Pride and prejudice

Dutch and German drug policy in historical comparative perspective

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(In)famous Dutch approach to drug policy

- Sale of cannabis (‘soft drugs’) tolerated

- Public health oriented approach to drug use
This presentation

- ‘Dutch approach’: history and backgrounds
- Conflicts Holland & Germany regarding drug policy in the 1970s and 1980s
- Lessons from history?
1950-1970: repression

- Opium Law 1953: possession of cannabis is a crime
- Between 1961 and 1969, the number of drug arrests in Amsterdam rose from 15 to 451
Dutch Opium Law – 1976 Revision

- Soft drugs (cannabis) vs. hard drugs (heroin, speed, coke)
- Focus on prosecuting dealers, not users
- Public health = focus of policy
Criminalizing drug use leads to violence & corruption

Irene Vorrink, Minister of Health (Dutch Socialist Party, PvdA)
Do we really want to clip the wings of youngsters who smoke a spliff? No!!

Minister of Justice Dries van Agt (Dutch Catholic Party, KVP)
Germany: our strict neighbour

- Opium Law Revision 1971: repressive
- Forced treatment for heroin addicts
- Cannabis not tolerated
- Methadone maintenance banned until 1992
1977: committee for the ‘Release of Harm Dost!’
1980s: 2000-3000 German heroin ‘tourists’ in Holland
Giel van Brussel:  
**Head of the Amsterdam Methadone Maintenance Program 1980s/1990s**

Sweden and West-Germany address the heroin problem in an almost fascist manner.
1990s: our national pride

• “The Dutch, being sober and pragmatic, opt rather for a realistic and practical approach to the drug problem than for a moralistic or overdramatized one.”

• (Eddy Engelsman, *British Journal of Addiction* 1989)
Since 2000: conservative turn

- 900 coffeeshops closed (600 remaining)
- XTC testing at dancefloor = stopped
- 2001: treatment under coercion
Once again, Holland should become a country at the vanguard of drug policy.
Lessons from history?

• Postwar Dutch & German drug policies: infused with nationalist sentiments

• National drug policies: an uneasy match with reality

• Drug use (and traffic) = transnational affair

• 21st century: international turn in drug policy?