

Acknowledgements

The European Society for Social Drug Research (ESSD) was established in 1990. The principal aim of the ESSD is to promote social science approaches to drug research, with special reference to the situation in Europe. Organising annual conferences and producing an annual book is a core activity of the ESSD. For this year's book, a number of participants who presented their studies at the 21st annual conference in Dubrovnik, Croatia in September 2010 were invited to submit a chapter. However, this invitation was not restricted to the participants of the conference: other ESSD members were also welcome to contribute. After a first review of outlines by the Editorial Board, submitted papers were peer reviewed by distinguished scholars. This book contains only the chapters that were approved during this process.

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Psychedelic musicians, Muslim dealers and domestic marijuana growers: an introduction

Dirk J. Korf

1 Introduction

The drugs market is constantly changing. New ‘recreational’ drugs appear regularly on the scene. Most are just a flash in the pan and are soon forgotten. Only rarely does a new drug take centre stage, as ecstasy has done over the past two decades. To adolescents growing up today, ecstasy (MDMA) is not even a new drug: it was already on the market before they were born.

Even when a drug proves more than a passing fad, it often leads a dynamic life. The same drug may have different social meanings for different groups of users – meanings that can change drastically over time (Fountain & Korf, 2007). Cannabis is a case in point. In the last century, it has borne the image of ‘killer weed’ in pre-war America (Himmelstein, 1983), was the drug of choice in the pacifist-oriented Western protest generation of the 1960s and 1970s, and later became the classic symbol of the normalisation of youthful drug use (Parker et al., 1998; Room et al., 2010). In recent years, cannabis has again been relabelled, as a catalyst of schizophrenia (Bossong & Niesink, 2010; Vuillaume, 2008). Cocaine is another good example. Depending on the mood of the times, cocaine may be associated with the success and wealth of an affluent crowd of sniffers (with lawyers and bankers invariably as the prototypical users), or with marginalised drug addicts who inject cocaine or smoke it as crack, or with pleasure-seekers in nocturnal club and party scenes (Decorte & Muys, 2010; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1985; Nabben & Korf, 1999).

Such temporal changes in the imagery surrounding drugs might be primarily explained as a question of perception and subjective experience. But there are also objective trends over time. Recent developments in the cannabis market may illustrate this. In Europe, imported hashish, mainly from Morocco, must now compete increasingly with domestically cultivated marijuana. This is not merely product substitution. The increasing popularity of domestic marijuana has also triggered sweeping changes on the European cannabis market. Even countries like Finland (Hakkarainen et al., 2011), whose climates are unsuitable for outdoor marijuana cultivation and which formerly relied on imports, now have domestic indoor growers. Such developments are made possible both by selective breeding improvements in the cannabis plant and by technological innovations – enabling not only consumers to grow a few plants at home under a heat lamp, but also criminal entrepreneurs to cultivate thousands of plants on a commercial basis in clandestine sites, using a battery of lamps fired by illegally tapped electricity, professional watering systems and other sophisticated equipment (Decorte et al., 2011).

2 Markets, methods and messages

Government drug policies target both the supply side and the demand side of markets. On the demand side, they try to discourage drug use through universal prevention campaigns and abstinence-based treatment; in Europe, they also focus increasingly on reducing drug-related harm through methadone substitution programmes and other initiatives (Hedrich et al., 2008). On the supply side, the customs, police and criminal justice authorities combat the production and trade of drugs. When the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime recently weighed up 100 years of international drug control, its executive director, Antonio Maria Costa, concluded that much had been achieved. At the same time he observed: "Yet this progress can only be maintained by coming to terms with the unintended consequences of drug control, especially the massive criminal black market in drug trafficking." (UNODC, 2009, p.3). According to Reuter and Trautman (2009), though, such 'unintended consequences' are intrinsic characteristics of illicit drug markets, the inevitable result of efforts to police the supply side of the market by criminalising it. Whatever view one adopts, it is patently clear that the illegal status of the drugs market generates its own unique dynamics and that any systematic research on that market therefore poses special challenges. For instance, whilst it is relatively easy to ascertain the costs of legal products at each stage of the production and marketing chain (manufacturing, wholesaling, distribution, retailing), researchers on illicit drug markets must have recourse to alternative methods to produce such figures.

In the monitoring of trends on the demand side of the drugs market, great progress has been made in recent years in European socioepidemiological research. Thanks to the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), we now have reliable data from an impressive, and still growing, number of countries about prevalence and trends in alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use by adolescents aged 15 and 16 (Hibell et al., 2009). Substantial headway has also been made by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) towards standardising national-level data collection in European Union countries, thus enabling the increasingly comprehensive mapping of drug use both in the general population and amongst problem users (EMCDDA, 2010). But new challenges constantly arise, necessitating critical reflection on existing methodologies and new orientations in social drug research. Of particular interest at present are the opportunities created by the internet.

Recent developments in the neurosciences, in particular, have significantly improved our understanding of drug use (Muscat et al., 2009). A major challenge for drug policy lies in applying such scientific knowledge towards successful drug prevention. What effective messages could we formulate to discourage people from starting to take drugs? Or, if they are already taking them, what messages could help them reduce the hazards? Drugs are more than just chemical substances that influence individual human behaviour through their effects on the brain. As Zinberg (1984) has shown, the personalities, attitudes, expectancies and motivations of drug users (*the set*), and especially the *settings* in which they take their drugs, exert a greater influence over both the users and their drug-taking patterns than the pharmacological properties of the drug. Although Zinberg may have underestimated the pharmacologic action of drugs and the role of the human brain, his argument is still valid that we cannot understand drug use without including in our analysis the individuals who take drugs and the environments in which they do so.

Markets, methods and messages are the three central themes of this volume. Some authors address one of the themes, others a combination. The focus is on Europe. All authors work in that part of the world, conducting systematic research on drug use, drug users and drug sellers. They include social scientists from a range of disciplines – including psychology, sociology, anthropology and criminology – and many have a specific orientation or interest in qualitative research methods.

3 Drugs and music

Much has been written about the interrelations between music and drugs, about drugs as sources of inspiration for song lyrics and rhythms, and about musicians who die from overdoses. Some musical styles seem to depend on drugs for their very right of existence: reggae is invariably associated with marijuana and electronic dance music (rave, house, techno) with ecstasy. In a compelling, in-depth analysis of the discourse in recent decades about the interplay between drugs and music, *Springer* reflects on both music and drugs as cultural issues, which can only be properly understood in their sociohistorical context, their "overall cultural framework." In the "psychedelic tradition," music is widely viewed as the expression of music makers' own experiences with drugs: music is created under the influence of drugs; and drug experiences are conveyed to the listeners via the music. This tradition is also recognisable in messages transmitted by the music media, where words like 'trippy' may be used to describe music. From a market perspective (which the author does not explore explicitly), the linkage of music to drugs might even be seen as a sales strategy. In the heyday of raves, the very mention of the word 'ecstasy' in a song text was enough to evoke loud cries of jubilation from the dance floor. Yet the simultaneous rise and popularity of electronic dance music and ecstasy also approximately coincided with an emerging new theoretical view on how drugs and music interrelate. In contrast to the psychedelic approach inspired by the 1960s and 1970s protest generation, there was little evidence of a political orientation in the new generation. The new musical style arose in the era of HIV and AIDS. The driving beat of electronic music, coupled with the drug-induced ecstatic high on the dance floor, resonated perfectly with the quest for bodily pleasure without dangerous sex. This is not to say, of course, that electronic dance music was the causal factor in the evolving use of drugs such as ecstasy. The connection is far more complex. A liking for a particular type of music or drug (or an aversion to them), either together or separately, may serve as an element in an identity formation process, a process in which other people, such as the peer group, also play a role. Although epidemiological research does show that drugs and related issues may be important to particular musical styles, references to drugs in music are not necessarily evidence of drug use by the listeners. Hence these messages cannot automatically be taken as valid indicators for the normalisation of drug use.

4 Drug dealing and ethnicity

From a very different, but no less broad-ranging and critical perspective, *Roy* illuminates the role of ethnic groups in the drugs market. He also uses discourse analysis, but he bases his investigation on his own empirical data, obtained in

qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. His central emphasis is on the complex meanings attached to race, place, religion and drug supply by a range of local people in a northern English town. For some time now in Western societies, drug suppliers qualify as ‘suitable enemies’. Today that may be even more the case for Muslims, particularly in the UK since the London bombings of 7th July 2005. The growing involvement of British-born Pakistani Muslim males in the street-level supply of heroin and crack has been accompanied by significant shifts in local modes of drug selling. These cannot be seen in isolation from the police activities directed at this group. Negative views about South Asian drug suppliers have amplified existing local tensions over ethnic and religious difference and cultural separation. From a theoretical point of view, especially interesting in Roy’s chapter is the combination of social history and psychology: the wider societal discourse on a particular group can have real effects on the lives of people from that group and may result, internally, in a self-fulfilling prophecy. The stereotype view of South Asian drug suppliers as business-minded entrepreneurs thus provides a convenient explanatory framework that the drug suppliers themselves can identify with and use as a reference point for behaviour.

The use of the term ‘race’ in this chapter, and more generally in the UK, may raise some eyebrows, as the word is often considered taboo elsewhere in post-war Europe, where terms such as ‘ethnicity’ are preferred. This does not make this British researcher’s contribution any less relevant to other European countries, of course, where his insights may be applicable to other ethnic groups.

5 Looking for cannabis dealers and growers

One of the most common methods used to study ‘hidden populations’ is snowball sampling. People belonging to the target population are interviewed, and they are then asked to help find other potential respondents from that population. Snowballing, and more specific variants like respondent-driven sampling (RDS), have often been used in studies of drug users. The success of recruiting respondents by snowballing depends on various factors, one of which is the type of population being targeted. It would appear that snowball sampling works better for more marginalised groups like intravenous drug users than for socially more integrated groups like frequent cannabis smokers (Liebregts et al., 2011). Contacting cannabis *dealers* via snowballing is definitely no easy ride, as shown in the contribution by *Surmont, Vander Laenen and De Ruyver*. Mutual trust between marijuana growers and dealers is obviously a crucial condition for sustaining oneself in the cannabis market. Anonymity in the outside world is also essential. Researchers must therefore first gain the trust of their respondents and then manage to convince them that they need not fear that their

anonymity will be compromised. If this succeeds, then the next challenge is to be put in contact with other actors in the cannabis market. The hierarchical relationships on that market present a formidable obstacle here: why would higher-level players on the cannabis market allow players further down the ladder to put them in touch with a researcher? A further impediment is that referring researchers to other growers or dealers might conflict with one's own business interests. This specific problem arose in this study, in which the researchers wanted to obtain information on the prices of cannabis at various levels of production and distribution. The frankness with which the authors report here on the barriers they encountered, and on the strategies they used to try to overcome these, has resulted in a chapter that could be highly instructive for other researchers.

A methodological approach to drugs research that is swiftly gaining popularity is the internet survey. It has been employed several times in recent years to survey marijuana growers (Decorte et al., 2011; Hakkarainen et al., 2011). In this book, *Potter and Chatwin* report not so much on the final results of their own study as on the strengths and concerns of online research on cannabis markets. In particular, they examine the process of recruiting respondents and obtaining valid data. They treat fundamental problems in online survey methodologies (e.g. response rates, representativeness of samples), and present and discuss research strategies that they and others have used to improve the quality of survey data. One approach they strongly advocate is active researcher participation in internet discussion forums. They demonstrate convincingly how this generates fruitful qualitative information that can complement and enrich quantitative data obtained from questionnaires.

6 New opportunities for qualitative social drug research

The virtual field of the internet offers wider opportunities for social drug researchers beyond surveys alone. In an inspiring essay, *Coomber* demonstrates the potentials of qualitative online drug research as a primary source of in-depth information, as a supportive addition to offline research, or as part of a mixed-methods approach. Thanks to the internet, researchers are now much less tied to particular geographical areas. This gives them far more flexibility, making it reasonably easy to set up activities like cross-border focus group discussions. Mobile phone SMS texts between actors in social networks can also be collected and analysed, as can group forum archives, chatroom discussions, blogs, web pages and other online resources. All such sources open tremendous opportunities for qualitative drug researchers. This signals a major breakthrough in ethnographic research. Whereas ethnographers in the past always had to go

physically out into the field, they can now work online from behind their desks – either supplementing or completely replacing the more classical ethnography, depending on the research topic. Although Coomber may be a bit optimistic to suggest that the obstacles to qualitative online research are “comparatively small” and “easily surmountable”, that does not make the challenge any less exciting.

7 Online drug shops

The internet enables people to sell drugs, just like other products. This opens new opportunities for researchers to follow trends in drug markets. *Solberg, Sedefov and Griffiths* outline a methodology to systematically monitor the online availability of “new drugs and legal highs” in Europe. They recount their experiences with this approach, discuss methodological and technical problems they have encountered, and explain whether and how they have solved these or how they could be dealt with in future. One problem of using the internet is to identify the country of origin of online shops: one cannot just judge by the language of the interface, as this is mostly English. A unique strength of this study is that the authors did not confine themselves to a single language area, as international studies often do, but included fifteen languages in their search. They conclude that the online availability of new drugs and legal highs via online shops gives valuable, timely insights into the current state of play. Such snapshots, if continuously made, can provide good indications of trends in many areas, including the substances on offer and the price developments. As the authors rightly note, the method also has its limitations, as it gives no insight into the real magnitude of sales (and hence the scale of use) of the products on offer. Supplementary methods and data sources are needed to shed light on these and other facets of the trade, such as the profiles of sellers and buyers. Whether the snapshot methodology could be employed to monitor markets for illegal drugs remains an open question.

8 Messages on drugs in newspapers

With all the enthusiasm about new possibilities on the internet, one might almost forget that the old media also still exist. They, too, report about drugs, and they are all the more important as data sources for studying long-term trends in public perceptions about drugs. Although there are more and more people around today who have taken drugs themselves or who know someone that does or has done, the vast majority are not actually addicted to drugs, nor have they ever been, nor do they know anyone personally who is drug-dependent. As a consequence, many of their ideas and perceptions about drug addic-

tion are based on second-hand information. The mass media are a major source of their perceptions. Hellman has analysed news coverage of drug addiction over a period spanning nearly four decades (1968-2006) in the most widely read Finnish newspaper. Her analysis reveals an intriguing evolution over time. In the 1960s and 1970s, the problem of drug addiction was located mainly in the addictive substances themselves and in the groups (criminals) that sold them. In the 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis turned to the individuals who were taking drugs, had become addicted and needed help. Since the late 1990s, the cause of drug addiction has been situated in the bodies of the drug-dependent individuals, in particular in the brain. Coinciding with these developments was a shift in terms of the people considered responsible for solving the addiction problem. First it was the law enforcement authorities, then it was seen as the state's responsibility to provide treatment and support, and more recently both the state and the individual were held responsible. The messages in the Finnish press not only keenly illustrate how the causal locus of drug addiction became differently positioned over time, but also how a succession of different institutions or groups were expected to take the lead in preventing, resolving or mitigating the problem. No less intriguing is that this analysis of a single national popular newspaper is so recognisable to people in many other European countries.

Demant, Raven and Kaae also analyse press reports about drugs. Their study includes the eight largest Danish newspapers over a much shorter timeframe, the first half of 2009. A striking number of articles were published in that period about cocaine, but fewer on amphetamine and still fewer on ecstasy. Three discourses are distinguishable from the messages in the newspapers. The *crime discourse* chiefly focuses on drug selling as a criminal activity, which is morally reprehensible and needs to be punished. In the *celebrity discourse*, drug use is an inherent part of a hedonistic, glamorous lifestyle that is more or less acceptable to those who lead it. Finally, the *discourse on troubled youth* labels drug use as deviant behaviour manifesting itself particularly in young people with a range of problems like low self-esteem. Not entirely surprising in the light of the history of perceptions of cocaine traced earlier in this chapter, the authors report that the drug is portrayed ambiguously in the Danish media. On the one hand cocaine is glamorous (*celebrity discourse*) and on the other hand it is problematic (*crime discourse*). Again consistent with the prevailing image in many other European countries is the low status and slightly seedy image presented for amphetamine, which much more often fits into the *crime discourse* than into the *celebrity discourse*. More surprising is that the Danish newspapers link ecstasy with troubled youth. This could be evidence of the declining popularity of ecstasy in Europe, or it could be an artefact of the increased scientific concern with neurotoxicity and brain injuries resulting from its use. Another possibility is that the Danish discourse on ecstasy is now diverging from that in

the rest of Europe, where ecstasy is still often presented as the party drug *par excellence*. A final explanation could be that the messages on ecstasy in the Danish press might reasonably reflect the general perceptions held across Denmark, but at the same time might radically differ from the image embraced by the users themselves.

9 Conclusion

Messages in the mass media shed light on how people are thinking about drugs, and also both reflect and influence policies on drugs. But that is by no means saying that media messages are a true representation of the experiences and perceptions in the world of drug users and suppliers themselves. And here lies one of the critical problems of drug policy: the issue of which methods and messages will be most effective in managing the drug market.

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