levels, as in summer months, when people who cause nuisance and people who are bothered by it are more likely to inhabit public spaces. Moreover, it was clear that the town with the highest nuisance statistics also had significantly more problems than the other towns we studied. Public nuisance is a phenomenon that is difficult to translate into concrete figures. Yet even though the level of nuisance incidents recorded by police does not qualify as a precise measure, it does seem adequate as a relative indicator of prevailing levels and trends in soft drug-related nuisance.