

# **Recreational Drug Use in Luxembourg and across Europe**

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## **Editorial**

Twenty years ago in 1995, the CePT started a pioneer work in the field of addiction prevention in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. In these early days, the main part of the work was a community based approach aiming to increase the interest in all kind of topics related to addiction prevention and legal or illegal drugs. Since 2009, the CePT has launched a national program implementing health promotion and harm reduction strategies in the party scene of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. This program includes data gathering about the party goers and their consumption habits. More recently, a study on the characterization of recreational drug use was conducted in the framework of an INTERREG co-financed project: MAG-Net 2 (cf. [www.mag-net.eu](http://www.mag-net.eu)). Astonishing, the population we encountered was very willing about sharing their experiences with drugs as the majority of these users define their consumption as non-problematic. As a consequence, a campaign promoting the importance of the dialogue between health professionals and their patients was launched and stressing out that the discussion about drugs and drug use has to be started before any misuse. This debate has to be continued among health professionals, drug experts, politicians and other stakeholders, to find better and appropriate responses on how to take care about drugs and drug consumers in the future.

Carlos Paulos  
Project manager

Jean-Paul Nilles  
Director

**Global Drug Survey: How the world's biggest drug survey (even accepting its limitations) can tell us some useful things about how the world of drugs is changing and why getting Luxembourg to join this year would be fantastic**

*Adam Winstock (Global Drug Survey, United Kingdom)*

Global Drug Survey runs the world's biggest drug survey. Using anonymous on-line surveys, translated into 10 languages we collaborate with global media partners each year to recruit a non-random sample of people who use drugs from across 50 countries. Our last 3 surveys GDS2013, GDS2014 and GDS2015 received over 200,000 responses. We have previously shown that self-report studies among sentinel drug using populations may be a valid and effective tool for detecting new drug trends and describing the effect and risk profile of novel drugs and for developing unique peer driven harm reduction and personal feedback tools (cf. [www.saferuselimits.co](http://www.saferuselimits.co)).

GDS sees its core mission to help make drug use safer for people who use drugs regardless of the legal status of the substance and to inform with integrity and honesty. We are not funded by any government or research organization, so are free to research what we find interesting and are able to feedback our findings to the public without censure.

In this talk I will focus on the 90% of people who drink and use drugs who don't develop dependence. These are the hidden masses. Their use is not always problem free but for the most part is driven by pleasure. For the vast majority drug use will be

passing fancy and will fade without intention as other life roles appear and take priority. But along the way we need to ensure that risks of harm are minimized and that we are able to deliver information that is useful, credible and accepts that pleasure drives drug use not the avoidance of harm.

GDS wants to help create this dialogue. Where risks exist we want to make people aware of them whilst offering solutions to minimize them. Where pleasures exist we want to acknowledge them. We do this by sharing our finds each year with our media partners and the public and through the development of a suite of digital tools that inform, educate and motivate.

In November 2015 GDS2016 will launch so I thought it would be good to share some of what we have learned from our last few surveys. I will cover key findings on alcohol, cannabis, synthetic cannabis, nitrous oxide, dark net drug markets and MDMA related harms. I will then finish by show casing our digital apps and tools that we hope go some way to reducing risks and keeping people who use drugs safer.

**Adam Winstock** MBBS, BSc, MSc, MD MRCP MRCPsych FACHAM. Adam is a Consultant Addiction Psychiatrist at the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust and Honorary Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London. He has written over a 100 papers, monographs and book chapters. He has a particular interest in the assessment, management of cannabis and club drugs. He is also founder and director of Global Drug Survey which runs the world's biggest annual survey of drug use trends and is

also the architect of the on line and smart phone apps the drugsmeter ([www.drugsmeter.com](http://www.drugsmeter.com)) and drinksmeter ([www.drinksmeter.com](http://www.drinksmeter.com)) and the creator of the free online harm reduction guide, the Global Drug Survey High-Way Code ([www.globaldrugsurvey.com/highwaycode](http://www.globaldrugsurvey.com/highwaycode)) and the world's first safer drug using limits guidelines ([www.saferuselimits.co](http://www.saferuselimits.co)). Adam thinks any new dialogue about harm reduction needs to start with a conversation about pleasure. He is interested in applying behavioural economics, social normative feedback to drug use and helping to craft optimal public health responses to drugs.

## **Swiss Nightlife prevention – a pragmatic answer to the reality of recreational drug use**

*Alex Bücheli, Safer Nightlife Switzerland, Switzerland*

During the past twenty years more and more nightlife-prevention and harm reduction offers were developed in Switzerland. Most of them are focusing in road safety, the alcohol drinking issue, the recreational drug use and two offers have the possibility of doing Drug Checking. The fact that Switzerland is a small country and the local nightlife problems are comparable has lead since the end of the nineties in several national activities. Although the realization of several national projects, a regional coordination structure was missing and in some part of the country Nightlife prevention and harm reduction offers were not existent. This was the main reason to create the professional support network Safer Nightlife Switzerland in 2011 and the nightlife-prevention association Safer Dance Swiss in 2014. The aim was to support local institution in there nightlife-prevention activities and to be present in region where no such kind of offers are existent. A typical example for the Safer Nightlife Switzerland activities is the organization of training days for professional and volunteers working in the Nightlife field. A typical Safer Dance Swiss intervention is somewhere in the mountain at a big psy-trance festival. Both networks where created by Swiss Nightlife experts working in this field in a bottom up process.

After a short explanation of the Safer Dance Swiss and Safer Nightlife Switzerland activities, this presentation will focus on the best practice experience, achieved results and on the doubts and problems related to this national nightlife prevention approach.

**Alexander Bücheli** is working since 2001 as nightlife prevention and harm reduction specialist. He was responsible for the nightlife offers of the city of Zurich. Since spring 2015 mainly active as consultant and freelancer on the national level for the associations Safer Dance Swiss, Safer Clubbing Zurich Bar and Club Commission and the Safer Nightlife Switzerland network. Since June 2015 he is president of the European nightlife prevention network NEW Net. Main objectives of his work are Drug Checking, consultation, counselling, cooperative work and club/festival labels.



## **Tackling recreational drug use in Luxembourg**

*Katia Duscherer (CePT, Luxembourg)*

Most people consume drugs for recreational purposes, be it alcohol, cannabis or ecstasy. Contrary to the so-called problematic drug users, the majority does so in absence of any severe addiction or other acute health issues linked to their consumption, at least for the time being.

As a consequence, recreational drug use has been neglected for a long time by health services and policies, which focused on providing health care for problematic users, on the one hand, and on primary prevention campaigns, like school projects, on the other hand. Concurrently, in the last decade, outreach projects using harm reduction strategies have flourished in many European countries - frequently initiated by members of the drug user community themselves.

The present talk will give an overview over three activities initiated in Luxembourg around recreational drug use over the last 5 years.

Party MAG-Net is an outreach project that is now established in the local music festivals and in some party venues. Using a peer approach, non-judgmental health messages about drug use, safer sex and hearing protection are provided to the visitors. Furthermore, the staff at the booth can provide information and orientation as well as sun screen, earplugs and condoms.

A lot of work goes also into depicting what recreational drug use is all about. Which drugs are consumed recreationally in Luxembourg? By whom? At which age? Where? Which effects do users seek in the different substances? Did they experience any adverse health effects?

A drug checking service was launched under the name of DUCK as a pilot project in 2014. DUCK tries to assess which synthetic substances are consumed in the country and whether they constitute a health risk for the consumers. If necessary, a health alert can be launched by the authorities.

A common goal of these three projects is that they allow us to enter in contact with recreational drug users, which are generally neither attracted to specialized drug help services nor common drug prevention campaigns.

After obtaining a PhD in cognitive psychology at the Université libre de Bruxelles in 2001, **Katia Duscherer** has been working as a postdoc researcher in psycholinguistics and developmental psychology, with a specific focus on the role of semantic representations and consciousness.

In 2007, Katia Duscherer joined the CePT - the National Addiction Prevention Centre - in Luxembourg, and has been dealing with drugs professionally ever since. Her topics of interests are the psychoactive substances and their effects on the human mind and behaviour, the motivations of the consumers and what this means for health promotion and addiction prevention.

## **Check your drugs – check your life**

### **IDC - Integrated Drug Checking: more than just analysis**

*Constanze Nagy (checkit!, Austria)*

With new Psychoactive Substances (NPS) continuously emerging and more rapid changes in the drugs markets than ever, a well-known problem of the 1990s has only become more pressing these days. Recreational drug users and professionals alike lack reliable information about the synthetic drugs they encounter. Another challenge for everybody involved is that the knowledge needed to judge the risks of using these new substances has become more complex and inaccessible.

At the same time most recreational users feel quite safe when using drugs. That explains why they do not access support services. How aware are they of the different risks that are involved? They are exposed to several acute risks (associated with consumption, effects of substances or legal risks) and long term risks (associated with problematic patterns of use, social stigma, etc.). One model of best practice example that can raise awareness of and address both types of risks in a balanced way is Integrated Drug Checking, abbreviated IDC.

IDC owns a unique potential to reach out to this specific target group because it provides credible and relevant information desired by recreational users. It helps them to make more informed choices about their health in the course of consumption. IDC facilitates synergy effects through the neat integration of other harm reduction and support services. That allows users to become aware of their individual risks and use an appropriate service.

The Vienna based organisation checkit! is offering support services for drug users since 1997. That includes the provision of “integrated drug checking” (IDC) directly at electronic music parties and festivals (onsite). The main objective of checkit! is to reduce the risks and harms for people with recreational drug use. Throughout the time checkit! gathered experience in promoting health and safety in the nightlife scene. Practical experiences will be shared and insights will be provided into the latest developments of the two crucial aspects of IDC, the chemical analysis and the psychosocial services.

**Constanze Nagy** originally trained as a clinical & health psychologist. Subsequently she gathered plenty of experience in the field of addiction prevention and drug trend research. Currently she is in charge of evaluation, monitoring and research at checkit!, a Viennese institution which provides various support services for recreational drug users since 1997, including integrated drug checking (IDC). At checkit! Constanze Nagy also used to work as a psychosocial counsellor for many years. An experience that she is sharing nowadays by providing training in Motivational Interviewing-based counselling. In her role of outreach counsellor, she still can be found at various music festivals and events where checkit! provides information, advice and support to drug users and those considering using substances. Therefore she knows IDC very well from various perspectives.

## **Time for a new European Enlightenment on alcohol and other drugs?**

*David Nutt (Imperial College London, United Kingdom)*

The use of the law to control drug use is long established though still unproven in efficacy. Although seemingly obvious that legal interdictions should work there is little evidence to support this assertion. So for example cannabis though illegal is at some time used by nearly half of the population. Similarly drugs like ecstasy and amphetamine are widely used by up to a million young people each weekend. This use is underpinned by a demand for the pleasurable experiences that the drugs produce, and also by a paradoxical desire by some people to break the law.

As well as being ineffective for many users prohibition of drugs often leads to perverse magnification of harms and drug use. When the “English” approach to heroin use i.e. prescription to addicts was abolished in the 1970s on moral grounds heroin use increased tenfold in a few years as addicts were forced to become dealers so getting more people addicted to fuel their income. The banning of alcohol in the 1920s in the USA led to huge criminal expansion of alcohol sales the perpetrators of which turned to other drugs once prohibition was repealed: a legacy that we still experience today.

Moreover the un-scientific and arbitrary distinction between legal drugs particularly alcohol and tobacco and “illegal” drugs also has perverse negative consequences. As well as bringing the scientific foundation of the drug laws into disrepute it also precludes the use of possibly life-changing drugs for those who might benefit

from them as treatments: examples of these include cannabis for Multiple sclerosis, MDMA [ecstasy] for PTSD and psilocybin for cluster headaches.

For these reasons I will argue that there are serious ethical implications for a simplistic prohibitionist approach to drugs and suggest we need a new Enlightenment to deal with these problems.

**David Nutt** FMedSci is Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College London and a consultant psychiatrist in the Central and North West London mental health trust where he conducts research into the mechanisms of addiction and the effects of drugs on brain function. He was chair of the ACMD until sacked by Alan Johnson and now is currently the Chair of the ISCD [Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs] a charitable group that provides unbiased evidence about drugs actions and harms ([www.drugscience.org.uk](http://www.drugscience.org.uk)).

Recent references:

Weissenborn R and Nutt DJ (2012) Popular intoxicants: what lessons can be learned from the last 40 years of alcohol and cannabis regulation? *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 26(2) 213–220

Sessa B and Nutt DJ (2015) Making a medicine out of MDMA. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 206, 4–6. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.114.152751

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Notes



## Recreational Drug Use in Luxembourg and across Europe

September 30th, 2015

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|------------------|---|
| <b>2:00 p.m.</b> | <b>Opening and welcome speech</b><br>Jean-Paul Nilles (CePT, Luxembourg)<br>Xavier Poos (Ministry of Health, Luxembourg)  |
| <b>2:15 p.m.</b> | <b>Global Drug Survey: How the world's biggest drug survey (even accepting its limitations) can tell us some useful things about how the world of drugs is changing and why getting Luxembourg to join this year would be fantastic</b><br>Adam Winstock (Global Drug Survey, United Kingdom) |
| <b>2:50 p.m.</b> | <b>Swiss Nightlife prevention – a pragmatic answer to the reality of recreational drug use</b><br>Alex Bücheli (Safer Nightlife Switzerland, Switzerland)   |
| <b>3:25 p.m.</b> | <b>Tackling recreational drug use in Luxembourg</b><br>Katia Duscherer (CePT, Luxembourg)   |
| <b>4:00 p.m.</b> | <b>Coffee break</b>   |
| <b>4:30 p.m.</b> | <b>Check your drugs – check your life IDC – Integrated Drug Checking: more than just analysis</b><br>Constanze Nagy (checkit!, Austria)   |
| <b>5:05 p.m.</b> | <b>Time for a new European Enlightenment on alcohol and other drugs?</b><br>David Nutt (Imperial College London, United Kingdom)  |
| <b>5:45 p.m.</b> | <b>Discussion and conclusions</b><br>Alex Bücheli - Katia Duscherer - Constanze Nagy<br>David Nutt - Adam Winstock  |
| <b>6:00 p.m.</b> | <b>End of symposium</b>   |