

Drugs in Hippo:

The evolution of a drug prevention experiment in an open youth centre

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Introduction

As an inhabitant of Leeuwarden my initial interest was sparked by a newspaper article that was shown on one of the slides during a lecture. The intriguing title read: “50 jaar wiet in Friesland”¹. The article referenced the youth centre Hippopotamus Unlimited (Hippo) and house dealers. I had never heard of Hippo and like many I associated the term house dealer with the illegal trade in drugs.² From the context of the article it became clear that this was very different in the past and that a house dealer was rather a legitimized dealer, a non-commercial precursor to the coffee shop owner.

In the early 1970s Dutch law enforcement had given priority to fighting hard drugs. With the introduction of the Opium Act of 1976 the choice had been made to divide the market into soft drugs and hard drugs.³ This distinct Dutch drug policy has been categorized as both pragmatic and paternalistic.⁴ The Dutch government seemed incapable of foreseeing the commercial growth of coffeeshops⁵ in all major cities. Even though these coffeeshops are highly regulated it is also painfully clear that just regulating sales is not a remedy for the illegal trade in soft drugs.⁶

The initial idea of separating the markets for soft and hard drugs was already adopted on a local level in major cities in the early 1970s mainly to discourage marginalization and criminalization of youths who used cannabis. In some cities youth centres would come up with initiatives to keep hard drugs from their premises in order to minimize the harms inflicted by drug use on their visitors, the environment and society by authorizing house dealers. House dealers working for funded youth centres, showcased the central aim of the national policy and Opium Act of 1976. The house dealer worked in the interest of public health and welfare affirming their legal position and was labelled a paragon for separating the markets and social contexts of hard and soft drugs.⁷

Youth centres that chose a house dealer construction were not only interested in regulating sales but also wanted to get a grip on abuse and use of both soft and hard drugs. This made the house dealer a representative of a harm reduction measure. Citing directly from Buning and Van Brussel the Dutch concept for harm reduction can be defined as: “If a drug user (man or woman) is not capable or willing to give up his drug use, he should be assisted in reducing the harm caused to himself and others.”⁸ It must be noted that the concept of harm reduction was not yet fully developed in 1979 and that within this definition the type of drug could either refer to soft drugs or hard drugs. It is also noteworthy that the term ‘user’ is applied instead of the rather more negative phrasing of ‘addict’ or ‘abuser.’⁹ In the early 1980s, harm reduction emerged as a concept but was not yet defined as such, it was developed due to limited success in primary prevention and drug-free treatment. Harm reduction treatment, introduced in Amsterdam at the Municipal Health Service, adopted a non-judgmental and low-threshold approach, involving general assistance to contain the spread of the drug epidemic.¹⁰

To learn more about drug prevention and assistance policy in Leeuwarden and the role the municipality played in regard to the house dealer experiment carried out in youth centre Hippo between 1979 - 1982 I argue that

The house dealer experiment at Hippopotamus Unlimited was a driving force behind the introduction of harm reduction measures in the municipality of Leeuwarden

In order to underpin this argument, articles written by Marcel de Kort, Gemma Blok, Dirk Korf and Arjan Nuijten (unpublished) will be used to take a more detailed look at the drug policy in the

Netherlands in general. The *Hippopotamus untd drugnota*¹¹ together with the progress reports written in 1981 by Edzer Kramer and Louis de la Combé, will give an insight into the case study of the drug prevention experiment. By way of illustration the case studies of Nuijten and Blok will be used.

The question that also needs to be addressed here is: *How did the local government support Hippo in their drug prevention experiment?* In order to answer this question the archives and catalogues of Historisch Centrum Leeuwarden and Tresoar, library and archive will be consulted.

This essay builds on the unpublished study by Nuijten.¹² In the introduction of his paper Nuijten points out that the Dutch drug policy is not simply a national policy developed by Dutch political parties but rather a construct influenced by local experimentation with regulation, to prevent soft drug users experimenting with hard drugs and maintaining control on the illegal trade in soft drugs. In order to underpin why the drug prevention experiment in Leeuwarden fits into this it is first necessary to understand the background of the Dutch drug policy.

1. Playing by the book, a short history of the Dutch drug policy

The Dutch drug policy is categorized by many scholars as deviating from drug policies in most other countries and has been labelled “pragmatic and normalizing”.¹³ According to Marcel de Kort the unique way of the Dutch drug policy traces back to the use of drugs in the 19th century and is directly tied to the political and social conditions after the Second World War.¹⁴

The opium trade in Asia had ceased to exist after the Second World War and the war of independence of Indonesia (1946-49). The trade in marihuana cigarettes was however on the rise. This was mainly due to the fact that American soldiers of the Allied Forces in West Germany were keen to buy these cigarettes from Dutch traders. Also in the popular music and cultural scene black artists and music were associated with marihuana. Only in 1953 did marihuana become illegal under the Opium Act which led to many severe arrests.¹⁵

In the Netherlands marihuana is largely associated as the symbol of counterculture. De Kort explores this view by stating that the collapse of the pillarized society in the 1960s made Dutch people no longer feel committed to their philosophical and ideological life. This in turn saw the emergence of new political parties which broke with the political culture, thereby giving room to new, young groups to influence social and political life, including a say in an alternative drug policy.¹⁶

The rise in the growing social power of youth culture was mainly visible in the city of Amsterdam.¹⁷ Here hippies calling themselves “Provo’s”¹⁸, eventually won seats in the city council. This trend would follow suit in other cities such as Leeuwarden¹⁹ where, in order to create a youth centre for the ‘alternative’ youth culture, the hippies started their own political party called *Axies* in 1970.²⁰ On a local and a national level there came a divide between liberal (left-wing) and conservative (right-wing) parties which perhaps gave room for a pragmatic approach towards drug legislation.

Dutch drug legislation was closely linked to the Baan and Hulsman reports. Both reports make a clear distinction between soft and hard drugs. They also distinguished between using and trading drugs. The Hulsman report had been the most lenient in this respect and considered cannabis as a ‘healthier’ option where tobacco and other opiates were concerned.²¹ This made it possible for the Minister of Public Health to frame the drug policy as a public health and welfare issue limiting the influence of criminal law and law enforcement.²² Demonstrating in the end that the Opium Act of 1976 tied in with the public health view of 1937 stating that the government has no say in what a person subjects his or her body to.

1.1 Stepping up or doubling down

The integration of both health and regulation in the Opium Act of 1976 would eventually lead to improvised and ad hoc decision making policies on a local level between administrative law and law enforcement in years to come. One of the reasons for this could be that the policy, is according to Van Vliet ²³ based on two concepts and could be interpreted as a double edged sword or interpreted as “a pragmatic compromise between two extreme options: an intensified war on drugs and legalization.”²⁴

The first concept is aimed to keep experimenting youths away from hard drug like heroin, LSD and cocaine. This would lead to the decriminalization and separation from the use and retail of soft drugs like cannabis. According to Van de Bunt this concept can be directly traced back to the Hulsman report which already in 1971 referred to the socially determined ‘stepping-stone effect’ as the stigmatizing effect of criminal law. Meaning that the threat posed by the ‘heroin scene’ was an important reason for the decriminalization of cannabis. The argument being that criminalization of cannabis users lead to further entanglement in deviant subcultures and therefore to more excessive use of drugs.²⁵

The second concept proposed by Van Vliet referred to the normalization of drug problems. This concept centres on integrating or including drug users in society, with the idea to reduce the harms inflicted by drug use on users, and to reduce the harm inflicted on their environment and society.²⁶ According to the Hulsman report cannabis use sometimes lead to a degree of independence and was more easy to overcome when comparing it to tobacco or opiates. The report also indicated that the use of cannabis hardly led to any form of physical or psychological risks.²⁷

Both these two concepts lean towards what can now be described as harm reduction. As stated in the introduction harm reduction can be defined as: “If a drug user (man or woman) is not capable or willing to give up his drug use, he should be assisted in reducing the harm caused to himself and others.”²⁸ Harm reduction can in this context be viewed as the treatment of drug-related problems such as addiction. In a broader sense it can refer to policies, programs and practices that aim to minimize negative health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies and drug laws.²⁹ Supporting the notion that it is unrealistic to try to completely eradicate drugs and addiction means that normalization also imposes limits to what can and cannot be tolerated as a part of establishing clarity with regard to the obligations and rights of drug users as members of organized society.

Drug prevention on its own has been criticized as it focused too much on preventing people from using drugs in the first place. Engelsman reflected on this in 1989 where he contemplated that in the 1970s drug prevention treatment did not take the needs of hard drug users into consideration. Instead the treatment concentrated heavily on abstaining from drug use. Helping users to function within society was not considered a priority. In these addiction clinics the treatment was entirely focused on the patient's willingness to become abstinent. The clinics themselves were mainly outpatient facilities and drug-free. Consequently, users who were unable to ‘kick the habit’ stayed beyond the reach of the health care system. Finally leading to further social isolation and degradation.³⁰ He continued by saying that this philosophy of abstinence was already criticized by the larger municipalities. The reason being that local government had to deal with the consequences. Treating users as rejects unable to benefit from the health care system or being able to afford any form of housing. Users were labelled as ‘addicts’ and were technically put back on the street as hopeless cases, given up by society. Which led to nuisance in some areas, ranging from streets crowded with prostitutes and users and areas frequented by drug dealers.³¹

Blok underpins this view of harsh drug prevention measures by arguing that in the 1970s drug prevention was based on ideas in line with the temperance movement which heralded abstinence. She illustrates this point by directly citing the Dutch National Health Council: “the only treatment for drug addicts that makes any sense is one that principally aims to free the addict from drugs. If one offers the addict shelter and food, this only stimulates him to continue his lifestyle.”³² This ties in with the view that was already given in the Hulsman report which Van de Bunt cited, stating that “those who

consciously choose to endanger their health or life for themselves in the private sphere are not forced in our society to abandon that choice.”³³ However this seemingly liberal view is equally damning the users to be left to their own devices if they do not choose abstinence. As Blok rightly observed the underlying drug prevention treatment holds a paternalistic and conservative view on drug prevention that was once propagated by the temperance movement.³⁴

That this rather cold and harsh drug prevention policy changed for the better was largely to do with the input from Dutch drug users and addicts themselves. Marlatt writes that the Junkiebond³⁵ founded in 1980 served as a trade union for concerned hard-drug users. The main aim was to lessen any further deterioration of the user by for example improving the housing and general situation of the addict. Their philosophy being that drug users themselves know their own problems best.³⁶

1.2 Preaching containment

What has become clear is that the Dutch drug policy overall is aimed on containment rather than eradication. Van Ooyen-Houben has summed up the Dutch drug policy in a model that underpins the theory presented above. The model drawn by Van Ooyen-Houben is based on the outcomes of drug policy carried out between 1995 – 2005. Still it is in essence fairly similar to the Opium Act drawn in 1976. The model summarizes the key aspects of the drug policy where the focus lies on containment with the argument being that interventions by government yields limited results. Once again it highlights that criminalizing users only exacerbates the problem of illegal trade, and the hard drug user is rather a patient than criminal. Law enforcement should concentrate on harm reduction and supply reduction. Coffeeshops function as a barrier to keep criminal organizations and dealers in hard drugs at bay.³⁷

The coffeeshop can very easily be substituted with the house dealer when it comes to the role they represent within harm reduction measures. The house dealer not only needed to regulate the use of soft drugs but also had to prevent soft drug users from experimenting or taking hard drugs.³⁸ This is in large part similar to the role coffeeshops represent today. The only difference lies in the fact that the house dealer was instituted on initiatives taken by local youth centres and even propagated by local authorities in large cities.³⁹ In this scenario Leeuwarden can also be seen as one of these larger cities where the local government and youth centres would join forces. In 1980 Hippo would come to such an agreement.⁴⁰ Hippo had by then become part of a larger committee setting up a drug prevention and assistance policy in Leeuwarden.

2. Hippo's utopia

The inception of the youth centre Hippo can be attributed to Sjoerd Sijbe Cuperus (1949-2015). In 1968, Cuperus, along with Jan ten Brug and teachers Klaas de Wit and Alle Pieron, played a key role in organizing the First FUQ festival at the Westerkerk, where the audience was treated to music, film, theatre, poetry, and even a striptease act. For the organization of FUQ, the Hippopotamus Unltd. foundation was established, which would later operate as youth centre Hippo. Alongside like-minded individuals from Axies Cuperus advocated strongly from the late '60s for founding a youth centre for the 'alternatives'. In 1973, the plan came to fruition with the opening of the youth centre Hippo on the Schoolstraat. Hippo became a breeding ground for cultural expressions, a meeting place for 'long-haired Leeuwarden, Within the centre, Cuperus, was one of the first paid staff members. He was primarily responsible for the artistic side, such as band programming, and organizing workshops. The other main member was Piet van der Wal, member of the political party Axies, who took care of the business side.⁴¹

That drugs and the problems related to drug use had become a major issue in Leeuwarden was already visible in the early 1970s. Out of frustration by the lack of a local policy, a drug committee within Hippo had written the *Hippopotamus unltd drugnota* memo in which they proposed an experiment. This drug prevention experiment focused on appointing two house dealers to sell soft drugs and hiring two social workers to supervise the house dealers.

The issue that there was not a clearly defined drug policy especially regarding preventing drug misuse was the major concern of Hippo. This is reflected in the four research reports written by Louis de la Combé and Edzer Kramer⁴² about the drug policy in Leeuwarden between 1970 and 1980. Both researchers were approached by the Stichting drugsinformatie en drugspreventie Leeuwarden (SDDL)⁴³ to monitor the experiment of house dealership in Hippo in relation to the initiatives taken regarding drug prevention in Leeuwarden. Hippo had created the foundation SDDL to support and execute their memo.⁴⁴ The SDDL could be categorized as an ‘employment foundation’ only founded on technical grounds in order to hire the house dealers, making the SDDL responsible for the purchase and distribution of hemp products. A drug prevention officer would be on Hippo’s payroll and would be a board member of SDDL.⁴⁵



Image: Dikken & Hulsinga. “Jongeren centrum Hippo. Kantoorruimte.” By Foto Dikken & Hulsinga. ID# (FDSCHOOSB022). 1981. HCL beeldbank. <https://historischcentrumleeuwarden.nl/onderzoek/beeld-geluid>

2.1 Small city, big city problems

In 1979 the urgency to receive subsidies from the Ministry of CRM⁴⁶ was high. In a letter to the Ministry, dated 15 October 1979, the municipality was pleading the case to fund the Krisis Informatie Centrum⁴⁷ K.R.I.C. that ran entirely on volunteers.⁴⁸ The letter also states that only the city of Leeuwarden is seen as being responsible as they had a Jongeren Adviesbureau⁴⁹ to cater for youths. The smaller municipalities in north Friesland were not willing to take the lead in this. The Ministry of CRM did not yield and persisted that the current funding was sufficient and did not want to invest any further into an organization like K.R.I.C.⁵⁰

The city council, which at the time was led by alderman for Welfare De Pree for the left wing labour party PvdA, decided it was time to draw up a policy: “Aanzet tot ontwikkeling van een Gemeentelijk drugspreventie- en hulpverleningsbeleid.”⁵¹ This was due to the fact that the council had been alarmed by a study carried out under youths. This study had signalled an increase in alcohol and drug use. This view was confirmed by the local police and youth centres⁵² Biels 28, Krats, ‘t Vliet and Hippo.⁵³

The situation in Leeuwarden in 1979 was rather grim. First of all, it was extremely difficult to obtain reliable and precise data on the extent of alcohol and drug use. Also the motivations on using

drugs were difficult to verify; the reasons usually remained obscure. Reasons that were given for the increase in alcohol and drug use were the extremely high unemployment rate which was 5.5% higher compared to the rest of the Netherlands with youth unemployment rates between 26 – 28%. On top of that was the lack of housing for young people and newlyweds.⁵⁴ With no prospect of a job let alone a roof over your head, it seemed likely that this was indeed one of the causes.

The other problem Leeuwarden faced was the sudden increase of Surinam families.⁵⁵ Here reasons for drug taking seemed more clear cut. The Surinam community felt alienated from their own cultural identity as Blok pointed out, citing Courtwright⁵⁶ about feelings of disorientation and feeling demoralized. As in Amsterdam, heroin was the choice of drug under Surinam youths. However, regarding housing and the unemployment rate the Surinam youth had an even tougher time as they had to compete with the equally large number of unemployed Leeuwarder youths.

What had become increasingly clear to the local council was that the Consultatiebureau voor Alcohol en Drugs⁵⁷ C.A.D. was not capable anymore of offering the right help at the right time. To tackle the problems the municipality was facing especially in regard to welfare of youths, the only way forward was to combine forces and form an alliance between youth centres, youth helpers and the C.A.D.

The C.A.D. was a municipal institution, but was financed by central government. They equally had a large autonomy and could draw up their own internal policy, and hire staff without consulting the city council, frustrating the policy that lay ahead. In answer to a questionnaire from the VNG⁵⁸ from 14 April 1981, asking whether the C.A.D. could play a role in drug counselling, knowing that the municipality had no influence, the Municipality of Leeuwarden answered that:

Given that the municipality is made responsible for building up a coordination structure for the purpose of drug assistance at the local level within which it is responsible for its structure, the municipality's influence on the C.A.D. should be greater than at present. At present the municipality has insufficient possibilities to influence C.A.D. policy.⁵⁹

Later in the same year another letter from the VNG addressed this inconsistency with the Central government. Here the VNG cited an earlier letter from 29 July 1979, in which the Secretary of State for Health and Environmental Hygiene acknowledged that municipalities were primarily responsible for establishing local drug assistance networks and that steps towards this should be left to the municipal authorities. It becomes clear that the ISD⁶⁰, a central governing body, did not assess these plans on general guidelines. The impression of many local governments was that the ISD stepped deeply into municipal responsibility. There was also a lack of clarity among municipalities regarding assessment criteria and the ISD was equally vague on financial funding.⁶¹

2.2 Bills, bills, bills

The main goal of setting up a drug prevention and assistance policy in Leeuwarden was to stimulate social recovery with the prospect of housing, employment and education. In order to achieve a coordinated approach to social recovery related to drug problems, the local government installed a coordination committee, consisting of, among others, the following institutions:

the C.A.D.;

the Leeuwarden Executive Committee (joint youth centres);

the D.G.D. (District Health Service);

the J.A.B. (Youth Advice Bureau);

the K.R.I.C.;

the municipality of Leeuwarden;
the police.⁶²

The institutions were diverse and also held different views when it came to drug prevention. Hippo and also K.R.I.C. argued the case that the requirement of being entirely drug-free would alienate the 'problematic' drug users from further assistance, leaning towards harm reduction measures focusing on being highly accessible when it came to aiding users. This view was categorized as 'low-threshold.' The C.A.D., believed primarily in therapeutic assistance which was considered as a 'high-threshold' point of view. The C.A.D. was willing to hire a prevention officer as a way to make assistance more accessible.⁶³

These two differences in approach were questioned by local politicians. Politicians leaning towards the right were mainly in favour of the C.A.D. approach. De Jong of the conservative Christian party CDA remarked that he had visited Hippo and was very much affronted by the sales in hashish and he focused heavily on the money that was made from this. He would support the bill but he had to be assured that the legalization of soft drugs was not part of this bill.⁶⁴ In equal measure Bijkersma of the right wing liberal party VVD felt nothing for legalization but would be supportive as long as the C.A.D. approach was followed. As a secondary school teacher himself he felt that teachers should have been consulted as part of the committee working on the policy.⁶⁵

Politicians leaning more to the left or in-between were more critical on the approach as a whole. First Van der Werf of the progressive left wing party PAL criticized the view of the CDA stating that Hippo had no ulterior motive selling soft drugs. The motivation was to get a clear picture on the number of users who would otherwise remain invisible as was proposed in their bill. She also recalled the occupation of the C.A.D. organized by youth centres⁶⁶ to protest the shortcoming and short sightedness of the current system.⁶⁷ De Jong of the left wing liberal party D66 wondered why psychiatrists who dealt with addicts had not been involved more directly. She also questioned the feasibility that only one prevention officer would be able to survey the situation, let alone be able to support anyone. Framing the policy as "tinkering on the margins."⁶⁸

What De Jong (D66) questioned was equally on the minds of people in charge of executing the municipal bill. As a part of this execution process Hippo's drug memo had already been greenlit in the same year, mainly focusing on appointing a drug prevention officer, as funding would not be an issue. However the position of the house dealer could not be justified on legal grounds.⁶⁹ This issue had been discussed in a meeting between city council, the chief inspector of the police and the Hippo board members in August 1979, where the mayor then pointed out the paradoxicality of the national drug policy.⁷⁰ A house dealer in a youth centre was more or less tolerated. However, it still remained unclear how to buy or even sell soft drugs in a legal fashion.⁷¹

In order to tackle the appointment of two house dealers the drug memo was redrafted in order to set up a drug prevention program including a purchase and sale system, taking into account boundaries within legislation. The only way possible was to set up a tripartite system between the chief justice, the mayor and the chief of police to monitor the transport of cannabis.⁷² As Kramer recalls: "I believe Hippo was one of the first to consider a tripartite system (...) the purchaser was protected, when he was stopped by police with 1 kilo of hashish an attorney would be called to inform the police it was part of the experiment..."⁷³ The two house dealers who were finally appointed would be supported by a drug prevention officer.

In addition the experiment had to be monitored (field research) and be set within a time-frame. The experiment was given one year after which the results would be evaluated. The field research would be carried out by staff members under direct scientific guidance by master students of SHF.⁷⁴ "We were with the three of us and we had split up the tasks, because, yes it took way more time than we had

foreseen...”.⁷⁵ After the first evaluation report one of the students dropped out. In the end Kramer and De la Combé would write the three final reviewing reports.

Although Hippo’s drug memo was focused primarily on a drug policy within the youth centre, it was tied to the bill the municipality had drafted. Hippo’s drug committee members had shown loyalty and commitment in shaping the municipal bill.⁷⁶ Both the memo and the bill had similar objectives, preventing abuse of soft drugs, preventing the use of hard drugs, regulating the trade in soft drugs and believed strongly in promoting knowledge and information regarding the use of drugs.⁷⁷

The municipal bill does not go into making any statements regarding legalizing soft drugs. The Hippo memo was ambiguous about legalizing soft drugs, stating that:

The use of hemp products (soft drugs) cannot be approved unconditionally. Our view towards hemp products is ambivalent. Like the use of alcohol and cigarettes, we are of the opinion with regard to the use of hemp products that their use is harmful to health. We also believe that their use is so well established that a ban would be completely ineffective.⁷⁸

Even though they had stated earlier in the same memo that: “they hoped their drug policy memo would be a cautious way forward toward legalization of the use of hemp products.”⁷⁹

Comparing the situation to other cities in the Netherlands when it comes to house dealers in youth centres as Nuijten does in his dissertation, the experiment in Leeuwarden can still be singled out as unique. Three things stood out in the case of Leeuwarden. The first was the tripartite system. Second the experiment was scientifically monitored. Thirdly representatives of Hippo youth centre were made committee members responsible for composing a municipal bill on drug prevention. In Nuijten’s examples of Heerlen, Arnhem and Amsterdam, the youth centres functioned as safe havens for soft drug users where the police could turn a blind eye.⁸⁰ This was true for Hippo in the sense of having a signalling function in order to keep track of both soft and hard drug users and to offer guidance and help.

Blok’s example of the case in Enschede, illustrates the antagonistic views between youth center ‘De Kokerjuffer’ versus the municipality Enschede and the chief justice.⁸¹ Here the main difference lies in the fact that Leeuwarden was governed by the left wing labor party PvdA. In Enschede the Christian conservative party CDA dictated the mood in the council meetings. Then there was the issue that geographically Enschede was close to the German border attracting foreign visitors to their youth centre. In the attempt to dampen any German discontent, any leniency towards the Kokerjuffer and house dealer plans was curtailed.⁸²

2.3 The final curtain

The first report focused mainly on the context surrounding the experiment and the role of the other institutions who worked alongside Hippo to fulfil the municipal bill, stipulating the necessity of a clear drug policy, not only focusing on prevention but rather on assistance. The report criticized the drug memo on several aspects. Firstly, the researchers questioned the issue of drug use, finding that alcohol abuse was more persistent in Leeuwarden than the use of drugs (both hard and soft drugs). Secondly, the wording regarding responsible use was deemed vague. Finally, the hypothesis that: “by controlling the market in hemp products they would get a grip on the market in opiates”⁸³ was put up for debate.⁸⁴

What became clear throughout the four reports was that the working relation between all the institutions involved in the municipal bill was already under pressure.⁸⁵ This was mainly due to the difference in approaches and the lack in communication. Unfortunately also within Hippo there was a lack of communication between SDDL and Hippo board members each in turn reimagining the aims of the experiment:

Because staff and administration and others involved do not have a clear picture of the goals to be achieved, or because these goals no longer correspond to those of the drug prevention memo, we see a situation emerging where there is no longer any actual policy-making during implementation.⁸⁶

Also the role of the drug prevention officer working in the youth centre was questioned in this regard, many staff members within Hippo found that this was the task of the C.A.D. and that Hippo should only have a signalling function.⁸⁷

The curtain finally fell for Hippo, filing for bankruptcy in 1982. This was not only due to the internal struggles regarding the drug prevention experiment, but also because of the conflict between board members Sjoerd Cuperus and Piet van der Wal. Cuperus focused predominantly on the activities (concerts) while Van der Wal tried to keep the place running financially. Van der Wal was appointed head of finance around 1979:

There were subsidies but if you wanted something then you had to make money, via the bar of course. Well the staff... staff members of the social academy, they didn't know the difference between debit and credit. Financially we were in a desperate situation. Huge deficits... where the money went, no clue.⁸⁸

The rift between Cuperus and Van der Wal resulted in them both being fired in 1980. Bringing Hippo once again in financial disarray as no one had a clear view of the financial situation: "Hippo was such a complicated conglomeration of all kinds of workgroups and working forms... I suspected that when I'd be gone that whole structure would collapse."⁸⁹

The sudden closing of Hippo frustrated the field research and delayed the researchers to finalize their recommendations. In the accompanying letter for the third report Kramer writes:

The experiment ended prematurely due to the bankruptcy of the youth centre... the results from our research can be useful in the context of the local support systems. Consumers of hemp products now have to rely on illegal traders. Users of hard drugs have now again become less visible as they have no place to go... It is our wish that the remaining organizations take on the tasks and responsibilities regarding the experiment. Hopefully this report will give insight in to how.⁹⁰

In the aftermath of the experiment, the chief justice officer stated that the Hippo experiment had mainly failed claiming that this had resulted in more people coming into contact with hard drugs.⁹¹ This was refuted by both De la Combé and Kramer in an interview discussing the outcome of their reports. The results showed that the house dealer experiment had been successful when looking at how it was set-up and executed but the drug prevention efforts had mainly failed.⁹² Looking back at the initial ideas of Hippo and their contribution to the municipal policy they had in the end shifted the responsibility of the drug prevention efforts to the C.A.D.. During the execution of the experiment they had focused their attention too much on the house dealer and the signalling function:

The closure of the youth centre effectively means a deterioration of assistance options. Hippo had a very mixed group of visitors that included avid users as well as abstainers. With the closure, this group has been split up and, as a result, has also become less accessible to social workers.⁹³

Conclusion

The argument that the house dealer experiment at Hippopotamus Unlimited had been a driving force behind the introduction of harm reduction measures in Leeuwarden holds true in the sense that the drug memo was taken very seriously by city council, as can be underpinned by the meeting held in 1979 which ultimately led to the municipal bill "Aanzet tot ontwikkeling van een Gemeentelijk

drugspreventie- en hulpverleningsbeleid.” The intentions from the *Hippopotamus unltid drugnota* memo but equally from the municipality was to shift the focus more towards harm reduction. The city council strived to do this in their efforts to convince the C.A.D. to hire a drug prevention officer and also pleading with CRM to fund the K.R.I.C..

One of the main issues why the harm reduction efforts failed was the lack of communication between Hippo and also all institutions involved in creating the municipal bill. The local government did not keep a finger on the pulse and perhaps relied too much on the common sense of the Hippo organization. Funding the experiment was deemed adequate perhaps due to the assumption that the profit of sales of hemp products would keep the experiment afloat. With a tighter schedule holding regular meetings between all parties involved in the municipal bill and the memo, the harm reduction efforts could perhaps have been realized sooner and more effectively.

It is very sad on the whole in the face of harm reduction efforts taken in Leeuwarden that by the closing of Hippo the municipality lost track of a large group of users but they also lost a valuable ally to assist in harm reduction efforts.

Notes

1. A 50 years history of grass in Friesland.
2. See for example: Dirk J. Korf, Marije Wouters, Ton Nabben, and P. van Ginkel. *Cannabis zonder coffeeshop*. Criminologisch Instituut Bongers, 2005: 116 Where from the context and description it is clear that 'Gemeente J' is the municipality of Leeuwarden: "The neighbourhood consisting entirely of terraced houses, mainly inhabited by native Frisians, was partly cordoned off by police two years ago."
3. Marcel de Kort. "The Dutch cannabis debate, 1968–1976." *Journal of Drug Issues* 24, no. 3 (1994): 417-427.
4. See also: Gemma Blok, James Kennedy. 'Geef die joint eens door. Het problematische idealisme van het Nederlandse softdrugsbeleid, 1976 – heden' in: *Onbehagen in de polder: Nederland in conflict sinds 1795*, Gemma Blok and James Kennedy (2014): 89-110. In this article the Dutch drug policy is scrutinized through the case of De Kokerjuffer a youth centre in Enschede. It argues that there is no consensus regarding the national cannabis legislation and that the Dutch drug policy can be categorized as both pragmatic and paternalistic.
5. Currently the number of tolerated coffee shops in Leeuwarden is 12. This number is based on the population of Leeuwarden in 2018. See: Leeuwarden. 2018. "Coffeeshopbeleid Leeuwarden." Lokale Wet- En Regelgeving. June 7, 2018. <https://lokaleregelgeving.overheid.nl/CVDR610505/1>.
6. See for example: Dirk J. Korf, Marije Wouters, Ton Nabben, and P. van Ginkel. *Cannabis zonder coffeeshop*. Criminologisch Instituut Bongers, 2005.
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10. Ibid.
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13. See for example: Ed Leuw, 'Initial construction and development of the official Dutch drug policy' in: *Between Prohibition and Legalization: The Dutch Experiment in Drug Policy*, ed. Ed Leuw and I. Haen Marshall (Amsterdam: Kugler Publications, 1994): 23-40.
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15. Ibid., 16.
16. Ibid., 18,19.
17. Eduard Leuw, 'Initial construction and development of the official Dutch drug policy' in: *Between Prohibition and Legalization: The Dutch Experiment in Drug Policy*, ed. Ed Leuw and I. Haen Marshall (Amsterdam: Kugler Publications, 1994): 23-40.

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 22. Eduard Leuw, 'Initial construction and development of the official Dutch drug policy': 33.
 23. Henk Jan van Vliet, "Separation of drug markets and the normalization of drug problems in the Netherlands: An example for other nations?." *Journal of Drug Issues* 20, no. 3 (1990): 463-471.
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43. Foundation for drug information and drug prevention in Leeuwarden.
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55. Numbers had increased in threefold in 1 years' time between 1978 and 1979, HCL. Archive number 1004, inventory number 9060.

56. Blok, Gemma. "Pampering "Needle Freaks" or Caring for Chronic Addicts? Early Debates on Harm Reduction in Amsterdam, 1972–82." *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 22, no. 2 (2008): 248.

57. Consultation bureau for Alcohol and Drugs.

58. Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (Union of Dutch Municipalities).

59. HCL. Archive number 1004 (Secretarie van de gemeente Leeuwarden), inventory number 9060, Stukken betreffende de instelling, subsidiëring en handelswijze van het Drugspreventie- en hulpverleningsproject, 1979-1981.

60. Interdepartmentale Stuurgroep Drugbeleid (Interdepartmental Steering group Drug policy).

61. HCL. Archive number 1004, inventory number 9060.

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71. Hippopotamus. *Drugnota*. Leeuwarden, 1980, 41.

72. Ibid., 14.

73. Kramer, Edzer. (retired lecturer Social Work), in discussion with the author. 23 June 2023. See also: Historisch Leeuwarden, "Langharig Leeuwarden 4, Hippo" Historisch Leeuwarden March 2012, Vimeo, 05:58-06:40 Last modified June 25, 2023. <https://vimeo.com/37894168>

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