



Section I

Synthetic Drug Trafficking in Amsterdam

Introduction

This section contains the results of a study on synthetic drug trafficking in Amsterdam, with special attention given to its mid-level segment. Research was done as part of the project “*Synthetic Drug Trafficking in Three European Cities: Major Trends and the Involvement of Organised Crime*” promoted by Gruppo Abele (Italy) in cooperation with the Transnational Institute (TNI – The Netherlands) and the Institute for Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Actions (IECAH – Spain), with the support of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) based in Italy. The project was co-financed by the European Commission (reference number JAI/B5831/2001/004), begun at the end of 2001 and continued throughout 2002 in three European cities: Amsterdam, Barcelona and Turin. The Amsterdam team was made up of Tom Blickman (coordinator), Dirk J. Korf, Dina Siegel and Damián Zaitch.

Terminology

Interviews with mid-level dealers made up the core of this research. But what is meant by “mid-level dealer”? Mid-level can be anything between dealing wholesale (first-hand) to retail (final transaction). However, this research showed not all dealers limit themselves to one level. Consequently, dealers can be difficult to define though not levels. We categorised the levels as follows:

WHOLESALE: transactions at “first hand” distribution (the first buyer from the producer) which can involve quantities of between 10,000 and 50,000 to over a million pills depending on the customers;

MID-LEVEL: the level of intermediaries who buy from wholesalers and distribute to retailers, involving amounts of between 1,000 and 50,000 pills depending once again on the customers;

RETAIL: direct consumer sales, supplied by intermediates, starting at about 1,000 pills.

Note that the amounts mentioned may be specific to the Netherlands.

Dealers tend to move between levels. First, most dealers have a career in dealing. Mid-level dealers interviewed usually started as retailers and sometimes continued selling at the retail level to relatives, friend and acquaintances. Second, they tend to do business where they can make money. One “mid-level” dealer interviewed was particularly versatile, jumping from one level to another, sometimes working simultaneously at more than one level. At one time or another in his career he acted as an employee of a wholesaler and had direct contact with the producer level; performed as an intermediary and broker between wholesalers and other mid-level dealers and retailers; ran his own phone delivery service employing a courier; and was a retailer himself.

Methods and sources

As agreed with the research teams from Barcelona and Turin, we tried to deploy research methods that could both make the study comparable with the other two and capture the specifics of the Amsterdam case. We combined several research methods and analysed various sources.

Primary sources included interviews with ecstasy dealers and police officers. Due to contacts with trusted informants of the researchers, the team was able to interview five ecstasy dealers. Three of them could be described as mid-level dealers (transactions around 10,000 pills) and one in particular was active at different levels (from direct contact with producers to retail) while another was also involved in transactions at the 50,000 level for export. The other two were more on the high side of the retail level (starting around 1,000 pills). Four were native “white” Dutch and one was Colombian. One of the interviewees was female. Wholesalers could not be reached although one of the dealers interviewed came close as a former employee of a wholesaler and a courier who picked up orders from producers. Other contacts could not be explored due to the limited time available. Through the previous work of the researchers, first hand information on the Amsterdam consumption and retail market was available through informants such as DJs, doormen, bar personnel, staff and patrons of clubs and discos, social workers, and users from the various youth scenes.

The team also interviewed police officials. There were two interviews with three officials from the Synthetic Drug Unit (USD) who also received us at USD headquarters in Helmond (Brabant) and showed us their fine collection of confiscated laboratory equipment as well as some instructional videos and PowerPoint presentations for external and internal education purposes. Furthermore, we interviewed three police officers from the Amsterdam-Amstelland police force. One was a member of the Regional Criminal Investigation Team (*Kernteam*); another was a member of Serious Crime Unit (*Unit ZwaCri*) at the central level; and the last was a criminal investigation detective in the inner-city district (*Recherche Binnenstad*).

The research team also relied on *secondary sources*: surveys and studies on con-

sumption patterns at national and local levels; annual reports of the Synthetic Drug Unit (USD); an extensive press review of all national and many local newspapers (1996-2002, and some important articles from previous years); scientific literature based on police studies and judicial files, as well as grey literature produced by police and social scientists. Furthermore, the team examined prior scientific research based on ethnographic methods, books published by investigative journalists, grey literature and conference presentations by law enforcement officials and social scientists. No judicial files were studied due not only to time restrictions but also the fact that studies based on police and judicial files were (and are) widely available in the Netherlands.

Most scientific research related to drugs in the Netherlands is on drug use and prevalence on the one hand and organised crime and (international) drug trafficking on the other. The Centre for Drug Research (CEDRO)¹ at the University of Amsterdam completed its most recent study of licit and illicit drug use in the Netherlands in 2001. The 2001 study surveyed 18,000 respondents 12 years and over, randomly selected from the Dutch population registry, and showed that drug use in the Netherlands is slowly increasing. The first national survey by CEDRO was conducted in 1997. One of the few research studies on the local urban market and mid-level trafficking in Amsterdam (*Dealers en Dienders*) was conducted by Dirk J. Korf and Hans Verbraeck and published in 1993. It is still the only one of its kind.

In 1995, the parliamentary inquiry of the so-called Van Traa Commission examined methods used by the police in the fight against drug trafficking. The Commission also ordered research on the nature, existence and scope of organised crime in the Netherlands. This was conducted by a team of criminologists, led by professor Cyrille Fijnaut, which produced some valuable new and innovative insights into organised crime (Fijnaut et al., 1996). This research was based on studies of police and judicial files as well as grey literature, produced by police and scientists, and interviews with participants and key observers. Since the parliamentary inquiry, research on organised crime in the Netherlands has changed beyond recognition. In order to monitor trends in organised crime, the government gave permission to continue the research of the so-called Fijnaut-group which is now conducted by the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice. The WODC published two reports on organised crime in the Netherlands; one in 1998 and the other in 2002 (Kleemans et al., 1998; 2002).

¹ Centrum voor Drugsonderzoek (CEDRO).

1 The context: Amsterdam

1.1 General information about the city of Amsterdam

The city of Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands as well as the country's cultural, intellectual and financial centre. The city alone has 735,000 inhabitants,¹ which increases to around 1.3 million when surrounding towns and suburbs are included. Though Amsterdam is rather small when compared to other capitals like London, Paris or Berlin, it still has the same atmosphere and international air. The Netherlands is a densely populated country of towns but with no major metropolitan areas. None of the main cities, such as the government centre of The Hague and the economic hub of Rotterdam, Europe's largest seaport, has more than a million residents. All three of these key national centres are concentrated in the western part of the country no more than an hour apart by train or car. This highly populated area is often referred to as one single entity, the *Randstad*.

Amsterdam was an industrial city up until the 1960s. The population reached its peak of 860,000 inhabitants in 1965. The city's heavy industry and large shipyards disappeared during the 1970s and 1980s, and main economic activities today include: business and financial services (120,000 jobs); trade, transportation and communications (72,000 jobs); and finally tourism (40,000 jobs). Schiphol International Airport is a major hub and key factor in Amsterdam's economy. With 40 million passengers a year, Schiphol ranks fourth in Europe, behind London, Paris, and Frankfurt, and third in freight, handling just over one million tonnes a year. Amsterdam's seaport ranks fifth in Europe and tranships some 60 million tonnes of goods a year. The total work force in Amsterdam is around 400,000, with 150,000 of these from outside the city. After a period of high unemployment (12% in 1992), currently 4% of the working population is out of work with national unemployment at 3%. The working participation is at 66%.

¹ Most information and figures for this section are from the Amsterdam City Council Bureau of Research and Statistics (Bureau Onderzoek & Statistiek: os.webtic.com); the Amsterdam City Council official website (www.amsterdam.nl).

Not only has the city experienced a radical transformation in its economic infrastructure, its socio-cultural character has also changed drastically. Predominantly "white" up until the 1960s, the population has now become multicultural. Due to large-scale redevelopment of older, poorer popular neighbourhoods, many mainly native "white" residents moved to the suburbs and satellite towns. The population had dropped to 680,000 by 1985. At the same time many so-called "guest-workers" from the Mediterranean arrived, as well as immigrants from the former Dutch colony of Surinam and the Caribbean overseas territories. The largest ethnic minority groups are: Surinamese (10%), Moroccan (8%), Turkish (5%) and Antillean (2%). There is also a large group of residents from other industrial countries, mainly Western European (10%), and a diverse group from non-industrial countries (10%).

Today only slightly more than half of the population (53%) is ethnic Dutch (i.e. themselves and both parents born in the Netherlands). The sudden, large influx of immigrants has not – or at least not yet – led to ethnic segregation into ghettos; although certain ethnic groups concentrate in specific, predominantly low-income neighbourhoods, and have built their own infrastructures of shops, meeting places and centres of worship. Unemployment is relatively high among ethnic minorities. Amsterdam hosts two universities and relatively many young adults: over 200,000 residents (28%) are between 20 and 34 years old. Thirty percent of the population lives in a single household. The average annual income in 1999 was 11,000 euros per capita and 20,900 euros per household.

Amsterdam is a major tourist centre in the Netherlands with about 4 million hotel guests per year. In addition, many people from other cities work in Amsterdam and many more come to the city either for the shopping, museums and cultural activities or to enjoy the night life and entertainment industry. Amsterdam has an international reputation as "sin city" because of the liberal Dutch attitude towards drugs and prostitution. The sale of small amounts of cannabis in so-called "coffee-shops" is tolerated and regulated, and law enforcement gives low priority to non-problematic drug use. The city attracts tens of thousands of so-called drug tourists every year who can visit the only marijuana museum in the world. Amsterdam is an international gay centre as well that attracts many national and foreign visitors. Though ecstasy and powder cocaine use tend to be higher in gay pubs as compared to the mainstream, it is still not as high as in the trendier, more fashionable pubs (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001).

1.2 Presence of different markets for different drugs

The presence of different markets is partially due to national and local drug policies, along with the fact that very diverse (social) groups use different substances in distinct fashions. Dutch drug policy is based on harm reduction and a public health approach. The key aims are to separate the markets of hard drugs (heroin, cocaine, etc.) and soft drugs (cannabis) to prevent graduation from soft to hard

drugs (the so-called *stepping stone* or *gateway theory*), avoid criminalising cannabis users and keep them out of the criminal circuit, as well as to increase control by local authorities. This differentiation was formalised by legislation in 1976 which declared possession of hard drugs a major offence and possession of a small quantity, currently a maximum of 5 grams, of cannabis (hashish and/or marijuana) a minor offence for which no legal action is taken. In addition, quantities of up to 0.5 grams of hard drugs are considered for personal use and not prosecuted as well. Generally speaking, cannabis users are left undisturbed while repression of hard-drug use is related to public order nuisances for the local community.²

Ecstasy (MDMA and five of its chemical variants) has been classified as a hard drug since it was scheduled under the Dutch Drug Act (*Opiumwet*) in November 1988. Nevertheless, ecstasy use is treated with the traditional pragmatic approach – i.e. low threshold basic care backed by a wide range of further care and support. Although ecstasy was scheduled as a hard drug, it is listed as a soft drug at the consumption level, i.e. possession for personal use. State supported treatment and prevention organisations provide pill testing facilities in most major towns. In addition, there are also pill testing facilities at some raves and house parties. In December 2001 a parliamentary majority decided against these on the spot facilities, against the express wish of the Health Minister, on the grounds that it promoted ecstasy use. The new conservative government announced it would no longer allow pill testing at public events. In any case, test facilities at house parties had already been diminishing because of logistical problems.

The domestic Amsterdam retail drug market can basically be divided into four categories. In addition, there is also significant synthetic drug production and a large export market.

1.2.1. Coffee shops

Cannabis is mainly sold in so-called coffee shops. *De facto* tolerated status was granted to 321 coffee shops in 1997. Sales of hard drugs (cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, etc.) are prohibited and no soft drugs may be sold to persons under 18 years old. Advertising is banned and no more than 5 grams per person per day can be sold. Coffee shops may not stock more than 500 grams of cannabis and are prohibited from creating a public nuisance (e.g. noise, strong smells, traffic jams, fights, etc.). City council policy is to freeze the number of coffee shops and the total amount of shops is declining. In May 1999 the city had a total of 294 coffee shops. Over one third of all Dutch coffee shops are located in Amsterdam and more than half of these (180) are located in the inner city.³

² Nuisance is the Dutch political and policy term for the effects of undesirable social behaviour affecting other citizens in the public domain, varying from mild inconvenience to severe harassment (Spruit, 1999).

³ There was a total of 805 coffee shops in the Netherlands in 2001. This number had declined from 1,179 over four years (Amsterdam City Council, 2000; Nationale Drugmonitor, 2002).

Although hard drug sales are not allowed, some coffee shops are gateways to procuring them, usually off-premises since shop-owners fear their businesses being closed down. Cannabis is by far the most used drug and use in Amsterdam is far above the national average; three times higher than the national average of “last month” users. In Amsterdam, in 1997, 225,000 people of 12 years-old and up had used it at least once in their life (36.3%), 80,000 were so-called recent users (13.1%), of which 50,000 current “last month” users (8.1%), of which 12,000 use nearly every day (1.9%). In 2001 “last month” use declined to 7.8% (50,000), while “lifetime” use increased to 38.1%. (Abraham et al., 1999 and 2002; Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001 and 2002). Combined with the numbers of drug tourists, this is a significant market.

1.2.2. Smart shops

So-called “Smart Shops” sell all types of drug paraphernalia (hash-pipes, pill-testing kits, etc.) as well as “smart drugs” and professed “non-traditional psychotropics”, such as magic mushrooms which 68% of users buy in Smart Shops (Abraham et al., 2002), along with other legal drugs such as herbal or natural ecstasy products (not containing MDMA) and synthetic ephedrine. Around 20 Smart Shops operate in the inner city. They mainly attract trendy and “alternative” young people as well as curious drug tourists.⁴ Coffee shops, Smart Shops and “Grow Shops” (where cannabis seeds and supplies for cultivation are sold) attract scores of young drug tourists who come to Amsterdam for “drug shopping”. Ownership of Smart Shops, coffee shops and Grow Shops sometimes overlaps.

A significant number of Smart Shop owners and/or managers have criminal records⁵ and there are indications that some are involved in drug trafficking. Nonetheless, a working group investigating the Smart Shop business concluded there was no serious risk of public nuisance, administrative problems or criminality. Because many shops are located in high priced, inner-city real estate, investment of trafficking proceeds and money laundering is suspected, though not documented (Smart Shops, 2001). The municipal administration is concerned that the excessive growth in “low-level” drug-related business activities in the city centre may contribute to the commercial and social deterioration of the area.

The Netherlands is also a major cannabis producer. High purity marijuana was grown and marketed in the Netherlands after being initially improved in California. Some so-called “*nederwiet*” is highly potent in THC, the active psychotropic ingredient. Several Grow Shops specialise in seed improvement and sell their products worldwide over the Internet. Domestically, Grow Shops sell all the necessary equipment, such as high-powered lamps, to set up cannabis cultivation facilities. “Indoor plantations” in city apartments are regularly dismantled in Amsterdam.

⁴ “Head shops” are similar to Smart Shops but mainly only sell drug paraphernalia and not “non-traditional psychotropics”.

⁵ The contents of these criminal records are not clear. Many coffee- and Smart Shop owners have had problems with the police on matters related to the business itself resulting in minor offences.

1.2.3. Street markets

Heroin and crack cocaine are predominantly sold on the “street market” level in the streets or apartments of lower-class neighbourhoods with high unemployment rates. The Zeedijk area near the Red Light district in the inner city has traditionally been, and still is, an important marketplace for heroin and crack cocaine. Other hot spots are found in the *Bijlmermeer*, a high-rise area built in the 1960s in the south-eastern section of Amsterdam where many ethnic minorities are concentrated (particularly Surinamese and Antilleans), as well as the area around the central railway station. In addition, areas like the *Mercatorplein* (in the heart of the old western section), *Geuzenveld* (in the more peripheral new western section) and *Sloterdijk* (around the tolerated street prostitution area) have also traditionally been areas to score low quality heroin and crack cocaine. Street dealers targeting tourists openly offer their merchandise at *Dam* square and along the *Damstraat* in the centre of town. But they hardly ever really sell what they offer.

Amsterdam has between 4,000 and 5,000 hard-drug addicts (so-called poly-drug users who often use both heroin and crack cocaine). Around 2000 of these are of Dutch origin, of which some 1,350 have roots in the former colony of Surinam, the Netherlands Antilles and Morocco. The rest mostly come from other European countries, mainly Germany and Italy. While the total number of hard-drug users is steadily decreasing, their average age is rising; from 26.8 years-old in 1981 to 40 years-old in 2000. During the same period, the total number of users under 22 years of age dropped from 14.4% to 1.6%. Around 1,000 of the city’s hard-drug users are a major nuisance factor for the general public. They are generally homeless, have no income, and live in the inner city and the *Bijlmermeer*. A large number finance their daily habits through theft and drug dealing (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2002; Amsterdam City Council, 2000).

1.2.4. Private setting markets

Ecstasy, cocaine powder, amphetamines and other “dance drugs” are predominantly sold at private addresses. Most of these drugs are acquired from relatives, friends and acquaintances: 78% of ecstasy and 65% of cocaine (Abraham et al., 2002). Cannabis users also buy in private settings (40%) and/or coffee shops (47%) or grow at home (4%). In addition, there are delivery services (order by phone that also include cannabis) and some dealing in clubs and pubs as well as at raves (see Table 2). In 1997, there were 43,000 “lifetime” ecstasy users in Amsterdam (6.9% of the population of 12 years-old and older). Of those, 19,000 (3.1%) were recent users including 7,000 (1.1%) present “last month” users. In 2001, “last month” use stayed at 1.1%, while lifetime use increased to 8.7%.⁶ Last month use and lifetime use of powder cocaine in Amsterdam increased between 1997 and 2002 from resp. 1.0 to 1.2% and 9.4 to 10.0%. (Abraham et al., 1999 and 2002; Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001).

⁶ In 2001, there were 638,000 people twelve years-old and older living in Amsterdam. (Abraham et al., 2002)

1.2.5. Export market and production

In addition to and overlapping these domestic markets there is an export market of drug tourists from abroad. Some of them bring drugs home to finance their journey. The gap between retail prices in Amsterdam and other European and North American cities makes this business a very lucrative one (see Table 1) (Kleemans et al. 2002, 66). Anecdotal information based on interviews with mid-level traffickers, press reports and the studies on Turin and Barcelona, suggests that significant ecstasy trafficking has developed through this channel which has become more and more professional over time.

Tab. 1 - Retail prices MDMA-tablets 2002

Country	Price in Euro
Netherlands ¹	2.5 – 7
USD estimate	4 – 5
Australia	23 – 42
Belgium	5 – 9
Canada	18 – 21
Denmark	7 – 17
France	8 – 16
Germany	4 – 12.5
Israel	12 – 21
Italy ¹	10 – 15
Norway	12.5 – 25
Spain (Barcelona) ¹	5 – 12
Sweden	13.5 – 16.5
United Kingdom ²	8 – 11
United States	28 – 40

Source: USD 2002; country reports ¹ and NCIS, 2002 ²

But the low level export market is not the only one supplied in Amsterdam. Professional international traffickers also come to the city to make deals since it offers several advantages. Amsterdam is well connected to the rest of the world and has an excellent infrastructure of business and financial services including international transport and mail facilities. The Netherlands is also the main distribution point in Europe for legitimate goods. Furthermore, the country is an important centre for the production of synthetic drugs (amphetamines, ecstasy and other MDMA-related products) and Amsterdam is the focal point for criminal expertise and illicit trafficking. The city’s wide variety of non-Dutch residents also facilitates international contacts. (Fijnaut & Bovenkerk, 1996)

1.2.6. Amsterdam as an ecstasy trade centre

USD officials say 70% of their ecstasy investigations nationwide are linked with the

Amsterdam area. International transactions are basically concentrated in the city and production is shifting more and more to the capital and the surrounding region from the southern provinces where it has traditionally been located.⁷ Labs set up in the middle of residential areas create dangerous situations because of the risks of explosion during the chemical process. In June 2002 a lab was discovered near the popular outdoor Ten Kate-market in Amsterdam-West. The alleged organisers were vegetable salesmen in that market. Around 170 kilos of MDMA powder was seized which could have produced 1.7 million pills with a retail value of 1.1 million euros.⁸ Indoor cannabis plantations have been found in the same area on other occasions. Although it is unclear in this case if both enterprises belonged to the same group, the combination of ecstasy labs and indoor cannabis plantations is not uncommon.

Amsterdam is “rather unique in that every type of drug-smuggling and distribution organisation is represented for strategic and logistical purposes. It is an organisational centre, a central brokerage point and a safe haven”, according to a report prepared by the intelligence division of the DEA in June 2000.⁹ “Dutch hashish traffickers are increasingly distributing heroin, cocaine and amphetamine to other countries. This “poly-drug” activity is being encountered more and more frequently.” The DEA is very critical of Dutch government policies, expressing (not always substantiated) scepticism about the effectiveness of its liberal approach. It describes the Netherlands as “perhaps the most important drug trafficking and transiting area in Europe”. Among the 100 criminal groups police estimate are active in drug trafficking in Amsterdam are organisations of Turkish, Colombian, Kurdish, Chinese, Nigerian, Israeli, Moroccan, British and Irish origin.

According to police, Amsterdam is the centre of “organised crime” in the Netherlands. The USD considers the local crime scene (with mainly native Dutch at its top level) one of the world’s biggest ecstasy producers.¹⁰ The USD has discovered an increase in so-called “cocktail” drug transports (USD, 2002: 16),¹¹ indicating the existence of stockpiling by specialised trafficking organisations of several kinds of drugs in the Netherlands for further distribution throughout Europe, mainly to the United Kingdom. The synthetic drug market is a “free market”. Anyone can move in with the right contacts. There is no indication any specific group wishes to dominate the business. The Dutch underworld is predominantly composed of frequently overlapping, business-oriented networks. There is no tradition of territorial control, monopolies or protecting a specific market niche. (Fijnaut et al., 1996; Klerks, 2000; Kleemans et al, 2002).¹²

⁷ Interview with USD officials, September 2002.

⁸ *Xtc-lab in kelder Jan Hanzenstraat*, Het Parool, 1 July 2002; *Kinkerbuurt rook letterlijk onraad*, Het Parool, 2 July 2002.

⁹ *Europe fails to stem rising drug tide*, The Guardian, 29 August 2000.

¹⁰ *Amsterdam criminele hoofdstad*, Het Parool, 30 October 2000; *Amsterdam brandhaard zware criminaliteit*, De Telegraaf, 27 September 2001 (Jaarplan 2001 en 2002, Politie Amsterdam\Amstelland)

¹¹ *Meer druglabs in woonwijken*, NRC Handelsblad, 30 May 2002.

¹² Interview with USD-officials, June 2002.

1.3 Presence of dealers specialised in supplying different drugs

The “street market” for the addict population is largely separate from the retail market for “recreational users”. While most street level dealers belong to specific ethnic minorities, native “white” dealers dominate the recreational retail market. Surinamese dealers took over heroin street dealing at the *Zeedijk* in the 1970s and are still very visible selling crack cocaine in the street. They share the street market with young Antilleans, Moroccans, native Dutch (themselves addicts) and newcomers from Africa and Eastern Europe. Retail of cannabis is mainly concentrated in coffee shops and largely separate from other illicit drug sales. Colombian traffickers are also involved in the local wholesale and recreational retail cocaine markets on the Latino circuit, as well as ecstasy distribution and export (Zaitch, 2002a). The high-level heroin market around the *Mercatorplein* area has been controlled traditionally by Turkish and Kurdish dealers (Bovenkerk & Yesilgöz, 1998).

Ecstasy, speed and cocaine are mainly purchased within networks of friends or acquaintances, often at private addresses, before they go to parties, discos or clubs (see Table 2). Inside such circles of friends someone either has contacts with a mid-level dealer or the mid-level dealer is part of the same circle.¹³ Trust is important. Most small retailers in this setting use themselves (a good indication of the product quality) and are not making a living off it.¹⁴ Ecstasy is a party drug most widely used at house parties and dance events as well as in more standard settings like discos and clubs.

Tab. 2 - Place of acquisition of last year users (18 years and older) in Amsterdam 1997 and 2001

	Relatives, friends and acquaintances		Home dealer		Delivery service		Coffee shop		Club, pub and other places of entertainment		Street dealer		Other		Total answers (underweighted)	
	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001
Ecstasy	98	107	13	11	3	0	2	1	21	14	1	0	6	5	144	138
Amphetamines	25	32	6	3	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	1	1	4	34	44
Cocaine	71	74	21	17	7	7	2	1	18	9	5	2	0	4	124	114

Source: Abraham et al. (1999) and (2001)

Most users in the house, dance and club scenes are different from other categories of users. These “party-people” are usually well integrated into society and most use alcohol. Two-thirds use hash, half of them take ecstasy (“last month”) and 25%

¹³ For an interesting discussion on the nature of “middle” drug markets, see: Pearson and Hobbs (2001: 11).

¹⁴ Field research. See also: *Handel in xtc en amfetaminen vooral in de huiskamer*, Rotterdams Dagblad, 14 January 1997; *Ik weet van wie ik mijn pillen koop*, Rotterdams Dagblad, 19 November 2001.

cocaine (“last month”) (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001: 26-27). Most clubs and discos have strict controls to prevent drug use and dealing nowadays, due to a series of incidents with ecstasy-use and police raids. Doorkeepers, sometimes escorted by private security guards, search visitors before they enter discos and clubs. So-called risk areas like toilets are checked and anyone caught dealing is kicked out. However, most nuisances are caused by excessive alcohol use (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001: 62). People are also searched at dance festivals. Nevertheless, many visitors are able to circumvent these controls. Media reports on these festivals often confirm that no real problem is constituted by bringing drugs into these events.

1.4 Visibility of the synthetic drug market

Ecstasy came to the Netherlands in the 1980s through alternative circles and trend-setting globetrotters who had their first experiences in Goa or Ibiza and the subsequent “summer of love” in the United Kingdom (Adelaars, 1991). The first dealers and producers were of the “aficionado-type”, people who used ecstasy themselves and sold to friends and acquaintances. The first generation of ecstasy users, in the early and mid-1980s, were often “home users”. But by the end of the 1980s, the vast majority were “out users” (taking ecstasy at parties and raves) as became clear in the first Dutch field study of ecstasy users in Amsterdam (Korf, Blanken & Nabben, 1991; Korf & Verbraeck, 1993).¹⁵

The real explosion came in the late summer of 1988 when the first large scale house parties were organised in Amsterdam. Some of the organisers of these house parties kept ecstasy distribution to themselves, either to launder their profits or ensure good quality ecstasy was available. Some of the house-scenes fell apart in those days because of bad quality pills (Korf & Verbraeck, 1993: 174). Amsterdam also became one of the distribution centres for the rest of Europe. Pills were smuggled from Amsterdam to London and Ibiza (which was also supplied from Spain itself). The first small labs in the Netherlands were set up by people from this scene.

When the market expanded, some dealers grew accordingly. They organised themselves and in one way or another made contact with traditional amphetamine cooks in the south of the country. Because of increased police repression at the end of the 1980s, observers at the time reported that “bonafide” ecstasy producers left the market and the original dealers retreated from the open circuit of discotheques and house parties.¹⁶ Real ecstasy was difficult to find between the summer of 1989 and the summer of 1990; but by the end of 1991 the supply of good quality pills was no longer a problem (Korf & Verbraeck 1993, 186). Apparently, more tradi-

tional criminals and amphetamine producers filled the gap in wholesale trafficking and production (Husken & Vuijst, 2002).

That situation has not really changed since then except for a rising “criminal professionalisation” due to increasing police repression (under pressure from complaints abroad) and the extension of the (global) market. The expertise of several Dutch organisations, along with Amsterdam’s position as one of the major international drug trafficking centres, has definitely helped establish them as major players on the international ecstasy market. Other favourable characteristics are the Netherlands’ position as a distribution centre for Europe and the extensive national chemical industry which facilitates the creation of an ecstasy production network. Israeli networks that have gained a prominent position in international trafficking to the US had their own contacts in Amsterdam. One Israeli group even set up its own lab in 1994 near Amsterdam after deciding against Eastern Europe. It was discovered when it exploded (Van Duyne 1995, 89; Husken & Vuijst 2002, 239).¹⁷

A large *national* field study (n=1121) conducted at raves in 1996 revealed 81% of the visitors had taken ecstasy at least once in their lives and 64% had used ecstasy during the rave where they were interviewed (Van de Wijngaart et al., 1997; 1999). Though later surveys among ravers and clubbers in *Amsterdam* reported lower rates, ecstasy still appeared to be a popular drug among these groups. While 50% of clubbers and ravers (n=462) reported lifetime use in 1995, 66% did so in 1998 (n=456). Both years, one fourth reported they had taken ecstasy the night the survey was conducted (Korf et al., 1999). According to a similar survey among young cafe visitors in the Amsterdam inner city in 2000, only 34% had ever used ecstasy and just 2% had done so on the night of the survey (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001). The latter finding confirms that ecstasy is even now still predominantly a “party drug”.

According to two general population surveys in 1997 and 2001, people in *Amsterdam* who had used ecstasy during the past year had in most cases acquired the substances from friends, relatives or acquaintances (see Table 2). A small proportion had got the ecstasy from home dealers and/or at clubs, pubs, raves or other places of entertainment. Buying ecstasy from a street dealer was very rare. A similar picture was seen regarding other “dance drugs” like amphetamines and cocaine. In the 2001 survey there was a slight increase in the main source of retail supply, i.e. friends, relatives and acquaintances. Buying ecstasy from a street dealer was not reported in 2001.

The ecstasy market in Amsterdam appears predominantly a “hidden” one from a qualitative perspective as well. Users buy ecstasy at private addresses and generally not at clubs or raves. Although street dealers in the Amsterdam inner city may

¹⁵ Ecstasy first became popular around 1985-86 after an article in the British magazine *Face*, although there were some who had already taken ecstasy in the first half of the 1980s. Members of esoteric New Age movements and the Baghwan cult were among the first ecstasy adepts.

¹⁷ *Local operators of Dutch drug lab nabbed*, Jerusalem Post, 30 September 1994; *Israëlische bende achter bouw xtc-lab*, Het Parool, 30 September 1994.

offer ecstasy, they generally do not sell real ecstasy but instead, for example, vitamin tablets. This kind of fake drug dealing has a particularly long tradition among street addicts who will offer any drug that is fashionable to tourists but hardly ever sell what they promise.

1.4.1. Supply market patterns

The market is even more hidden at the mid-level intermediate and wholesale supply market levels and large-scale, international trafficking levels. “*We see international traffickers fly in, check in to one of the top luxury hotels, make their deals and then leave,*” says a criminal investigator at the inner city district of the Amsterdam police.¹⁸ Another police officer reported pills are sometimes produced and delivered “on request”. “*This can take place at remarkable speed. Traffickers book a night in the Hilton and order pills in the evening which are subsequently produced and ready to be picked up the next morning after breakfast.*”¹⁹ This pattern is not found exclusively at the wholesale level. The police officer gave one example of a US citizen who tried to buy just 7,000 pills. Though deals are mostly made in the more expensive hotels and restaurants, the “goods” are never present there.

Law enforcement places priority on international trafficking and not the Amsterdam domestic supply market, though these two overlap at the top level. “*Ecstasy is not a problem in Amsterdam,*” according to one Amsterdam police officer. “*Most of it is exported anyway, so... why should we take care of it?*”²⁰ Since exporting ecstasy is much more profitable, most traffickers are involved in smuggling the drugs out. One mid-level dealer (at around the 10,000 level) stated that between 80-90% of wholesale transactions (100,000 pills) are destined for export. Police officers interviewed on ecstasy trafficking, especially officials from criminal investigation divisions, almost always immediately launched into the issue of international trafficking, an indication of the priority of law enforcement activities.

1.5 Changes in dealing locations

Drug dealing locations have been rather stable over the past decade. Changes predominantly involve the street market which is quite mobile, particularly because of law enforcement activities and renovation projects in specific neighbourhoods. The *Zeedijk* was redeveloped at the end of the 1980s in order to restore the area and eliminate excessive street dealing; this after police had previously stepped up repression (Korf & Verbraeck 1993, 43; Fijnaut & Bovenkerk 1996, 67-69). The situa-

tion improved even though a significant number of junkies and dealers never left. Part of the scene moved to the *Bijlmer* where certain sections have become “no go” areas because of street dealing and related violence. And there is still a connection between the *Bijlmer* and *Zeedijk* areas, not in the least because the city’s only underground metro line literally connects these two parts of town.

The Mercatorplein in Amsterdam-West was another problem area in the early 1990s. Principally Turkish dealers had taken over on and around the square, and large quantities of heroin were being dealt in some of the Turkish coffee houses (not to be confused with cannabis coffee shops). The wholesale heroin supply in Amsterdam was, and still is, dominated by the Turkish underworld. Street dealing, quarrels, “rip deals” and finally a few “eliminations” made life unbearable for ordinary citizens (Fijnaut & Bovenkerk 1996, 76-77). Again, a mixture of police action and subsequent urban renovation eventually cleaned up the area. And although intermediate and wholesale heroin dealing still goes on, the nuisance of street dealing has diminished significantly.

Problems have recently reappeared in the *Zeedijk* area. A new, much more aggressive generation has emerged of mainly Surinamese and Antillean addicts. “*In the old days you knew all those jokers. Now there are all kinds of new groups,*” reported one long-time neighbourhood resident. Police activities in the *Bijlmer* and at the Central Station have moved the new groups back to the old area.²¹ These kinds of problems are absent in the recreational market which mainly exists within circles of friends and is much more peaceful and relaxed. Amsterdam night life is constantly changing. People alter their social values, musical preferences and other “fashions”. Though all these changes have their impact on drug use, this apparently has little impact on the locations or methods of drug dealing.

In the beginning, the house scene was concentrated in “free areas”, so-called SLOAPs – Space Left Over After Planning (Fijnaut & Bovenkerk 1996, 11-12; Korf, Nabben & Benschop 2001, 78-79): squats, abandoned cinemas (the *Roxy*) and churches, old shipyards and factory buildings left over when Amsterdam’s seaport facilities were restructured and moved from the eastern to the western part of town (the *Graansilo* at the Westerdoksdijk, *Levantkade*, *Vrieshuis Amerika* at the Oostelijke Handelskade), and so forth. But city planning increasingly caught up with a lot of these areas in the mid-1990s and redeveloped them into residential zones and apartment blocks. There is now such a shortage of these “experimental zones” that some have started to worry their innovative qualities for the city are being lost. There is still some space left at the western part of town, in particular around *Ruigoord*, a centre of hippie culture and “psychonauts” since the late 1960s.

House parties lost their popularity and discos and clubs, as well as mega-dance festivals, took their place. “Dance” has now become a big industry and festivals have developed into commercial mass events. The industry developed out of self-organ-

²¹ *Junks en dealers keren terug op de Zeedijk*, Algemeen Dagblad, 22 October 2002.

¹⁸ Interview with a detective from the Criminal Investigation Department (Bureau Ondersteuning Recherche Binnenstad), September 2002.

¹⁹ Interview with a drug expert on the Rotterdam police force in: *Ondanks tanende rol blijft Nederland “hofleverancier” van xtc*, Rotterdams Dagblad, 8 December 2000.

²⁰ Interview with an officer from the Serious Crime Squad of the Amsterdam Police Department, August 2002.

ised raves at the end of the 1980s. Some of the “free areas” have been turned into commercial “fun factories”. Several commercial companies organise mega dance-parties and run house parties in large former factory buildings for all kinds of lifestyles with all kinds of music (techno, trance, gabber, hardhouse, etc.) (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001; 2002). The dance industry grew from 40,000 attendants at events in 1991 to 800,000 in 2002. Amsterdam is one of its major centres. The business has an annual turnover of 488 million euros and employs 11,000 people.²² Health problems related to drug use have decreased one fourth in the last five years to 0.9% of those attending dance events. Arrests for drug possession are “negligible” at 0.1%. One of the dance event companies, *Q-Dance*, attracts some 125,000 people a year at several festivals. Party organiser *Dance Valley* attracts between 200,000 and 300,000 people a year, and also organises festivals on Ibiza (Spain). There are also some 600 smaller dance events each weekend, including those at discos and clubs.²³ “Party drugs” are an important part of this lifestyle. According to surveys in 1995 and 1998, one fourth of trendy clubbers and ravers in Amsterdam reported they had taken ecstasy the night the survey was conducted (Korf et al., 1999).

The SLOAPs and more standard facilities in the industrial zone around the city also function as areas where ecstasy production facilities are established and are difficult to survey. This is not only the case in Amsterdam but also IJmuiden (on the western coast at the beginning of the canal to the Amsterdam seaport), Haarlem and the Zaanstreek (respectively just west and north of Amsterdam). The city government is worried about the spread of illegal activities in and around the western docklands and recently announced an official clean-up of the area.²⁴ Highly hazardous chemical waste byproducts from the ecstasy labs are also being dumped in that area.

1.6 Changes in consumer preference

Ecstasy use among young people appears to have stabilised. According to *national* school surveys (of young people from 12 to 18 years-old), levels of lifetime ecstasy use increased from 3.3% to 5.6% between 1992 and 1996 but dropped to 3.8% in 1999, similar to levels from the early 1990s. Current use (=last month) was 1.0% in 1992, 2.2% in 1996 and 1.4% in 1999 (De Zwart et al., 2000). Among secondary school students (average age 16.4) in Amsterdam, ecstasy use seems to

²² Turnover includes the production of CDs, magazines and radio stations, but not ecstasy sales. Figures are from an accountants report commissioned by one of the dance event companies. *Dance is een echte industrie geworden*, NRC Handelsblad, 17 January 2003.

²³ *Wereld van de snelle beats is miljoenenindustrie*, de Volkskrant, 21 November 2001; *“Fun” of niet, de party zal doorgaan & Megadansen nog overal mogelijk*, Het Parool, 16 November 2001; *Weinig steun voor verbod dancefeesten*, de Volkskrant, 7 December 2001.

²⁴ *Veel criminaliteit in Amsterdamse haven*, Het Parool, 26 February 2002; *Bezem gaat door havengebied West*, Het Parool, 15 June 2002 (“De criminele risicokaart van het Westelijk Havengebied”, rapport van het hoofdstedelijke Van Traa-team).

have decreased. Lifetime use was 6% and current use 2% in 1999, versus 10% and 3% in 1997 (Korf et al., 1998). Young drug-users in the club-scene are different from those in other categories. They are the experimenters, at times still in school, at times hanging around in coffee shops. They are usually well integrated into society and take more or less soft drugs like alcohol and hash (although some do take hard drugs like ecstasy and cocaine). They show no signs of addiction, only “use” for a short time, and never steal to buy their drugs (Amsterdam City Council, 2000).

Prevalence of ecstasy use in the general population (12 and older) is higher in Amsterdam than the rest of the country (Abraham et al., 1999). Between 1990 and 1997 lifetime ecstasy use among the general population of Amsterdam increased from 1.3% to 6.9%; and current use from 0.1% to 1.1%. In 1997, lifetime use was highest in the 20 to 34 year-old age range, while current use peaked among 20 to 29 year-olds. “White” Amsterdammers (ethnic Dutch and other Western Europeans) showed the highest prevalence rates for ecstasy (Abraham et al., 1998). Although ecstasy is still the most important “dance drug” in Amsterdam, both qualitative and quantitative research in Amsterdam indicate a shift from ecstasy to powder cocaine among trend-setting clubbers and ravers (Nabben & Korf, 1999; Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001).

Over the years, amphetamine (speed) has not been a favourite drug either among clubbers and ravers or “street addicts”. Those who try this drug only rarely become frequent users. Other drugs have gone through short periods of popularity but then lost their appeal. Laughing gas is the clearest example. GHB is a more recent trend and showed a clear increase in 2002. This substance is expected to remain popular over the next few years (Korf et al, 2002). Other drugs have become popular with relatively small groups, somewhat isolated from larger groups of clubbers and ravers. One clear example is ketamin, predominantly taken by so-called “alternative” users, e.g. squatters (Nabben & Korf, 2000a). Psychedelic drugs such as LSD are generally not very popular among larger groups; their use is generally restricted to what have been called “psychonauts”. Magic mushrooms are an exception to some extent. Though relatively many people have tried these, in most cases it has only been once or a few times.

Two general trends can be seen here. First, there has been a clear increase in the consumption of “new” kinds of alcohol, including expensive liquors (i.e. vodka), champagne, cocktails and mixed drinks (i.e. Breezers). Second, combined drug use is very common, of both licit and illicit drugs (i.e. alcohol and cocaine), and various kinds of illicit drugs (i.e. ecstasy and cocaine). (Nabben & Korf, 2000b). According to media reports and field research results, the latest trend is apparently a combination of ecstasy with sexual potency enhancers, like *Viagra*, known as “sextasy” (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2002).²⁵ Police recently discovered a group

²⁵ *Viagra duikt op in drugsircuit*, Rotterdams Dagblad, 24 July 2002; *Miljoenen neppillen Viagra in omloop*, NRC Handelsblad, 27 July 2002; *Nep-Viagra blijkt gewild bij stappers*, Het Parool, 29 July 2002.

that dealt in both substances. This drug mix has been popular on the club-scene in the United Kingdom since 1998. There are reports that kilo quantities of the main ingredient *Sildenafil* are bought in India and China or that pills are stolen at from legal stocks.²⁶ In the US the phenomenon started on the gay scene in Boston and New York. The Public Health Inspector reports there are now some 2 million fake illicit *Viagra* pills in circulation on the party circuit: “*It seems that at certain night spots ecstasy is offered when entering, and Viagra when leaving.*”

1.7 Price trends in ecstasy

Ecstasy has become significantly cheaper over time. Prices depend on setting, quantities and relations between dealer and customer, while at the production level the price and availability of the main precursor PMK (piperonylmethylketone) are also important factors. According to USD officials, 90% of producer investments is in precursors and only 10% in lab hardware. When ecstasy started to become fashionable in Amsterdam in the early nineties, the average price for a pill was about 16–18 euros (35–40 Dutch guilders) within a price range of 9–23 euros (20–50 guilders). The price in Amsterdam was lower (35 guilders) compared with the rest of the Netherlands (40 guilders). There was some kind of tacit agreement not to go below those prices (Korf & Verbraeck, 1993). This price has dropped since the mid-1990s.

Today the average price among clubbers and ravers in Amsterdam stands at 3 euros per tablet (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2002). But field research reports pills were sold for 7 euros per unit to “second-range” customers at this year’s second *Sensation* party in the Arena. This higher price fits within the general finding that pills bought at parties or in clubs are generally more expensive than at private addresses. The USD estimated the average street price in the Netherlands at 4–5 euros in March 2002 (USD, 2002).²⁷

According to the USD, ecstasy prices per tablet on the wholesale and intermediate markets are 0.90 euro (from production tableting off-premises), 1.50 euros (wholesale) and 2.70 euros (intermediate level) (USD 2002, 11; Reijnders, 2002).²⁸ By the time the doses are sold at a rave or night club in the United Kingdom (one of the biggest markets for ecstasy produced in the Netherlands) or the United States, the price could reach as much as 15 euros, resp. 40 euros per tablet (see Table 1). According to the USD, production costs of an MDMA tablet in an operating lab are 0.25 euros (including transport and rental of the premises, but not ini-

tial laboratory start-up costs). However, mid-level dealers contacted during field research report prices are much lower. Production costs probably run between 0.15 and 0.20 euro.²⁹

Informants said the price per pill was also much lower at the wholesale and intermediate levels: 0.35–0.40 euros (for lots of 100,000 pills); 0.50 euros (for 10,000); 0.55–0.60 euros (for 5,000); 0.70–0.75 euros (for 1,000); 1.00 euros (for 500) and 1.50 euros for 100 pills. One less well-connected retailer paid 1.75 euros for 100 and 0.90 euros for 1,000 pills. Setting, quantities and relations between wholesale and intermediate dealers and retailers also shape prices at those levels. In the early 1990s the average price at the 10,000 level was around 4.50 euros (10 Dutch guilders) (Korf & Verbraeck 1993, 183), and according to a dealer one wholesaler paid 2 euros from tablet producers for 70,000 pills in 1999. In ten years time the price at the intermediate, 10,000 pill level had dropped 90%! According to two dealers interviewed, who worked at the 10,000 pill level, the market has become saturated. It has changed from a *seller’s market* into a *buyer’s market*. Supply is overwhelming while demand is slowly dwindling (Korf, Nabben & Benschop, 2001; 2002).³⁰ One mid-level dealer interviewed stated the price was also approaching Dutch market levels in Belgium and Germany.

1.8 Purity trends in ecstasy

Until 1988, when ecstasy was scheduled under the Dutch Drug Act (Opiumwet), the substance was generally pure and thus contained MDMA. Since the early 1990s, ecstasy testing has been available as part of the national *Drugs Information and Monitoring System* (DIMS). Jellinek Prevention is one of the pill-testing locations in Amsterdam. Since 1994, a growing proportion of tested samples has contained MDMA.

Almost all samples currently contain MDMA as their most important active ingredient (see Figure 1). The amount of MDMA, in tablets containing that substance as an active ingredient, first dropped from about 110 mg in 1994 to 60 mg in 1998, and then rose to around 90 mg in 2001 (see figure 2). The main reason for this drop was the large nationwide seizures of the precursor PMK and other chemicals in 1997 (Korf, Nabben & Benschop 2001, 214ff). The amount of amphetamine (sometimes in combination with caffeine) in what was sold as ecstasy increased significantly in the second half of 1997 and early 1998. Later in 1998 the percentage of MDMA in pills increased again. Instead of the expected “pollution”, the ecstasy market has actually become “cleaner”. More than 90% of pills now in fact contain MDMA.

²⁹ Interviews with mid-level dealers, September 2002 .

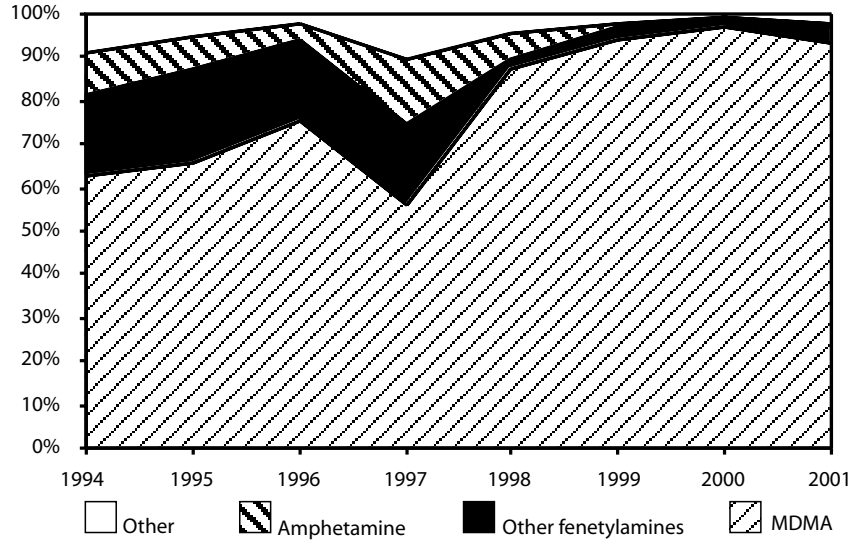
³⁰ According to one observer with contacts in the ecstasy scene in the south of the country and the *Randstad* the “*business is on its beam ends*”. Ecstasy pills now go for 0.45 to 0.90 euros at the wholesale level while they used to sell for 2.25 or 2.75 euros. “*If you can sell them at all, because stocks are everywhere.*” See: *De criminele landkaart verandert*, BN/DeStem, 4 January 2001.

²⁶ *Duizenden Viagra-pillen gestolen bij Azivo*, RTV West, 6 November 2002

²⁷ These USD figures may already be outdated. In 2002, according to information from the lawyer of a local dealer, ecstasy pills were sold for 3.50 euros each at a mega-dancing in Nijmegen. The retailer made 30% on his cost price and sold some 2,000 pills before he was arrested. See: “*Drugsdealer word je eigenlijk vanzelf*”, *De Gelderlander*, 9 November 2002.

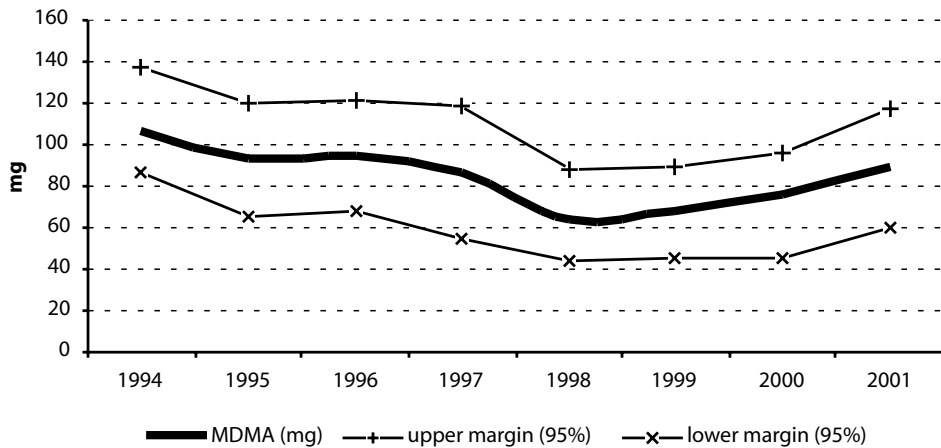
²⁸ Based on quantities of 750,000.

Chart 1 - Most important active substance in tested ecstasy samples at Jellinek Prevention (1994-2001)



Source: Korf, Nabben & Benshop, 2002.

Chart 2 - Average amount of MDMA in tablets with MDMA as most important substance



Source: Korf, Nabben & Benshop, 2002.

One of the mid-level dealers interviewed said he presently had a steady supply of 120 mg pills when buying at the intermediate level. But he also stated pills could be ordered with lower amounts of MDMA, (e.g. 90 mg), and could be available within two or three days at a lower price. The amount of MDMA in ecstasy seems to be a matter of a rather autonomous dynamic between demand and supply. According to the USD, some 775 different logos have been on the market since ecstasy was introduced. The USD registered 121 different ones in 2000. The *Mitsubishi* logo is the most common. Since introduced in April 1998, it has apparently become a worldwide indication of good quality, "made-in-Holland" ecstasy (USD, 2001). Consumers inform each other about pill quality and give ratings over the Internet.³¹ Pill testing seems to result in some consumer control and safety. A kind of self-regulation has occurred in an irregular illicit market. Self-tests are available at both Smart Shops and on-line.

³¹ See for instance: <http://www.pillreports.com/>

2 Supply

2.1 International and national trafficking networks

Most, if not all, law enforcement and international drug control agencies consider the Netherlands the world's major production and trafficking centre for synthetic drugs. According to the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) "80 percent of the world's ecstasy is produced in clandestine laboratories in the Netherlands and, to a lesser extent, Belgium" (DEA, 2001a). The Netherlands is also the main source in Europe for amphetamines, virtually all shipments going to Britain, Germany or Scandinavia. According to the specialised Netherlands law enforcement task force, the Unit Synthetic Drugs (USD), established in 1997 to combat synthetic drug production and trafficking, 85% of MDMA tablets confiscated worldwide and connected to the Netherlands were seized in the United Kingdom, followed by the United States, Germany, the Netherlands itself, Canada and France. (USD 2002).¹

Whether or not the Netherlands is the largest ecstasy producer is difficult to say because of the lack of comparable data and independent scientific research.² Though seizures are considerable and law enforcement activity seems successful against trafficking networks connected to the Netherlands, anything occurring elsewhere is generally unknown. Even in the Netherlands, where the USD has become a centre of expertise and an information clearing house for foreign law enforcement agencies over the past five years, officials still acknowledge they have no real overview of the ecstasy business. According to one official, very little of the

¹ The USD stresses that figures regarding the source of ecstasy pills seized abroad are not "wholly reliable" since not based on a uniform system of observations (USD, 2002).

² The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) – which includes the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) – has been unable to produce reliable statistics on ecstasy-type substances due to incomplete reporting in the Annual Reports Questionnaires (ARQ) on which the statistical work is based. Some governments classify ecstasy-type substances as stimulants, others as hallucinogens (ODCCP, 2000: 172).

ecstasy produced in the Netherlands is seized.³ The public prosecutor coordinating the USD, Martin Witteveen, also admitted he had no idea of the business volume or the identity of the major traffickers (Witteveen, 2001).⁴

Statistics rely on fragmentary information based on seizures and police operations against specific trafficking and production organisations; while the situation in the booming market and potential production areas of South East Asia and Eastern Europe is largely ignored. The dismantling of two major ecstasy laboratories in Indonesia in April 2002 indicates that production centres have been set up elsewhere outside the Netherlands.⁵ An overview of worldwide ecstasy production facilities is impossible to make because no comparable data are available (BKA, 2001). However, increased and improved law enforcement in the Netherlands appears to pay off. More and more labs have been discovered abroad (frequently with links to Dutch groups) (USD, 2002; BKA, 2001).⁶ This may either be due to relocation of facilities because of better law enforcement in the Netherlands or because foreign law enforcement is now taking on the task due to increased media and official attention. According to the USD: "more and more signals indicate the Netherlands can no longer be labelled as the exclusive producer of synthetic drugs." According to the USD and Europol, Belgium, Germany and increasingly Poland are becoming more important production countries (USD, 2002).⁷

According to one police officer, Swedish government figures in 2000 showed only 50% of ecstasy pills there came from the Netherlands, down from 90% a few years before. Poland and Hungary are both growing in pill production.⁸ Similar development had taken place earlier with amphetamine production. Until the early 1990s, the supply of amphetamines in North Western Europe was largely in the hands of Dutch citizens residing in the southern provinces of Brabant and Limburg. After the fall of the Berlin wall and political changes in Eastern Europe, the market started to change and the Poles proved to be skilled competitors. Their share of the market in Germany and Scandinavia rose from less than 10% to between 20% and 26% (Van Duyne, 1996; CDPC, 1999). This pattern may repeat itself in the ecstasy trade. Eastern European groups have the advantage that precursors needed to produce

³ *Xtc-pil duikelt naar 450 cent*, de Volkskrant, 12 April 2002

⁴ *We weten niks over xtc-baronnen*, Algemeen Dagblad, 1 June 2002.

⁵ The first plant was built in 1998 and the second in 1999. The main suspect held both a Dutch passport and an Indonesian identification card. 700 kg of PMK was found. The suspect had imported five tonnes of liquid PMK from China, which could produce 2.5 tonnes MDMA. He confessed to having produced about 1.2 tonnes of MDMA flakes which could then produce between 10 and 11 million ecstasy tablets. See: *Huge Ecstasy Bust*, Associated Press, 9 April 2002; *Police seize 8,400 ecstasy pills*, The Jakarta Post, 9 April 2002; *BBN raids another drug lab in Tangerang*, The Jakarta Post, 11 April 2002; *Biggest Ecstasy Plant Found in Karawachi*, Kompas (Jakarta), 11 April 2002.

⁶ The fact that Dutch citizens appear to be involved in ecstasy production abroad may also have to do with the assistance of the USD in dismantling labs across the border. The USD is of course concentrating its efforts on Dutch groups.

⁷ *Laboratoria xtc gaan weg uit Nederland*, Het Parool, 15 March 2002

⁸ *Ondanks tanende rol blijft Nederland 'hofleverancier' van xtc*, Rotterdams Dagblad, 8 December 2000.

ecstasy are more readily available there while precursor control measures in Western Europe have increased. (BKA, 2001; DEA, 2001a)

Though the Netherlands seems to have lost its earlier leading position and some of its original advantages, overall this will probably only lead to the displacement of labs to other areas across the border and around the world. The global market is most likely still expanding. “*Today, a clever criminal would set up an ecstasy lab in Australia,*” one police officer remarked. Nonetheless, according to USD officials, the easy availability from local criminal groups and low prices of ecstasy in the Netherlands, as well as the presence of experienced trafficking organisations, are no incentive for foreign ecstasy traffickers to set up their own production chains. In other words, common reasoning seems to be: “Why bother taking the risk of setting up a complex production infrastructure when ample supply can be found somewhere else?” (See also appendix Amphetamine-Type Stimulants & Ecstasy)

2.1.1. The origins of ecstasy production and trafficking in the Netherlands

Why Dutch groups have gained such prominence on the global ecstasy market is still very much an open question. Assuming Dutch criminals are no more intelligent or daring than those of any other nationality, a combination of factors has more than likely contributed to this alleged prominent position. This report does not pretend to give a full explanation as to why the Netherlands plays such a leading role, but certain factors should be mentioned. First, there are long term structural factors, such as: (a) the natural geographic position of the Netherlands as a distribution centre for both licit and illicit goods inside Europe and from Europe to the rest of the world; (b) the Netherlands’ longstanding tradition as a trading and entrepreneurial nation; and (c) the presence of an extensive chemical industry, with approximately 2,400 companies nationwide (Ministerie van Justitie, 2001).

Excellent transport connections and the presence of several vital transport hubs along many international trade routes (e.g. Rotterdam harbour and Schiphol airport near Amsterdam) offer international traffickers great possibilities for moving illegal goods (Fijnaut et al., 1996). Rotterdam is by far the biggest seaport in Europe (and an important transit point for chemical products) and Amsterdam ranks fifth. Moreover, yet another major European port lies nearby in Antwerp in the north of Belgium. All three are also, reluctantly, smuggling centres; not only for cocaine from Colombia (Zaitch, 2002a) but also bulk loads of the main precursor for ecstasy, PMK, hidden in large shipments of chemicals from China, which find their way through the extensive port facilities (Kleemans et al., 2002). These facilities are by nature extremely difficult to control since the intensity and concentration of large flows of goods requires rapid processing. In addition, there is a broad commercial logistics sector that redistributes goods overland via a large fleet of trucks.

These so-called “routine socio-economic activities” contributed to the Netherlands’ emergence as an illicit distribution centre for all kinds of drugs (Farrell, 1998) and improved the position of Dutch ecstasy producers in terms of

importing precursors and production equipment.⁹ This is especially true since increased precursor control measures in Western Europe caused a shift in the importation of precursors from European chemical companies to chemical producers in China and Eastern Europe where controls are less intense. Presently, most precursors imported into the Netherlands originate in China and Eastern Europe, while in the past they would have been diverted from legitimate chemical companies in Western Europe. These factors blended very well with the traditional expertise of some criminal groups in processing amphetamines.

The origins of the Dutch ecstasy business lie in the Netherlands’ traditional leading role in producing and trafficking amphetamines. In the 1960s and 1970s local criminal groups in the southern provinces of Limburg and North-Brabant established stable production and trafficking lines to Scandinavia (where amphetamines were very popular), the United Kingdom and Germany. (Korf & Verbraeck, 1993; Van Duyne 1995; Fijnaut, 1996; Houben, 1996; Husken & Vuijst, 2002).¹⁰ Amphetamine production also flourished on the other side of the border in Belgium and the different groups cooperated. According to a Dutch amphetamine lab owner, production in Belgium was even more trouble-free because of police corruption and less control (Korf & Verbraeck 1993, 152). Several factors contributed to the rise of synthetic drug production in the south of the country and Belgium. A thriving traditional bootleg liquor industry and the longstanding experience of black market smuggling over the southern border to evade taxes (before the creation of the European common market) facilitated the entry of local family-based “crime” groups into the amphetamine business on both sides of the Dutch-Belgian border.

When ecstasy came to the Netherlands in the mid-1980s the first dealers and producers were “aficionados”; people who used ecstasy themselves and sold to friends and acquaintances (Adelaars 1991; Korf & Verbraeck, 1993). There were virtually no links to the more traditional underworld. Until 1988 and 1989 most ecstasy tablets in trendsetting Amsterdam were still imported. In 1989, ecstasy in pills and powder came from Spain. Some MDMA was imported from the US in powder and tableted in the Netherlands, and there was also a small supply of powder, capsules and badly fabricated, crumbly pills from small domestic labs that had developed as part of the scene. In the spring of 1989, most ecstasy pills were so-called “Stanleys” manufactured on a large scale by the German chemical company *Imhausen* just before production of ecstasy was prohibited. These pills were industrially produced, and had a constant purity of 110 mg of MDMA. That year, the police raided

⁹ Farrell noted a connection between the low prices for illicit drugs in the Netherlands and the importation of these substances which could be related to the volume of licit international trade. The main principle behind the theory of “routine socio-economic activities” is that crime starts in areas where there are potentially motivated perpetrators and suitable targets while proper surveillance by so-called guardians is lacking. Under these circumstances the routine activities of potential criminals offer opportunities for crime. From this theory one can deduce that the smuggling of illegal goods “tags along” with the trade in legal goods (Van der Heijden, 2001).

¹⁰ *Politie en justitie willen 'gouden handel topcriminelen' hard aanpakken*, Volkskrant, 25 September 1996.

a “stash house” with 900,000 *Imhausen* pills. They apparently did not manage to seize them all since “Stanleys” were sold up until the summer of 1990 (Adelaars, 1991; Korf & Verbraeck, 1993; Van Duyne, 1995)

The market expanded and some retail dealers grew accordingly. One way or another contact was made with the traditional amphetamine cookers in the south. Because of stepped-up police repression at the end of the 1980s (when ecstasy was put on the list of drugs with “unacceptable risks” in the Dutch Opium Act in November 1988), observers at the time stated that “bonafide” ecstasy producers increasingly left the market and some of the initial dealers retreated from the open circuit of discotheques and house-parties. Traditional amphetamine producers increasingly filled the gap.¹¹ An encounter between these two worlds is described in an early research study on the ecstasy market at the beginning of the 1990s. A dealer from Amsterdam recalled his first contact with a group that ran a lab in the south of the country: “*Almost all of them had shotguns with sawed-off barrels. Once, to make a deal I had to go with a guy I didn't know. The one who put me in contact with that guy gave me a gun. 'For security', he said, 'you never know with these chaps'. Once we were in the car the other guy pulled a big gun out of a holster on his leg and put it on the dashboard: 'I guess we don't need this, don't you think?'*” (Korf & Verbraeck 1993, 165ff) The business had lost its innocence.¹²

These southern producers traditionally had ties with large-scale hashish traffickers in the west of the country in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. These groups managed to control a significant segment of the international hash traffic during the 1980s (Fijnaut 1996, 19ff). When ecstasy was prohibited as the market started to expand, some of these groups may have combined their expertise in amphetamine production and their financial resources from hash trafficking profits to replace the original producers who came from the user scene themselves but shied away when the business became tougher (Houben, 1996). They had little to no experience in running a clandestine enterprise, let alone the financial resources to back it up. The southern amphetamine producers did not pioneer ecstasy production but learned quickly when ecstasy appeared to be popular (Husken & Vuyst, 2002). The first professionally manufactured pills from illegal laboratories appeared on the Amsterdam market in the spring of 1990, according to observers at the time, and several different types of pills quickly arrived on the scene. From the summer of 1989 until the summer of 1990, real ecstasy was difficult to find. But by the end of 1991, the supply of good quality pills was no longer a problem (Korf & Verbraeck, 1993).

The infrastructure to produce ecstasy was there alongside the amphetamine producers who had set up production facilities in the 1970s. According to one USD

¹¹ *Drugsspecialisten: XTC-markt is vervuild*, NRC Handelsblad, 16 April 1992

¹² However, producers and dealers had already been very careful in conducting their business even before ecstasy was scheduled on the Opium Act in November 1988 (Korf & Verbraeck, 1993: 188). This was probably because they already foresaw problems since ecstasy had been banned in the US in 1985.

official, this was a rather small sector at the time (Husken & Vuijst, 2002). Law enforcement identified four major professional amphetamine laboratories in the 1980s: three in the south of the Netherlands and one in the western part of the country. The names of those “amphetamine pioneers” return in present day investigations into the ecstasy business. One of the sons of such a pioneer also entered the business. In a report on organised crime in the Netherlands, the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC)¹³ of the Ministry of Justice suggests an explanation for the rise of the ecstasy business in the Netherlands, specifically at its origin in the southern provinces. WODC researchers point to a phenomenon from sociological research on the “social structure of entrepreneurial activity”: i.e. the importance of the existence of other, similar enterprises in the emergence of a new venture. In such an environment, new ventures develop because they have more chances of acquiring the necessary know-how, plus the essential social relations to expand and the basic confidence to start up an enterprise. Personal contacts and geographical proximity are essential (Kleemans et al. 2002, 43).

The ecstasy market was still relatively new and open in the early 1990s. Along with large-scale producers and wholesalers, a multitude of mid-sized and small-scale amateur enterprises operated who were sometimes as dangerous to themselves as their direct environment; incidents such as exploding stills, leaked acid and ammonia emissions resulted in small environmental tragedies and the premature closure of laboratories which looked more like primitive, unhealthy sculleries than professional factories (Van Duyne, 1996). Apparently, ecstasy production proliferated. WODC researchers point to a phenomenon, encountered while researching criminal organisations, which they describe as the “snowball effect”: individuals involved with criminal coalitions eventually become more and more independent from other people (and resources such as money, expertise and contacts) and start up their own venture. When they do so they involve new individuals from their own social environment and the process repeats itself (Kleemans et al. 1998, 55).¹⁴

In February 1992, a major production and trafficking organisation was dismantled. Leaders of this group belonged to the established underworld of Dutch criminal organisations in Amsterdam and Rotterdam that had become major players in national and international hashish trafficking in the 1980s. The group owned labs, imported precursors from Belgium and ran export trafficking lines, mainly to the UK. It even ran a counter-surveillance operation to check on police activities. It had produced millions of pills within its ten months of operation and had an estimated business volume of 135 million euros according to forensic experts. Profits were estimated at 33 million euros but in the end only some 7 million euros were confiscated (Van Duyne, 1995; Fijnaut et al., 1996).¹⁵ One of the key organisers was Belgian physician Danny Leclère, also known as the “ecstasy professor” because he

¹³ Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek en Documentatie Centrum (WODC).

¹⁴ WODC researchers suggest “cell partition” may be an even better term.

¹⁵ *Grote drugsbende bij actie opgerold*, NRC Handelsblad, 15 February 1992; *De strijd tegen de georganiseerde misdaad*, NRC Handelsblad, 21 July 1993.

had apparently revolutionised the production process. He had learned the tricks of the trade from the southern “amphetamine cooks” (Husken & Vuyst, 2002).

Leclère used to organise hashish transports with the established hash entrepreneurs of the 1980s.¹⁶ This was a clear indication the traditional underworld had established itself in the ecstasy market, particularly the export market. Another example shows the extent of production and trafficking at the time and its international dimension. In December 1992, officials at the Frankfurt airport seized 63 boxes containing 11 million tablets of ecstasy with a retail value of about 250 million euros. The shipment from Riga in the Baltic state of Latvia was on its way to the Netherlands. The ring-leader was a Dutch citizen who resided in Belgium. An investigation by Belgian, Dutch, German and Slovak officials uncovered a Dutch-Slovak criminal ring that had bribed the director, deputy director and chief chemist of a Riga state-owned pharmaceutical company to manufacture ecstasy and other synthetic drugs.¹⁷

Paradoxically, when the ecstasy business expanded in the early to mid-1990s, Dutch law enforcement unwillingly helped in the proliferation of ecstasy production. In an attempt to bring down criminal organisations involved in ecstasy production, criminal intelligence officers allowed an undercover agent (a fairly small-time criminal) to infiltrate several organisations. He first learned the tricks of the trade from one of the traditional southern amphetamine cooks. When that man was arrested, the undercover agent taught others how to produce ecstasy, supplied precursors and lab equipment, built labs and high pressure autoclaves and made repairs over a four-year period from 1992-1996 (Husken 2000; Husken & Vuyst, 2002). The whole operation eventually backfired. The controversial infiltration had to be abandoned and some of the targeted ecstasy producers had to be released. (See also chapter 3.2)

According to a police report, by the mid-1990s most producers were in the business for money and no longer the “aficionado type” (Houben, 1996). The bottleneck in the business was and still is the supply of hard-to-get precursors, in particular PMK. In July 1995 the law on “Prevention of Abuse of Chemicals”¹⁸ came into force. The law tightened controls and brought the raw materials used for synthetic drug production under the control of a licensing system. To obtain precursors, traditional amphetamine producers had the advantage of previous experience in obtaining the main precursor for amphetamine, BMK (benzylmethylketone), that is scheduled under the same control mechanism and could be produced by the same chemical manufacturers.

¹⁶ Leclère was known to have been eliminated after he failed to return from the funeral of his grandmother, indicating that organised crime figures were establishing themselves in the ecstasy business. See: *Alleen 'kleine garnalen' worden gepakt*, NRC Handelsblad, 7 January 1993; *Doodgeschoten man in auto blijkt leider XTC-bende*, NRC Handelsblad, 22 May 1993.

¹⁷ *Xtc voor Nederland uit Letse staatsfirma*, Het Parool, 7 January 1993.

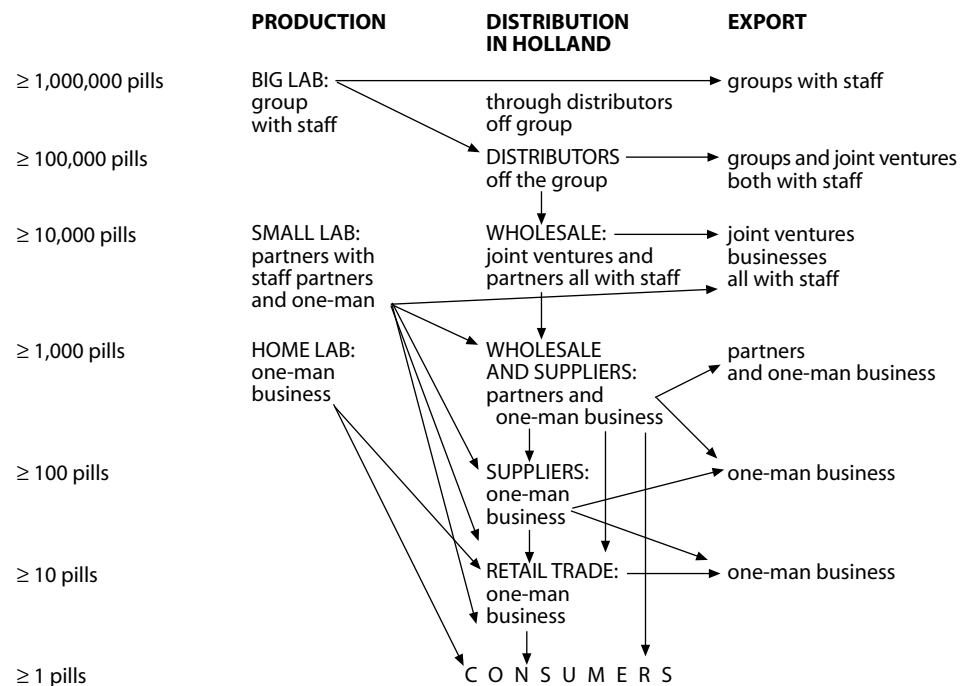
¹⁸ Wet voorkoming misbruik chemicaliën (WVMC). Even before the new law, precursor controls in the Netherlands were stricter than abroad because of the country's history as an amphetamine producer. Chemical companies required end-user certificates and would inform police if they were confronted with “dubious transactions” (Korf & Verbraeck 1993, 175).

Ecstasy producers either needed contacts with the chemical industry or with companies abroad where controls were less strict or with the black market. According to one mid-level dealer, the result of this was that small independent producers were even more marginalised and the business became monopolised by big ecstasy producers, with ties to “organised crime”, who were able to procure the necessary chemicals.¹⁹ Another reason for the apparent dominance of large-scale producers may be that they are simply more competitive. They lead the market because they are able to produce higher quantities at a cheaper price. Small labs have no substantial part of the market because they simply can not produce in bulk.

2.2 Production, trafficking and smuggling methods/routes

Researchers Korf and Verbraeck outlined the structure of the ecstasy business based on data collected on the Amsterdam ecstasy market in the early 1990s (see Chart 3).

Chart 3 - Structure of ecstasy-trade in Amsterdam in early 1990s



Source: Korf & Verbraeck (1993)

¹⁹ Interview with mid-level dealer, September 2002.

Since then the ecstasy market has expanded both nationally and internationally and established criminal groups have become more entrenched. This has resulted in the following dynamics: (a) a scaling-up of the business in production and trafficking; (b) professionalisation and concentration of production and trafficking; and (c) extension of the range of activity. Compared to the early 1990s, production has shifted from home labs to bigger professional labs; trafficking has probably shifted more to export with larger amounts of tablets; and the amounts involved in wholesale and mid-level dealing have increased. The market seems to be saturated. The original “aficionados” and “hobbyists” have been replaced by criminal organisations in business for the money. On the whole, the impression is that the original “alternative” characteristics of the ecstasy industry have been replaced by a more commercial, businesslike attitude. Two mid-level dealers who were shown the outline found it valid even today.

According to informants, characteristics of ecstasy trafficking groups differ little from other drug organisations: small and network-like, they are often run by one to three people who subcontract some tasks to “outsiders”, professionals or occasional helpers. On the production level, this includes professional chemists or technicians able to set up and run labs, people involved in the trade of legal or illegal precursors (sometimes themselves linked to the pharmaceutical/chemical industry or business), and people who can provide (either knowingly or unknowingly) a room or flat where the lab can be set up. Internal couriers and helpers are also hired to move money and pills.

There are three types of business models: joint ventures with staff (employees) and subcontracted personnel; partnerships with no staff, and one-man enterprises. One of the mid-level dealers interviewed formed a joint venture with three others and employed an outsider to stash stocks and trade proceeds. They dealt in cannabis, powder cocaine and ecstasy, and were considering moving into the illicit *Viagra* market. All partners involved had their own contacts but could at times introduce someone else. The advantage of the joint venture is that they could purchase “*high quality at a good price*”. Proceeds were pooled to eventually be invested in setting up a legal business. The dealer interviewed moved 10,000 pills per month and was involved with moving 50,000 abroad. His 20 odd clients purchased between 500 and 5,000 pill lots and he also sold 100 pill lots to a retailer as a personal favour. He has a good relationship with larger wholesalers and his contacts are sustained based on mutual respect and trust. He likes to work with people he knows he can trust even though that may mean a somewhat higher price.

From conversations with representatives of different law enforcement institutions in Amsterdam and some mid-level dealers, it became clear that Amsterdam occupies a very special role in the ecstasy business. First of all, both national and international contacts are made there. Several cafes and luxury hotels in Amsterdam serve as meeting places. Second, Amsterdam is the “logistical centre” for the ecstasy business and so the necessary links and methods of setting up (new) trafficking lines are easy to find through the existing contacts in the overall drug trade. According to a report

prepared by the intelligence division of the DEA in June 2000, Amsterdam is “*rather unique in that every type of drug-smuggling and distribution organisation is represented for strategic and logistical purposes. It is an organisational centre, a central brokerage point and a safe haven*”.²⁰ Among the 100 criminal groups (police estimates) active in drug trafficking in Amsterdam are organisations of Turkish, Colombian, Kurdish, Chinese, Nigerian, Israeli, Moroccan, British and Irish origin.

USD officials say 70% of their ecstasy investigations nationwide are linked to the Amsterdam area. International transactions are basically concentrated in the city and production is shifting more and more from the southern provinces, where it has been traditionally located, to the capital and surrounding region.²¹ According to police, Amsterdam is the centre of “organised crime” in the Netherlands. The USD considers the local crime scene (mainly native Dutch at its top levels) one of the world’s main ecstasy producers.²² The USD discovered an increase in so-called “cocktail” drug transports (USD, 2002), indicating the existence of specialised trafficking organisations stockpiling several kinds of drugs in the Netherlands for further distribution throughout Europe, mainly the United Kingdom.

The synthetic drug market is a “free market”, according to USD officials. Anyone can enter it with the right contacts. There is no indication any specific group wishes to dominate the business. The Dutch underworld is predominantly composed of business-oriented networks that frequently overlap. There is no tradition of territorial control or monopolisation and protection of a specific market niche (Fijnaut et al., 1996; Klerks, 2000; Kleemans et al, 1998, 2002). Organised crime in the Netherlands is characterised by cross-border movements of people, money and goods; so-called transit criminality (Kleemans et al., 2002). The stereotype of a hierarchical, pyramidal criminal organisation does not exist in the Netherlands. The traditional perception of organised crime had already been questioned based on field research into the local drug market in Amsterdam in the early 1990s (Korf & Verbraeck, 1993). Cannabis and cocaine importing organisations and laboratories for amphetamines and ecstasy were not smooth running, long-term operations. Each import and production operation was a project in itself which could function for some time (even years) within a set framework by the same people, in general they were temporary joint ventures. Few organisations could ever match the pyramid-type model of organised crime.

Instead, a much more diverse picture emerged; one of extended fluid networks containing a multitude of individuals, often formed into “cliques” or groups, either connected by means of loose or close relationships or with the capacity to establish those kinds of relationships rather easily if necessary through “friend of friends”. Within those networks are “nodes” and persons with more power than others.

²⁰ *Europe fails to stem rising drug tide*, The Guardian, 29 August 2000.

²¹ Interview with USD officials, September 2002.

²² *Amsterdam criminele hoofdstad*, Het Parool, 30 October 2000; *Amsterdam brandhaard zware criminaliteit*, De Telegraaf, 27 September 2001 (Jaarplan 2001 en 2002, Politie Amsterdam/Amstelland)

Many of these relationships are not very stable. Specific interests of groups and personalities of bosses can clash and lead to dissolving the cooperation or even violent conflicts. Nonetheless, new “action-sets” will arise to “do the job” by means of shared investments, lending out logistics and/or employees or forming longer-term coalitions (Fijnaut et al. 1996, 55-56). This pattern of organised crime activities and the existence of a broad set of beneficial “routine socio-economic activities” in the legitimate economy explains the emergence of a very dynamic and flexible illicit industry.

2.2.1. Production

Well-organised criminal groups are involved in the production and distribution of ecstasy. The production and distribution chain is sometimes divided according to certain stages in the process (acquisition of precursors, production of ecstasy powder, tableting, distribution, disposal of chemical waste by-products). Some of the groups involved in a particular stage do not necessarily know other parts of the organisation (Fijnaut, 1996; Houben, 1996; Kleemans et al. 1998). Nonetheless, there are still also small groups of two or three people who manage the whole production process and initial distribution stage. According to one mid-level dealer, large producers with ties to organised crime presently have a monopoly, providing 90% of the Dutch domestic market and exporting some 80-90% of their production. Original small producers who manufactured small amounts for their own networks have been pushed out of the market, mainly because intensified precursor controls made it more difficult to get hold of the raw materials. One informant stated that in the old days a few “hobbyists” might produce a few kilos of MDMA that were tableted in a few runs. Nowadays big producers deliver pills from 100 kilos of MDMA in just one run.

One case description shows the level of cooperation and exchange at the production and “first hand” distribution (i.e. first buyer from producer) levels. The case involved a group operating in the southern part of the Netherlands. Five individuals in this group were involved in synthetic drug production. They closely collaborated with about six other Dutch criminal groups also involved in producing and trafficking synthetic drugs, but who were implicated in other criminal activities as well. All the individuals involved had criminal records for drug offences, among other things. Cooperation between the groups included supplying precursors, means of production and end products as well as exchanging personnel and expertise. Various chemists worked for several groups. A chemistry professor taught one group to produce ecstasy while a lawyer provided another group with the formula for ecstasy he had found in court files (Houben, 1996).

Some of the groups and individuals were large-scale suppliers of precursors and production equipment bought at ordinary chemical businesses, second-hand markets or through front stores in Eastern Europe. Deliveries were made from the southern provinces of Limburg and Brabant, and the Amsterdam area. Some groups were also involved in setting up laboratories in Eastern Europe. One of the groups used a mobile lab in a steel container on a truck. Another group operated a very sophisti-

cated lab built partly underground. Amphetamines were smuggled to Scandinavia, the UK, and Amsterdam markets. Ecstasy was mainly distributed to Amsterdam and the UK, but also Italy and Spain. When one group had a shortage, they bought from another, and batches of amphetamine were exchanged for ecstasy.

USD figures from the last four years show an average of around 35 synthetic drug installations dismantled every year (see Table 3). These installations range from large-scale professional laboratories to smaller labs. Many of the facilities are only used for a certain stage in the production chain such as tableting. In 2001, three installations (two labs with tableting facilities and one factory with only a tableting machine) were discovered in the Amsterdam area. Four more installations were dismantled in the Haarlem-IJmuiden area west of Amsterdam and the Zaanstreek area just north. That year, 20% of the drug installations dismantled nationwide were based in the greater Amsterdam region, while 13 installations (37%) were discovered in the southern provinces of Brabant and Limburg (USD, 2002).

Tab. 3 - Synthetic drug installations dismantled in the Netherlands

	2001	2000	1999	1998
Amphetamine	10	0	9	10
MDMA Related	15	27	22	14
Tableting	10	10	10	14
Total Sites	35	37	36	35

Source: USD 1999 – 2002

The largest ecstasy laboratory discovered in the past few years was in an industrial zone in the south of the Netherlands in October 2000. It had been active at least a year and a half but had not operated continuously. At times the lab would produce for several days in a row and then at others would remain idle for several months. Forensic experts estimated it capable of producing about 1,100 kilos of ecstasy powder, from which 127 million pills could be made (with a retail value of about 865 million euros). The lab was discovered by accident, after neighbours became suspicious because of the bad smell.²³ One favourite location for ecstasy labs is near pig stalls in the countryside to camouflage the heavy odour. Workers in these labs are described by USD officials as untrained and not very intelligent, willing to work for a few hundred euros per day, sometimes without realising the risks and health damage they face. Production may go on day and night for a week.²⁴

Laboratories vary from simple kitchen-types to highly professional ones with ultra-modern equipment. Investment in production usually depends on the equipment

²³ Details presented in interview with USD officials, September 2002. See also: *Maasbrachts xtc-lab goed voor 1,9 miljard*, De Limburger, 13 January 2001; *Maasbrachtse xtc was waarschijnlijk bestemd voor export*, De Limburger, 13 January 2001

²⁴ *Werk in xtc-handel ondermijnt gezondheid*, De Limburger, 9 June 2000.

but in most cases 10% is invested in the laboratory and 90% in PMK. The amount of PMK arriving in Western Europe from China and Eastern Europe is roughly estimated at between 100 and 500 tonnes though in fact data is imprecise.²⁵ Actual confiscations in 2001 included 10,961 litres of PMK, enough for 142 million MDMA tablets, and 14,328 litres of BMK, potentially 489 million amphetamine tablets.²⁶ Those amounts were absolute minimums. Confiscations also included mixtures of chemicals with unknown amounts of PMK or BMK (USD, 2002).

The USD also monitors the dumping locations of chemical waste byproducts from ecstasy production. These figures indicate the presence of production sites and the intensity of production. Out of 127 dumps in 2001, 19 (15%) were in the Amsterdam area and 69 (54%) in Brabant and Limburg. Various groups use different methods to dispose of this chemical waste. Frequently vans are stolen, filled with jerry cans of hazardous waste and set fire (with subsequent explosions) in deserted areas. Other methods involve injecting the hazardous waste into the soil and leaking it out of moving vans or boats. In any case, this unregulated chemical waste dumping causes serious environmental pollution. Chemical waste disposal poses a problem for production groups since it increases the risk of detection. According to the USD, production methods have shifted to chemical procedures with less chemical by-products and the use of “solvent cleaners” to recover solvents used during production (USD, 2001; 2002).

2.2.2 Trafficking methods and routes

While most ecstasy production takes place outside the inner city, pills arrive in Amsterdam for wholesale and retail. For those already somewhat familiar with the drug business, it is a simple matter to find the initial contacts needed to set up a trafficking line. According to police officers, and one knowledgeable mid-level dealer, most traffickers are involved in smuggling ecstasy out of the Netherlands since export is much more profitable and the Amsterdam market itself is saturated. Because of the large number of different nationalities in the city, foreign export organisations have rather easy access to suppliers. Pills need not even be physically available when conducting business. During an investigation into an Israeli trafficking network, the main organiser acted as a broker arranging supply for different trafficking operations and an intermediate between Dutch producers and clients based abroad (in the US, Canada and Australia). He basically called around the world with his six or seven GSM phones and non-public phone cells. He likely never even saw the ecstasy pills.

Despite the importance of Rotterdam and Amsterdam ports for importing precur-

sors, and cocaine and cannabis import/export to and from the Netherlands, ecstasy export seems to take place overland (to Europe) and by air to more distant destinations. Ships, vessels and harbours seem to be marginal for the ecstasy business. Due to the small volumes of large shipments of pills, most are smuggled by human couriers (50% of all intercepted ecstasy tablets in 2000 (USD, 2001)) via regular commercial airlines (34% of couriers in 2000) or by parcel post services (13% of all intercepted ecstasy tablets in 2000). Airfreight as well as maritime containers are used for larger shipments of tablets. Again, the Netherlands offers all these facilities for conducting business. Schiphol airport near Amsterdam ranks fourth in Europe behind London, Paris, and Frankfurt. Recently, however, due to increased checks in the United States and Canada on flights from Amsterdam, couriers are now first sent via nearby Brussels, Paris or even London and Madrid on flights to North America.

The network of the Israeli broker mentioned earlier shows the wide range of trafficking methods and smuggling routes. He and his partner in Amsterdam were intermediates for at least six groups running trafficking lines to the US. One line used maritime containers with 500,000 to 2 million pills approximately every month. The containers arrived in Montreal (Canada) via Belgium, France and Germany. From there couriers redistributed it in amounts of 50,000 to 100,000 units over the border to Manhattan and Brooklyn in the New York area. The other five lines used couriers with an average of 30,000 to 50,000 pills on regular airline flights to various destinations (Los Angeles, New York, Newark, Miami, Houston and Toronto). One line had a base in Paris where couriers were put up in hotels and provided false-bottomed suitcases packed with ecstasy for flights to the US.

Smuggling methods with couriers are various and sometimes very original. One case involved young orthodox Hasidic Jews recruited on the belief that their conservative looks –traditional black hats, dark suits and long side locks – would deflect the attentions of customs inspectors at Kennedy Airport in New York. Other cases involved Christian nuns, pregnant mothers, stock exchange traders and others caught with ecstasy pills in their luggage or on their body. The age of couriers ranges from teenagers to the very old. In one case couriers were taken to luxury shops to buy “proper” clothes before they were sent off. Thousands of dollars were invested in dressing them in such a way they would not “look suspicious” when passing US customs. In some cases, “decoys” were paid as much as US\$ 2,500 to go with couriers on the same flight. These “decoys” were dressed so as to attract attention from customs, in an effort to allow real ecstasy couriers to pass through undetected. In other cases children, sometimes as young as four or five years old, were brought along on smuggling trips (Husken & Vuijst, 2002).²⁷

Most internal smuggling in the Netherlands takes place by road (cars, vans, trucks); the safest (and quickest) way of moving illegal drugs within the small country. This type of internal transportation is not considered particularly risky or problematic

²⁷ US Customs Service Operation Dismantles International Ecstasy Smuggling Organization, US Customs Press Release, 14 June 2000.

²⁵ Interview with USD-officials, September 2002. See also: *‘Er wordt veel gerommeld met XTC’*, Volkskrant, 30 April 1997; *Werk in xtc-handel ondermijnt gezondheid*, De Limburger, 9 June 2000.

²⁶ BMK seizures were exceptionally high in 2001 as was the increase in dismantled amphetamine labs. There were no BMK seizures in the Netherlands in 2000 though 6,685 litres of PMK were seized there along with 14,816 litres in Belgium linked to the Netherlands (USD, 2002).

by wholesale distributors. Informants say Amsterdam is a very good place to buy and sell ecstasy, not only because the city attracts many foreign customers but also because their activities may go rather unnoticed. Informants repeatedly argued that export to Europe is mainly performed by the large number of foreigners who come to Amsterdam (as well as other cities) to buy large or small quantities from producers or distributors and are not disturbed by border controls in the European Union. However, large seizures in other European countries (especially the UK) involving Dutch trucks and drivers indicate Dutch networks are heavily involved at this stage of the market, maybe in direct contact with producers. As is the case with cocaine, the border with Belgium is bi-directional. Dutch ecstasy crosses to Belgium and France while ecstasy produced in Belgian labs (some in the hands of Dutch traffickers) is sometimes further commercialised in the Netherlands.

Tab. 4 - Ecstasy seizures related to the Netherlands

Year	In the Netherlands		Abroad		Total	Percentage
	Pills	Powder	Pills	Powder	Pills	Abroad
	1998	1,100,000	54 kg	2,400,000	/	3,500,000
1999	3,600,000	405 kg	9,700,000	/	13,300,000	73 %
2000	5,500,000	632 kg	16,200,000	9 kg	21,700,000	75 %
2001	3,605,476	113 kg	22,062,190	16,5 kg	25,667,666	86 %

Remarks: Only seizures above 500 pills or 0.5 kg are taken into account. The USD stresses that the figures about the source of seized ecstasy pills abroad are not 'wholly reliable'. They are not based on a uniform system of observations. More countries have reported to the USD over the years [USD, 2002].

Year	NUMBER OF SEIZURES				
	Home	Abroad	Total	Percentage abroad	Number of countries
1998	124	233	357	65 %	36
1999	154	274	428	64 %	36
2000	125	453	578	78 %	35
2001	136	542	678	80 %	34

TOP 6 IN COUNTRY SEIZURES RELATED TO THE NETHERLANDS IN 2001

Country	Amt. seizures	Amount pills
United Kingdom	43	6,068,249
Germany	119	4,344,989
United States	122	3,994,954
Netherlands	105	3,605,476
Canada	25	2,682,122
France	59	1,286,415
Total	473	21,982,195
Spain	13	702,307
Italy	6	177,156

Note: top 6 is 86% of total pills worldwide related to the Netherlands

TOP 6 SEIZURES DESTINATION COUNTRY RELATED TO THE NETHERLANDS IN 2001

Country	Amt. seizures	Amount pills
United States	188	5,970,364
United Kingdom	45	5,843,693
Canada	30	2,912,736
Australia	16	2,888,852
Spain	41	1,222,395
Germany	66	1,095,471
Total	386	19,933,511

Note: 78 % of total pills worldwide related to the Netherlands

Source: USD 2000, 2001, 2002

Export outside Europe takes place in different forms and along different routes. First, some exporters send quantities of around 50,000 pills with couriers to the US via regular commercial airlines. These flights, especially to Kennedy Airport (New York), Newark (New Jersey) and Miami, are not direct but have stopovers in other European airports. Informants mention Spanish, German and British airports as frequent transit points to the US. Other more distant destinations such as Indonesia, Australia or Latin America seem also to be reached quicker by air than by sea. In one operation reported in our interviews, two Colombians sent a large amount of pills from the Netherlands to Spain. The shipment was received there by two other Colombians, working independently, and then sent on to the US.

A recent investigation into Dutch couriers imprisoned abroad (Germany and the United States) revealed different smuggling patterns between traffic within the European Union and non-EU, cross-border trafficking (Van de Bunt et al., 2002). While the couriers arrested in the US were predominantly working for and recruited by others, including criminal organisations, those in Germany were mainly independents working on their own initiative. Those arrested in the US were typical couriers; those in Germany are better described as small-time smugglers. Couriers were arrested at airports in the US while in Germany they were apprehended on motorways and in train stations. The absence of border controls in the EU facilitates smuggling by independents willing to take the chance because of price differences in Europe. Those arrested in Germany sometimes simply carried the ecstasy on the back seat of their car while those smuggling to the US must use specially prepared suitcases or other ingenious methods to pass customs undetected. Both couriers and smugglers share a common motive: money. As with cocaine, couriers also sometimes swallow ecstasy; one courier on his way to the US was detected at Schiphol with 70 balls of 20 pills each.²⁸

In 2001 the USD registered 678 confiscations of synthetic drugs: 20 percent (136) took place in the Netherlands and 80 percent (542) abroad (in 34 countries) with a demonstrable relationship to the Netherlands. The figures in Table 4 give an overview of seizures related to the Netherlands. However, it should be noted that USD officials acknowledge they see only a small part of what is actually going on.

2.3 Presence of more established criminal groups

According to law enforcement officials involved in setting up the USD, some ten "top" criminals financed the production of synthetic drugs in the Netherlands in 1996. These were the same people who invested in the production and trafficking of Dutch marihuana, so-called "nederwiet", and hashish. They put up the money (sometimes hundreds of thousand of euros) to set up laboratories and collect millions in profits. These top levels sometimes worked together, pooling their resources, trafficking lines and contacts. Other financiers were located in Spain and

²⁸ Scanapparatuur vindt meer cocaïne op Schiphol, Brabants Dagblad, 28 February 2001.

the United Kingdom. Together they dominated the European market in synthetic drugs.²⁹ One USD officer reluctantly guesstimated there were approximately 60 to 65 groups in the Netherlands with a total of about 500 people involved in ecstasy production and distribution on different levels.³⁰

Nonetheless, all judgements on the top levels of the ecstasy industry in the Netherlands are arbitrary. Public prosecutor Witteveen, who coordinates the USD, recognised he had no idea of the business volume or identities of major traffickers. However, most law enforcement officials agree there is a small, invisible group at the “top”. Most observers agree groups that produce and distribute synthetic drugs depend on the top level of organised crime for financial backing, the import of precursors and/or export of pills (Fijnaut et al., 1996). According to USD officials and local Amsterdam police officers, this group includes old hashish entrepreneurs. This “old guard” of top Dutch criminals is more involved in money laundering and real estate transactions. One police officer mentioned they finance and outsource operations.

One police officer engaged in investigations focusing on Dutch criminal networks estimated the top level of the ecstasy business was in the hands of 80 or 90 people. Police teams continually run into the same people during investigations. Nowadays, most are around 40 years-old. He stated that once you are in the business it is difficult to get out, even if you want to. Experienced individuals are commonly dragged back in again. However, new individuals sometimes suddenly appear, young people in their mid-20s who in a short period of time succeed in creating new networks and coalitions with dealers and production organisations. Thus the top level of the ecstasy industry also seems to be very dynamic and flexible and composed of a fairly loose coalition involving established criminals in the Randstad and southern provinces of Brabant and Limburg. From time to time disputes in the ecstasy trade result in assassinations including bomb attacks.

Foreign Mafia-type organisations seem to have no connection with the ecstasy industry in the Netherlands. The possible exception to this are Chinese Triads with a position in the Chinese community in the Netherlands. Chinese Triads are involved in human trafficking, smuggling the ecstasy and amphetamine precursors, PMK and BMK,³¹ and apparently in exporting pills. Though Amsterdam police noticed the emergence of the Triads in the ecstasy business in 1997,³² no additional evidence of growing involvement has been reported.³³ Established Dutch crimi-

nal groups are also involved with importing precursors from China. One businessman, once the financial adviser to one of the major Dutch hash entrepreneurs of the 1990s, was arrested for supplying precursors from China to five ecstasy labs.³⁴

The presence of Israeli criminal networks managing substantial trafficking lines may have led to joint investments in laboratories with Dutch producers. An Israeli chemist apparently advised Dutch producers on the installation of laboratories.³⁵ In 1994, one Israeli group tried to set up a lab near Amsterdam, after eliminating the possibility of establishing it in Eastern Europe. The lab was discovered when it exploded.³⁶ Another Israeli group was involved with a laboratory in the Netherlands in 2001.³⁷ The Israeli networks’ profits are generally invested in Israel. Although Israelis do invest in real estate in Amsterdam (Rokin and the Damrak (Husken & Vuijst, 2002), there is no decisive evidence that Israeli real estate transactions involve drug money. Since the 1980s Israeli groups have been involved in money laundering through money transfer offices in Amsterdam. Israeli groups do not function like Mafia-type organisations but are instead loose networks of freelancers. Although the general impression is that Israeli trafficking networks have no desire to get involved in production, apparently they do not entirely shy away. Israeli groups include Russian gangsters who have emigrated to Israel.

The role of Hells Angels biker gangs should not be underestimated: they sell ecstasy at biker rallies held in France, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Belgium. The fact they deal in synthetic drugs is not new. The new element is, however, the total control Angels now exercise over all parties, rallies and demonstrations held by “pirate biker” clubs. Angels not only utilise their international connections in Europe but are also involved in trafficking in the United States and across Canada.³⁸ The Hells Angels *chapter* in Amsterdam is the most important in the Netherlands and has a leading position over other *chapters* in the country. They deal in more than just synthetic drugs and are also involved in firearms and extor-

allegedly running ecstasy labs in Indonesia with connections to Chinese in Malaysia and Hong Kong for the import of PMK. Australian police have noted an increase in ecstasy imports with links to Triad groups from South East Asia. See: *Doodstraf voor Nederlander*, Algemeen Dagblad, 14 January 2003; *Biggest Ecstasy Plant Found in Karawachi*, Kompas (Jakarta), 11 April 2002; *\$30M Drug Seizure Cracks Crime Syndicate*, Sydney Morning Herald, 18 October 2001.

³⁴ *Boekhouder de Hakkelaar aangehouden*, Het Parool, 17 March 2001.

³⁵ *‘Kosjer nostra’ rukt snel op*, de Volkskrant, 30 November 2001; *Hoofdkwartieren Israëlische criminelen in VS*, de Volkskrant, 1 December 2001; *Israel's New Extradition Law Targets Criminals Wanted Here*, The Jewish Star Times (Miami), 31 July 2002.

³⁶ *Local operators of Dutch drug lab nabbed*, Jerusalem Post, 30 September 1994; *Israëlische bende achter bouw xtc-lab*, Het Parool, 30 September 1994.

³⁷ A professional lab on a farm in the northern province of Groningen was dismantled and citizens of Israel, the Netherlands, Turkey and England were arrested. The factory was equipped to produce 120,000 pills an hour. The Israelis were violently extorting money in Israel to operate the lab. See: *Five Israelis Arrested for Running Ecstasy Factory*, Jerusalem Post, 1 March 2001; *Dealers werkten aan lijn naar Israël*, Haarlems Dagblad, 9 May 2001.

³⁸ Presentation by Dina Siegel at the conference “XTC – Trends in use and illicit trade” organised by the Centre for Information and Research on Organised Crime (CIROC) at the Free University of Amsterdam, 23 October 2001.

²⁹ *Politie en justitie willen 'gouden handel topcriminelen' hard aanpakken*, de Volkskrant, 25 September 1996.

³⁰ Interview with USD officials, September 2002.

³¹ In 2001, Chinese were involved in shipping 14,000 litres of BMK and 3,000 of PMK to a laboratory in Limburg through the port of Rotterdam. See: *Supervangst grondstof xtc was een toevalstreffer*, Rotterdams Dagblad, 11 January 2002; *Milde eisen tegen smokkelaars recordpartij xtc-grondstoffen*, Rotterdams Dagblad, 10 April 2002.

³² *Strijd om macht op xtc-markt*, Het Parool, 22 February 1997.

³³ Chinese involvement might prompt displacement of ecstasy production to South East Asia. One Chinese citizen with a Dutch passport who had been living in the Netherlands for a long time was

tion rackets (Fijnaut et al, 1996). After the assassination, during an ongoing conflict, of a prominent figure in the Amsterdam underworld involved with the Hells Angels, a large “escort” of bikers from several countries accompanied the corpse to its funeral while police controlled traffic to allow the bikers to pass.

2.4 The presence of specific ethnic groups

The top level of the ecstasy business – financiers, producers, “first hand” distributors (i.e. the first buyer from the producer) – is predominantly in the hands of native “white” Dutch individuals and groups. One informant claims there are many white Dutch over 40 years-old at the production level. Ethnic divisions in drug trafficking seem to disappear specifically at the higher levels of the distribution level, especially at the wholesale level and with international trafficking groups (Kleemans et al. 1998, 47-48). Apart from the Israeli and Chinese groups mentioned before, other ethnic minorities with previous well-established involvement in the wholesale distribution of other illicit drugs (such as Colombian cocaine importers and distributors, Antillean cocaine dealers or Turkish heroin wholesalers) seem to have added ecstasy to their traditional businesses that both coexist and work together with Dutch traffickers. Multiple drug trafficking increasingly appears to cut through ethnic divisions.

Even at the wholesale distribution level for the domestic market, ecstasy trafficking attracts people from various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. However, most mid-level dealers interviewed claim native Dutch individuals and groups mainly dominate the market, especially at the “first hand” distribution and retail selling levels. One case encountered during fieldwork was a paradigm of the truly inter-ethnic nature of transactions: a Colombian and a Dutchman working for an Antillean (buying from a Dutch producer) and selling to Turkish traffickers. Coalitions or partnerships along the Dutch marketing chain also include people from other EU countries, Israelis, Australians, Dutch-Antilleans, Colombians and East Europeans (particularly Polish).

The picture is even more heterogeneous at the export level and varies regarding destinations, international contacts, quantities and place of purchase. Recent law enforcement and media reports point to Israeli trafficking networks as the main global ecstasy distributors. Although significant amounts of pills have been captured and several trafficking lines have been dismantled, the emphasis on the “Israeli Connection” is mainly due to the fact they operate on the North American market and have become the focus of US law enforcement agencies that have intensified operations against ecstasy since it became popular in the United States around 1995. Once Israeli networks were targeted by the DEA and Dutch law enforcement, ongoing investigations resulted in a “snowball” of subsequent investigations targeting connected and overlapping Israeli networks. USD officials said Israeli traffickers were in fact small overlapping networks working worldwide (mainly in the US, through different European countries and ultimately also

Australia) but not really involved in the European market. British and Irish groups, for instance, control the substantial market in the UK and Ireland, with their own representatives and established connections in Amsterdam, trafficking in all types of drugs.³⁹

Nevertheless, Israeli trafficking groups play an important roll in supplying the North American and Australian markets. Israelis operate in networks. A trafficker generally will look for contacts with producers in the Netherlands for supply, an outlet in the United States, and financiers among established “big guys” mainly based in Israel. The “Israeli Connection” benefits from the “routine socio-economic activities” of Israeli and Jewish communities, specifically in the diamond industry that is concentrated at the world’s largest diamond exchange in Antwerp and extends into Amsterdam. Demographics also contribute to the prevalence of Israeli involvement in the trade: Amsterdam, Antwerp and New York all have large Jewish\Israeli communities. Traditionally, Jewish people have been very much involved in the diamond trade in which carrying small expensive cargoes across borders is a valued skill and frequently illicit as well. Ecstasy traffickers also use the informal banking system traditionally surrounding the diamond trade to make payments without leaving a money trail. The fact many Jewish communities are dispersed worldwide is also beneficial since Israeli traffickers can hide and find partners and employees in those communities.

Colombians, Surinamese and Antilleans are also involved in export to the Americas, though not to Europe. A recent investigation into a Dominican trafficking group exporting ecstasy to Miami and New York once again showed inter-ethnic cooperation, multiple drug activities, shifting positions in the trafficking chain, and overlapping multinational contacts. The Dominican group had contacts with a Colombian who was involved with importing large amounts of cocaine (200-500 kilo loads). The Dominicans were implicated in a ring of couriers importing one to two kilo loads of cocaine from the Dutch Antilles. The Colombian provided cocaine in the Antilles that was smuggled by Dominican women living in the Bijlmer to Amsterdam. The profits were then invested in exporting ecstasy to the US.⁴⁰

The ring was a “family-business” with Dominican relatives in the US, some whom worked in airports. The Colombian probably also provided contacts in Florida. Marriages were arranged with Antilleans to get Dominican women Dutch passports. The ecstasy was smuggled abroad through an express delivery service in amounts of 20,000 to 35,000 pills each time. A Dutch citizen of Surinamese origin and his partner in the delivery service helped several groups send not only ecstasy but also heroin to the US. The Surinamese handled the paperwork, putting suitcases on the regular accounts of other companies, while his partner made

³⁹ See for instance: *Crime Barons Go Dutch*, Irish Independent, 4 May 2000; *Dutch Links To Nine Gangs Here*, Irish Times, 6 May 2000.

⁴⁰ Information from Amsterdam police; *Actie Nederland en VS tegen XTC-handel*, ANP, 5 November 2002; *Officials Say International Ecstasy Ring Is Smashed*, The New York Times, 6 November 2002.

sure the suitcases containing the drugs were put on the right shipments corresponding to the account numbers. Consequently, the drugs were not only put on unsuspected shipments but were free of charge as well. Two to three suitcases a week were handled during a certain period. The legitimate companies never noticed the extra charges; the suitcases simply disappeared in the mass of shipments. Beside his smuggling activities, the Surinamese also sold ecstasy retail in the Bijlmer.

From interviews with imprisoned Dutch ecstasy couriers, it became clear that Antillean and Dominican groups involved in international ecstasy distribution mainly recruit, accompany and control ecstasy couriers on their way from the Netherlands to the United States. They receive about 500 euros for each new courier. They usually operate in groups of two or three. According to the couriers interviewed, these people are at the low level of the organisational hierarchy while Colombians make up the “top”. These organisations do not deal exclusively in ecstasy but also other drugs, especially cocaine (Van de Bunt et al., 2002). Dominican trafficking rings also use Spain and Spanish couriers for their smuggling routes via Dominicans residing near Madrid.⁴¹

Some informants on the local Amsterdam retail market say ecstasy dealers are “whiter” than, for instance, cocaine dealers, and that the key to success lies in having very close contacts with predominantly white mainstream Dutch young people on the party and rave circuit. After all, ecstasy is mainly purchased within networks of friends or acquaintances and often at private addresses. Trust is an important factor in the transactions, benefiting dealers with the same social and ethnic backgrounds. One observer noticed an increase in young Moroccans as couriers in the retail phone delivery distribution system. According to recent scientific research, ethnicity is less important in criminal networks in terms of social relationships between criminals. Although it still plays an important role, ethnic homogeneity and ethnic inclusion within criminal groups is not as strong as generally accepted. This will probably diminish even more with the integration of ethnic minorities into Dutch society (Kleemans et al., 2002).

Social relations, such as family ties and friendships, play an important role and function as the glue for criminal coalitions. They also play an important role in building bridges between criminal networks in different countries. Social connections that are the result of immigration into the Netherlands by immigrant groups from drug source and transit countries such as Morocco (cannabis production), Turkey (heroin transit), the former colony of Surinam and the overseas territories in the Antilles (cocaine transit), and China (production of synthetic drug precursors), all provide a fertile base for international drug trafficking (Kleemans et al., 2002). Apparently, it is very attractive to add synthetic drugs on the return trips of already existing trafficking lines.

⁴¹ *Las policías de cinco países desarticulan una red mundial de tráfico de éxtasis*, El Mundo, 23 January 2003.

2.5 Local suppliers

The entire supply for the local Amsterdam market seems to be produced in the Netherlands or perhaps Belgium and no evidence exists regarding imports from abroad. Police officers and some mid-level dealers interviewed stated certain cafés function as meeting places where wholesalers can be reached. “*You just have to look at the number of expensive cars in front of them to know*,” declared one police officer. It is a small world where everybody seems to know each other. From interviews with some mid-level dealers, it seems there is a lot of informal conversation at these meeting places between wholesale and mid-level dealers on prices, business trends, where it goes and where it comes from, as if the ecstasy business were any ordinary commodity market. “*Everybody knows everybody*,” according to one of the mid-level dealers.

Some local mid-level dealers interviewed were regulars on the party scene and had taken ecstasy themselves. Over time they came to know retail and bigger dealers and got into the business for money, either through people they had met on the party scene or family, friends or acquaintances already involved who noticed their presence in the scene. One retail level dealer (100 pills) simply got her first supply of 800 pills from a business partner of her father who had heard she used ecstasy. She could pay later. Two mid-level dealers started as retailers and moved up to the mid-level (10,000 pills) but said they did not want to get involved at the wholesale level since: “organised crime” is involved and the business would no longer be “relaxed” because too much money is involved.⁴² They know what kind of people are involved at the higher levels, and are afraid of “rip-off” deals. One mid-level dealer with some experience in the underworld through relatives said however the really “big guys” are not problematic types.

Amsterdam police have little data on local suppliers since law enforcement focus is on international trafficking. The overall structure of the ecstasy market in Amsterdam has not been analysed. According to one police officer, the mid-level intermediate market in Amsterdam is in the hands of several ecstasy dealers who provide pills to between 10 to 20 retailers. The same names frequently surface in different investigations. A police investigation into a local network centred on about five white local Amsterdammers from the working-class area of *De Pijp*. They were all in their late 30s and early 40s. They were regulars on the local crime scene and had appeared for years in all kinds of criminal investigations (small-time weapon and cannabis deals). They knew each other well, and visited the same pubs and each other’s houses when not busy putting deals together.

They generally dealt in quantities of around 30,000 pills and never less than 10,000. At the time of the arrests 5,000 pills were found in a safe. The network was very flexible and dynamic. The pills were delivered to retailers who took 100 pill lots and

⁴² Another dealer interviewed in the mid-1990s also said he did not want to know wholesale dealers and producers because he was afraid of the very rough environment of producers (Houben, 1996).

probably sold them in discothèques and clubs. (The investigation did not target the wholesale and retail parts of the case.) Though these five were the major figures, many others were also involved. Other individuals continually “walked into the investigation” which rapidly expanded like an oil slick. Many pills were also destined for personal use or smaller amounts for friends and acquaintances. The five main individuals had worked their way up from small-time dealers.

Distribution was more local during the pioneer era of the 1980s, occurring within a more or less closed system with direct relations between producers and consumers. When ecstasy became popular and demand increased, producers started to focus on production and distribution was outsourced to intermediates. Once ecstasy was prohibited, an extra buffer emerged to shield producers and distributors (Korf & Verbraeck, 1993; Houben, 1996). The “idealist” who supplied pills for friends to share in the experience seems to have disappeared. Most dealers are now in it for the money. Distribution networks are somewhat safeguarded. Most dealers are friends and acquaintances or are introduced by acquaintances. Use increased in the mid-1990s as well as the number of dealers who started selling in lots of 10 or 100, most of them users who started dealing to finance their own use and party expenses. These kinds of dealers are not usually considered “criminals”; they merely buy pills for friends and acquaintances and also resell some at house parties and discos. A certain increase in their prestige among friends also plays a role (Houben, 1996).

With the popularisation and commercialisation of the ecstasy market, dealing became more businesslike and attracted those with previous experience dealing in other drugs (powder cocaine and cannabis). One Colombian dealer interviewed came to the ecstasy business through previous involvement in cocaine trafficking. He became involved with a coffee shop owner who was also involved in importing cocaine from Colombia and exporting ecstasy to Miami. Some dealers trade only in ecstasy; others supply different drugs to the recreational market; but there is generally no overlap with problematic drugs like heroin and crack cocaine. There seems to be an increase in multiple drug dealing (including cocaine powder and more recently *Viagra*) on the recreational market, particularly at the higher levels. One mid-level dealer stated profit margins are higher with cannabis and cocaine because of the saturation in the ecstasy market.

2.6 Distribution and marketing chains; styles of distribution

The ecstasy market in Amsterdam is predominantly a “hidden” market. Ecstasy, cocaine powder, amphetamines, and other “dance drugs” for the recreational market are mainly sold at private addresses among relatives, friends and acquaintances. In addition there are delivery services (order by phone) as well as some dealing in clubs, pubs and at raves. There is practically no street dealing (see chapter 1.2). Within the circles of relatives, friends and acquaintances, either someone will have contacts with a mid-level intermediate dealer or that mid-level dealer will

be part of the same circle. Trust is important; most of the small retailers in this setting use ecstasy themselves; a good indication of product quality. Most small retailers do not necessarily make a living out of it but instead use profits to cover the expenses of their night life.

A certain introduction system exists in the more “open” market of discos, clubs and raves. There are no big dealers at raves and other dance events; this sales area is for retail dealers carrying at most 100 pills, but more often 10, 20 or 30. One has to know the “codes” and the relationships of the people present. Nevertheless, people who want to buy ecstasy, speed or coke in a disco run the risk of ending up empty-handed. Most pills are sold during the week through networks, contacts at private addresses. “*It is similar to sex,*” states a female retailer who sells to friends. “*You make sure you buy your condoms in advance. You don't take for granted there will be a condom machine at hand in a place.*”⁴³ It has now become more difficult to buy at discos and clubs because of increased entrance controls. Another female retail dealer said she got tired of checks by doormen and the constant hassle with people who wanted pills without paying for them. These kinds of “hobbyist” dealers try and avoid the stress of selling in public places and prefer selling at home.

Though informants are not familiar with transactions of hundred of thousands to millions of pills on the wholesale market, they suspect these differ little from operations involving quantities of tens and hundreds of thousands. Most keep no stocks but instead buy from a supplier once they have a particular request. Wholesale transactions are mostly paid in cash after the pills are delivered. Ecstasy is a cash market, although credit is regularly given and postponing payment is accepted. The saturation of the market tends to expand some forms of credit. Although delays in payments and debts are more the rule than the exception in the drug business, one informant claims the less debts you have the more successful you are. He always pays after he has received the money from the buyer, since he never has enough cash to finance bulk buys in advance. As a helper, his boss used to pay him differently depending on the success of the operation and risk of his job. He was often paid a particular percentage of the quantities handled. According to informants, wholesale distributors try to restrict the number of buyers to two or three persons for security reasons. Informants also say neither they nor anybody else they know ever sell to total strangers.

Although interviewees suggest the marketing chain from production to retail is not very long, there still seems to be a place for go-betweens or intermediates who merely buy and resell the same amount with a small profit (commission). While there are different stages in the marketing chain, that does not necessarily means dealers stick to any one particular level. One mid-level dealer interviewed was active at several levels. He helped his ex-boss –a coffee-shop owner– purchase ecstasy in the south of the Netherlands buying directly from the lab every fortnight (around 70,000 pills each time), resold half to several Spanish traffickers who came

⁴³ *Handel in xtc en amfetaminen vooral in de huiskamer*, Rotterdams Dagblad, 14 January 1997.

to the Netherlands and the other half to other Amsterdam distributors (Colombians and Dutch). He also acted as internal courier for large quantities of pills (mainly within the *Randstad*). He was paid by commission and also kept a stash of soft drugs for the coffee shop in his flat. In the meantime, he also worked with a local Colombian cocaine distributor as a broker, always on commission.

In addition, he managed to sell during the week in two ways. First, working as a delivery service (order by phone) with an employee who actually made the deliveries; second, by working with a Dutch partner in a specific neighbourhood in mid-level operations (kilos or fractions of kilos of cocaine, 1,000 ecstasy pills). He was also involved in retail selling in discos and at dance events. Another mid-level dealer sold to retailers but was also a retailer himself for his own circle of friends and acquaintances. It has been regularly claimed that, since various drugs are traded by the same networks (actors often buying one and selling another), on some occasions ecstasy is “exchanged” for cocaine, heroin or other illegal goods. Some informants emphatically contradict such ideas, arguing that even when exchanges take place, each transaction is paid separately. Another said it happened only occasionally (ecstasy for cocaine).

2.7 Social background

The social background of those working with and around the interviewed informants is rather heterogeneous, ranging from Dutch *penose* (the established underworld), wealthy foreign traffickers, local students and small time criminals. One informant claimed many white Dutch males “over 40” work at the production level. This contrasts with the younger type of dealer on the retail level. Women are not very involved in the business. The profile of the ecstasy dealer, according to police officials, would be: a young Dutch-born male (25-35 years old), well-educated and well-trained at sport schools, who spends his free time at the trendy beach bars in *Bloemendaal aan Zee*, a fashionable Dutch seaside resort some 30 kilometres west of Amsterdam. They begin their careers selling pills in discos and develop contacts especially with tourists and other foreign connections. The money goes to parties and expensive vacations.

The police perspective is probably based on dealers in the more “open” commercial circuit of disco and clubs. The more “hidden” market at private addresses among relatives, friends and acquaintances is most likely much less visible to the police. The police profile does not entirely fit the dealers who were interviewed (e.g. a student, an office employee). There may likely be a difference between the retail market at discos, clubs and raves and the private setting market among friends and acquaintances much closer to the user circuit; although both these markets overlap. The predominantly native Dutch dealers operating at the “hidden” level are much closer to the user profile: usually well-integrated into society with a good education and/or job. One of the mid-level dealers interviewed did not consider ecstasy a “criminal drug”, though fully aware dealing is considered a criminal activ-

ity. He said one of the reasons he started dealing was so he could provide good quality pills when the general quality was unsatisfactory.

Distribution networks are somewhat safeguarded. Most dealers are either relatives, friends and acquaintances or are introduced by them. One dealer interviewed who belonged to the higher echelons of the mid-level (10,000 to 50,000 units) was able to operate at that level despite his young age (mid-20s) because some of his relatives were also involved in the drug trade with other substances (cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy). Some of his relatives had been in prison for drug trafficking. He himself had already been involved in the business for ten years and began harvesting “nederwiet” as a teenager through one of his relatives. Subsequently, he started selling marijuana to friends and after his first experiences using ecstasy moved into dealing through acquaintances he had met at house parties. He gradually moved up; first selling small amounts then buying stocks of 1,000 pills and eventually moving to an average of 10,000 per month redistributed to other mid-level dealers and retailers and occasionally 50,000 for export.

There is a difference between the bigger dealers who are close to producers and smaller dealers and retailers who are close to users. Some, but certainly not all, dealers close to the producers are “wise guys” who will trade in anything lucrative. These sorts of dealers often frequent the “sport schools circuit” and supply their own segment of the market with several thousands of pills. They sometimes include doormen and security guards at house parties (Houben, 1996). But social profiles are diverse: one mid-level dealer interviewed fit neither the stereotype of a criminal nor a “muscle-bound type” but was instead a decent-looking student with good manners. At the upper levels of the established underworld and in the ecstasy industry in the Netherlands there is a over-representation of “tough guys” out of the so-called “*kampers*” milieu: white Dutch natives who belong to a rather marginalized but clannish group residing in mobile home camps at the edge of towns. From a tradition of common crime (burglary) they had already gained a prominent position in the hash business in the 1980s and 1990s.

2.8 Market competition or cooperation; presence of market barriers

As noted before, the synthetic drug market is an “open market”. Anyone can enter it with the right contacts. There is no indication any specific group wishes to dominate the business. The Dutch underworld is predominantly composed of business-oriented networks that frequently overlap. Key individuals (chemists for instance) may even work for different networks, depending on contacts or expertise in a specific segment of the production or distribution process. Criminal cooperation is often directed towards gaining reciprocal benefits or resolving mutual problems. Especially at the ecstasy production level, where supplies of raw materials and production tools are a problem, groups pool resources and contacts to obtain precursors and formulas. Semi-manufactured products are also exchanged. This way “buffers” are created to counter the uneven supply of precursors.

Criminal groups seem to act more as “partners in crime” than competitors (Kleemans et al. 1998, 66).

On the local Amsterdam retail market some informants claim the key to success is having very close contact with the predominantly white mainstream Dutch youth on the party and rave circuit; this since ecstasy is mainly purchased within networks of friends or acquaintances, often at private addresses. Trust is an important factor in the transactions, benefiting dealers who share the same social backgrounds. Dealers in clubs and discos and at dance events sometimes are confronted with security personnel and doormen that deal themselves or protect favourite dealers, admitting certain ones and refusing others. Cases are known of seized drugs being re-distributed by security personnel, as well as dealers forced to hand over their trade proceeds (Houben, 1996). The profile of security guards and doormen bears remarkable resemblance to “wise guy” dealers at the 1,000 plus level. They both frequent the same environment of “sport schools”. Ecstasy dealing in that scene overlaps with the illicit market in anabolic steroids and other muscle enhancers.

2.9 Overlap with legal and other illegal activities\criminal markets

There has been an apparent increase in multiple or poly-drug activity on the international trafficking level and also in domestic wholesale, mid-level and retail dealing (cocaine, cannabis, ecstasy). Not only informants but also police data suggests many Dutch ecstasy entrepreneurs (especially at the production and “first hand” distribution level) have financed operations with illegal profits from the cannabis and hashish trade. One individual who first produced ecstasy in the Netherlands was involved with one of the pioneers of cocaine trafficking in the Netherlands, a Dutch citizen with good contacts with Colombians through his Colombian wife. Another case is of a local Dutch producer of synthetic drugs who was able to expand his market through an Israeli broker involved in trafficking to Belgium, Germany, Israel, Costa Rica, the US and India. At the same time the Israeli broker enabled the Dutch ecstasy producer to diversify his criminal activities into cocaine which the Israeli imported through his contacts in Latin America (Kleemans et al., 2002).

The Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice monitors the nature of organised crime in the Netherlands. In two reports, they described 80 large-scale police investigations; 15 of which involved synthetic drugs.⁴⁴ Out of those 15, twelve were poly-drug trafficking organisations; seven involving cannabis, six cocaine and four heroin. One organisation trafficked in all

⁴⁴ The report says it covered 12 cases of synthetic drugs. The criteria was the main activity of an organisation. A selection was made to avoid too much emphasis on drug trafficking, the main criminal activity of organised crime in the Netherlands. Seven cases involved production of ecstasy and/or amphetamines; three organisations dealt only in production. Other main illegal activities according to the report were: 25 cases of “traditional” drugs (heroin, cocaine, cannabis); trafficking of humans (10); trafficking of women (9); trafficking of fire-arms (2); car theft (2); and fraud and money laundering (16) (Kleemans et al., 2002).

types of drugs. This group was mainly composed of English nationals re-distributing to the UK and one of the few organised hierarchically. They had moved to the Netherlands because of increased police investigations in the UK. One organisation was mainly Chinese (some with Dutch nationality), active in heroin trafficking from South East Asia, deviating precursors, and producing and trafficking ecstasy and amphetamines. Another organisation was mainly Turkish; importing heroin from Pakistan and exporting ecstasy (Kleemans et al., 1998; 2002).

Other criminal activities of organisations involved in ecstasy production and trafficking encountered in the WODC reports and a press review were: fashion design knock-offs; CD piracy; smuggling cigarettes, alcohol and illegal fireworks; money laundering; tax fraud schemes; and trafficking in firearms. Police have sometimes found Uzis, explosives and other weapons during raids against ecstasy labs. Indoor cannabis plantations are regularly found in combination with ecstasy production facilities, indicating multiple drug activity also at the production level. There are also several cases in which ecstasy traffickers have been found with large amounts of weapons and explosives. Some established drug trafficking organisations simply have added ecstasy to their range of products for the international market.

2.9.1 Overlap with legal activities

To produce ecstasy, organisations need precursors and other chemicals as well as laboratory equipment that must be obtained on the legal market. Since the law on “Prevention of Abuse of Chemicals” came into force in July 1995, controls have become stricter and some of the raw materials used for synthetic drug production have been classified in a licensing system for 23 chemical substances in three categories with an obligation to report “dubious transactions” in these substances. Tableting machines and other lab equipment are not under any licensing system. The problem is that (apart from the precursors BMK and PMK) most chemicals have broad legal uses in the chemical industry. Illegal use makes up only a small percentage of legal use and too many controls could damage liberalised legal economic activity. Furthermore, the Netherlands has about 2,400 companies in the chemical industry and a lot of manpower would be required to control them.

Consequently, legal suppliers are still wittingly or unwittingly involved in selling chemicals and equipment to ecstasy producers. There is always a weak link in the chain when a lot of extra money is involved. Employees regularly notice “*men with pony tails, baseball caps and sunglasses who pay in cash and don't park their rented vans in front of the building*”.⁴⁵ Police check with companies when equipment and chemical substances are found which can be traced, and officials from Criminal Intelligence Divisions (CID) keep tabs on what is happening. If the public prosecutor can prove supply was done knowingly and intentionally, suppliers can be prosecuted for “preparatory action” in drug offences through the Opium Act. Most companies collaborate with law enforcement.

⁴⁵ ‘De politie uit Limburg nam zelfs vlaai voor me mee’, Rotterdams Dagblad, 31 January 2002.

Ecstasy producers set up front companies, such as paint factories or chemical waste removal companies, to acquire the necessary equipment and chemicals (or dispose of chemical by-products). The black market and trafficking in precursors have become very lucrative because of these controls. Precursors are now mainly purchased from chemical companies abroad: in Eastern Europe (sometimes co-owned by criminals) and China. Some producers have shifted to manufacturing their own precursors with chemicals or pre-precursors not scheduled under the law (safrol for instance) (Houben, 1996). Production methods have shifted to chemical procedures with fewer chemical by-products and the use of “solvent cleaners” to recover solvents used during production (USD, 2001; 2002).

Producers and traffickers also use employees of legal companies. Chemists who have worked in large chemical companies have help mediate the supply of chemicals, and the contacts of one chemist with Chinese chemical producers were used. Another way of camouflaging activities was to invest in a moribund *bonafide* company and force it to perform certain services (stock of drugs, transports, intermediary for the purchase of precursors) (Kleemans et al., 1998). Traffickers may also use key employees of companies involved in the distribution system: drivers for international trucking companies; luggage handlers, stewardesses and cleaners at the airport who can move easily on both sides of controlled areas; workers at parcel post services; etc.

The trucking industry is very vulnerable. Not only must companies depend on drivers who might want to earn some extra money on the side, traffickers also sometimes smuggle drugs aboard as a stowaway load that is picked up somewhere else. Due to stiff competition in the transport sector, a lot of small trucking companies and one-man businesses have difficulty surviving. So some drug trafficking groups monitor the sector to target those with financial problems and offer them a way out by transporting drugs. Trafficking groups may also set up front stores in the transport sector or take over insolvent companies (Fijnaut et al., 1996).

Certain disco owners, house party organisers, and DJs are suspected by police as maintaining ties with ecstasy dealers, though no real evidence of large-scale involvement is available.⁴⁶ Drug dealing in discos may sometimes be condoned either by management or security.⁴⁷ One southern ecstasy producer organising a production and trafficking ring owned a disco in Amsterdam.⁴⁸ The co-owner of an Amsterdam disco was recently arrested for ecstasy trafficking to the US.⁴⁹ One mid-level dealer interviewed combined his trafficking activities with regular illegal work in legal businesses: a coffee shop and organising and promoting raves. He knew

several DJs as well. By hanging out long hours in a coffee shop (“the office”, as he calls it), he extended his network of potential partners and clients into a more local and international youth scene.

With his boss and Colombian partners, this mid-level dealer went to commercial and illegal raves every weekend, and after-hours parties outside Amsterdam where they were treated as VIPs due to the large amounts of money they spent. At a certain point, he became fairly established as a broker and distributor of both ecstasy and cocaine on the techno-music scene. He left the coffee shop and started to work for a company organising mega-techno parties and events all across the Netherlands. He considers this his legitimate job. Though it only pays around 500 euros a month, it also allows him to sell both ecstasy and cocaine during these events.

2.9.2. Corruption and contacts with the legal world

According to the WODC, little corruption is involved in the drugs industry in the Netherlands. The “modus operandi” of criminal organisations is more inclined to avoid controls instead of corrupting them. Open borders and the use of falsified documents also make it less necessary for organisations to use corruption (Kleemans et al., 2002). Colombian cocaine traffickers using the Rotterdam seaport regard business environment around the port as very positive due to the large amount of “routine economic activities” but complain about limited access to corruption. On the other hand, according to one Colombian trafficker: “*You don't need corruption with so many legal businesses around*” (Zaitch, 2002b). Police officers in Amsterdam have been suspended or sacked because of ecstasy possession or retailing among friends and acquaintances. One policewoman from a neighbouring police force died at a house party after taking ecstasy. There are very few cases of law enforcement officers involved with criminal organisations.

One mid-level dealer interviewed is regularly approached by people with an “idea” for a particular business (rock bar, disco, restaurant, etc.) and are looking for investors. He knows his ex-boss (a coffee-shop owner), along with other traffickers, has invested in legal businesses often kept totally clean and separate from drug trafficking. Another mid-level trafficker interviewed was putting money aside to invest in a legal business with his partners. Many successful ecstasy producers or wholesale distributors –especially those engaged in export– are able to buy bars, restaurants or properties in Amsterdam. Occasionally there are rumours of large scale investments of illicit proceeds in real estate in Amsterdam, in particular in the most expensive shopping area, the PC Hoofstraat. But there has yet to be any decisive evidence of this (Klerks, 2000).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *Panden in PC. Hooft in bezit van criminelen*, Volkskrant, 28 April 2001; *Panden met een luchtje zijn gemeengoed in de PC. Hooft*, Het Parool, 30 April 2001; *Panden in de PC Hoofstraat onder de loep*, Het Parool, 21 March 2002.

⁴⁶ Interview with Amsterdam police officer, August 2002.

⁴⁷ *Drugshandel koopt discotheken om*, Het Parool, 11 March 1995; *Inval politie discotheek iT Amsterdam*, NRC Handelsblad, 28 June 1999.

⁴⁸ *Netwerk van 'bendes' achter lucratieve illegale pillenhandel*, NRC Handelsblad, 21 June 1995; *OM verzwijgt in xtc-zaak het gebruik van een infiltrant*, NRC Handelsblad, 14 February 1997.

⁴⁹ *Discobaas vast voor xtc-smokkel*, Algemeen Dagblad, 10 January 2003.

3 Law Enforcement

One interesting case is of a well-known real estate entrepreneur who appeared in the dismantling of one of the first large ecstasy networks in 1992 (see chapter 2.1.1). The top level of this crime enterprise was made up of veterans from the hashish trade (Van Duyne, 1995). Apparently the real estate entrepreneur was involved in their money laundering operations. His case never appeared in court, however, because he reached a settlement with the Public Prosecutor's Office. Ten years later his name re-appeared in connection with money laundering and investment of criminal proceeds by top-level individuals in the Amsterdam underworld. Due to financial disagreements and an ongoing war inside the Amsterdam underworld, one top criminal started talking to police and newspapers.⁵¹ He described the real estate entrepreneur as the "underworld banker" who re-invested criminal proceeds. The real estate entrepreneur and a partner had links with a financial institution involved in real estate transactions that is a subsidiary of the ABN-Amro Bank, the largest bank in the Netherlands.⁵²

3.1 Drug policy and law enforcement in the Netherlands

For many years, drug policy in the Netherlands has been either admired or criticised for its relatively liberal, tolerant attitude towards the use and possession of drugs. Dutch drug policy is based on harm reduction and a public health approach. Harm reduction is meant to reduce the harm to the users themselves, their environment and society as a whole. The government wants to prevent a situation in which judicial measures do more damage than drug use itself. One key aim is to separate the markets of hard drugs, defined as "drugs with unacceptable risks" (heroin, cocaine, ecstasy etc.) and soft drugs (cannabis), in order to prevent graduation from soft drugs to hard drugs (the so-called *stepping stone* or *gateway theory*), avoid criminalising cannabis users and keep them out of the criminal circuit, as well as improving control by local authorities.

The first Opium Act (the main drug law) of 1919 was drafted after the Netherlands took part in the International Opium Convention in The Hague in 1912 and came into force in 1928. The Opium Act regulates the production, distribution and consumption of psychoactive substances. Possession, commercial distribution, production, import and export, and advertising the sale or distribution of all drugs is punishable by law. Drug use is not a crime in the Netherlands. The differentiation between hard and soft drugs has been enshrined in legislation since 1976 when possession of hard drugs became an offence and possession of a small quantity (currently a maximum of 5 grams) of cannabis (hashish and marijuana) was no longer regarded as a criminal offence requiring legal action but instead as a misdemeanour.

An amount of 0.5 grams of hard drugs (or one pill in the case of ecstasy tablets) is considered a personal dose and is also not prosecuted. Manufacturing and trafficking of drugs are more serious offences. Penalties for hard drugs called for under the guidelines of the Public Prosecutor's Office range from a suspended sentence of

⁵¹ *Vriend van Klepper bij politie te biecht*, De Telegraaf, 27 August 2002; *Topcrimineel praat, onderwereld niet blij*, Het Parool, 27 August 2002; *Of ik word afgeschoten of ik praat*, De Telegraaf, 28 August 2002.

⁵² *Band tussen Endstra en Bouwfonds*, Het Parool, 4 September 2002; *Politieonderzoek naar oplichting-praktijken van vastgoedtycoon Hummel*, De Telegraaf, 4 September 2002.

several weeks for the possession of fewer than 5 grams or 10 tablets or doses (as in the case of ecstasy) to prison terms of three to 12 years and a fine of 45,000 euros for the import and export of more than one kilo (or 2,000 tablets or doses) of hard drugs. The latter standard has been broadly formulated since suspects may have played various roles within an organisation, ranging from courier (transporting the commodity in return for a small reimbursement) to principal organiser.¹

Repression of hard-drug use is related to nuisances to public order in the local community. Cannabis is openly sold in so-called coffee shops in many cities around the country. Municipalities are, however, free to ban all coffee shops (the so-called “zero option”) or restrict their numbers. In Amsterdam, a de-facto tolerated status was granted to 321 coffee shops in 1997. The number of coffee shops had already dropped to 288 at the beginning of 2001 and continues to fall (Korf et al., 2001). In the 1990s coffee shops were regulated by the so-called AHOJ-G criteria: advertising (A) was banned, as were sales of hard drugs (H); sales to young people under 18 (J), and sales of large quantities (G) officially set at a maximum of 5 grams per visitor at the so-called “front door” (retail transactions) and a maximum of 500 grams of stock at the “back door” (supply for the coffee shop). The “O” implicates a ban on causing a public nuisance (Jansen, 2001).

There is constant tension on the institutional level between the two main pillars of Dutch drug policy. On the one hand is the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (the leading government department coordinating drug policy on the national level (Spruit, 1999)) that advocates a “harm reduction” policy (limiting the risks of use) alongside a “demand reduction” policy (prevention and treatment). On the other hand is the Ministry of Justice that is in charge of law enforcement and must implement the Opium Act, obligations resulting from international treaties (i.e. the three United Nations Drug Conventions) and agreements within the context of the European Union. The policies of harm reduction and repression, as represented by these two departments, sometimes tend to clash. For instance, prosecutor Witteveen, coordinator of the USD, said regarding pill testing that the Dutch government is sending out “contradictory” signals since it permits and even regulates something it has formally prohibited (Witteveen, 2001).

3.1.1 Policy on ecstasy

The house-music scene attracted a lot of media attention when it developed in 1987-88. Amsterdam got the reputation of being one of the trend-setting cities, and (almost inevitably) of also being one of the main ecstasy distribution centres. In November 1988 ecstasy (MDMA and five chemical variants) was scheduled on list 1 of the Opiumwet. Other varieties (such as MDEA, 2C-B, etc.) were subsequently scheduled shortly after they appeared. Not that Dutch authorities worried much about problematic use in the Netherlands itself but the decision was triggered by

pressure from abroad (the substance was scheduled on list 1 of the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances in 1986) and signs that the country had become an important transit point for international trafficking in ecstasy (Adelaars, 1991; Korf & Verbraeck, 1993). It was largely a political manoeuvre, of symbolic importance in smoothing international relations (Spruit, 1999).

In February 1990 the Minister of Justice remarked: “*Risks of harm to society only developed in the Netherlands in 1988, when the use of the substance became fashionable and the CRI (National Criminal Intelligence Service) obtained very reliable information that criminal organisations in this country had made preparations to start large scale production of the substance, also for transport purposes.*”² Anxiety about the international repercussions of the alleged position of the Netherlands as the world’s number one production and distribution centre seems to have been the main incentive for government action on the issue of ecstasy. The country was, and still is, under constant attack because of its liberal domestic drug policy in general and the government needed this added problem of ecstasy “like a toothache” as a Dutch saying goes.

Although ecstasy was scheduled as a “hard drug” on list 1 of the Opium Act, when possession for personal use is concerned the drug is viewed as a list 2 drug instead of a list 1 drug (VWS 1995, 6). A personal dose of ecstasy is considered to be a “soft drug”, which under normal circumstances is not prosecuted. On the consumption level, harm reduction policies gradually evolved from the bottom up, as had been the case with the previous *de facto* cannabis regulation and hard-drug policies. A non-governmental organisation pioneered harm reduction regarding ecstasy; August de Loor’s Drug Consultation Bureau (*Adviesburo Drugs*). The Bureau took the lead in pill testing and implemented an integral approach for safety during large-scale dance events in 1989, the *Safe House Campaign*.

This approach was gradually accepted among: policy makers; health care, prevention and treatment institutions; local police forces; and, eventually, on the government level. In 1992 the Drug Information and Monitoring System (DIMS) was established within which the Netherlands Institute for Alcohol and Drugs (NIAD) collects data on ecstasy and other drug markets, and on trends in drug use and drug quality. Thus a national pill-testing programme was established with government funding. This system allows institutions to monitor an illicit and unregulated market. DIMS acts as warning system when harmful pills are detected; puts alarming and sensational press reports in perspective; and regulates the market to some extent since consumers (and apparently producers as well) can control pill quality.

Because ecstasy use and large-scale dance events became a more and more established phenomenon, the government eventually felt obliged to give its official blessing to arrangements that had been developed on the local level. In 1995 the

¹ *Clear Strategy on Criminal Enforcement of Drugs Policy*, Public Prosecutor’s Office press release, 18 September 1996.

² Response of Minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin to questions in Parliament on 19 February 1990 (Korf & Verbraeck 1993, 168).

Ministry of Health produced the policy paper “City Hall and House” (*Stadhuis en Huis*) which formalised these arrangements in a set of guidelines for local authorities to counter the risks of ecstasy use and prevent public nuisance at large-scale dance events. This memorandum officially established harm and demand reduction as the leading policy regarding ecstasy. It specifically stated that “*in Dutch drug policy, preventing problems related to the use of drugs is equally important as preventing use itself*” (VWS 1995, 6). “Tailor-made” and “on-the-spot” measures at the municipal level, (targeting the drug set and setting) using local expertise, were considered more appropriate than zero-tolerance prohibition which had proved unsuccessful in the past (Spruit, 1999).

Recommendations were made regarding the availability of First Aid, pill-testing and “chill out” facilities, a sufficient water supply, good ventilation, numbers of visitors, and security measures like entrance checks and body searches of visitors. Local governments are responsible for implementing these guidelines. Most do, others adapt them (for instance, some prohibited pill testing since local authorities do not want to give the impression ecstasy use is tolerated), and some simply banned raves outright. A parliamentary majority recently prohibited pill testing at public events. Despite the fact the Ministry of Health from the previous government wanted to continue these projects,³ the new conservative government that came to power in 2002 announced it would no longer allow pill testing at public events. However, test facilities at house parties and raves had already diminished because of logistical problems. Due to the positive response to the “City Hall and House” memorandum and the shift in entertainment fashion towards more standard night life activities, policy measures were extended to that sector as well.

3.1.2 Law enforcement and ecstasy

Law enforcement places priority on large-scale trafficking and production rather than low-level dealers and users, thereby allocating scarce resources to the problem perceived as most important and reducing the strain on the criminal justice system. There have been considerable problems in targeting organised crime and the ecstasy business due to the decentralised structure of the police in the Netherlands. Over the years, national coordination of these forces has proved to be difficult. There are 25 regions in the Netherlands with their own significantly autonomous police forces headed by the mayor of the largest town in the region. In addition, there is a national police force with a limited range of action intended to assist regional police forces with intelligence through the Central Criminal Intelligence Information Service (CRI), liaison with foreign police forces (Interpol and Europol), and coordinating foreign assistance requests. In addition, it has its own National Criminal Investigation Team.

In practice, communication within the police system often does not work. Information exchange is limited and incomplete. Foreign police forces seeking

judicial assistance have difficulties finding the right police force from which to request assistance. If they finally do find the right one, there is a risk of being turned down either because that force simply may not have the capacity and manpower, or priorities lie elsewhere. In order to tackle nationwide and international drug trafficking organisations, Interregional Criminal Investigation Teams (*Kernteam*s) were formed in the late 1980s, composed and financed by several local police forces in the region. One of these teams, the Criminal Investigation Team South-Netherlands in the province of Brabant, was allocated the task of targeting synthetic drug trafficking and production.

In 1996, the Criminal Investigation Team South-Netherlands produced a so-called “fact-finding investigation” into the phenomenon of ecstasy production and trafficking. The report basically confirmed concerns regarding the central position of Dutch criminal organisations (Houben, 1996; Klerks 2000, 243).⁴ One USD official felt law enforcement had paid little attention to the ecstasy business until that time. In 1995 and 1996, alarm flared up due to critical remarks from European partners over the alleged position of the Netherlands as the major ecstasy production and trafficking country. At the time, an officer from the Central Criminal Intelligence Information Service (CRI) compared the Netherlands’ position in the ecstasy and amphetamine market to Colombia’s as the main cocaine producer;⁵ a comparison that has been popular with foreign law enforcement agencies ever since.

In 1996, the government decided to intensify law enforcement measures against production and export. Then prime minister Wim Kok declared: “*The fact that my foreign colleagues keep telling me that nearly all ecstasy pills sold abroad stem from our country is not gratifying. I want an example to be made. We need law enforcement measures to stop labs and trafficking.*”⁶ That year the Public Prosecutor’s Office noted the traffic and manufacture of synthetic drugs had increased in the Netherlands in recent years and announced new stricter guidelines on the criminal enforcement of drug policy. The Office announced, “*Individuals guilty of such offences may count on the same treatment as “traditional” dealers in heroin and cocaine.*”⁷

As a result, a new task force, the Synthetic Drug Unit (USD), was set up in 1997 in order to coordinate law enforcement activities against ecstasy nationwide, facilitate law enforcement cooperation with foreign counterparts and try to stem the piling amounts of foreign judicial assistance requests. The USD was composed of several entities involved in law enforcement and precursor control: the Central

⁴ These ‘fact-finding investigations’ attempt to collect all available data on a specific crime phenomenon to produce an overview of the state of affairs.

⁵ *Nederland produceert de meeste pepillen*, NRC Handelsblad, 26 October 1995.

⁶ *Kok verklaart oorlog aan xtc-pillen*, De Telegraaf, 15 June 1996.

⁷ *Clear Strategy on Criminal Enforcement of Drugs Policy*, Public Prosecutor’s Office press release, 18 September 1996.

³ *Borst wil xtc-pillen toch blijven testen*, NRC Handelsblad, 13 December 2001.

Criminal Intelligence Information Service (CRI) of the national police force, the Fiscal Criminal Intelligence Service and the Economic Inspection Service (FIOD-ECD), the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary (in charge of border control), Europol and several other entities, all coordinated by a special team from the Public Prosecutor's Office and the interregional Criminal Investigation Team South-Netherlands. As noted before, the main concern in setting up the USD was government anxiety regarding the position of the Netherlands as the source country for synthetic drugs. Public prosecutor Witteveen, who coordinates the USD, described the Unit as a "fire extinguisher" to quell finger pointing from abroad concerning the prominent position of the Netherlands in ecstasy production and trafficking.⁸

One important factor in labelling the Netherlands as the major ecstasy producer is the fact the United States "discovered" the increase in ecstasy use and trafficking in that country around 1995. Over the past several years, seizures at US airports pointed to Israeli trafficking networks, based in part in the Netherlands and supplied by Dutch producers, as the main source of ecstasy bound for the US market. Consequently, US officials and media reports stressed the role of Israeli and Dutch networks as global players when in fact they meant both were heavily involved in the supply to North America. According to some police officers, a lot of pressure came from the US to counter the "flood" by cracking down on ecstasy trafficking and production in the Netherlands. They also said US officials do not hesitate to use access to certain media in their campaign. On the whole, the US government has little trust in the effectiveness of the liberal Dutch approach to drug policy (Husken & Vuijst, 2002).

The Netherlands was listed as an area of "emerging concern", alongside Cuba and North Korea, by Clinton administration drug czar General Barry McCaffrey, in 1999.⁹ "*Perhaps due to a combination of geography (the Netherlands is a commercial and transportation hub for Western Europe) and ambivalent drug policy, the Netherlands is a significant drug-producing nation,*" said McCaffrey about the prominent position of the Dutch in ecstasy and marijuana production. US officials generally stress good law enforcement cooperation between the two nations and joint DEA and USD operations have been successful. Ironically, the paradox of successful law enforcement is that it triggers stigmatisation: i.e. the more you seize, the more you appear to be the source of the problem.

The government evaluated its ecstasy enforcement policy in 2001 and announced new measures, apparently after US President Bill Clinton had complained person-

⁸ Statement of Mr Witteveen at the conference 'XTC – Trends in use and illicit trade' organised by the Centre for Information and Research on Organised Crime (CIROC) at the Free University of Amsterdam, 23 October 2001.

⁹ McCaffrey based his testimony in large part on the article, *Holland's Half-Baked Drug Experiment*, in the influential journal *Foreign Affairs* (May-June 1999). The article is filled with wrong figures and manipulated quotes.

ally to then Prime Minister Wim Kok (Husken & Vuijst, 2002). The memorandum, "Conspiring against ecstasy", again reflected the main anxiety, that is "*the growing concern about the position of the Netherlands in the distribution of this drug to other countries, despite previous attempts to diminish the production of ecstasy inside our country's borders.*" A five-year plan (2002-2006) was presented to significantly reduce ecstasy production and trafficking (Samenspannen, 2001).¹⁰ Five extra so-called "ecstasy teams" were allocated to the police forces of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Limburg/Brabant and one in eastern part of the country, all working in close collaboration with the USD.¹¹

According to Dutch drug expert Peter Cohen, the memorandum "Conspiring against ecstasy" is a "*serious sign of the growing mental defectiveness*" of Dutch drug policy because of pressure from the US and conservatives. The Netherlands is unjustly portrayed as the biggest producer of synthetic drugs due to "*propagandistic data*" by the US, Cohen says. More repression will not solve the problem: "*Ecstasy use in the Netherlands and elsewhere will only become more dangerous. It will not decrease and will not be less criminal.*"¹² Recently the government decided to set up a National Criminal Investigation Team that would incorporate the six Regional Criminal Investigation Teams (*Kernteam*s), the existing National Criminal Investigation Team, the USD and the recently formed Ecstasy Teams. Special emphasis will be given to the prominent position of the Netherlands in the ecstasy industry. That problem should be tackled nationally according to the government. The focus is on production and precursors. "No drugs without chemicals" is the credo (Ministerie van Justitie, 2001).

3.2 Law enforcement activity

Paradoxically, Dutch police unwillingly promoted ecstasy production in the early mid-1990s. In the mid 1980s, law enforcement authorities discovered that in the previous decade some rather large hashish trafficking organisations had developed which operated on an international scale. Extra resources were allocated after they convinced politicians of the serious nature of the situation. New interregional criminal investigation teams were created. Within these teams several prosecutors and the police embarked on a series of controversial investigation techniques (involving criminal undercovers, large-scale uncontrolled drug deliveries, illegal phone taps, clandestine house searches, etc.) in an attempt to bring down these criminal organisations. In their eagerness to "score", certain law enforcement sectors ignored a good part of the penal code and began long-term secret investigations aimed at "the upper levels of organised crime". The use of undercover agents

¹⁰ *Jacht op xtc-bendes geopend*, Brabants Dagblad, 13 April 2001; *Forse intensivering van de aanpak synthetische drugs*, Persbericht Ministerie van Justitie, 9 May 2001; *Minister Korthals opent jacht op xtc*, Het Parool, 10 May 2001.

¹¹ *Speciale teams voor jacht op xtc-criminelen*, Het Parool, 13 November 2001.

¹² *Drugsprof kraakt nota xtc-strijd*, Het Parool, 10 May 2002.

to incite people into trafficking is not allowed by Dutch law. However, law enforcement officers tried to find their way around these limitations.

One of these methods was to resort to long-term infiltration, permitting criminal organisations to go on trafficking dozens of tonnes of cannabis;¹³ sometimes with active support from the police themselves. The idea was to target the leaders of the organisation, who were never actively involved in the actual criminal groundwork, instead of arresting the lower ranks of drug trafficking organisations. Long-term infiltration was used to cultivate an informer at the top. In order to do so, active cooperation with drug transports was necessary to build the undercover agent's credibility at the top. In the end it became completely unclear who had the lead in these operations: the criminal intelligence section of the police or the criminal organisations themselves. At the end of 1993, discord within the police over these controversial methods led to a crisis in law enforcement that paralysed criminal investigations and prosecution for several years and prompted a parliamentary inquiry in 1995.¹⁴

At the time, these criminal organisations that had expanded in international hashish trafficking had also become involved with ecstasy production and trafficking. Several major ecstasy transports to the UK were also condoned. Even more controversial was that some criminal intelligence officers allowed a criminal undercover (known as *The Snail*)¹⁵ to infiltrate several organisations of ecstasy producers. First, he learned the tricks of the trade from one of the traditional southern amphetamine cooks. When that man was arrested, *The Snail* instructed others in how to produce ecstasy, supplied precursors and lab equipment, built labs and high pressure autoclaves and made repairs over a four-year period from 1992-1996 (Husken 2000; Husken & Vuijst, 2002).¹⁶

This scandal resulted in tremendous blowback for law enforcement especially at the prosecution level. Most organisations targeted by the undercover, *The Snail*, were initially dismantled but in subsequent court cases against some of the southern “ecstasy barons” the controversial investigation methods were judged illegal and several of the ecstasy-gang leaders had to be released.¹⁷ It is not clear to what extent this operation caused the ecstasy business to expand but the actions of the

¹³ There were even rumours that 15,000 kilos of cocaine had been smuggled into the Netherlands by the same means though later investigations dismissed that possibility.

¹⁴ According to observers, diplomatic and operational pressures from the US had led to the acceptance of these so-called pro-active policing methods in the Netherlands (Klerks, 2000).

¹⁵ He got this nickname in criminal circles because he was slow to respond when propositions were made since he first had to consult his ‘runners’ at the Criminal Intelligence Division.

¹⁶ See also: *Netwerk van 'bendes' achter lucratieve illegale pillenhandel*, NRC Handelsblad, 21 June 1995; *Criminele infiltrant produceerde XTC met toestemming politie*, Volkskrant, 30 December 1996; *OM verzwijgt in xtc-zaak het gebruik van een infiltrant*, NRC Handelsblad, 14 February 1997; *De pepillen van De Slak*, Vrij Nederland, 15 February 1997.

¹⁷ *Jaren bedrog bij politie en justitie*, De Limburger, 27 April 2001; *De duistere gangen van De Slak*, De Limburger, 12 May 2001.

undercover helped spread expertise on ecstasy production among criminal groups who were already eager to step into the business. On the other hand, police may also have gained valuable insights into the business. However, some of the major ecstasy producers in Limburg are still at large and ecstasy production in general is flourishing to the point the market is almost saturated.¹⁸

The parliamentary inquiry by the so-called Van Traa Commission examined the methods used by the police in the fight against drug trafficking and shed light on several scandals involving police infiltration and/or informers who were involved in committing serious crimes alongside or together with the criminals they were mixing with. The result of the Van Traa Commission Report in 1996 was a restriction on criminal investigation methods. The use of criminal undercovers to infiltrate criminal organisations is now allowed only in exceptional cases after personal approval by the Minister of Justice. The same applies to the use of controlled drug deliveries. In recent years, these restrictions have been loosened again with the introduction of new laws and control bodies.

The after-effects of this scandal still have repercussions. An interesting case is that of former Dutch marine commando and top figure in the Amsterdam underworld, Robert “Mink” Kok, prosecuted in 2000 for trafficking ecstasy and firearms. He was an informant of the Dutch secret service and apparently worked for the American DEA in the early 1990s from which he got some of the sophisticated weapons found, along with 232,000 ecstasy pills, in a house in Amsterdam that served as a stash for Kok. He was involved with the Danny Leclère ecstasy gang dismantled in February 1992 (see chapter 2.1.1.). Apparently, he was able to combine his criminal activities with informing police and security agencies. He repeatedly, but not always, escaped prosecution due to his unclear relationships and deals with public prosecutors and security and law enforcement agencies. He allegedly was also one of the clients of a prominent gang of ecstasy producers in the south of the country. His case is still clouded in many mysteries (Husken, 2000; Husken & Vuijst, 2002).¹⁹

The Van Traa Commission also ordered research into the nature, existence and scope of organised crime in the Netherlands. The investigation showed the hierarchical, pyramidal type of criminal organisation did not really exist in the Netherlands (see chapter 2.2). Since the parliamentary inquiry into law enforcement methods and new insights into the nature and *modus operandi* of drug trafficking networks, police investigation tactics have changed. Instead of long-term operations to bring down criminal organisations, the so-called “long haul” (“*lange haal*”), police investigations are now limited in time and scope, the so-called “short strike” (“*korte klap*”), in disrupting loose criminal networks. Quick investigations and police action take out segments of a drug trafficking or production network,

¹⁸ *De criminele landkaart verandert*, BN/DeStem, 4 January 2001.

¹⁹ See also: *Kopstuk in IRT-affaire opgepakt*, NRC Handelsblad, 18 September 1999; *Wapens uit VS voor Mink Kok*, Het Parool, 6 January 2000; *Crimineel Kok was informant BVD*, Het Parool, 13 March 2000; *Schaduw Mink K. in zaak York-bende*, BN/DeStem, 16 February 2002

instead of unending investigations to bring down a supposed entire organisation which might not even exist.

Opinions on effectiveness differ; the leader of one special investigative team thinks the “short strike” tactics are becoming counter-productive; that the big picture is getting lost. These short-term investigations may also not be useful in dismantling complex international networks, which limits the success of cooperation between law enforcement agencies from different countries. The chief of criminal investigations for the Amsterdam police force is very sceptical about the effects of long-term secret investigations aiming for “the top levels of organised crime”. *“Now that we know criminal networks have become very fluid –there are no permanent organisations anymore, everyone does business with everyone else in changing coalitions– even dismantling whole networks is not very effective. Every once in a while we take one out but is has no impact on drug trafficking or street prices.”*²⁰ He would prefer “frustrating” criminal networks and adding new tactics to traditional criminal investigation methods. The police are cooperating with scientific researchers to improve their tactics.

Despite government efforts to avoid tension with the US, the profound differences in drug policy between the two countries create problems (Husken & Vuijst, 2002). The DEA, for instance, criticised “short strike” police tactics as ineffective and offered “friendly advice and support” to the government. According to one DEA official, there is little support at the higher levels of drug enforcement in the Netherlands for current police tactics.²¹ On the other hand, there is no wide appreciation at lower levels of DEA criminal investigation methods either. One Amsterdam police officer interviewed was unimpressed with the DEA. As an example, he mentioned a request to use an undercover against a “small-time” dealer who handled at most some 5,000 pills. The DEA wanted to get him to the 50,000 level or higher and subsequently crack down on the “whole ecstasy ring” created by them in the first place. The request was denied. According to this police officer, the DEA has little or no expertise in traditional police work and basically only uses undercover operations.

Problems also arise with the extradition of Dutch citizens to the US on charges of ecstasy trafficking. Until recently, Dutch citizens were extradited with only marginal examination of formalities and no further scrutiny of evidence, criminal procedure and judicial process. Due to the differences in the two judicial systems, this has led to protests from defence lawyers and legal experts as well as drug policy experts who claim Dutch citizens have no fair trials according to Dutch standards (Husken & Vuijst, 2002). To paraphrase journalists Husken and Vuijst, one could speak of US “judicial imperialism” in relation to that nation’s attitude towards the Netherlands.

²⁰ *Criminele netwerken ongrijpbaar voor politie*, Het Parool, 2 November 2001.

²¹ *VS wil grondige aanpak drugsbendes*, Algemeen Dagblad, 25 June 2001.

Procedures regarding the use of undercovers and incitement in US criminal practice are not allowed in the Dutch system; and the widespread institution of plea bargaining in which some suspects can accuse others in exchange for a reduction in criminal charges is considered unjust because cases are not taken to court and consequently there are no checks by the judiciary. Recently, a judge ordered more information from the Dutch government about the criminal procedure and judicial process in the US, to see whether or not suspects would have a fair trial, and subsequently suspended the extradition of Dutch citizens. The government responded that this judge’s decision would have “*damaging effects on relations*” with the US.²²

3.3 Law enforcement in Amsterdam

Drug policy to a large extent is a matter for local authorities. The national government delegates many policy measures to city hall, for instance through the guidelines on large scale dance events. Decentralisation lies not only at the health, treatment and prevention level but also at the law enforcement level. Big cities have an important say in local law enforcement because the mayor is the head of the regional police force. While maintaining public order is basically a matter for local authorities, criminal investigations are more imbedded in national anti-crime policies since most larger criminal organisations operate on regional, national or even international scales. Nevertheless, each local police force has its own criminal investigations division and also cooperates with other local police forces at inter-regional levels to fight organised crime.

Drug enforcement activity in Amsterdam has two aspects: (a) maintaining public order and preventing nuisances related to drug use and dealing, this aspect coordinated by the so-called “triangle” of the mayor, chief of police and chief public prosecutor; and (b) criminal law enforcement which is decided by the Public Prosecution Office. Maintaining public order involves occasional raids when it becomes clear drug dealing in certain areas is getting out of hand (street dealing as well as dealing in discos and clubs), preventing wild raves, etc. Criminal law enforcement targets national and international trafficking networks (cooperating with the USD and foreign judicial assistance requests) as well as local mid-level dealers.

Drug enforcement at clubs, discos and raves is actually outsourced to private security companies under police supervision. Locked safes were recently installed in discos and clubs to collect drugs and weapons seized by security in order to hand them over to police later. Only the police have the key to open the safes. In the first two months since the introduction of this policy in March 2002 around the Rembrandtplein area, police seized 239 ecstasy pills and 148 wrappers of cocaine and heroin, as well as 91 knives, 39 gas canisters and 9 other weapons.²³ The safes

²² *‘Rechter schaaft band met de VS’ and Veroordeeld in VS en geen rechter gezien*, NRC Handelsblad, 16 December 2002.

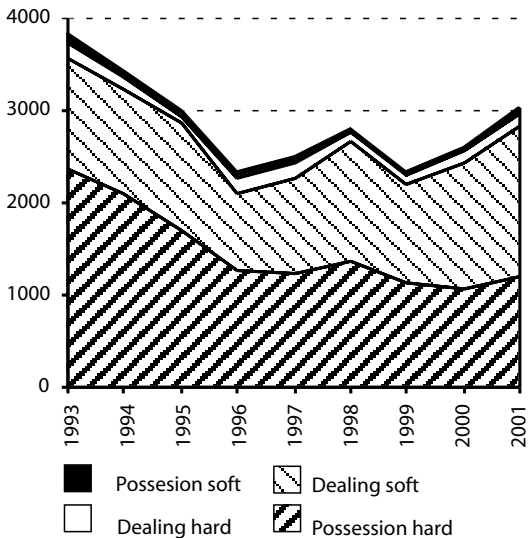
²³ See: http://www.minjust.nl/b_organ/dpjs/tijdschriften/sec/s_164_roethofprijs2002.htm

were installed to manage the flow of seized drugs and weapons that has increased since improved security controls. Punishment for hard-drug dealing in the entertainment sector means closing the establishment down for six months or permanently in the case of a second offence.

3.3.1 Public order maintenance in Amsterdam

The focus of drug law enforcement in Amsterdam remains on large scale organised trafficking. However, the street market (crack cocaine and heroin in particular) is also subject to frequent police intervention. Controlling coffee shops has increased. One team of police and other legal authorities check roughly half the coffee shops every year. If more than 500 grams of soft drugs are found on the premises, or if hard drugs are being sold, or if the premises are the centre of a public nuisance, the police have powers to close the premises. In addition to at least bi-annual checks by the local police team, all coffee shops are checked by a special police squad, the HIT-team (Horeca Intervention Team) also active at raves and in controlling clubs as well. “Wild” raves are frequently closed down when discovered in time.

Chart 4 - Arrests for drugs in Amsterdam (cumulative)



Source: O&S, 2002

The first large scale police action in Amsterdam against ecstasy at house parties was on 16 December 1989 at the *Melkweg* multimedia centre, a famous youth centre rooted the flower-power scene of the late 1960s (Adelaars, 1991; Korf & Verbraeck, 1993). That marked the beginning of police repression against ecstasy which until then had developed quite undisturbed. Three New Year’s Eve parties were forbidden and the police also refused to tolerate a large acid-house party in

the spring of 1990. Eventually, the police relaxed their controls. Although low-level dealing and consumption is not a law enforcement priority, every once in a while police announce stricter controls of discos and house parties where ecstasy is sold and used. Or a well-known, trendy locale may be raided as an example. At the end of 1996, the Amsterdam police said they would step up controls.²⁴ Police raided the popular, fashionable disco *Mazzo* and searched 80 visitors and employees. Seventeen had ecstasy and 300 pills were confiscated, as well as 30 doses of cocaine and speed.²⁵ The city government closed the disco down for six months.

Police and local city officials began holding regular meetings with the entertainment industry to contain excessive public nuisance, violence and related drug use and dealing that was disturbing the major night life areas (*Rembrandtplein* and *Leidseplein*). In June 1999, a spectacular raid targeted Amsterdam’s best-known, extravagant disco, the *iT*. Two hundred police invaded the place and frisked the 450 visitors. Undercovers had bought ecstasy and cocaine in previous weeks from so-called “house-dealers” who police claimed were tolerated by the management. Twelve persons were arrested, among them the “house-dealers” and doormen (who apparently protected the drug dealing and may have forced management to tolerate it).²⁶ Again, the overall “catch” was meagre: 397 ecstasy pills, 20 liquid doses of GHB and six grams and 28 “wrappers” (of more or less 0.5 grams each) of cocaine.

But the warning was clear. The *iT* had not participated in the regular meetings with police to prevent disturbances and public nuisance. At present, most clubs and discos have tight controls to prevent drug use and dealing. Doormen, sometimes accompanied by private security guards, search visitors before they enter discos and clubs. So-called risk areas like toilets are checked, and anyone who deals is kicked out or handed over to the police.²⁷ Local authorities stepped up controls after a series of deadly incidents and no longer hesitate to close down establishments in an effort to contain the scale and nuisance factor of the “fun industry”.²⁸ Local authorities and the dance industry started a process of self-regulation along the guidelines of the *Stadhuis en House* memorandum. The industry acts in agreement with local authorities to set rules such as the availability of First Aid, “chill out” facilities, water supply, good ventilation, fewer visitors and strict closing times.

Though the above mentioned raids in the *Mazzo* and *iT* were the most spectacular, police raids in general are not uncommon. In November 2002, some 120 police,

²⁴ *Xtc-offensief tegen disco's in Amsterdam*, De Telegraaf, 22 November 1996; *Amsterdam gaat harder optreden tegen XTC-handel*, de Volkskrant, 7 January 1997.

²⁵ *Drugsdealers opgepakt in discotheek Amsterdam*, De Telegraaf, 9 December 1996.

²⁶ *Inval politie discotheek iT Amsterdam*, NRC Handelsblad, 28 June 1999; *Uitgesnoven, uitgeramd, uit de mode*, NRC Handelsblad, 1 July 1999.

²⁷ *Aanpak discotheken en grote houseparty's kan handel en gebruik niet aan banden leggen*, Volkskrant, 25 January 1997; *XTC-dealer aangehouden*, Politie Amsterdam-Amstelland, 27 December 2001.

²⁸ *Houseparty's Zaanstad: einde nabij*, Trouw, 15 November 2001; *'Fun' of niet, de party zal doorgaan*, Het Parool, 16 November 2001; *'80 procent is aan de pillen'*, NRC Handelsblad, 21 November 2001

including the HIT team, raided the disco *Dino's* in the western docklands during an “after party”.²⁹ About 80 visitors were present. A couple hundred pills, five “wrappers” of cocaine and 23 capsules of GHB were confiscated and 23 people arrested. Police found 138 pills in the car of one of those arrested. The establishment will be closed down for a certain period of time. The pattern that seems to be emerging is that police need to assert themselves from time to time with large-scale raids in order to keep the situation more or less under control. The HIT team actively monitors activities on the dance and disco circuit. Plainclothes policeman are present at many events to keep tabs on the situation. Containment seems to be the major policy guideline.

In quoting the minutes of a meeting between police and night life representatives, the local Amsterdam television station revealed police will not act if someone in a club or disco in the *Leidseplein* area is discovered dealing with less than 10 pills. The margin used to be five, but capacity problems forced the police to set new guidelines. When confronted with the facts, authorities and local politicians said this was unacceptable.³⁰ Club and disco owners regularly complain of arbitrary police actions and little support from the police in their efforts to keep their venues drug free.

People are also searched by security at dance events, although this is certainly not foolproof. One 23-year-old dealer from Amsterdam told a reporter at the 2001 mega-festival, Dance Valley, on the outskirts of Amsterdam: “*Business is going well. I hid 100 ecstasy-pills in my underpants. In two hours I sold 80. Because of the enormous crowds security cannot search everyone thoroughly. I've almost sold all my stock and will organise a delivery of another 100 pills.*”³¹ Some 80,000 people attended the festival held for the 7th consecutive time but only 13 were arrested with drugs; another 180 had to hand in their personal doses and were denied entrance. Most managed to bring in their own pills purchased before the event. Often a certain amount of pills for personal use is tolerated to avoid people buying bad pills from unknown dealers.

3.3.2. Criminal law enforcement

The Amsterdam regional police force is involved at different levels with criminal enforcement in the ecstasy chain. First, the Amsterdam police force, together with other neighbouring regional police forces (Kernteam Amsterdam-Amstelland/Gooi- en Vechtstreek), contributes to the interregional criminal investigation teams that target nationwide organised crime. Second, there is the Serious Crimes Unit of the Amsterdam police force that targets organised crime in the city; and third, every district has its own criminal investigation department. These teams are put into action by the Criminal Intelligence Division (CID) of the local

Amsterdam police, requests by the national Synthetic Drug Unit (USD) or international requests for police and judicial assistance.

When interviewing police officers on ecstasy trafficking (especially those from criminal investigation divisions), they almost always immediately embark on the issue of international trafficking, an indication of the overload of international requests for judicial assistance. Not every police officer is pleased with this situation: “*Ecstasy is not a problem in Amsterdam,*” according to one Amsterdam police officer. “*Most of it is exported anyway, so... why should we take care of it?*”³² Because of international obligations and requests from the USD, the Amsterdam police force seems mainly involved in investigations into international trafficking, not supply for the local Amsterdam market, although these two overlap at the top level. The police department is flooded with international assistance requests but lacks the capacity to act on all those requests. Criminal investigations are subject to strict rules regarding task, personnel and deadline. This causes inflexibility and limits additional requests, especially from abroad. Often requests are simply rejected.

According to one police officer interviewed, Amsterdam police have a bad “information position” on the ecstasy business: “*Every police investigation in the Netherlands ends up in Amsterdam but we don't know what is happening.*” One officer interviewed thinks the “short strikes” tactics are becoming counter-productive. A lot of capacity is involved while the effect is a lack of general overview resulting in a “tunnel vision” determined by the individual cases worked on. This has repercussions for other investigations such as assassinations within the drug underworld. There is a need for long-term investigations. Capacity is not managed efficiently. All information should be collected by the central Criminal Investigation Information Office (Bureau Recherche Informatie – BRI) but according to one officer, the overall structure of the ecstasy market in Amsterdam is not analysed. On the spot, he phoned BRI to ask if there was any overview of the ecstasy market in Amsterdam. It did not exist. The CID may have more information. They have contacts with companies supplying laboratory hardware who tip them off when anything unusual happens.

When asked about the recent discovery of a substantial ecstasy laboratory near the Ten Kate outdoor market, a police officer at the regional level said he did not know anything about it: “*So much is happening in Amsterdam, I don't want to know everything. It would drive me crazy.*” One police officer interviewed said the police only see the tip of the iceberg. Two other police officers said the police are only aware of two or three percent of all trafficking operations. Whether or not that figure comes anywhere close to reality is impossible to assess but it does indicate the apparent despair within the police force. Several police officers said they knew little about the functioning of the local ecstasy market in Amsterdam since this had no priority for their teams. The police force seems to work on a case-by-case basis, taking out several trafficking lines per year. Most police officers are quite aware of recent scientific insights into organised crime and drug trafficking and seem to have no illusions they can really stop it.

²⁹ *Politie wil na inval Dino's sluiten*, Het Parool, 5 November 2002; *Enige wat helpt: drugshond voor de deur*, Het Parool, 9 November 2002.

³⁰ *Weinig drugs horeca niet melden*, AT5, 20 December 2002.

³¹ *Pillen en speed in je onderbroek*, Haarlems Dagblad, 7 August 2001

In the meantime, police officers concentrate on their individual cases. Nevertheless, cases tend to expand rapidly. One police officer said a rather simple case of a foreign trafficker looking for a deal in Amsterdam quickly inflated to Irish and British traffickers and Chinese importing PMK. In order to bring a case to the prosecutor's office, police are forced to restrict their investigations and merely take out one segment. Information is passed on but does not always reach the proper police level.

The somewhat uncoordinated course of action of the Amsterdam police force seems to reflect the difficulties at the national level with the Regional Criminal Investigation Teams (*Kernteam*s). In a study on the operations of these teams, it became clear they have to deal with some 20 coordination authorities and arrangements with shifting status and mandates. Management of activities is complex, slow and unclear in many cases. Consequently, "alternative" modes of management develop which result in frequent friction between different priorities. One of the reasons is a lack of adequate information from the authorities on the national operational crime policy against serious organised crime (Klerks, 2002). Sometimes one team works on the same subject as another without knowing it. Passing on operational information seems to be a problem.

Appendix: Amphetamine-Type Stimulants & Ecstasy

About 0.2% of the global population, some seven million people (age 15 and above, annual prevalence) consume ecstasy. Some 60% of ecstasy consumption worldwide is concentrated in Europe. Western Europe and North America together account for almost 85% of global consumption. Use of ecstasy, however, is increasingly spreading to Eastern Europe as well as developing countries, notably in the Americas, southern Africa, and the Near and Middle East as well as South East Asia. The overall view on amphetamine type stimulants (ATS) is much more diverse when all synthetic drugs are taken into account.

Although ecstasy is in fact part of the ATS group, it is increasingly viewed as a somewhat different substance, mainly because it is a new phenomenon and its use tends to be different. Ecstasy is considered much less addictive. Despite all the media and official policy attention on ecstasy, the real (global) problem is with (meth)amphetamines. While amphetamine is the ATS of choice in Europe, in South East Asia and North America it is methamphetamine which is generally more potent and carries more health risks. According to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) about 0.8% of the global population, some 33.4 million people (age 15 and above, annual prevalence) consume (meth)amphetamines. That is nearly five times more than global ecstasy consumption. (ODCCP, 2002: 260-274).

Two-thirds of (meth)amphetamine consumption is in Asia (22.3 million), mostly in East and South East Asia (mainly Thailand, the Philippines, Japan, Korea and Taiwan). Methamphetamines are produced mainly in Burma and Laos, as well as Mexico, the US and Canada. Both Canada and the US have a considerable domestic market of 2.8 mil-

lion. In 2000, approximately 6,700 clandestine methamphetamine laboratory sites were seized in the United States by the DEA and state/local law enforcement, compared to 6,782 seized in 1999. The majority of these laboratories, approximately 95 percent, are considered "mom and pop" operations capable of producing ounce quantities. The remaining five percent (some 335) are considered "super-labs," capable of producing five or more kilos of methamphetamine in a single cook. (DEA, 2001a).³³

Asia is the largest (meth)amphetamine consumption and production region. Interpol reported that in 2000 "more than 22 tons of methamphetamine in crystal form and more than 100 million ecstasy tablets were seized in the region. Interpol has identified Asian crime syndicates that are exporting heroin to Europe which is then exchanged for ecstasy tablets that are taken back to Asia by the same couriers." The primary source region is Europe.³⁴ The production capacity of the 40-50 methamphetamine factories in Burma and between 20-30 plants in Laos would total 800 million tablets of speed or more each year.³⁵ According to the secretary of the INCB, H. Schaepe, Asian countries are gradually taking over ecstasy production from the Netherlands due to increased law enforcement.³⁶

The major amphetamine producers in Europe are Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Russia, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium. Although production of ecstasy requires more know-how, the step from manufacturing (meth)amphetamines to ecstasy is not impossible, as shown by the experience in the Netherlands. Depending on how the market develops, Eastern Europe and East and South East Asia could become major ecstasy producers. China and Eastern Europe are the main producers of the most important precursors for ecstasy and amphetamines, PMK and BMK. Because of increased precursor controls in North America and Europe, future ecstasy production might be expected closer to or in countries where PMK is produced, and law enforcement is generally less effective.

Small-scale ecstasy production has also been reported in the United States and Canada. During 2000, the DEA seized six MDMA laboratories and state/local authorities seized two compared to 1999 when the DEA reported 13 MDMA laboratory seizures and state/local authorities reported six. 17 laboratories were dismantled in the United States in 2001. In Canada, eight clandestine labs were involved in MDMA production in 2000 and the trend toward larger, more sophisticated MDMA and MDA lab operations continued to be observed in 2001 (DEA & RCMP, 2002).³⁷ The manufacture of ecstasy is relatively uncomplicated and clandestine laboratories for the manufacture of synthetic drugs already exist in the United States; for those reasons, it is likely the illicit manufacture of ecstasy may emerge in that country as a result of the increase in the domestic demand for that substance. This is also true for countries like Australia and South Africa where an increase in MDMA manufacturing has also been detected (INCB, 2000).

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