

NIGHTLIFE AND PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

Public health policy and intervention evaluation with adolescents and young adults within nightlife

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Abstract:

This article analyses the complex relationship between the perception of risk, nightlife and the consumption of psychoactive substances. Adolescents and young adults, as well as nightlife promoters, were interviewed throughout this study. The present work is a synopsis of an in-depth research –based on the interrelation of qualitative and quantitative methodological techniques– that evaluates the policies and intervention in risk reduction efforts by Catalan public health services. The discussion of the research findings provides a foundation upon which intervention proposals can be made to public health authorities on how to improve policies in the field of drug use.

Key words: psychoactive substances, risk perception, nightlife, adolescents and young adults, and risk reduction.



Generalitat de Catalunya
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INTRODUCTION

This article is the synopsis of an extensive research project that took place during the year 2006, and was published in April of 2007.¹ This research answers the need to better understand the impact and effects of risk reduction policies and interventions, in reference to drug use in Catalonia.

The changes in adolescent and young adults's consumption patterns and their growing interrelation with designated nightlife spaces are creating a rise in the demand for risk reduction services for recreational substance consumption. In order to increase these services and ensure their high quality, creative measures, follow-up and evaluation methods need to be in place.

Currently in Catalonia, risk reduction policies and measures are implemented by two main entities: Energy Control² and SOM.NIT.³ In addition to these groups and their efforts, localized government youth programs are also taking part. For this reason, current policies and interventions must be evaluated in order to establish the necessary criteria for promoting public health.

As a result of this need to improve services and care for adolescents and young adults, towards the end of 2005 the General Subdivision for Drug Dependency, under the General Direction of Public Health within the Department of Health⁴, contacted Spora⁵, a psychosocial consulting agency, to begin the research for which this document is the main product. Once the General Subdivision for Drug Dependency and the appointed representatives from SOM.NIT, Energy Control and Spora had met and exchanged views, the main objectives for the research were established:

- Analysis of the meaning adolescents and young adults give to nightlife policies and preventive interventions.
- Identification of the facilitators and the problems felt by private nightlife promoters in the face of risk reduction policies and interventions.

In order to put these objectives in motion, the following specific objectives were developed:

1. Identification of the key factors that embody the relationship between pleasure management and risk taking associated with recreational drug use in nightlife settings.
2. Description of the key factors that determine decision-making when faced with the use of psychoactive substances in nightlife settings.
3. Analysis of the kinds of access there are to information about nightlife recreational drugs, and what degree of credibility they are given.
4. Understanding of the self-perception of young adults and adolescents in terms of how much information they have about cocaine, ecstasy, speed, LSD, mushrooms, GHB, ketamine and nexus.
5. Identification of the level of need for information about these substances.
6. Verification of the ways they would rather receive information about these substances, and the kind of information they are looking for.
7. Understanding of how this population values the strategies used by prevention campaigns, as well as the information they provide.
8. Understanding and analysis of how nightlife promoters value the application of policies and interventions for risk reduction.
9. Analysis of how nightlife promoters characterize the relationship between this sector and public administration.

This research is focused, on the one hand, on young men and women between the ages of 15 and 24 who have lived in Catalonia for at least one year at the beginning of data collection, and on the other hand, on private business nightlife promoters in Catalonia.

The substances that have been analyzed are the following: cocaine, ecstasy, speed, LSD, mushrooms, GHB, ketamine and nexus. Other substances have been left out of this research following different criteria. We therefore do not study the consumption of alcohol or cannabis, given that these substances are so extensively and normally used among young adults and teenagers in Catalonia that we would run the risk of not finding people this age that define themselves as non-consumers.

1 The full length document can be found at: www.spora.ws/webpdfs/nit.pdf (language: Catalan)

2 More information at: www.energycontrol.org

3 More information at: www.creuroja.org/cat/crj/somnit/somnit00.asp

4 More information at: www.gencat.net/salut/depsan/units/sanitat/html/ca/Du1/index.html

5 More information at: www.spora.ws

The criteria to define a person as a 'consumer' or 'non-consumer' do not end here. We have established 'consumers' as those people who have consumed one of the substances mentioned above in the last 12 months. Therefore 'non-consumers' are those who have not consumed one of these substances in the last 12 months. These consumption patterns are defined in more depth further along, since 'consumers' are differentiated according to habitual or sporadic drug use. Furthermore, we will find that 'non-consumers' define themselves as such even though they have at some point used drugs.

For this reason, and to help readers identify the 'non-consumer' profile within the wide range of drug consumption, we have added to the term 'non-consumers' a tag that reads [cons. OH/THC]. This tag corresponds to the acronym for 'consumers of alcohol and cannabis'. By this we intend to show that, of the consumers questioned for this study who claim not to consume any of the main substances of this analysis, not even 10% deny having consumed alcohol or cannabis.

METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the research objectives, we considered it pertinent to use a methodological framework that integrates qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Therefore, the methodological strategy is based on a qualitative immersion that allowed for intense data collection based on interviews. Once part of the qualitative data was analyzed, we collected extensive quantitative data using appropriate quantitative

methodological techniques. Finally, we integrated all the data into one set of conclusions.

In short, the integration of both methodologies in the same study allows us to detect and comprehend a variety of meanings surrounding the research topics, and at the same time analyze how these meanings are expressed in quantitative terms.

Qualitative framework

In accordance with the objectives of the completed research:

- 4 interviews with members of risk reduction entities (Energy Control and SOM.NIT) experienced in interventions in the nightlife scenario.
- 9 interviews with men and women who are nightlife promoters in Catalonia.
- 8 focus groups, distributed as follows:
 - 3 groups of adolescent men and women (between the ages of 15 and 17): 1 group of 'consumers'; 1 group of 'non-consumers [cons. OH/THC]'; 1 group with both 'consumers' and 'non-consumers [cons. OH/THC]'.
 - 5 groups of young adult men and women (between the ages of 18 and 24): 2 groups of 'consumers'; 2 groups of 'non-consumers' [cons. OH/THC]'; 1 group with both 'consumers' and 'non-consumers [cons. OH/THC]'.

The objective of the individual interviews with active members of risk reduction entities was to study in more depth the key factors that preoccupy the professionals in this sector. Based on these interviews, guidelines for further interviews with

nightlife promoters and focus groups with adolescents and young adults were established.

The later design of 8 focus groups took into account the different variables regarding the profiles of the people that compose them:

- Age: adolescents or young adults considered separately.
- Geographical location: groups chosen in large, medium, and small towns in different areas of Catalonia.
- Sex: equal numbers of men and women in all groups.
- Consumption: groups were made up of people exclusively considered 'consumers', others of 'non-consumers [cons. OH/THC]' and, finally, mixed groups with both profiles.
- Awareness of services to reduce risk: this study included people with no knowledge of

these services, others who were not aware of their existence, and those who had been in contact with them.

Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with male and female managers of nightlife venues in Catalonia, as well as with people responsible for associations and unions around which different business people in the sector are organized. In this case these people were located in densely populated areas as well as the surrounding areas to which there is difficult access.

Quantitative framework

This analysis uses a semi-probable multi-phase stratified sampling. In other words, it is an improbable sampling, because the final phase does not include a random selection of cases. While this kind of sampling does not allow for a calculation of the margin of error in the final findings, it allows for direct access to the population in question, therefore eliminating the biases that the presence of adults and tutors might generate during the interview. If done in other spaces – such as private homes, schools or universities– the answers could have been conditioned by the presence of adults or by the overrepresentation of adolescents and young adults within the formal school system, ignoring all those who may have abandoned formal education.

The sampling is composed of two subsamples defined by the variable 'Relationship to the consumption of substances linked to nightlife – cocaine, extasy, speed, LSD, mushrooms, GHB, ketamine and nexus–': those who have tried one of these substances in the last 12 months –which we will call 'consumers'; and those who have not tried any, during the same period of time –called 'non-consumers [cons. OH/THC]'–.

Each one of the subsamples is composed of two sampling phases. For this reason the sampling is classified as multi-phased.

The first sampling phase went through a stratification process based on the territorial distribution of Catalonia, the objective of which was to capture the heterogeneous nature of the population studied. The definition of these strata is based on two criteria: in the first place there are two different regions: the city of Barcelona and the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, two areas with

specific socio-geographical characteristics; secondly, for the rest of Catalonia, there are municipal distinctions depending on the size of the population.

Four geographical regions remain:

- The City of Barcelona.
- The Metropolitan Region of Barcelona (MRB): this includes the Barcelonès (except the City of Barcelona), the Baix Llobregat, the Garraf, the Alt Penedès, the Vallès Oriental, the Vallès Occidental and the Maresme.
- Medium-size municipal areas: those where the population is between 2,000 and 15,700 inhabitants (excluding those included in the MRB).
- Small municipal areas: those where the population is less than 2,000 inhabitants (excluding those included in the MRB).

In the last phase of the sampling, there were sampling points in each chosen city. The selection of the cases included in the sampling was done in order to fulfill the established gender and age quota, which is proportional to the population data quoted in the IDESCAT of December 2005.

The size of the sample is 769 cases. It has been calculated to be 95% trustworthy (2 sigmes) based on a precision factor of $\pm 3,532\%$ and assuming the maximum variability of the variables within the study ($P=Q$).

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The discussion of the final research findings revolves around a set of themes that have derived from the analysis and interrelation of data obtained using qualitative and quantitative exploration. This section presents the key findings of this research, followed by a discussion of each point. These key findings are structured around five important questions:

1. Nightlife as a network.
2. The limits and possibilities of intervention in the nightlife network.
3. The invisibilization of consumption: a dominant strategy.

4. Risk reduction as a strategy in relation to consumption.
5. Public policies, nightlife and risk reduction.

These questions allow us to conclusively analyze the set of analyses that we have developed throughout this report. They set up the basis and the premise needed to then present the chapter on "Action proposals".

1. Nightlife as a network

Recreation, consumption, and risk are factors that work, are expressed and need to be understood, in relation to each other. They are pieces of a network that are conformed by interdependent factors that are increasingly linked to weekends and the night.

The metaphor of the network helps to avoid reductionist interpretations that simplify nightlife's complexity into separate concrete factors. This view tends to distract attention from the more revealing interpretation of these factors as intricately related to one another. This study illustrates nightlife as a set of intertwined factors that need to be considered as a complex phenomenon with properties of its own. To undermine any of these related factors, such as recreation and consumption, or consumption and group activities would mean talking about something other than nightlife. In this sense, we will refer to nightlife as recreation for 'the act of having fun', sociability processes, substance consumption, and risk assumption and management.

Leisure, a recreational time

Recreation and leisure are, at this point, synonyms that have to do with time off, or free time, during which the person develops a set of activities that aren't oriented towards general productivity or business. Leisure time is therefore, in general terms, a space in time away from the social norms that regulate our daily productive lives, resulting then in fun, or recreation.

Recreation is related to the aspiration to 'free will'

Originally, the term for recreation, *diversión* in Spanish, comes from *divertere*, meaning 'to carry on in different ways' or to 'get away from'. We could relate this definition specifically to the fact that recreation, or fun, includes a series of activities that allow the person to 'get away from' work time. This 'carrying on in different ways' brings us back to the first characteristic of recreation defined in the document: recreation as an aspiration to 'free will'.

Recreation is an enjoyable, voluntary and collective practice

Recreation is defined as something enjoyable because it implies a search for pleasure and wellbeing. It is also a voluntary phenomenon, because the person understands that he or she is managing that moment. Recreation also has a collective aspect, in other words it gains meaning within the activities and shared understandings of groups of people. Recreation, amusement, or fun, can be defined as a group activity based on a shared experience.

Weekends and night time make up the larger part of the recreation environment

The distribution of time in our cultural and work context organizes the week around five main workdays, and two days off. The workweek brings with it a set of responsibilities and obligations that are not present (or become diluted) at night and on the weekends. The perception of control, routine, and regimented life disappears during moments of recreation, and this is what gives this

space a feeling of freedom and amusement, much superior to that felt in the workplace. Therefore, the time away from the work environment is perceived as limited, and therefore one has to be able to "get the most out of it". Nightlife on the weekends is lived with such a willing intensity to guarantee achieving the expectations of contrast with work life.

Leisure time becomes a time of reunion and encounter with new experiences

Another factor of time regulation has to do with the contrast between social relationships at work and in nightlife environments.

Within the social network in the workplace, relationships are highly structured and defined by work titles.

On the other hand, in leisure time environments social relationships are regulated differently, favouring sociability, the breaking of interpersonal barriers, or the fact of sharing experiences. In this sense, socialization during leisure time is fuelled by contingency, with the unexpected result of the interaction with the collective.

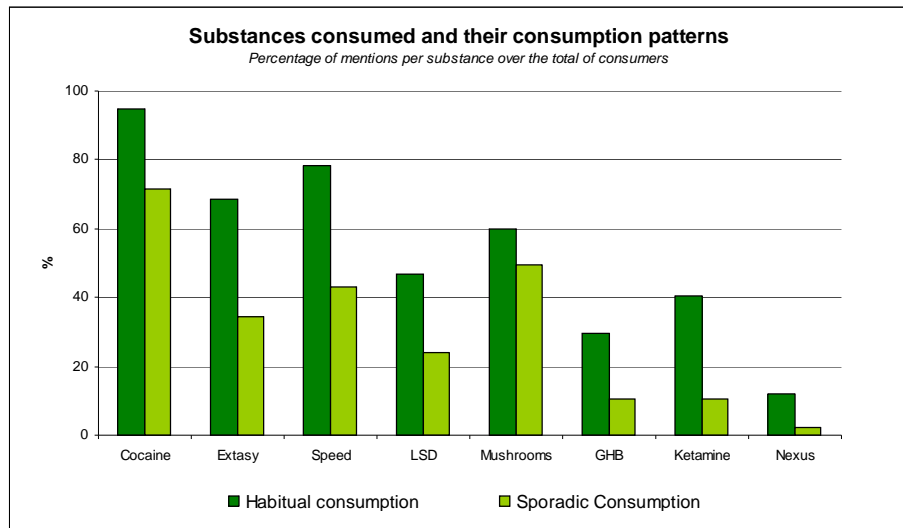
Leisure time and partying as a consumption context

Highly related to music and collective activities, partying is defined as a context for psychoactive substances. Talking about partying often means talking about consumption.

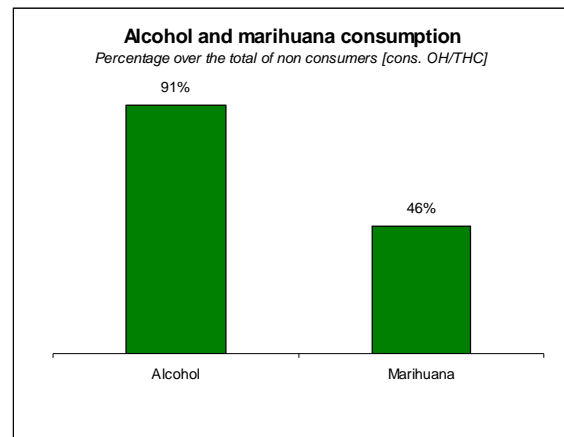
Consumption is something that is part of our society; such is the case that we speak of a 'consumer society'. We are all consumers. Consumption is a means by which we survive if we consider consumption as a synonym to ingestion (consumption of food or beverage), and it is more generally the basis for the current economic model (consumerism). Consumption is also the means by which we take pleasure in fulfilling our desires in relationship to everything we buy in order to enjoy our quotidian life. In many cases, one way of consuming or another becomes a way of life, and a way of configuring a personality and a collective identity.

Drug consumption is not much different from other kinds of consumption. Psychoactive substances are merely another set of consumable objects in our society. In this sense, people interviewed that defined themselves as 'consumers' said they had a wide range of psychoactive substances at their

disposal when partying, the most common being cocaine, consumed in different quantities and frequency by a significant 82%.



On the other hand, we observe that interviewees who claim not to consume any of the substances this study includes, relate nightlife to highly normalized psychoactive substances such as alcohol (91%) and cannabis (46%).



We can therefore understand why the interviews as well as the quantitative research data show that nightlife is intricately connected to the consumption of psychoactive substances. The quantitative research also indicates that consumption is a practice found in all party contexts frequented by the people who participated in our questionnaires. We are talking about discos, street parties, raves, festivals, concerts, as well as public spaces.

Drugs are defined in different ways

'Drugs' are defined and characterized following three different criteria: the effects they have on the body, the intensity of these effects, and the fact that they can or cannot produce dependency. We find it important to highlight that the legal condition of each substance does not seem to be a criterion by which a drug is identified. Therefore,

within the concept of what 'drugs' are, we found alcohol, cocaine, coffee and ecstasy grouped and defined together in function of the criteria presented below, and not by their legal status.

The consumption of drugs is perceived as having certain appeal.

Enjoying life, experimenting with the forbidden, and experiencing new sensations are the main attractions for consumption. Being able to disconnect, to elude reality, and feel socially uninhibited are also part of the appeal for consumption. Consuming psychoactive substances, therefore, becomes a source of needed intensity during the short weekend break.

Consumption is a collective practice

The research findings confirm some assertions made by different authors (Carter, Bennets and Carter, 2003) in the sense of peer groups having an important role in nightlife and recreation. This phenomenon also plays a fundamental role in the consumption patterns of group dynamics, concerning initiating drug use, never consuming, or stopping consumption, as well as the frequency, intensity and ritualization. From this we understand to what extent drugs tend to be identity generators within a group (Funes, 1996). In fact, through analyzing data, we have found that the majority of people that consume psychoactive substances regularly go out with people who use the same substances. The same is true for people who don't consume psychoactive substances who tend to go out with people who also do not consume them.

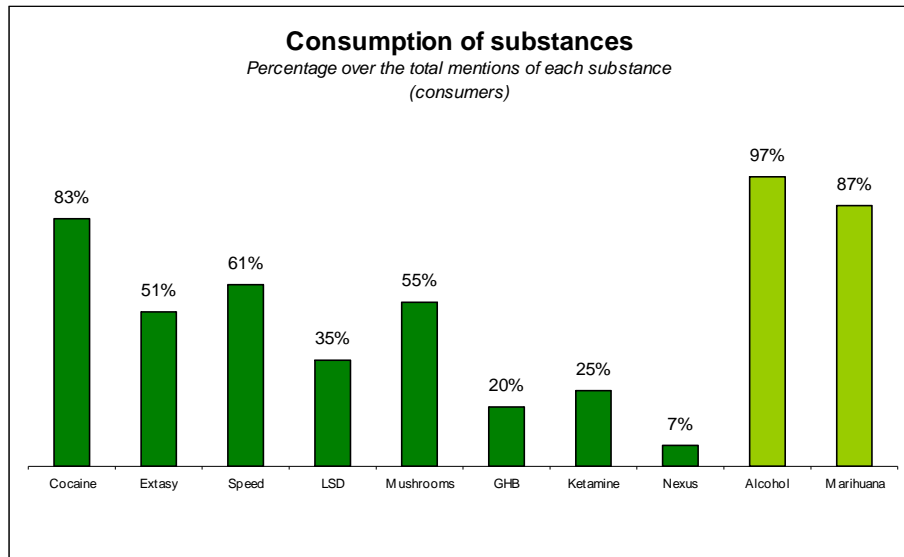
In party contexts, there tends to be a mix of people who do consume and people who do not. This allows us to comprehend the fact that many people who confirm that they are drug users assure that they know and go out with –even though it may be minimally- groups of people who do not use drugs, and vice versa.

Drug-use patterns –the kind of substances consumed and the frequency of consumption- tend to be adopted collectively precisely because of the group logic framework.

This supports the idea that the relationship between substance, consumption and party environments is not based on individual practice but on social, contextual and collective practice.

Consumption is an extended and generalized practice

The nightlife environment has become a context in which certain substances are very generalized and accepted. Of the set of substances analyzed in this study, cocaine is the most present in party environments. As we can see from the quantitative data, the majority of people that mention having consumed some substance, mention cocaine.



In terms of the kind of consumption, we find the multiple-consumption (the fact of consuming more than one substance) is very tightly linked to the frequency of consumption. In other words, the more frequent the consumption, more kinds of substances are consumed. This data is a source of information that is backed up by the idea that consumption patterns are part of group logic. Both the kind of substance consumed and the frequency with which it is consumed are intricately related to the collective dynamics of the peer group.

Consumption is recognized as a risk

The people interviewed recognize that to consume certain substances is risky behaviour that can lead to very negative consequences. Adolescents and young adults that were interviewed point out what these risks might be: possible physical harm, a variety of suffering and psychosocial problems and addiction. Even so, the interviewees recognize that there are determinant factors that make it impossible to avoid the uncertainty of consumption risks. These 'uncertain' effects can be attributed to the substance (for it alone or for its degree of adulteration), to the person that is taking it (for his or her physical constitution, metabolic functioning or emotional state), or to the consumption pattern (the quantity consumed, the frequency of use, multiple substance consumption or specific mixes).

Risk implies a decision that has consequences. Risk is tied to decision-making. In other words, we talk about risk when a choice can to one extent or another change the future, bearing in mind that the future is uncertain. Risk then adopts a sense of contingency, such that it remains open to the possibility that something unexpected will happen or something the consequences of which remain uncertain. This often causes risk to be associated with randomness. Meanwhile, risk is also associated with responsibility, seeing that everything derived from a certain choice is partly a consequence of one's actions and decisions. Risk is perceived as a direct consequence of a set of decisions and is therefore valued as something that is manageable and one's own responsibility.

The meaning of risk is constructed collectively

The set of meanings that surround the concepts of risk, consumption, and fun are collectively constructed, not only because they are activities usually carried out in groups, but also because they give support to the communion of the peer group. These components create the context of young people coming together and sharing experiences. Finally, risk assumption and management are also defined collectively.

Defining consumption as a risky activity can make it attractive

Another element that constitutes the perception of risk is its parallel concept of limits and boundaries. Limits and boundaries can serve as deterrents when projecting their transgressions. Depending on the meaning given to a limit this can generate curiosity or even the fascination of experimenting with what is prohibited or unknown. This becomes especially relevant within the adolescent collective where transgression plays a pivotal role in identity forming processes (Funes, 1996). Within this universe of shared meanings, assuming risks becomes attractive. In a context where consumption of certain substances –like alcohol, cannabis or cocaine- is generalized and normalized the role of peer groups feeds the collective investigation of that which is prohibited and unknown.

The awareness of risk, in time, helps consumption management

Finally, the awareness of risk, while it may not affect the decision to consume at a certain given moment in a nightlife setting, can influence consumption patterns over time. The awareness and knowledge obtained at a certain given time can influence medium and long-term practice. This is can be explained by the dynamic relationship between knowledge and experience; firstly because meaning is constructed within a collective context

that changes and evolves over time, and secondly, because of the importance of experience in constructing meaning that will guide future conducts.

Substance consumption requires a need for management

Because of its negative effects, consumption of certain substances requires a substance specific selfmanagement system that takes into account the way in which different substances are mixed, the frequency with which they are consumed and the necessary behaviours that develop after firsthand or secondhand negative experiences. This is why control is mentioned as necessary in order to manage one's own consumption and the associated risks.

We find two clear postures when presenting consumption control. One claims that control is not complicated. To know one's own body and limits and to consume carefully and moderately appears possible and common for this posture. The other posture claims quite the contrary, saying that the perception of control over consumption is innocent and scantily realistic.

Risk, recreation and consumption are interrelated

At this point, we see that for adolescents and young adults the meaning of recreation, consumption and risk assumption are closely intertwined. First of all making the decision to consume is understood, just as recreation is understood, as an expression of free will. Both produce a feeling of freedom and signify a distancing from work time –or study- where imperatives exist for what has to be done in terms of responsibility and obligations. Secondly, consumption introduces an element of unpredictability and uncertainty, while breaking with routine boredom. Recreation and consumption provide the possibility of the unexpected. Finally, when life itself is understood as risk, and this is felt as an omnipresent element, the risk of consumption does not diverge from what is commonplace and a part of daily life.

In closing, we want to highlight that the metaphor of the network brings us to underline a set of elements that constitute the ties that emerge at night and during the weekend between recreation, consumption and risk. To begin with, we talk about sociability as a fundamental factor to understand in what way collective and social dynamics become the fabric or basis for the relationships that constitute the nightlife network. The roles of the peer group or social dynamics during leisure time are, as we explained, factors that tie recreation and consumption together. In other words, both recreation and consumption take on meaning in a

set of social relationships that constitute what we call 'nightlife' (or night time leisure). These relationships are traversed by everything we call risk, that which is unexpected and derived from decision-making. Risk management shows itself as a social dynamic that structures nightlife relationships. The search for control, and the consumption management of psychoactive substances are also part of this network of interrelated factors.

Conclusively, any intervention for prevention or risk reduction requires a global understanding of this network called nightlife.

2. The limits and possibilities of intervention in the nightlife network

In this section we see some examples that illustrate the multiple conditioning of the nightlife network, as well as the problems created by initiatives that don't take this into account.

Awareness of risks has undetermined effects

As Rhodes (2002) states, the "Theory of Reasoned Actions" and "Rational Decision-making" are predominant theories in the field of awareness and conduct. These theories argue that a reasoned evaluation of a risk situation should change the behaviours that create the risk, but they fail to pay enough attention to the role that context plays in behaviours of risk.

To recognize behaviour as risky does not imply an active role in avoiding it. In the party context the assertion gains much more meaning. In the words of young adults: "When you're out partying, you're out partying". In a party context that is vastly collective, the peer group generates personal experiential knowledge around consumption and the risks that they want to assume. The dynamics created by the peer group offer its members a shared interpretation of reality that then works as a reference to comprehend, evaluate and manage the risks associated with their behaviours.

For this reason, the preventive measures that don't take into account the experiential, emotional, and affective dimensions that are intricately linked to the nightlife network are bound to be less effective.

A large portion of informational campaigns have no impact

Many of the current campaigns don't address the complexity of collective 'risk guidelines' (Mayock, 2005) based on group experience, and are therefore perceived with skepticism and mistrust. And it seems as though the drug-use informational campaigns try to inform about things that don't

correspond to the values, practices, and feelings⁶ of adolescents and young adults. The farther away the received information feels from the peer group's shared experience, the less persuasive the campaign will be about consumption patterns.

The majority of interventions are directed at the individual

Both in terms of the decision to consume or not consume, and in terms of risk management associated with substance consumption, a good part of the policies (including interventions for the reduction of risks) focus on the individual capacity to make decisions and the personal capacity to manage the risks. It is clear that risk reduction is directed at both individual and community action, as well as at environmental change, but with an overdependence on conceptions of changes in individual conduct (Rhodes, 2002).

The individual's responsibility continues to be the main focus of the majority of policies having to do with psychoactive substance consumption, even though we see that, because of the characteristic party environments within which this consumption takes place, they should be conceived as a 'collective responsibility'. This is why, beyond the idea that individuals should be taught to embrace certain values that will make their individual consumption more responsible, it may be necessary to target group cultures of consumption and have collectives embrace these responsibilities.

Not all information is useful for managing risk

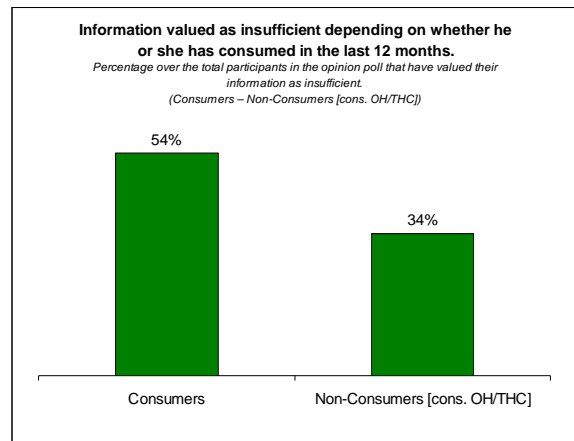
While there are many campaigns about consumption, half of the consumer population questioned (54%), and a third of the non-consumer population questioned (34%), even

⁶ This assertion agrees with Costa-Pau i Vendrell (2001) when they say that "Often, the preventive messages 'against' drug dependency that are dictated by public health authorities are perceived by (large) collectives of young adults as a threat to their ideosyncrasy and way of life, some of which denounced the lack of sensitivity to group norms and others found to have a counterproductive outcome given the proposed objectives."

though they claim to have information consider that it is not enough.

The information that comes from experience is what allows groups to emit a sense of control when managing consumption. Interestingly, the requested information is mostly concerning specific drug composition, specific effects, mixing effects, and recommended procedures to balance out the effects.

Basically, what is being requested is information that will provide knowledge on how to manage the consequences derived from the use of psychoactive substances. Therefore it is understandable that the population in question say they receive a lot of information about drugs, but they don't consider it 'useful information'.



3. The 'invisibilization' of consumption: a dominant strategy

Now that the main elements of consumption and sociability in party environments have been established, this section will focus on explaining what the dominant logic is within the network of relationships.

The consumption phenomenon of party environments perceived through hegemonic discourse promotes what we have called the 'invisibilization' of substance consumption. But what does it mean for substance consumption to be invisibilized?

The pervading way of conceptualizing substance consumption tends to mask this phenomenon. To this effect, consumption of illegal psychoactive substances is penalized, sanctioned, prohibited and coerced. Regardless, the consumption of these substances remains, even if it is hidden from the public eye. The conditions in which consumption occurs depend on this process of consumption invisibilization. Far from being eradicated, or even diminished, consumption continues under conditions that are almost clandestine and decisively determine consumption patterns.

The following explores the main mechanisms that maintain and reproduce this strategy of consumption invisibilization: the 'abstentionist paradigm' and nightlife public policies.

The 'abstentionist' paradigm

The dominant discourses and intervention policies around substance consumption are framed in what we call an 'abstentionist paradigm'.⁷ We here lay out some of the characteristics that define this

paradigm and explain how it contributes to what we have called the invisibilization of consumption.

The 'abstentionist' based information policies promote a series of awareness campaigns that have a clear message: 'Drugs are always bad and detrimental'. Abstinence (not consuming) is the priority objective of these campaigns, and consumption is always framed as problematic. The message is basically: "Say NO to drugs". This is how everything that has to do with consumption and/or the experience of consumption is omitted and negated as a possibility, and therefore is invisibilized. As a result, these policies on consumption make everything having to do with responsible consumption invisibilized.

Even though the abstentionist message can seem coherent and effective for a large part of the population, it is not consistent with the experiential knowledge of collective consumption practices, and in turn, is rejected by the majority of groups that claim to have consumed some sort of illegal substance.

Regardless of consuming or not consuming psychoactive substances, all participants in this study agreed that the majority of public campaigns about drugs are wrong (because they don't correspond to personal or life experiences), that they create a distorted reality (exaggerating it) and simply because they lie about the effects of consumption.

As the abstentionist discourse is the most dominant in terms of ideology and culture, it is no surprise that people who consume affirm that their primary source of knowledge about consumption comes from experiencing it with peer groups. In fact, given the lack of other sources of information that

⁷ This paradigm is exhaustively defined in the section called "Evolution of paradigms in terms of drugs" At: www.spora.ws/webpdfs/nit.pdf (language: Catalan).

don't judge their behaviour, experience becomes the only trustworthy and accessible source.

In addition, given that the abstentionist discourse does not accept the possibility of consuming certain substances responsibly, these are maintained in almost clandestine and hidden spaces to the outside eye. In other words, it foments the invisibility of consumption.

Public policies are a strategy to invisibilize substance consumption

The policies, norms, and sanctions that correspond to the consumption of substances in nightlife environments only focus on this phenomenon as: the illegal substance. When defining the problem in strictly legal terms what is emphasized is that those responsible for the consumption of illegal substances must be found.

Nightlife venue promoters are held responsible for substance consumption

In the nightlife environment blame falls on the venues, as they are promoters of nightlife, and they are accused of having an excessively permissive attitude towards substance consumption inside their venues. As a result, the reaction from the nightlife sector has been to increase their systems of control and keep watch in order to expel substances from their venues.

Within leisure contexts, consumption is a generalized practice

Even so, substance consumption in party environments, night times, and nightlife is more present and more generalized every day. It can be stated that substance consumption is contextual, and that leisure and night time are the privileged

contexts. Substances are moving from nightlife venues to public spaces, and viceversa, but in any case, consumption is not stopping.

Punitive rules applied to common practice tend to invisibilize consumption

Given this scenario and the current norms that regulate it, the outcome is the invisibility of substance consumption. What is important is that consumption not be seen due to the threat of fines, which is dangerous for both nightlife promoters and drug users.

The invisibilization makes consumption management policies hard to implement

This explains how other possible actions, such as social health and risk reduction policies, are getting secondary attention since they are based on the acceptance that substance consumption is a generalized nightlife practice.

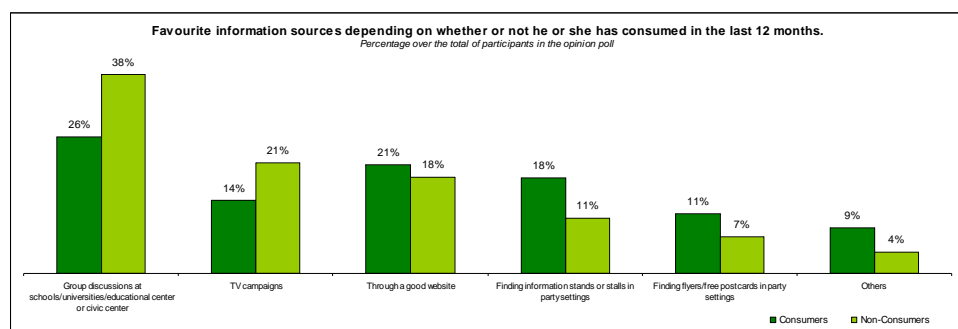
The reduction of risks: an alternative for visualization

Despite the fact that invisibility of consumption is the basis for the dominant strategy, there are other proposals. Recently, there are substance consumption intervention proposals that plan on working around the dominant strategy in order to reduce the risks of consumption. These new practices coexist tensely with the general abstentionist policies.

4. Risk reduction as a strategy in relation to consumption

Risk reduction policies present themselves as an alternative that assumes the complexity of the consumption phenomenon, and tries to facilitate new kinds of understanding and management of consumption in nightlife venues. The information on substances, on the effects of consumption, and on the possibilities for responsible management, is one of the main strategies of risk reduction policies.

This is why we divide the current section into two parts. In the first part we do a brief analysis of the information adolescents and young adults dispose of, how they value it, and what information they claim to currently need. In the second part we look at the perceptions and values surrounding risk-reducing actions.



a) Accessibility of information about 'drugs'

Credibility of the ways to access information

The adolescents and young adults that have been interviewed have different kinds of access to information about drug-use. There are multiple channels through which they gain this access, and a number of information agents. Above all other information access channels is the high credibility given to experiential knowledge. This is formed from personal experience, as well as lived experience in group contexts and the closest information agents.

Beyond the experiential component it becomes obvious that the value attributed to the different information channels is directly dependent on the credibility of their discourses. These discourses are, first of all, those held by the abstentionist paradigm, and second of all, by the risk reduction paradigm.

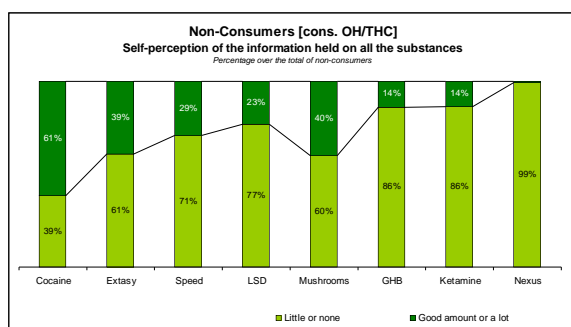
In any case, beyond the experiential information, 'non-consumers [cons. OH/THC]' prefer general access to information, more than 'consumers' do. These are media (21%) and educational institutions (38%). Consumers, on the other hand prefer access to information in party contexts (29%).

The interviews show that media and educational institutions are strongly linked to the abstentionist discourse, while freely distributed information in party environments is linked to the risk reduction discourse.

Perception of available information

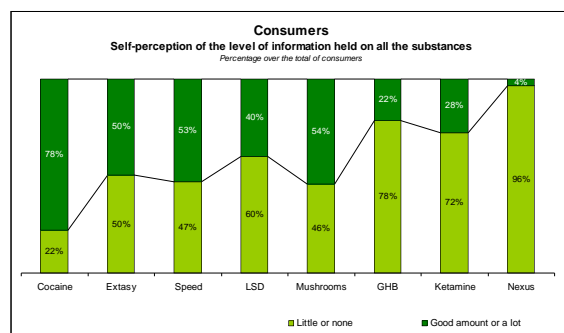
The adolescents and young adults that were interviewed demonstrate different perceptions regarding the level of knowledge about different psychoactive substances. Therefore the level of understanding and awareness is directly related to the amount of interaction with each substance.

With young adults and adolescents that define themselves as consumers, we can observe that they claim to have information about each drug as long as they have used it.



In this sense, and as we can see in the interviews, the experiential component becomes the main source of information about substances for consumers, which explains the connection between the level of consumption and the level of knowledge about each substance.

It is important to mention that in the case of young adults and adolescents that are 'non-consumers' of the psychoactive substances studied here, the level of understanding that they claim to have, even if below that of the consumers, still follows the same patterns.



Evidently, the perception of the access to information is lower among 'non-consumers [cons. OH/THC]' but, even so, there is not a significant difference. The fact is that shared experience is expressed as the main source of information about all the different substances, including non-consumers.

Therefore, although their patterns of consumption are configured within their peer groups, it becomes evident that consumers and non-consumers [cons. OH/THC] share party and recreational spaces. In these spaces information circulates freely.

The need for more information

It is important to remember that while a general perception exists that everybody seems to know a lot about drugs, it has also been stated that the information available is not sufficient. The fact is that experience does not give information about a whole series of issues that are 'non-experiential' that are also considered relevant. The requested information has to do with the effects that substances can have in the medium or long term for a consumer, and the composition of the substances.

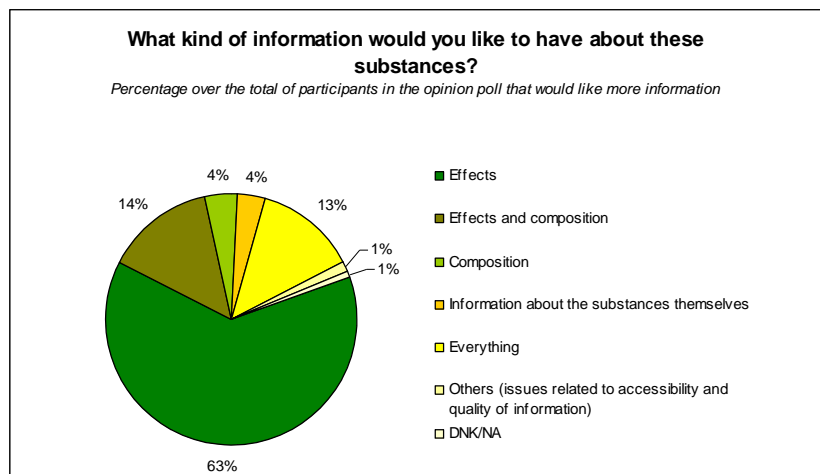
We find an emergent preoccupation about the medium and long term effects of substances on the organism. As we saw earlier in the interviews, it is important to highlight that the level of adulteration of substances is also a preoccupation for a large number of adolescents and young adults interviewed. In this sense, and as we saw in the

interviews, attributing harm to medium and long term drug-use has to do with the level of adulteration of the substance, as well as the 'drug' itself.

In this sense, consumers demonstrate a greater need for information than 'non-consumers'. The question here is that the message that drugs are bad is not accompanied by a good argument that can support the message.

This creates a lack of argumentative resources that give support to the conviction that consumption of substances is bad for you. Therefore, it can be agreed that psychoactive substances are bad for you, but there isn't an information platform on which to sustain the argument, of when, how, and why it is bad. This lack of knowledge of the arguments for which drugs are supposed to be bad becomes a source of weakness and vulnerability for young adults and adolescents since it makes it harder to argue the decision to

not consume. And the fact is that what the interviews show is that recreation is increasingly tied to nightlife, and in these environments psychoactive substance consumption is becoming normal.



b) Actions for risk reduction

Risk reduction is perceived as limited in reference to its target population

Even though in principle risk reduction policies should target the entire population, it is generally perceived as a paradigm designed for consumer people. The generalized idea is that the risk reduction discourse only wants to get involved with consumption management when it already exists.

On the other hand, the risk reduction discourse presents a pronounced qualitative effectiveness difference depending on the consumption patterns at hand. The risk reduction discourse reveals a diverse array of effects on those who enter into contact with them. Some, like the specific first responder training are highly valued by everyone. There are others that have a more specific impact depending on the consumption pattern. The most relevant effects that risk reduction produces for the consumer population we consulted are the following:

- A reflection on consumption management.
- An awakening of health awareness.
- Moderation of intensity and frequency of consumption.
- The provision of tools and resources to defend responsible consumption.

The most relevant effects revealed within the non-consumer context we consulted have to do with:

- Production of argumentative resources with which to defend and consolidate the decision not to consume.

This is an especially relevant point since it proves the potential of risk reduction information in increasing and consolidating the ability of primary preventive measures for non-consumers (Benschop, Rabes & Korf, 2002).

The visibility of policies and interventions for risk reduction

Policies and interventions for risk reduction have narrow visibility. Only a third of adolescents and young adults we consulted are familiar with risk reduction services (36%). In this sense, the main source of familiarity with risk reduction is direct and personal encounters in nightlife venues (84%). Subtract a small proportion of young adults and adolescents who have encountered risk reduction some other way. The most effective method of information distribution, aside from direct and personal contact, is word of mouth.

This last medium, more so than personal experience, is what predominates among young adults and adolescents when transferring and

receiving trustworthy information about drugs, and operating within a shared experienced. Two thirds of the young adults and adolescents consulted (66%) affirm having passed information on risk reduction among their peers by word of mouth. In this sense, it is apparent that the information coming from risk reduction travels using the same comfort spaces and trust seen in shared experiences of psychoactive substances.

The visibility of risk reduction services presents differences depending on variables such as age, consumption patterns, and geographical distribution:

- Age. Risk reduction services have limited access to adolescents. Young adults consulted claim to know about the services more than the adolescent population.
- Consumption patterns. Risk reduction services have limited access to the non-consumer population. The level of understanding expressed by non-consumers [cons. OH/THC] is always low no matter what age.
- Geographical distribution. Risk reduction services have a low impact in highly populated territories. The risk reduction groups organize fieldwork outings all throughout the year. These are distributed in terms of number and frequency all over the Catalan territory. The number and frequency of outings are planned based on certain criteria, among which equal territorial reach is most important, and not population density. The nightlife party venues in high population density sites tend to have a diverse clientele, with elevated degrees of mobility, which means that one isolated action intervention reaches only a small part of the potential clients to that venue.

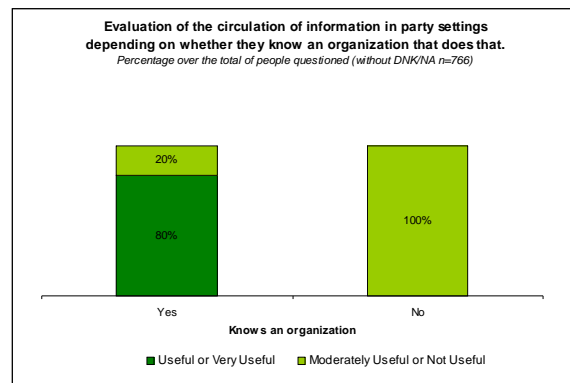
Perceived usefulness of interventions in party settings

The perceived usefulness of risk reduction interventions in party settings basically depends on whether personal encounters take place. For 100 % of people consulted, beyond the fact of whether consumption is practiced or not, not knowing about the services available implies thinking that they are not useful. The degree of positive evaluation of these services reaches 80% when personal encounters with them take place.

The abstentionist paradigm constitutes the only possible method for those who have not encountered the risk reduction paradigms personally. When attributing value to risk reduction we find people thinking of variations of the abstentionist model or applications of such within the party environment. The only difference being that risk reduction would provide information about

the negative effects of psychoactive substances, within party environments, reducing its effectiveness. Assuming that the objective is abstention, the effectiveness of risk reduction in a privileged consumption environment is nullified.

Another factor to be considered is that 20% of people that have encountered services in a party environment find them to be of little use or useless. Interviews show that these are adolescents and young adults that recognize these services but don't approach the information stands, and who continue regarding them as part of the abstentionist discourse.



Interviews also demonstrated that more profound interactions with services and information stands in party settings are more valued. In the event of having approached one of these information stands, nightlife settings are considered to be the most effective spaces in which to provide information. The direct impact on consumption comes with recommendations on use that are most effective on site. Furthermore, when services are approached and contact is made with personnel, the usefulness rating goes up to 88%.

Flyers are a broadcasting medium

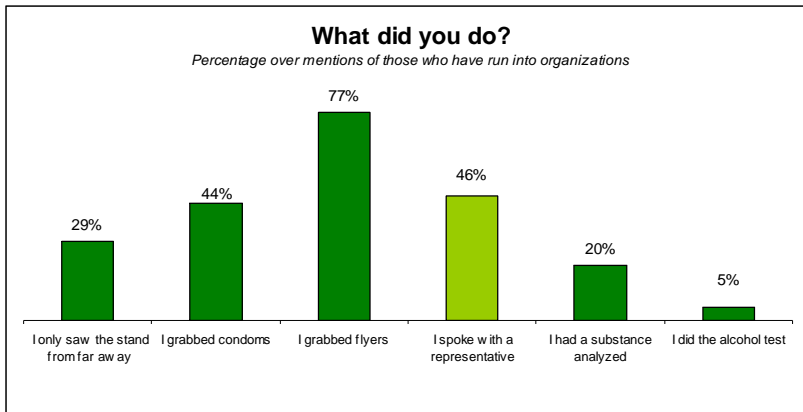
Flyers are the main medium through which information about risk reduction circulates. More than three quarters of the people interviewed pick them up, proving that they are the most interesting part about visiting stands.

The information contained in flyers is received positively, but that doesn't always mean it has a changing effect on consumption patterns. We find a couple of factors that explain this lack of affectation:

Informational flyers have little mobility (an 11%). They tend to contain a large amount of information that can't be retained by reading it just once. In any case, it turns out that adolescents and young adults keep the flyers but don't circulate the information or the flyer once they've got it.

Using flyers as a risk reduction discourse leaves the individuals alone in the conversation. The flyers

tend to speak to the reader in the second person singular, which puts emphasis on individual consumption responsibilities. In this sense they don't tend to provide action or reflection guidelines directed at groups, and so they don't get shared with the collective.



The expert friend as an information source

A huge gap separates, and makes impossible to reconcile experiential, knowledge and the information provided by the abstentionist discourse. While the first considers the immediate contextual interpretation, the second one sanctions and even negates the experience of it. This is one of the reasons why the abstentionist discourse remains illegitimate and for which it is seen as having little credibility. In the gap created by both forms of knowledge, and within the risk reduction framework, a figure has emerged in response to the need for information: the expert friend.

This figure is incarnated by the people who offer information during nightlife consumption, using language and communication styles that are familiar to people who are nightlife users. These are passionate and interested informers that adopt a non-invasive attitude, leaving a margin of exploration that respects the space of who has approached them. They also don't make a moral judgement around substance consumption. What interests us here is the intersection between practical and experiential knowledge and information, and theoretical or expert sources.

Reasons not to approach information stands

Of the people interviewed, 29% have come across stands in party settings, and have demonstrated no interest in approaching them. The interviews that were conducted show that approaching a stand means interrupting the flow of the party, which is not something they are willing to do. In addition we have the stigma associated with substance consumption. In multitudinous parties like festivals, concerts, or big cities, anonymity can be assured for people that approach stands, but for less populated venues, approaching stands

becomes visible and therefore more difficult. Being seen approaching the stand is threatening because of the stigma attached to substance consumption.

More specifically, we see that 44% of young adults who affirm not to consume don't approach the stand, whereas this pattern only happens with 22% of consumers. The interviews show that services are conceived as being for consumers, which explains why non-consumers understand the service as not being directed at them.

In terms of what we have learned about the consumer percentage that does not approach the stand, it is important to address the fact that they think the stands are intended for non-consumers

[cons. OH/THC]. This is because they associate the service with 'NO to drugs,' and therefore with the abstentionist discourse. Secondly, we have noticed that some accounts identify information stands exclusively with substance analysis. In these cases some of the people interviewed prefer not to pass by the stands because they don't want to 'sacrifice' a part –possibly a substantial part– of their recreational drugs to the substance analysis. Finally, a third set of explanations remarks that substance analysis only proves what they already know: that the substances have been adulterated. According to them, receiving that information at a party setting will not make them stop consumption. In any case it could 'spoil their fun' for the night, which they find unnecessary. This third argument also explains why consumers that approach the stand don't actually interact with the personnel.

If we pay attention to the differences between genders we find that men who are non-consumers [cons. OH/THC], and especially young adults more than teenagers, tend not to approach the stand, while women who are not consumers tend to pass by without interacting with the personnel of the organization. If we focus on the consumer population we will see that adolescent men are the least motivated to approach the stand or interact with the personnel running it.

Substance analysis and its effects

Substance analysis is a service that produces controversy among adolescents and young adults that we interviewed. According to some accounts, the cost factor and being right in the middle of a party context makes analysis results useless in terms of effecting the consumption of substances.

What is important to consider about this is that, regardless of whether these accounts pertain to consumers or to non-consumers of psychoactive

substances, they have not directly used the substance analysis service. These people's stories reveal a dual attitude: one that acknowledges that the substances they use are adulterated and another that avoids the substance analysis service claiming that an expert opinion could create contradictory unwanted feelings. It seems more comfortable not to know. The process of developing responsible patterns must go through an information phase. The best way not to assume responsibility is to avoid accessing the information.

In relation to these explanations we find other accounts that value the substance analysis service and find them to have a positive impact on substance consumption and management. The emphasis is placed on the availability of these services in consumption contexts. In this sense, we find a highly positive perspective of the long term effects of on site analysis services. They are considered as effective in increasing moderation of common consumption frequency and use patterns.

Another aspect that is viewed positively in terms of substance analysis services has to do with the effect of monitoring the market through unofficial

filtering of the quality of the substances. What is revealed is precisely that making it 'public knowledge' that some substances are adulterated and others aren't, introduces crucial information that effects purchasing of substances as well as consumption management.

At this point it is necessary to point out how nightlife promoters interpret these kinds of services. According to these accounts, the sole action of carrying out substance analysis can create a positive image of the array of organizations and projects working to reduce consumption risk. In this sense, this kind of implementation is considered – beyond the immediate effects it might have on the different groups of consumers of substances in nightlife environments- to be contributing to a positive evaluation and increased attention to the rest of messages and information that come from these organizations; especially those oriented towards fomenting healthy behaviours

5. Public policies, nightlife, and Risk Reduction

We end this section with a series of reflections on the relationship between public policies, the nightlife sector, and risk reduction measures. We consider that this relationship is presently very much connected to the process of invisibilization of the aforementioned consumption as well as to a lack of understanding of this complex phenomenon within the nightlife network.

Data analysis shows that the nightlife sector is being subjected to an increasing process of tightening of regulations and norms that govern it. In this manner, many of the measures taken by the companies that own nightlife venues are aimed at avoiding the entrance and consumption of prohibited substances in these nightlife venues. The principle regulating this phenomenon is that of attribution of responsibilities. Stated in another way, the phenomenon of consumption of substances is based on the question: who is responsible for the consumption of substances in nightlife venues?

The responsibility, as we see in the testimony of nightlife promoters, is mobile and itinerant. And the fact is that it is moving back and forth between the different administrations and public authorities in the direction of the persons or organizations responsible for managing nightlife, depending on whether the consumption is taking place in public

spaces or in nightlife venues. We have explained this situation via the metaphor of the hot potato. According to this, in considering, administratively, legally, and socially that the problem is localized exclusively in 'the substance', together with the fact that the responsibility is attributed to whoever is closer, the central question is avoided like the proverbial hot potato. It is imperative to get rid of it immediately to avoid burning yourself.

The consumption of illegal substances in nightlife settings is encountering, as a result of its conception centered on the attribution of legal responsibility that the nightlife venues are being penalized because they are being held responsible for the consumption. Following this logic – moreover, unavoidably – the measures taken by venue owners prioritize vigilance, control and the expulsion of the illegal substances from the venue instead of other possible measures. In this way, any other measures, such as those oriented to influence the effects of the consumption (relation of substance / person), on the context of the consumption (relation substance / persons / nightlife venue context) or other measures including still more elements (substances / nightlife users / nightlife venues / administrations), are relegated to a second level on the sector's agenda.

But what are the consequences deriving from the present configuration of the nightlife sector relative

to the consumption of substances? A negative evaluation is deduced from the fact that –in Catalonia– public policies applied to the nightlife sector depend exclusively on the Department of the Interior (police). The promoters interviewed denounce the lack of design and planning of the proactive management policies of the nightlife sector and, going farther, of leisure time activities generically. Added to this is the antiquated nature of the current norms with respect to the socio-cultural transformations of the last two decades, which have had a decisive effect in the way leisure and free time is conceived. According to nightlife venue promoters, the coercive and penalizing offensive of the administration contrasts with the lack of active planning and/or nightlife promoting strategies. In the same way, they express the lack of formal and regular systems of dialogue between the administrations and the nightlife sector.

In addition, a rejection of the risk reduction measures (stands with technical personnel, analysis of substances and, to a lesser extent, informative flyers) takes place in the nightlife venues which are interpreted within the sector as a threat. The inclusion of stands inside the venues sends a double message with two different recipients: to the administration it says there is no consumption in the nightlife venue, but that it is necessary to safeguard the health of clients who consume; to the clients it says you cannot consume in the venue, but in case you do you should take measures to protect your health. Given the setting within which the sector operates, its promoters are invited to prioritize the 'health' of the venue itself ahead of the health of the persons who use the venue. It is important to point out, at the same time, that it is never a matter of outright rejection but an attitude reflected in the expression "yes, but not in my house".

A SET OF PROPOSALS

The following is a set of proposals that will both facilitate the management of policies and interventions that are already in place, and set forth new policies, plans and actions regarding the substance use in the nightlife environment.

First we offer a series of recommendations focused mainly on improving and facilitating the management of public preventive policies including those that affect the nightlife sector. Secondly, we

present a group of more specific recommendations. These focus mainly on improving the quality and impact of risk reduction services in nightlife venues. Finally, we set forth a proposal that would integrate the views of adolescents and young adults -who are after all the main protagonists of the current study- into public policy management.

Regarding public policy management

There is an urgent need to establish formal systems of communication and dialogue between the nightlife sector and public administrative organisms. These systems would have to include, on the one hand, representatives of the Department of the Interior and the Department of Health and, on the other hand, representatives of the principal organizations and associations within the nightlife sector. These systems must allow for regular dialogue as well as fluidity in the calling of formal and informal meetings.

Health information and advice for personnel in the nightlife sector should be handled through their associations and federations. Coordination between the political organisms of the Department of Health and the Department of the Interior is essential for carrying out preventive sociosanitary policies in nightlife venues. Beyond that, privileged lines of cooperation must be

established between the Department of Health and the main associations in the nightlife sector.

Risk reduction services should become more visible, primarily hand-in-hand with independent associations. The young adults and adolescents interviewed showed –as did the private promoters- a strong lack of confidence in institutional messages and, in general, in the institutions themselves, which come across as threatening. The third sector has a significantly higher margin of credibility among young adults and adolescents. This is especially true in terms of all things related to information on drugs. Therefore, the risk reduction associations should be firmly counted on as a vehicle for change in the management of drug use.

Joint actions should be planned and promoted among the nightlife sector, the risk reduction organizations and the administration. The

benefits to all three organisms would quickly become evident:

- The administration could implement its sociosanitary policies in situ, without the opposition they currently generate in the nightlife sector.
- The nightlife sector could alleviate the feeling of institutional threat in the implementation of actions to promote the health of their clientele while enhancing their sociosanitary safety.
- The risk reduction organizations could implement actions previously agreed upon with the health authorities, while offering quality service to the nightlife venues and their clientele.

Proactive and integral promotional and/or planning mechanisms for the nightlife sector should be established. The designing and planning of public policy for the nightlife sector should be based on the contributions and collaborative work of the organisms involved. A Task Force for Nightlife should be set up to address the problems, needs and possibilities of the sector and should ideally include:

- The views of the institutional organisms involved. To this end, it would be advisable to establish interdepartmental coordination of combined comprehensive actions among the Departments of the Interior, Health, Education, Culture and Youth Affairs.
 - The views of people working in the nightlife sector.
 - The views of experts in risk reduction.
- The Task Force should also consider:
- The views of personnel in the nightlife sector.
 - The views of the neighborhood residents.
 - The views of the people using nightlife spaces.

Current regulations regarding drugs and nightlife should start being revised and updated. The current regulations should adapt to the recent sociocultural changes that have decisively shifted society's conception of nightlife and leisure time in general.

Regarding risk reduction intervention and policy management

All risk reduction discourse, policy and action should be actively visibilized. The risk reduction paradigm must become part of public discourse. Public health strategies must be found that do not exclude an ever increasing part of the population, especially young adults. Implementing appropriate decisions is fundamentally a collective task. In order to empower young adults, tools must be provided to teachers, families and any other possible sources of influence on young adults's decision making. Ways need to be explored to make public health issues and drug use a requirement in the school curriculum. By the same token, risk reduction campaigns need to be more widespread in formative and general information environments (most particularly the media). The results of this investigation lead to the conclusion that one of the effects of publicizing risk reduction would be to regain the confidence that young adults have lost in the administration (at least in terms of anything related to psychoactive substance management). Therefore, it's clear that a commitment to risk reduction would also imply, among other things, an increase in the capacity of institutional action.

The 'non-using' public should be actively involved as a target for risk reduction services. Risk reduction must become a globally accessible paradigm for both users and non-users.

This would require the development of mixed informational materials that include a wide range of tactics for managing non-consumption. It is therefore essential to empower adolescents and young adults who choose not to use psychoactive substances. This explicit commitment would affect the sector in a variety of ways:

- Primary prevention. As we have seen, young adults and adolescents who choose not to consume, lack the arguments and solid resources they need to rationalize their choice. Risk reduction needs to become a tool that not only allows them to hold to their choice of abstinence, but also to reinforce it in the face of increased pressure and widespread use in youth and nightlife venues.
- Normalization of the risk reduction paradigm. Expanding the discourse to include the non-using public will have the inevitable effect of making it socially acceptable to abstain.
- Widespread visibility for risk reduction services. This would destigmatize the services which, in turn, would allow two things. On the one hand they would be able to reach a wider public, and on the other, substance use management could be focused more on health issues and less on purely moral or exclusively legal issues.

Mechanisms should be established to ensure that information about the services reaches the adolescent population. As we have seen,

risk reduction services have a low impact on the adolescent population. Therefore, specific steps must be taken to reach them in two ways:

- By increasing the number of risk reduction interventions in those venues frequented mainly by adolescents.
- By systematically incorporating risk reduction into the school curriculum.

Risk reduction should be part of the school curriculum. On the one hand, this would help to answer the problem of the significant lack of preventive resources in the adolescent population. On the other hand, it would contribute to the generalization of the public health paradigm as a social model.

The more densely populated municipalities should have more sustained intervention programs. In these areas there is a great demand for a longer-term approach especially in those venues where more people congregate. Many of them are only occasional clients and are not always around when the risk reduction services are in action, and therefore do not benefit from them. Currently there is a very low quota of interventions in densely populated areas. The need for sustained regular action needs to be addressed in order to fill the current void.

Permanent information points should be established. This would mean placing permanent information stands in those areas where there are a number of nightlife venues together. Permanent risk reduction information spots would answer the needs of a great number of young adults who frequent those venues. They would have to include a first aid team and be in direct communication with mobil emergency services, covering a complete spectrum of sanitary, preventive and curative needs typical of nightlife venues with a high concentration of clients. In the same vein, the various public organisms must coordinate with nightlife associations in order to carry out these measures. Until current regulations have been revised, This will help to defuse the sense of threat that many promoters feel at having such stands inside their venues.

The staff in nightlife venues should be trained. In addition to First Aid, these people need to know the specifics of the immediate effects associated with substance use.

Peer groups should become key participants in the discourse. Risk reduction discourse, and more specifically, the information and advice in flyers, must be directed at the nerve center of substance use management; in other words, at the group cultures. There are some useful approaches for discussing substance use management by modifying the group cultures:

- Reflecting on the person or persons at whom the message is directed.
- Providing tools for group risk management.
- Designing and proposing activities for group substance use management.

Flyers should become a generalized informative strategy in risk reduction discourse. These informational flyers should be widely used in all areas where young adults congregate whether they are substance users or not. For example, youth information spots, civic centres, cultural centres, activity clubs, sports centres, etc. There should be two standardized types of flyers, each with different goals:

- Detailed information flyers. These provide a large amount of information on a specific subject or substance.
- Mobile flyers. These are small and their aim is the mobility of a message that is specific and easy to remember.

Selection criteria should be established for technical personnel in the information stands. Great care is needed in the selection of technical personnel, and it should be done following criteria that fit an optimum profile. These criteria should include necessary knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes:

Specific knowledge requirements:

- How youth cultures work and the ways in which they interrelate.
- The cultural groups of substance use.
- The language and communication styles in the nightlife context.
- The short-term, mid-term and long-term effects of different substances.
- The composition of the various substances available in the nightlife environment.

Optimal aptitude profiles:

- Regardless of age, they should have the ability to empathize with and express cultural values associated with the youth culture.
- In addition to showing interest, they should be passionate on the subject.

Recommended attitudes and approaches:

- It is best to adopt a non-invasive attitude and allow people who stop at the stands to explore what is offered without pressure.
- It is advisable to show willingness to respond actively to the needs of the people who stop.
- It is essential to avoid moral judgements about the standards of substance use for those who stop.

Regarding the need to initiate more participatory policies

Adolescents and young adults should be actively included in planning public policies. Traditionally, decisions on public policies are concentrated around political entities, which allow themselves to be influenced to a greater or lesser degree by other social entities – generally figures who enjoy a certain social or economic status – or by experts who handle their knowledge from a different, less common perspective. The purpose of the current study is precisely to contribute to this expert perspective. Specific knowledge is developed, from which a set of results is extracted, submitted to analysis and discussion, and finally a set of proposed measures is outlined. However, what is not at all common in political planning is the inclusion of the population that is directly affected by the measures that are proposed.

The present report is the result of an institutional request and is therefore evidence of the existence of a political will to incorporate new views and ideas in order to enrich and improve the quality of public policy planning. This report, then, brings in an expert viewpoint to confirm existing intuitions, to set aside some fading intuitions and, fundamentally, to open up new ways of looking at knowledge and action.

It remains, then, to take the final step. The population that is most affected by public policy must be firmly incorporated into the policy planning process. We therefore propose a procedure for the inclusion of the protagonists in the direct management of public policies. In order to achieve this we can use a method that is being developed with great success in the field of solving social and technoscientific controversies. We are referring to the so called consensus conferences (Callon, Lascoumes & Barthe, 2001) – also known as citizen conferences, in France or publicforums in Switzerland–. The consensus conference is a participative method for developing knowledge that was conceived to expand the circle of discussion, which, as we have said, is normally limited to the decision makers and, in some cases, a body of experts who provide the former with data.

It is an act of participative democracy that would, without a doubt, help to form policies that accord with the opinions, assessments and needs of the population involved. Even though it is necessary to be supported by expert knowledge drawn from broad perspectives, the next and essential step is to incorporate the view of the protagonists into the active development of diagnoses and proposals for new public policies.

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