Acknowledgments

The European Society for Social Drug Research (ESSD) was established in 1990. Its principal aim 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 are core activities of the ESSD. For this year's book, a number of participants who presented their research at the 25th annual conference in Nantes, France in September 2014 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. The editors would like to thank the authors for their diverse and original contributions to this book, their responses to queries and comments from the editors and peer reviewers, and their adherence to deadlines. We thank and appreciate the peer reviewers for their time: Marcelo Andrade, Jeroen Boekhoven, Gregor Burkhart, John Cameron, Pekka Hakkarainen, Alexia Maddox, Meropi Tzanetakis, and Freya Vander Laenen.

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1
Real life and virtual worlds of drug users and drug dealers in social drug research: an introduction

Dirk J. Korf

1. Between street and screen

Changes take place swiftly in the European drug situation and in social drug research. To a large extent, these developments are fuelled by technological innovations. Like many other people, drug users, drug dealers and drug researchers increasingly make use of electronic devices such as computers, smartphones, laptops, tablets, the Internet, apps, etc. These devices share one thing: the screen. The screen is used to search for information and to communicate, and today, drug users can also use it for conducting do-it-yourself interventions such as risk assessments and harm reduction. They can also order drugs electronically and this raises the question of what this means for traditional retail drug supply, such as street dealing. These developments mean that researchers no longer need to go to locations where drug users congregate to conduct 'real life' observations or interviews. Instead, they can turn to the screen and carry out online interviews and virtual ethnography.

Given these rapid technological developments and new opportunities, one could almost forget that, in most cases, people use drugs together with other people in a real life setting. Today, professionals in the drug field still have contact with drug users on the street (e.g. outreach workers, police officers), in clubs, at raves and festivals (e.g. prevention workers), or in treatment centres and clinics. Consequently, it appears advisable that social drug researchers do not fully hide themselves in their offices behind their computer, but keep going onto the streets. Of course, it would be wise to make use of technological innovations too. Rather than sticking to pen-and-paper surveys in clubs for example, it is much more convenient and faster to use tablets or smartphones. Yet onsite observations, informal conversations and qualitative interviews still appear to

be an appropriate and sophisticated approach to reveal and understand the atmosphere, social interactions, drug use rituals and meaning of drug use in the club scene.

The challenge for social drug research is therefore to find the right balance between street and screen. This book includes contributions from researchers that illustrate the relevance and value of classic ethnographic methods in contemporary research, and also show that sociological concepts and theories from the twentieth century can still be helpful in understanding new phenomena in the drug field. Other chapters demonstrate the possibilities of new data sources and new research methods, as well as the risks of the use of the Internet and the limitations of 'screen research'. Together, the various chapters present a state-of-the art picture of the diversity in today's world of drug use and drug distribution. They show that 'street methods' are more appropriate for research into certain themes or groups, and 'screen methods' for others. It also becomes clear that it is not always a matter of choice between them, but rather a combination of online and offline methods that offers the best chances for social drug research. Last but not least, this book discusses implications of the use of the screen for policymakers and practitioners in the field of law enforcement, prevention, harm reduction and treatment.

2. Drug policy at street-level: police and drug users

In Chapter 2, *Michael Bujalski and Łukasz Wieczorek* describe the successive changes in Polish drug law and drug policy over the past three decades. In 1985, the Polish Act on Counteracting Drug Addiction was adopted. The emphasis was on a public health approach, with a key role for prevention and treatment, and the possession and purchase of illicit drugs were not criminalised. Some years later, changing patterns of drug use and increasing supply after the democratic transformation in 1989 fuelled the debate on how to respond to the possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use (Krajewski, 2004). In 1997, an amendment to the act penalised drug possession with the exception of small amounts for personal use. Three years later, after intensive political campaigns calling for a strict prohibitionist policy, this amendment was withdrawn. From then on, the law on possession of illicit drugs was actively enforced (Krajewski, 2013), leading to a drastic increase in the number of drug offences.

In 2005, a new Act on Counteracting Drug Addiction was adopted, with Article 72 concerned with delivering treatment as an alternative to prison. Since 2011, Article 72 can also be applied to detainees with previous criminal records. However, this rarely occurs in practice. The question why this is the case is at the core of chapter 2. The authors interviewed police officers in Warsaw who had been conducting preparatory charges against drug users who had committed other criminal acts. Their aim was to examine how the perception,

attitudes and knowledge of officers may affect the process of treatment referral, as well as to define the frame of interactions between police officers and drug users and their consequences for the implementation of drug policy.

The theoretical point of departure was the classic sociological notion that people do not simply react to conditions of environment but actively participate in the process of defining them (symbolic interactionism). Interactions create significance, make sense of certain conditions and give meaning to the actions of other people (Blumer, 1969). In the context of Bujalski and Wieczorek's research, the status of drug users was recognised from the perspective of police officers. Officers' role is to conduct an investigation, to record proceedings and to prepare an opinion on detained drug users based on the collected evidence, which is subsequently forwarded to the prosecutor who decides whether to take punitive measures or to refer a detainee to specialist drug treatment. To fulfil this role, police officers in Warsaw make use of a set of typifications. In their work, they come into contact with a variety of drug users, but their perception is predominantly influenced by those with whom they are most often are confronted, namely 'hard' drug users who commit property crimes (such as theft and burglary) in order to obtain money for drugs. The interviewed police officers claim that these people are difficult to work with: their stereotyped image presents them as lacking morality, weak-willed, unpredictable and potentially dangerous. The authors interpret this process of stereotyping in terms of labelling and stigma (Becker, 1983; Lemert, 1967; Goffman, 1968). Labelling and stigma alter a person's identity and create distance. Polish police perceive drug addicts as carriers of diseases (HIV and AIDS in particular). In the opinion of police officers, drug addicts – especially injecting drug users – may inflict serious health damage, as each physical contact potentially carries a risk of being injured with infected injecting equipment. This specific risk can be described as a 'needle threat' (drug addiction means illness that the police fear) and is an important psychological factor hindering police officers' interaction with drug users.

Chapter 2 confirms the idea that official drug policies may not be implemented as intended because of the actions of 'street-level bureaucrats' (police officers in this case), i.e. '… public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work' (Lipsky, 2010, p. 3). In order to cope with the gaps between the aims and expectations of official policies, and the actual resources and context in which they are implemented, street-level workers need to create strategies. 'Discretion' in Lipsky's comment refers to workers' relative freedom in making choices. Their decisions depend on the resources and regulations provided by the organisations in which they work (Lipsky, 2010), but also on the values and attitudes of practitioners towards the official policies and practical procedures that govern their work (Evans, 2013). In the Polish case of Article 72, it is police officers' decisions that determine whether the individual drug user

will receive treatment or be sent to prison. The options for recovery are in fact in the officers' hands. From their perspective, the complicated procedures and the lack of time discouraged the use of Article 72. According to police officers, prosecutors were pressing for the immediate finishing of proceedings, as their suspension would escalate to large amounts of unfinished cases. Police officers themselves used negative stereotypes and were reluctant to pay attention to, and distanced themselves from drug-related issues. The risk and uncertainty of their contact with drug users was avoided by employing rules of interactions and standardisation of their treatment of detainees. They did not inform detainees about the possibilities of treatment and delegated that responsibility and decision to prosecutors and judges, therefore avoiding additional duties and difficulties for themselves.

Despite the country specifics, Chapter 2 shows that drug policy can fail if the official approach and ideas have not been adopted and internalised on the micro level. In this specific case, solutions could include reducing stigma and negative stereotypes of drug users through education, training and information on treatment options for both police officers and drug users, and better cooperation between police and socio-medical practitioners.

3. Resolving conflicts in online drug markets

In Chapter 3 we leave the street and move to the Internet and address the supply side of the drug market. In this chapter, *Meropi Tzanetakis* focuses on cryptomarkets or darknet markets, i.e. digital platforms where goods and services are exchanged on a part of the Internet that cannot be accessed through conventional search engines (Martin, 2014). More specifically, she explores and discusses the role of violence in these new markets compared with conventional drug markets.

Drug dealing on conventional illicit markets is based on face-to-face contact between the actors involved. The opposite is true for online drug trading. Parties involved in transactions in cryptomarkets know neither the personal identity, nor the exact physical location of one another. Vendors and customers can exchange drugs anonymously, all around the world and purchases are paid for in decentralised and pseudonymous digital currencies. In conventional drug markets, interpersonal violence is both a means of conflict resolution and a form of imposing sanctions. In contrast, because of anonymising technologies, the use of interpersonal violence is simply not possible on darknet marketplaces. Instead, there is the risk of fraud. To explore which and how alternative mechanisms to violence are being established on cryptomarkets, Tzanetakis conducted qualitative case studies on four vendors actively operating on Agora, which at the time of the study (mid-2015) was the largest drug marketplace on the darknet. The vendors were selected to capture different types of cus-

tomer satisfaction, different grades of trading experience and different types of trading.

One source for the emergence of conflicts on illicit drug markets are transaction processes. These encompass issues of quality, quantity, delivery and payment. On cryptomarkets, various mechanisms are being introduced address these issues. An initial safeguarding mechanism used to prevent scamming between vendors and customers, and for conflict resolution, is (1) the *centralised escrow* system. This enables a third party (a trustee, usually the administrator of the marketplace) to facilitate the trade between vendor and customer. The transaction will be completed by the trustee only when the buyer receives the product as agreed upon (Van Hout & Bingham, 2013). In the meantime, the payment made by the customer remains with the administrator and is not sent to the vendor. A dispute resolution is offered by the third party to solve a conflict (e.g. fraud) between buyer and seller if necessary. However, the escrow system is not without its shortcomings. Administrators hold a relatively powerful position, as they keep the money until the consumer authorises the transfer of the payment to the vendor. Money in escrow has been stolen by administrators or external hackers (Martin, 2014).

An alternative transaction process is (2) to *finalise early,* by the customer paying prior to delivery. Such transactions are often cheaper, and can be attractive for customers if the vendor has proven to be trustworthy via previous sales and positive feedback. On the other hand, finalise easy transactions leave the customer in a vulnerable position, because they run the risk of not receiving what they ordered, and are sometimes used to scam buyers. Another strategy is (3) *multi-signature* transaction. Two out of the three parties involved must agree on releasing the payment otherwise the funds will be blocked. The disadvantage is that this mechanism is technically demanding for all parties involved – the administrator of the marketplace, the buyer and the seller.

To build trust among sellers, online drug marketplaces provide (4) a sophisticated *customer feedback* system. This allows the buyer to submit a review on the product and the transaction. However, it is also a source of conflict when feedback is compromised. Vendors seem to put great emphasis on not receiving negative feedback or bad ratings by customers, and may go offline and register with a new user name to build a better reputation instead of continuing to offer their products with relatively low ratings that discourage buyers. Finally, the feedback information about the vendor can be supplemented by (5) *discussion forums.* Forum chat entries may provide more detailed information than customer feedback posts. Vendors can quickly respond to critique or requests, and thereby provide good customer service. Buyers can exchange information about their experiences with a particular vendor and their products. However, not in the least because of the anonymity that characterises the online drug market, discussion forums can also be misused and provide false information.

An essential feature of both online and offline illicit drug markets is that they cannot rely on the conflict resolution mechanisms that are offered by the state for legal businesses. To deal with trust and distrust, both markets rely on informal social control mechanisms. In 'real world' illicit drug markets, contact between buyers and sellers is usually face-to-face, but in online markets, trust and distrust are negotiated in a virtual space with technological innovations. In contrast to offline illicit drug markets, however, online markets have the potential to minimise physical forms of violence (Martin, 2014) due to the mechanisms described above that intend to prevent the emergence of violent conflicts. However, none of the online strategies works perfectly and instead of violence, fraud and scamming appear to be the main risks.

Online and offline drug markets are not fully separated. Their funds constantly flow into one another. Vendors in darknet marketplaces may be supplied by conventional drug distributors and online customers may re-sell their drugs offline to end users.

4. New challenges for intervention: from outreach to netreach work

Chapter 4 is also concerned with the Internet, but with a focus on drug users and drug prevention. As a point of departure, *Cristiana Vale Pires, Marta Borges and Helena Valente* take the 'democratisation' of information on drugs, in particular new psychoactive substances (NPS).

The Internet has brought about the emergence of so-called online drug cultures. Today, the Internet is an important socialisation and interaction space, facilitating new ways of social interaction, individual and collective identity-building, and information exchange. Drug cultures are no longer bound to real world spaces (e.g. streets, parks, clubs, festivals), and these have gradually been taken over – though not fully – by the Internet and social media. Chapter 4 explores the dynamics inherent in online drug cultures and identifies online interventions that can be useful for targeting drug users. In addition to a literature review, the authors collected the 'non-scientific' information available in the public domain, such as blogs, websites, press articles and grey literature, in a variety of languages. They conclude that the emergence of online drug cultures has allowed drug users to discuss drugs, share information and document personal experiences. The Internet has also led to the development of contact between outreach teams and peer-led initiatives with their target-groups/peers, complementing offline interventions by using privileged online spaces for information exchange, peer-to-peer education, prevention and harm reduction.

The authors propose that traditional outreach work should be complemented with netreach work. Outreach work can be defined as a set of services that

are carried out and provided in the target groups' real world settings. Netreach work has evolved by embracing technologies and designing intervention strategies adapted from face-to-face outreach work to online settings. In chapter 4, netreach work is defined as a set of web-based practices surrounding working online at the drug demand level, and is presented as an intervention strategy with the potential of dealing with the challenges imposed by the NPS phenomena and the dark web drug markets.

The authors distinguish five types of netreach strategies, and discuss their advantages and disadvantages:

1) *Information provision*. The most well-known website is Erowid, which since 1995, has been a major reference source for drug users and also for teams intervening on the recreational drug use level. The main criticism of this as a netreach strategy is that evidence suggests that information provision alone is more effective at altering knowledge and perceptions than in changing behaviours.
2) *Online drug self-assessment tests*. Teams working in the online drug scene use a self-assessment tool to support drug users while monitoring their drug use. Users are evaluated online to determine their drug use pattern and, in some cases, they receive (usually via email) self-help strategies and information to help them increase their awareness and moderate their drug use. Self-assessment followed by interventions can be a valuable netreach strategy, but scientific evidence on its efficacy is still rare.
3) *Drug testing* is an outreach service that monitors drug markets and provides objective information about the drugs' content to users. Several European projects provide online, up-to-date information about drug testing results and disseminate warnings when a dangerous substance is identified (such as adulterated ecstasy tablets). Netreach work passes on the information from these online databases and in addition to the results, provides information on the substances involved and harm reduction advice.
4) *User-led forums* are spaces for an extensive peer-to-peer production and sharing of knowledge and social support concerning drugs and harm reduction. Studying them can make a valuable contribution to research on understanding the online dynamics related to the search of information on drugs. Although peer-led initiatives are successful in terms of user empowerment, there is a risk that visitors to such websites consider the information received from their peers – which is not always accurate and can be related to individual experiences that should not be generalised – more credible than advice from professionals in the drugs field.
5) *Apps*. User-led forums, as well as NGOs and other organisations, are creating apps as intervention tools that can provide real time information to drug users and also help them to monitor their habits. Such intervention tools can be particularly valuable for use with smartphones, as they are not only widely used to communicate, but also to search for information online.

In their study, Pires, Borges and Valente identified 43 websites based in 14 European countries as netreach initiatives that include users of NPS in their target groups. As the authors admit, their overview is not exhaustive. In fact, that would not have been a realistic task, if only because of the variety of languages used in Europe, the rapid pace of innovation and also the closure of some websites as a result of law enforcement interventions. Nonetheless, their overview is very informative and illustrates a variety of netsearch strategies.

Regarding policy and practice, the authors conclude that with regard to the recreational drug scene, netreach work can bridge the gaps between professional and peer-led harm reduction initiatives. However, they underline that outreach and netreach are not mutually exclusive: they are complementary, and used together can create a holistic and up-to-date intervention. The authors also state that in cases of comorbidity and problematic drug use especially, online communication alone cannot replace personal communication and assistance.

5. How technological innovation changed the club scene

Ton Nabben has been studying Amsterdam nightlife since the early 1990s. Twice a year, he conducts individual face-to-face interviews about developments in drug use with a panel of trendsetters. In Chapter 5, he vividly describes the impact of technology and the emergence of new communication networks in nightlife where drug use plays an important role. In interviews, he still uses a classic topic list, but his smartphone is indispensable for making appointments with panel members and during the interviews they routinely use their tablets to show pictures of the latest nightlife venues and share with the researcher how contemporary real life drug dealers communicate online with their customers.

The first goal of the panel study is the early detection and contextual understanding of new drug trends. Most panel members are in their twenties. That means that about every five years a new (sub) generation rushes into nightlife with a different and sometimes new focus on nightlife and drug use. At first sight, little seems to have changed since the early 1990s. Ecstasy (MDMA) is still the most popular drug among Amsterdam nightlife clubbers and ravers, and electronic music still dominates the dance arena. However, what has changed dramatically since the early 1990s is the impact of the world wide web. The current generation of clubbers and ravers grew up with the Internet. Until the 1990s, the drug culture was mostly portrayed in books, pictures, and movies. Initially, the promotion of club nights and raves was limited mainly to flyers, posters, magazines and illegal (local) radio broadcasts. The current domain of youth culture is increasingly influenced by the digitalisation of visual culture and social media. New digital technologies and applications made the visualisation of entertainment and sharing of information virtually inexhaustible.

The vernacular web provides people with information on 'the what', 'how' and 'where' of their friends.

To understand the developments in nightlife, they need to be contextualised, both locally and globally. Amsterdam is quite a bit smaller than Berlin, London or New York, but is often mentioned in one breath with other 'cool' cities where commercial impulses stimulated innovative urban development (Hayward, 2004). Cities like Amsterdam can be considered as stages for, and facilitators of the party culture, which also symbolises the object of modernisation and continuous innovation, and a place that is sensitive to the vagaries of economic ups and downs. In this argument, the current renaissance in the economy of the dark hours cannot be dissociated from the metamorphosis in the 1990s that Amsterdam went through, from a business community to a high-quality service and network community with a vibrant nightlife culture.

One of the most influential concepts in social drug research since the 1990s is 'normalisation'. The extensive party and club culture, among other things, contributed to a normalisation of substance use during clubbing (Parker et al., 1998; Parker, 2005). However, within the normalisation debate, the influence and expansion of the drug discourse on the vernacular web has been largely neglected (Murguia et al., 2007). Nonetheless, the correlation between drugs, consumerism, knowledge-gathering and availability of resources has increased substantially through the Internet, and Walsh & Phil (2011) have stated that, online, the border between licit and illicit drugs has become blurred. The club culture nowadays is also inevitably a mediated culture where we cannot ignore the role of old and new media, and their part in the circulation of ideas about drugs. Consequently, it is very likely that the new popular media have amounted to a process of normalisation (Manning, 2014).

The Internet is an inexhaustible source of knowledge: although real world social networks continue to be an important source of information, finding information on, and discussing drugs on the Internet has become easier and more commonplace. One of the consequences is that the classic top-down model in drug prevention, with professionals informing lay people, has changed to a linear model in which the role of lay people is as experts.

At the demand side of the drugs market, the use of social media has led to the emergence of new networks in nightlife. Club cultures prove eminently receptive to new trends in nightlife and through the use of new communication technology, a new standard has been set. Facebook has considerably promoted the way in which new party collectives organise themselves and has provided a different interpretation of the meaning of 'going out'. This development runs parallel to the flight from overregulated entertainment venues and a desire for adventure and to organise a rave outside the regular circuit with like-minded people. In his conclusion, Nabben suggests that the strong growth in recent years of the rave culture in Amsterdam may also have been a major impetus for the increased drug use.

6. Psychedelic revival and new spiritualism

For decades, *Alfred Springer* has been interested in subcultural drug use. In Chapter 6 he explores new discourse and practice in sacramental drug use and the practice of ecstasy – i.e. meaning 'extasis', not the drug MDMA – that have been made possible by the Internet and social media. The interpretation is based on a broad definition of shamanism established since the 1960s, when the study of psychedelics was institutionalised in the academic field of anthropology. In chapter 6, shamanism is investigated as a convenient metaphor for all kinds of spiritual experiences involving direct contact with spiritual forces both in non-Western and Western cultures (Znamenski, 2007). From the 1980s onwards, with the rise of neo-liberalism, American shamanistic ideas and practices were transformed into a flourishing economy of shamanic goods such as Ayahuasca rituals and resorts. Within the neoliberal framework, drug experiences with shamanic intentions took on new meanings and correlate with different strategies of self-realisation (Boekhoven, 2011). Neo-shamanism is not a single, cohesive belief system, but a collective term for many philosophies and activities. It comprises an eclectic range of beliefs and practices that involve attempts to attain altered states of consciousness and communicate with a spirit world.

The episodes in the development of the genealogy of shamanism and drug use with spiritual/shamanic intentions are represented on the Internet, on the Erowid website in particular. There is a 'museum' containing the genealogies of shamanism and of sacramental and experimental drug use, and there are 'libraries' providing visitors with essential literature. Thereby, the Internet serves to sustain certain ideological and political positions crucial to the discourse of the 1960s and 1970s, and simultaneously conveys the latest developments in neo-shamanic culture. Springer's analysis of Erowid's Experience Vaults revealed thousands of reports on glowing experiences, mystical experiences and bad trips. Glowing and mystical experiences were reportedly induced by a wide range of psychoactive substances and most of them occurred after the ingestion of more than one substance (polydrug use). Many experience reports contained references to shamanism and drug mysticism. Over time, the use of substances traditionally linked with drug mysticism (e.g. LSD, psychedelic mushrooms, DMT, MDMA, dextrometorphane) was stable. From 2011 onwards, methoxetamine became increasingly popular as a substance that induces glowing experiences.

For those who are not so familiar with these issues, Chapter 6 will be a revelation. However, among experts there is much debate about their complexities and details. For example, can a clear distinction be made between traditional indigenous shamans and neo-shamans? Critics find the assumption that experiences can be scientifically examined quite problematic. After all, only the narratives about experiences can be investigated. In other words, experiences that

are interpreted as mystical above all tell us something about the framework in which these experiences are interpreted. Some people might report mystical experiences after the use of MDMA, while others call that experience euphoric or exciting.

However, drug use by definition can only be understood as the result of the interaction between drug, set and setting (Zinberg, 1984). Drug users interested in mystical experiences (set) are more likely to use certain substances (drug), in solitude or in the company of like-minded people (setting), but generally not in clubs or at raves. Therefore, it is no surprise that on an esoteric website with many self-defined psychonauts, drug experiences are reported as mystical. Undoubtedly, psychonauts constitute a small minority in the total population of drug users, but through sharing their experience and knowledge via cyberspace with thousands of other individuals, they become part of a global community. The interaction between drug, set and setting is also influenced by the time factor, the Zeitgeist (Wouters et al., 2012). Consequently, it is fascinating to discover that young people in the 21st century look back to authors who wrote about their psychedelic drugs experiences in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and that contemporary subcultures of young people associate the use of psychedelic drugs with centuries-old traditions, with some defining themselves as shamans. The strong presence and importance of mystical and glowing drug experiences in the Erowid reports and the large number of readers of such reports show that sacramental drug use to induce ecstatic states remains a topic of strong interest.

For the relevant group, the experience reports on the Internet may also serve objectives of secondary prevention and harm reduction. Springer concludes that the reports on bad trips and other undesirable effects can help individuals who are ready for drug experimentation to reach an informed and balanced decision on how to proceed. Interestingly, the Internet discourse on strategic psychedelic drug use as it was initiated during the 1950s and 1960s has been kept alive in cyberspace and even infused with new life. In the online world, drug users talk freely about their attitudes and experiences of drug use. However, this informal process of normalisation is at odds with formal norms, rules and regulations. The advice for 'proper' use from the virtual expert, given in a virtual environment beyond moral categories, will become an instruction for the breaking of rules when implemented in the real world, where most psychedelic drugs remain subject to criminal law.

Finally, the new availability of and easy access to documents and materials concerning experiments with the therapeutic use of psychedelic drugs in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s may have influenced the revisionist trend in psychiatry and psychotherapy, the reassessment of the therapeutic possibilities of psychedelic drugs, or the treatment of common psychiatric disorders (Telztrow & Bosch, 2012). Although Springer welcomes this, he underlines that psychiatric intervention faces other challenges than the satisfaction of spiritual needs.

7. Conclusions

Via the Internet, cyberspace has become a vast network of user communities, each springing up around common interests, although the individual members are separated geographically, socially and culturally. For today's social drug researchers, policymakers and practitioners the Internet is an inexhaustible source of information. However, the new data sources do not always fully or correctly capture what is happening in the real world. For both researchers and practitioners, 'street methods' are sometimes more appropriate than 'screen methods'.

Democratisation of knowledge, drug prevention and harm reduction

Among drug users, the growing influence of the new media has democratised knowledge, opinions and discussions about drugs. Although existing real social networks continue to be an important source of information, finding information on drugs, and also speaking about and discussing them has become easier and more commonplace. As a result, the dividing line between laypeople and experts has become increasingly blurred. The classic the top-down model of drug prevention, with professionals informing lay people, has changed to a linear model, with lay people presenting themselves as experts. Roles are reversed with prevailing institutions playing a lesser role with regard to the prevention and risk discourse. Social media has broken through the institutional monopoly and its power to define, and is based more on dialogue than monologue. In online discussions, drug users are not only made aware of the risks and dangers of drug use through information from institutions, but also through the development of their own expertise gained by sharing experiences and talking about drug risks and pleasures.

These developments require innovation in drug prevention. Regarding recreational drug users, one option is to bridge the gap between professional and peer-led harm reduction initiatives through netreach work. However, to create up-to-date interventions, traditional outreach and new netreach initiatives should be complementary, not mutually exclusive. In cases of comorbidity and problematic drug use especially, online communication alone cannot replace personal communication and assistance.

Normalisation of drug use and self-organisation

Young people's information and opinions about drug policies are increasingly influenced by the Internet. Most likely, the new media have amounted to a

process of normalisation of drug use in nightlife entertainment. This informal process of normalisation is at odds with official drug policy.

Social media have considerably promoted the way in which new party collectives organise themselves and has provided a different interpretation of the meaning of going out. This development contributes to the flight from overregulated entertainment venues, and the desire to go out with like-minded people, away from formal control by police, security staff, etc.

Drug supply

New technologies partially result in the displacement of drug dealing from street to screen. There is still abundant offline supply, however, although online and offline drug dealing have become increasingly intertwined: their funds constantly flow into one another. Rather than the violence that can occur to settle disputes in real word drug markets, fraud and scamming appear to be the main risks in online drug markets.

Drug policy on paper and in practice

Since the first international treaties at the beginning of the twentieth century, drug policy has moved between a social-medical and a prohibitionist approach. At some times, the focus shifts in the direction of more law enforcement, and at others towards more prevention and treatment. Internationally and within Europe, there are large differences between countries. Despite the pursuit of harmonisation of drugs policy within the European Union, there are still differences between Member States. Within countries too, drug policy can change over time. A clear European example (chapter 2) is Poland. Different from several other European countries (e.g. the Czech Republic and Portugal), Poland criminalises drug use and the possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use. The Polish example confirms the idea that official drug policies may not be implemented as intended because of the actions of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010). Despite the country specifics, it shows that drug policy can fail if the official approach has not been adopted and internalised on the micro level.

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