# Going up the country – Characterizing recreational drug use in music festivals

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, harm reduction projects have been developed through a diversity of actors in the European festival scene. Successful projects stress the importance of a participative approach involving the different stakeholders and of a good familiarity with the subcultures and the party scenes they are involved in. In 2009 we planned to implement a harm reduction project named Party MAG-Net in the Greater Region located between Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg. This small rural area has a rich cultural offer with a high cross-border mobility of the population. The nightlife scene in this region consists mainly of bars, small clubs and music festivals, attracting a mainstream international public. To adapt our offer to the needs of the festival goers we decided to conduct a quantitative survey with the objective to characterize the public of the music festivals, namely their recent recreational drug use. Unsurprisingly, the most commonly consumed substances were alcohol, tobacco and cannabis; all other illegal substances being reported far less frequently. Separated analyses for age, gender and region of origin will be presented.

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#### 1. Introduction

In recent years, health promotion and harm reduction activities have been developed in the European festival scene. Supported by ONGs, governmental services or by the partygoers themselves, information booths provide, for instance, earplugs, condoms, sunscreen, sniff kits, or water, as well as information about recreational drugs, advice on safer use or even chill out zones. Successful projects stress the importance of a participative approach involving the different stakeholders (e.g., promoters, organizers, partygoers, local authorities, prevention and health services, security) in this particular field of harm reduction work. Also a good familiarity and acceptance of the subcultures and of the party scenes, they are involved in, are indispensable to reach conclusive results.

While most harm reduction services keep statistics about the consumption habits of the partygoers they are in contact with, based on interviews or the completion of short questionnaires, systematic studies about the recreational drug use of the general public of music festivals are scarce. Most data that is available stem from school surveys like HBSC or ESPAD, or is provided through drug help services dealing with problematic or addicted drug users. However, these populations differ significantly from the usual festival public, be it on age, gender, interests or drug use.

# 2. Survey on recreational drug use 2.1 The background: Party MAG-Net

In 2009 a consortium of associations and institutions decided to launch a harm reduction project named Party MAG-Net in the Greater Region located between Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg. This territory is a small rural area with a highly mobile population, which is used to cross regional and national borders on a daily basis, be it for work, shopping, school or leisure activities. The nightlife scene in this region consists mainly of bars, small clubs and music festivals, attracting a very international, mainstream public.

The Party MAG-Net Charter of Quality guarantees organizers and partygoers alike

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"Coop. Libraria Editrice Università di Padova" Via G. Belzoni, 118/3 Padova t. 049 8753496 | f. 048 650261 www.cleup.it | www.facebook.com/cleup that a variety of services is accessible, like information on drugs, ear plugs, condoms, information about legal regulations, traffic safety, risky sexual behaviour, support services, and public transport timetables.

The main focus is on harm reduction messages associated with recreational drug use. This information is provided in situ by a team of trained peers. Most of the peers are students in social sciences, interested in the party scene they are working in. Fancy trilingual postcards are made available to the public, including information on alcohol, cocaine, cannabis, synthetic cannabinoids, tobacco, XTC, LSD, ketamine, GHB/GBL, heroine, speed, as well as information on road safety, risky sexual behaviours and auditory risks.<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.2 Objectives

To adapt the Party MAG-Net offer to the needs of the festivalgoers of our region, we decided to conduct a large scale quantitative survey. The main objective of this survey was thus the characterization of the public of the music festivals we planned to attend to.

#### 2.3 Methodology

A short written questionnaire with closed questions was set up in a bilingual German/French version. Participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, region of residence, languages they understood, how they planned to return home from the festival, and which drugs they consumed in the last two weeks.

The questionnaires were distributed on a large scale to the festivalgoers, mainly when they entered the festival site. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire and then to drop it in a ballot box.

#### 2.4 Results

As an example, this abstract will summarize the data gathered in 2011 in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (Duscherer and Paulos, 2012). That year, Party MAG-Net booths were part of most national music festivals, which were attended by a total of approximately 32.000 visitors.

2.480 questionnaires were completed and 2.397 questionnaires were validated for this region alone. The median age of the participants was 19 years, ages ranging between 12 and 70 years. 48.0% of the respondents were female. Favourite transportation mode was by far the private vehicle (78.9% of respondents).

Asked about their drug use during the last two weeks, alcohol was by far the most frequent psychoactive substance declared (85.2%), followed by tobacco (50.5%) and cannabis (22.8%). All other drugs ranged below the 5% mark, like cocaine, magic mushrooms, LSD, amphetamines, ecstasy, heroin or ketamine. As can be seen in Figure 1 (taken from Origer, 2012), male participants consistently indicated to have consumed more psychoactive substances than female participants.

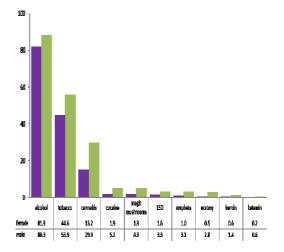


Figure 1. Caption: Use of psychoactive substances during the last two weeks by partygoers (valid %) according to the gender of the participants.

Further data and analyses will be discussed during the presentation.

#### 3. Acknowledgments

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The whole Party MAG-Net card set can be free downloaded at the Safer Nightlife digital library at http://www.safernightlife.org/digital-library.

the Greater Region 2007-2013 for the MAG-Net Project (project ID: 52 GR 3 3 100).

# 4. References

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