



The role and prominence of user groups as stakeholders in European drug policy processes varies greatly, but are generally difficult to fit into existing analytical research frameworks.

stakeholders
drug policy processes
drug users
analysing voices

There is variation between countries in the role and influence of drug user groups as stakeholders in drug policy developments. This piece of work studied, more precisely, how drug user groups act and get the opportunity to participate in policy processes. The analysis is based on data generated by interviews with stakeholders and document studies from four country cases, Austria, Denmark, Italy and the UK.

When analyzing these materials it becomes clear that drug users and drug user groups played rather different roles in the different countries. In some countries, such as Denmark and UK, user groups were very active and visible in policy processes, while in others, such as Austria, they were almost absent, or, if present, hardly visible. The study also highlights the difficulty in locating drug user groups' voices within the existing literature and placing such groups in the analytical frameworks employed in this type of research - this is because they are not very sensitive to unconventional stakeholders such as drug users. To explore these issues, the study has taken as its point of departure Backstrand's three concepts of representation, participation and democratization; paying attention to the fact that user groups and user voices are, for various reasons, often not very well organized or prominent in public debates, but can nevertheless - at times - play important roles in policy processes. Overall, the analysis found that the countries studied are only beginning to grapple with the issues of representation, participation and democratization. Even within those countries where these processes have been developed the most, there are limited 'windows' for these processes to emerge and develop.

It is also worth noting that representation and participation do not necessarily lead to democratization or democratic governance. These attempts at greater public participation may be just 'cosmetic adjustments' which do not challenge the traditional policy-making structures and procedures.

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Bjerge B., Duke K., Asmussen Frank V., Rolando S. & Eisenbach-Stangl I. (2016) Chapter 6: Exploring user groups as stakeholders in drug policy processes in four European countries In [Hellman, M., Berridge, V., Mold A., & Duke, K. \(eds.\) Concepts of Addictive Substances Across Time and Place. Oxford: Oxford University Press.](#)

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