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Edited by Matej Sande

# NIGHTLIFE RECONSIDERED

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Edited by Matej Sande

Nightlife Reconsidered / [editor Matej Sande].  
Trieste: The Etnoblog Intercultural Association.

ISBN 9788890690907

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# NIGHTLIFE RECORDS ON THE RED

Matej Sande

*The deep rumble of the bass in the distance proclaims that something is happening below or above the city streets. Discos, clubs, halls, the crowd, sweaty bodies, loud music, security staff, DJs, party organizers, drinks, laser lights, drugs, raving, ambulances, the outreach team, the police, stars, dealers, the heat, filthy stalls, strobe lights, sex in booths, taxis, drinks spilled all over the bar, chit chat, love, three guys in a booth, drugs scattered on the floor, aluminum foil, vomiting, spilling, kissing, snorting, flirting, money, condoms, passion, twitching, nausea, piling on, the dizziness, the looks, the hope... just a few flickering scenes from last night.*

The nightlife – in the past, a minor issue in the context of prevention, yet forever a source of fear and anxiety of so many parents – has become a towering phenomenon demanding an increasing amount of attention in the past years. At times, it seems that we are indeed reinventing the nightlife, although the phenomenon as we know it today has actually existed in Europe in a similar form for almost thirty years. Along with the commercialization of nightlife, which began in the 1990s, and the surging use of old and new stimulants came the first prevention programs focusing on recreational settings, the first websites providing information on dance drugs, and the first organizations offering the means to analyze pills in recreational settings. These efforts were insufficient, however, as countries in the EU witnessed in the 90s a staunch increase in the use of dance drugs, the most popular of which was MDMA. Soon after, the first backlashes associated mainly with the recreational potential of dance drugs sprung up. Partygoers began to combine different drugs and wash them down with alcohol as the quantities consumed grew steadily, which only added to the possibility of complications resulting from drug use. It was necessary to shift the focus of prevention to clubs and discotheques.

People from various facets of the social, political and professional arena started to take note of this phenomenon as raves and dance drugs began to draw attention from the media and loud complaints from neighbors, parents, public officials, teachers and the police. For a while it seemed that Slovenia would go down the path of criminalizing raves and pushing the scene into the underground before the turn of the millennium. To prevent this from happening, we teamed up with clubs and in 1999 we set out to establish a basic framework for limiting the risks associated with clubbing and the nightlife.

From the perspective of a harm reduction organization, the task has not been easy to accomplish. Initially, organizations focused on harm reduction at electronic music events were undoubtedly driven by a great deal of zest since they sprung up directly from the scene or from the ranks of electronic music fans. After all, it is hard to endure a rave unless you enjoy loud electronic music. The years to come witnessed significant developments in the field, professionalization, collaborations between various stakeholders, and calls for systematic regulation. Throughout, the contact with the target population and the dance scene remained unbroken, for without it, there can be no progress. Similarly, without regular assessment of the state of affairs on the basis of surveys and outreach work, there can be no adequate and timely prevention measures.

Event organizers too were initially enthusiasts, who arranged the first parties held outdoors in meadows and in the first clubs. But soon, money came into play. Expenses had to be covered, an ever larger audience had to be drawn in, and an ever increasing stockpile of alcohol and refreshments had to be sold for the money to roll in. With the rise in attendance came the rise in the number of complications and problems associated with the health and wellbeing of partygoers and with the organization of events.

In 1999, we struck up a partnership with the Faculty of Education, the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Drugs, the Municipality of Izola and Slovenia's largest dance club, Abasada Gavioli, to reduce the risks associated with dance events and increase the safety and security in the club, which was to ensure unlimited access to drinking water and proper ventilation, maintain suitable temperature and humidity levels, provide readily available exits and free bottled water for clubbers suffering from medical complications, ensure the presence of healthcare workers, provide separate facilities for interventions, a wardrobe, a room for cooling off and proper parking spaces, and allow free entry to DrogArt's outreach team trained to provide counseling, information and basic first aid. Playing a key role in facilitating the agreement were Dr. Bojan Dekleva of the Faculty of Education and the then director of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Drugs, Milan Krek, MD.

Instead of imposing earlier closing hours, an agreement was reached, which served as the backbone of all our future efforts to ensure the safety and wellbeing of partygoers of the club culture. Our principles have remained unchanged – respect for partygoers, putting their safety before the profits of organizers, calling attention to organizational glitches and irregularities, providing factual information on risks associated with drugs and alcohol, and playing a part in the evolution of electronic music culture.

This book tells the story of two prevention organizations from different countries. It is based on twelve years of experience in the field with more than one and a half million prevention materials distributed, over one thousand direct interventions in field, five studies on the use of drugs and alcohol... It is a book about experience, learning, growing, enthusiasm and cooperation. The collaboration between Slovenia's DrogArt and Italy's Etnoblog began two years ago. Sharing a common pursuit in the field of harm reduction in nightlife, we first collaborated within the scope of the Safe Coast project, which was endorsed by the European Commission. The partnership was outstanding as years of experience mingled and merged and intertwined with incredible facility. We realized immediately which methods were superior and how each organization could benefit from the other's know-how. DrogArt brought to the table invaluable experiences with outreach activities, research, counseling and disseminating information, while Etnoblog introduced the concept of subsidizing taxis to drive clubbers to their destinations and back to reduce the risks related with driving under the influence. Trieste's Overnight Taxi concept was adopted across the border within three months as the After Taxi project, which now operates in three major Slovenian cities. Providing a safe ride and encouraging partygoers to take a taxi to and from parties have thus become key elements of safer partying.

This book is intended for all who are intrigued by or play an active role in nightlife. It is intended for event organizers, club owners, legislators responsible for drafting and enacting drug policies, and organizations working in the field of harm reduction related to drug or alcohol use and STDs. Finally, it is intended for anyone willing to learn from our experiences and to contribute to efforts to reduce the risks in nightlife settings.

**Chapters One and Two** contain brief overviews of DrogArt and Etnoblog, from their earliest years onward.

**Chapters Three and Four** describe the features of nightlife in Slovenia and in Italy as well as the conditions in place for organizing events and the most frequently encountered problems with ensuring the safety of attendants.

**Chapter Five** presents the guidelines for event organization and regulation of nightlife in the EU, and relates those guidelines to the ones outlined by the two abovementioned organizations on the basis of extensive outreach work. Subsequently, **Chapter Six** highlights a number of best practices related to nightlife in the EU.

**Chapter Seven** introduces the findings of a quantitative and qualitative research study on the use of cocaine in Slovenia's and Italy's nightlife scenes and concludes by describing the programs and projects helmed by the two organizations as well as their joint effort, the Safe Coast project.





# DROGART-ARETROSPECTIVE

Mina Paš in  
Matej Sande

The earliest years of DrogArt hark back to a period before its official founding in 1999. In the early 90s, the electronic music scene in Slovenia was fresh and untamed. We were there when the first organized raves started taking place in 1995, when techno burst onto the scene, and when the first MDMA pills arrived on the scene. Back then, up to 1.300 people would gather at the larger events to see the likes of Aldo, Umek, Gaby, Primus, Random Logic and others. This was a romantic period of bloom, of techno, raves, PLUR, whistles and bright, bold clothing. The electronic music scene was booming.

In 1996, we put together a research team at the Society for the Development of Preventive Work under the direction of Dr. Bojan Dekleva. The team proceeded to devise a qualitative study entitled 'The Methodology of Qualitative Research on the Negative Effects of Drugs among Young People', which was the first study on the use of MDMA in Slovenia. The main objective was to gain insight into the use of so called 'dance drugs' in recreational settings, which we knew very little about at the time. What did we find? The results showed that Slovenia already had a relatively well developed rave scene, that synthetic drugs had made their way into raves, that users occasionally experienced problems with drug use, and that Slovenia lacked a program aimed at supplying young people with information and advice. This led to the realization of the need for a project to undermine the harmful repercussions of drug use at electronic music events.

We set up the first website on drugs on the 'students' server KISS in 1997. We posted basic information on MDMA and conducted an online survey on the use of illicit drugs. The strong

response (more than 200 respondents took part in the survey) was followed by a slew of requests from users calling on us to update the website and take the next step. So we did.

In 1998, a team of students of social pedagogy from the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana, who had helped conduct a different survey using the ESPAD methodology (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs), began organizing drug prevention workshops in secondary schools throughout Slovenia. Their efforts were well received and rated as a success. Six months later, the idea of setting up our own organization to take up prevention efforts in the area of (mainly) synthetic drugs was born.

The two seminal surveys revealed that **dance drugs** such as **ecstasy, amphetamines and cocaine** were the most popular among the high school population, and that consumption among youths was rising (in 1998, the share of fifteen-year-olds from Ljubljana who had tried ecstasy at least once was 7 %, which was already more than in 1995; similarly, the use of marijuana was increasing – in the 1998 survey, 25,8 % of respondents stated that they had used it). The use of illicit drugs, particularly marijuana, ecstasy and amphetamines increased in that period, not only due to the rapid rise of electronic music culture (which was closely affiliated with stimulants) in Slovenia, but also because they were readily available, progressively cheaper and relatively simple to use.

The results highlighted the need for specialized programs straddling the line between preventive and therapeutic action. For this reason, we focused our first project on 'dance drugs' since these, along with marijuana, had been the most prevalent among Slovenian high school students since we began our activities.

Finally, in the summer of 1999, we gathered at the founding general meeting of the Association DrogArt where we legalized and formalized our activities. Within a month, we were standing in front of the former club Propaganda, handing out flyers warning of the dangers of MDMA use. Our first prevention materials were mainly met with approval. The text was prudently written to provide factual information on actual dangers instead of employing scare tactics as a means of deterring, and we have managed more or less to preserve this approach throughout the years. Our first flyers were modeled after the eye-catching and witty designs featured on informational materials of Manchester's Lifeline project. Since then, we have invested much effort into making our materials attractive and compelling so that young people would reach for them, read them from front to back, and put them in their pockets and purses. At dance events, only a relatively small chunk of our distributed material ends up on the floor after closing time. In the last decade, we have been carefully and meticulously planning and designing our prevention materials by drafting a variety of

designs and titles for flyers and posters, and presenting them to focus groups consisting of partygoers to hear which designs they like best and which message speaks most clearly and loudly to them.

The first editions of flyers contained 15.000 copies, but soon that number swelled to 70.000, which was just enough for a year's worth of distribution across Slovenia's dance-floors. Apart from the new website, we also set up in 1999 an online forum, the DA conference, which has encouraged people to take an active part and contribute new ideas. It began as a small internet community and has grown into a veritable social experiment within the last twelve years. Today, the largest Slovenian forum on electronic music, parties, synthetic drugs and nightlife-related topics is moderated by 14 moderators. The 'Gremo na party' (roughly translated as 'Let's party') forum has featured more than 10.700 topics with over 300.000 replies. A diverse and active forum allows us to maintain contact with our target population and to pick up almost in real time on emerging problems to plan immediate and adequate prevention responses.

Our first prevention project called Dance smart ;) or by its longer designation Preventing Harmful Effects of Dance Drugs among Young People was launched in 2000 with the purpose of informing, raising awareness, counseling and familiarizing young people with the effects of individual dance drugs through various media in order to attain the primary goal – to reduce as much as possible the harm resulting from regular, occasional or experimental drug use among young people. In 2004, the project was awarded the European Prevention Prize by the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe. At the beginning, the main elements of the Dance smart ;) project included:

- **Outreach work** – educating and providing information to young people on site at electronic music events by means of preventive-informational flyers;
- **Prevention workshops for secondary school students** – implementing current didactic methods to educate young people on the characteristics, effects and risks of the use of dance drugs;
- **Prevention and harm reduction over the internet** ([www.drogart.org](http://www.drogart.org)) – employing electronic media for prevention measures, maintaining the most popular drug harm reduction website in Slovenia;
- **Encouraging peer-group education** – the exchange of information, experiences and knowledge between peers and members of the electronic music scene;
- **Developing standards to reduce risks at electronic music events** – working hand in hand with event organizers to ensure basic conditions for safer partying.



Within the scope of the Dance smart ;) project, we organized in 2000 the first training course for outreach workers at the Association DrogArt with the purpose of adequately preparing volunteers to provide information on risks associated with drugs, and first aid at dance events. The far-reaching purpose was also to inform as many young people as possible on the risks and first aid procedures so that they would be able to help each other in case of complications. By this time, the 'mainstream' rave scene had spread from Ambasada Gavioli in Izola to so called mass gatherings, the Mecca of which were Golovec Hall in Celje and later the Rdeča Dvorana Hall in Velenje. Attendance at these events would vary from 2.000 to 5.000, therefore, we had to restructure our approach to cover an entire venue. At Golovec Hall, we set up the first DrogArt booth where partygoers could pick up flyers, fruit, isotonic beverages, and obtain assistance in cases of health and psychological problems relating to drug use.

One of the major hindrances encountered at the beginning was the mistrust on the part of drug users. Admittedly, it took some time for partygoers to shake off their suspicions and realize that our mission was to help, and once they did, they started turning to us for assistance.

A key factor that helped build our credentials was the fact that our outreach workers stemmed from the ranks of partygoers, thus we can say that our group has abided by the peer-to-peer principle since the very beginning. Equally favorable was also the fact that users were never met with scorn, judgment or moralizing regarding their lifestyles. At DrogArt, we have always based our practices on the belief that drug use falls within the purview of personal decisions, which we cannot encroach upon. Our reputation and status are also due in large part to the abovementioned website and online forums, which acted as weekday gathering spots for partygoers, and platforms for debates on topics ranging from parties to other aspects of life.

In spite of having gradually established trust between us and partygoers, winning over dance event organizers proceeded much more tediously along a very patchy road. Conditions at raves were strikingly different back then. Oftentimes, entrances would bottleneck the crowd to a standstill, taps in bathrooms would dispense only drips of lukewarm or warm water, and security was regularly understaffed and undertrained. In spite of the presence of around three or four thousand ravers, many of whom were using drugs, there were no ambulances present at events. Our team too initially ran into cold shoulders as the organizers feared that by allowing the presence of a group working to reduce drug-related harm they would in effect be admitting to holding events where illegal drugs are routinely consumed.

After every event, we would call out the organizer on the appalling safety conditions, waiting in vain for any sign of improvement. It required a lot of effort even to maintain our presence at raves. The organizers would send us a few free tickets, leaving us to cover the remaining expenses by ourselves.

Then, in the summer of 2001, a turning point was reached with regards to safety at electronic music events. Sadly, this shift was triggered only by a tragic, ecstasy-related death. The cause of death was cerebral edema, one of the common health hazards of MDMA use. The incident made the front pages and the media heaped scorn upon the organizers and disparaged the rave scene in general. The threat loomed that dance events would be subject to criminalization. At the time, the scene was in full bloom, and prohibition would have only lead to a retreat into the underground, which would have been potentially disastrous for partygoers as it would have precluded any possibility of regulation or control.

In order to work out a constructive solution, a meeting took place at the Association DrogArt between representatives of DrogArt, the director of the former Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Drugs, Milan Krek, and two main organizers of electronic music events in Slovenia. Together, we proceeded to draft the guidelines for organizing dance events, which were intended for individual municipalities. Slovenian legislation namely requires that a municipality issue a permit for any public event where more than 300 people are expected to attend, therefore, we proposed that permits for dance events be issued only if organizers comply with conditions set out by the guidelines. Bringing in the organizers to take part in drafting the guidelines was paramount, as it would have been fruitless to prescribe guidelines without their involvement and have them ignore or attempt to dodge them due to sharp rises in costs. It was equally crucial that the organizers understood that safety was worth the extra investments since negative campaigns resulting from tragic incidents would cause much greater losses.

Following the incident, we struck up a productive partnership with the Central Forensic Laboratory of the General Police Directorate of Slovenia. Having established a trustworthy relationship with users, we were able to obtain an ecstasy pill identical to the one that had caused the death of the young girl. The lab was able to identify its contents, which was particularly important from the perspective of public health as there was a possibility that the pill contained particularly harmful substances, in which case we would have immediately had to spread the word and inform other users. Our partnership with the police has continued and evolved ever since.

In the following years, our Dance smart ;) outreach team attended every major gathering in Slovenia. Mass gatherings were held once every two months in Celje and Velenje, and the Meet Me festival took place at the beginning of July of each year, initially in Zeleni gaj and later in Divača. This period was marked by a deluge of large electronic music events, which meant that we had to know the packet event calendar in advance in order to be able to make appropriate logistic in technical provisions.

The second pivotal moment occurred with another ecstasy-related death. After a young girl died from cerebral edema, DrogArt linked up with the Center for Intoxication and, acquiring funding from the Ministry of Health, conducted training courses for physicians in every region in the country. We had identified the need to educate physicians in the field of specific medical complications resulting from drug use, and they welcomed the opportunity and showed strong support. This marked the beginning of our collaboration with medical professionals, which has developed over the years to accommodate current demands.

In the last twelve years, the Dance smart ;) scheme has engendered an effective system for harm reduction and an indispensable network for first aid provision at electronic music events. In shaping the program, we have consistently responded to the needs of users, and we have succeeded in including a growing number of stakeholders, from organizers to healthcare professionals and government bodies, which has been essential for the program's achievements.



The background of the entire page is a photograph of a DJ performing at a music event. The DJ is wearing a blue t-shirt and is positioned behind a DJ booth. The scene is illuminated with vibrant, multi-colored stage lights in shades of blue, purple, red, and orange, creating a dynamic and energetic atmosphere. The DJ's hands are visible on the turntables and mixer.

# THE ETNO BLOG INT ER CULTU RAL ASS OCIATION

Silvia Pallaver  
and Paolo Rizzi

The Etnoblog Intercultural Association was founded in 2004 by a group of young people of various professional backgrounds (pedagogues, designers, sound and video technicians, website designers, interior designers, coaches, PR workers, DJs and VJs) bound by a common desire to create a space in Trieste, the city where many of them were studying or had entered the labor market, where they could pursue their diverse interests. The story of Etnoblog thus begins in July of that year with the Etnoblog Festival.

Dozens of young people took part in bringing to life a four-day festival featuring concerts, conferences, book presentations and workshops, all taking place in the charming little town of Lignano Sabbiadoro. After this exhilarating yet demanding experience of joint work, a group of them decided to establish an association named Etnoblog to be able to continue pursuing their activities. In December of 2004, they rented and overhauled an old squash gym in the heart of Trieste, setting up headquarters and initiating activities in a more stable context. Over the years, those facilities, dubbed Circolo Etnoblog ('The Etnoblog Circle') saw literally thousands of events ranging from DJ sets, concerts and theatre performances to lectures, conferences and debates.

In 2005 they were awarded their first substantial chunk of funding for a major project entitled Colors, which has been operating ever since. The investments were used to educate and train the staff of an editorial board consisting of young foreigners to prepare and shoot radio broadcasts and documentaries depicting the life circumstances of immigrants in the region. Following the success of the project, Etnoblog continued to conceptualize and implement projects with a number of stakeholders from the public and the private sectors, becoming an important reference point in the field of youth work in the regions Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

In 2006, they launched their first informal education project called On Stage. Within the scope of the project, they carried out courses in activities related to entertainment and show business, which were attended by twenty people aged between sixteen and twenty-one. The project ultimately gave rise to the On Stage social co-operative, the only work integration social co-op in Italy to provide stage construction for concerts and events.

From the city center, Etnoblog moved its headquarters to the seaside in 2009. Initially, they conducted art projects in the former public pools facilities Stabilimento Ausonia and afterward they 'occupied' the old Ausonia Restaurant, which they remodeled from top to bottom, working closely together with the On Stage social co-operative. The new multi-purpose facilities, which were opened in January 2010, feature educational activities, concerts, theatre and festivals, all in step with the needs of different interest groups in the area of Trieste. In the afternoons, the center is open for youth work conducted by the social co-operatives 'La Quercia' and 'Duemilauno-Agenzia Sociale', which closely parallel one another thanks to years' worth of outreach work with young people in the province, and can potentially work with Etnoblog. In the nighttime, the center becomes a venue for different kinds of musical events.

As mentioned above, the Etnoblog team is driven by a patchwork of different interests. The propitious combination of professionalism and divergent passions channeled into the group's activities as well as the perpetual connection with young people in the city are two factors which have allowed Etnoblog to pursue a two-tier mission – organizing events and carrying out projects for harm reduction related to the use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances. Though the world of entertainment events and the world of substance abuse often overlap, it is scarcely imaginable that a single entity should encompass both. In truth, however, the two are readily reconcilable provided that proper planning is done. The reasons for the split approach lie in the character of the association – the common denominator of the motley of interests permeating Etnoblog is music culture in all its shapes and forms, which includes the organization of concerts and festivals as well. The team has always fostered a passion for the electronic scene, not simply in its audible form but also in terms of all other aspects of this growing phenomenon. *'If you're under ninety, chances are that you've spent most of your life listening to electronic music,'* said Brian Eno a while back. Electronic culture is also one of the fastest evolving areas which is at the same time a subject of interest primarily of young people. Technological advancements of the past years have opened the doors to young people, who have scrambled by the masses to exploit the possibilities of engaging in the music in terms of creation and production. Creating music was suddenly made

feasible with the advent of relatively low priced tools, the use of which could be learned easily with the right motivation.

The love of music and for working with young people as well as the skills in almost every aspect of event organizing flourished in Circolo Etnoblog, and in 2006, inspired the group to organize the Electroblog Festival of electronic music and culture. Financial support was provided by the regions Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the event enjoyed huge success in three provinces and across the border in Slovenia. The first installment of the festival was also a prime opportunity for the group to hone their second calling – to imbue events such as this one with a positive message of awareness and responsibility in nightlife activities. The fest marks the beginning of collaborative efforts between Etnoblog, the n°1 'Triestina' Office of Addictions of the Institute of Public Health and the social co-op 'La Quercia' to address drug and alcohol abuse among young people. Fully aware of the social responsibility entailed by an event such as Electroblog (an electronic music festival raging until the early morning hours, young people involved in the project, a huge turnout), Etnoblog turned to the Institute with both sides presenting their views and ideas on how to devise adequate strategies and efficient methods of promoting partying with less risk. The Institute immediately seized the opportunity to work with Etnoblog, providing social workers and healthcare workers to work side by side with the teams of 'La Quercia' and Etnoblog. Before the festival took place, training was conducted for all who would be responsible for the smooth running of the show as well as for the city's bar and café owners, waiters, security guards, DJs and technicians. Altogether, around sixty individuals took part in the training, which was intended to facilitate mutual understanding of individual roles and capacities, juxtapose discrepant views on problems arising from drug and alcohol use, and develop a strategy of action based on common consent. The medical staff of the Institute of Public Health offered basic training in first aid to all those who would work at the festival, and provided support for the duration of the event. The three-day revelry featured a host of activities organized by the Office of Addictions, the Etnoblog team and the outreach workers of 'La Quercia' to raise awareness and reduce drug and alcohol-related harm. Furthermore, these alliances laid the groundwork for another major project spearheaded by Etnoblog, which was later dubbed 'Overnight'. Cooperation therefore did not end with the completion of the festival. The association proved to be an exceptional partner in efforts to raise awareness of drug and alcohol use among young people. Circolo Etnoblog is, after all, the place to go for many young residents of Trieste, which helps strengthen the link with the target population. Moreover:

- it is a youth and culture center, which emphasizes the fact that it is not a public institution (which is very important for young people);
- all initiatives including nighttime parties are organized and managed by young people, which includes full-time members of Etnoblog as well as individuals and groups that take part only occasionally;
- the approach whereby anyone can play a part imposes on all those involved the responsibility for managing and sustaining a truly common and inclusive space for young people.

The latter fact brought on a subtle self-regulation on the part of participants, including those who might use drugs and alcohol in other settings, underscored by the tacit agreement that the association should not suffer at the hands of negative and destructive impulses. Etnoblog was the perfect venue for implementing prevention measures and harm reduction programs related to drugs and alcohol, and became a medium for similar projects helmed by Trieste's Institute of Public Health. Soon, a number of questions sprung up: are the youths at Etnoblog simply a target audience for disseminating information and intervening within the scope of projects lead by public institutions or can they be included in a different, more proactive way? What are the implications of the joint efforts of a youth organization which holds events for young people and a public institution to reduce alcohol and substance-related harm? How do adults perceive young people in various contexts and vice versa? Confrontation, cooperation and equality between partners were the underlying principles of the Overnight project and the core of joint action of the youth organization and the public body. The success of such initiatives is hinged upon the active involvement of all key players – young people as well as adults as representatives of various institutions, providers of leisure activities, and parents must work closely together with youth groups and associations. .

In order to establish fertile common ground between these disparate worlds, it was necessary to engage in dialogue, which facilitated the exchange of and reflection upon perceptions of reality as well as the construction of a common vision. A clear example of good practices borne by this approach was the collaboration with Enaip Trieste to organize the training of security personnel, i.e. those stakeholders who are mainly responsible for safety in nightlife settings. The courses included training in interventions in cases of physical harm resulting from drug and alcohol use as well as instructions on skills necessary for communicating with young people in the nightlife context. The other fine example of good practices was the uninterrupted cooperation with bar and club managers, who attended courses in order to discuss the problems encountered in their line of work and to seek common solutions.


Etnoblog continued to evolve, receiving full support from the Institute of Public Health of Trieste as well as other public bodies of the province such as the Traffic Section and the Department of Order and Legality. All the while, the group emphasized the importance of the simultaneous provision of prevention information and access to public transportation as an alternative to using one's own transportation. Drawing on this idea, in 2006, a team of young 'Etnobloggers' came up with the concept of free bus rides from the Sistiana beach, the area's nightlife hub during the summer months. The concept has since grown into a weekend service provided annually in the summertime. Within the scope of this project, outreach workers are present on the Overnight buses (which deliver more than 15.000 partygoers to and from their destinations every summer) and set up stands along the coast where people can simply discuss issues, sign up for bus rides to and from parties, rest up in 'chill-out spots', receive fruit beverages, water and diverse prevention and information materials designed jointly by likeminded youths and professionals from the Institute for the Treatment of Addiction.

On the wings of positive experiences with the Overnight project came the Overnight Taxi project in 2009 as a result of attempts by Etnoblog to transfer prevention measures relating to traffic over to wintertime nightlife in the city of Trieste. During the cold months, people are more likely to use private means of transport to move across the city and head to parties and back. Similarly, they are more likely to sit behind the wheel to traverse shorter distances and hop from one bar to the next. In addition, nightlife during wintertime becomes decentralized and spreads to pubs and clubs scattered across town, with no distinct center of party-life and nighttime activities. Searching for adequate alternatives to private transportation, the Overnight team envisioned taxi services as the ideal means of getting around the city. Taxis are still being used by a minority of young people, mainly due to bigger expenses but also because young people are unaccustomed to using taxis. By registering at the Etnoblog info point, young people aged between 16 and 25 could acquire coupons for subsidized taxi fares on weeknights. Funding for the project was provided by the Trieste Institute of Public Health and the Trieste Province. The concept was later transferred to Slovenia as a good practice. Within the scope of the Safe Coast project helmed by the Association DrogArt, the After Taxi service became a huge success.

For Etnoblog, the proposal to join forces under the Safe Coast project was an important recognition of their efforts in the fields of event organizing and implementing strategies for harm reduction in relation to alcohol and drug use. The Etnoblog team firmly believes that by engaging in both fields (event organizing and prevention) in a responsible manner and with

a good deal of self-reflection they can maintain contact with the entire specter of stakeholders involved and monitor the state of affairs, which in turn enables them to respond quickly and adapt their outreach activities. Maintaining a good relationship with young people allows for a constant flow of information as well as feedback regarding their work, which is the basis for self-evaluation and future improvements of activities in the respective fields. Although their approach undoubtedly entails countless challenges and traps while inextricably tying favorable results to a never-ending state of action and development on the part of the organization, the team has no intention of relenting in their endeavor. Firmly committed to this 'grey area', Etnoblog will continue on its path, seeking in it inspiration for new projects grounded in the actual needs of young people from the area of Trieste.





# AN OVERVIEW OF THE STATISTICS OF NIGHTLIFE IN SLOVENIA

Mina Paš and  
Matej Sande

## Introduction

The nightlife scene in Slovenia occupies bars, which are open until midnight or slightly longer, clubs, which open their doors at around ten o'clock and close in the early morning hours (typically at 6 a.m.), and public events, which take place outdoors or in larger venues from ten o'clock until seven in the morning. The youngest partygoers, however, rarely attend organized parties due to a lack of funds. For them, it is financially more convenient to buy alcohol in stores and settle in parks or other open spaces. Although the Restrictions on the Use of Alcohol Act strictly prohibits the sale of alcohol to persons under the age of 18, minors nevertheless find ways to get their hands on alcohol, either from older peers or because the cashier simply fails to verify their age.

The party scene comes to life mainly on Fridays and Saturdays. A typical night out for youths and young adults starts out in bars or at home. Alcohol remains the drug of choice, however, partygoers tend also to spice up their evenings with marijuana and stimulants (cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy or recent synthetic drugs such as Methylone). Bars are usually the place to meet before setting off to clubs or public events, whereas many people end up there having started the evening at private parties.

Usually, the first arrivals to clubs and other 'main events' appear at midnight or later. In order to encourage crowds to show up earlier, organizers offer discount prices on tickets and drinks until midnight. Clubs and electronic music events tend to turn on the lights somewhere between six and seven in the morning and from there, the party moves to an organized or private 'after-party'.

Through outreach work, we have recently noticed an increased awareness on the part of young drivers of the dangers of driving under the influence. Oftentimes, a group of young people will tell us that each week one of them makes the necessary 'sacrifice' and remains sober to drive the others around for the night. Two of DrogArt's projects are devoted to alcohol-related harm reduction. The Choose Yourself project takes place in high schools where we provide valuable information to youngsters on how best to plan a safe night out and on the main risks lurking along the road to and from the party. The After Taxi project provides a system of subsidized taxis to encourage people to use public transport instead of getting behind the wheel of their own cars or in the passenger seat with a drunk driver. The project is a fine example of a transfer of good practices as it was originally conceived and set in motion in Italy by the Etnoblog organization and later adopted in Slovenia within the scope of the Safe Coast project.

## Event Organization

Slovenian legislation contains no provisions for regulating the external conditions at electronic music events taking place in clubs (proper air conditioning, restrictions on the number of attendants, access to running water...). Conditions at nightlife venues are thus regulated by the Public Gathering Act and the Hospitality Industry Act. The following sections present the regulations governing the organization of large events, and the provisions for organizing club events, which are much more poorly regulated from the viewpoint of harm reduction.

### Legal Provisions Governing Organization of Large Events ('Mass Gatherings')

Electronic music events which take place outdoors instead of clubs are organized according to the same regulations as other public events. The conditions to be met for organizing public events are set out by the Public Gathering Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Num. 113/2005, from 16 December 2005). Article 16 of the Act states:

'The competent body shall issue a permit for organizing a public event under the condition that the organizer demonstrates that adequate measures shall be implemented to ensure order, the personal safety of participants and other individuals, and the protection of property, and that the event shall not interfere impede public traffic or produce unacceptable environmental burdens.'

In practice, this means that public events must guarantee adequate security and fire safety as well as the presence of an ambulance with trained medical personnel.

In addition to the preceding, individual administrative units customarily require additional conditions to be met for the organization of electronic music events, drawing on the recommendations pertaining to the organization of such events issued in 2001 by the Ministry of Health. Although administrative units have no strict obligation to require that organizers comply with these recommendations, most of them nevertheless do so. However, they must first decipher from the application for a permit that the public event in question is indeed an electronic music event, a fact which organizers cleverly attempt to conceal in order to cut through the red tape and expedite the procedure.

The guidelines for the organization of electronic music events state that the organizer should provide/ensure/secure the following:

1. Cool drinking water for attendants free of charge.
2. An adequate number of sanitary facilities based on the expected number of attendants.
3. Separate facilities on site with a maintained cool temperature level to allow attendants to retreat after dancing and cool off.
4. Emergency medical assistance:
  - Separate, smaller facilities with a cool temperature to allow the administering of first aid to individuals with health problems;
  - An ambulance in the immediate vicinity as well as a physician and proper resuscitation equipment;
  - Non-governmental organizations (DrogAtc, etc.) and others should be permitted to distribute informational materials, offer counseling on the hazards of drug use, and provide basic first aid with the help of the medical staff.
5. Proper ventilation and, if necessary, temperature control to maintain cool temperature levels.
6. Adequate means for a safe evacuation of the entire site.
7. Adequate fire protection.
8. Adequate security services.

### Legal Provisions Governing Organization of Club Events

The area of club events is not as well regulated as the area of large events or 'mass gatherings', as they are called. The majority of clubs is registered as catering establishments with recorded music since Slovenian legislation does not assume a separate category for nightclubs. In order to open its doors, an establishment requires an operating permit. The manager determines the working hours at his/her own discretion, but they have to be approved by the local authority responsible for catering and hospitality services. To obtain the permit, an establishment also requires a club safety plan, which determines the maximum capacity of the venue.

Although there are certain regulations in place, which clubs must abide by to ensure the safety of patrons, they are not adapted to the specificities of electronic music events. For example, there are no requirements for temperature control, the number of attendants is



not adjusted to the nature of electronic music events, and there are no requirements to provide access to free drinking water or to ensure the presence of prevention or harm reduction organizations. In Slovenia, this particular field leaves considerable room for improvement.

## Outreach Efforts of the Dance smart ;) Team

Launched in 1999, the Dance Smart ;) program of the Association DrogArt has been in existence for twelve years and has flourished into a notable example of good practices in the context of reducing risks at electronic music events by virtue of the provision of information, first aid and other prevention measures to alleviate complications suffered by partygoers due to alcohol and substance abuse.

The outreach team behind the project attends the majority of electronic music events in Slovenia. Team members are mostly students who are close to the target population, fitting roughly in the same age group. In this manner, the team implements a peer support approach, which is particularly suitable for working with young drug users, who are likely to feel apprehensive about confiding in older individuals in the field.

In spite of their youth, which makes them more 'user friendly', it is imperative that they be adequately trained to carry out their duties. At electronic music events, one of their principal assignments is to administer first aid to people suffering from medical complications due to consumption of drugs and/or alcohol. For this reason, they must be thoroughly familiar with the mechanics of these complications, with first aid procedures as well as with appropriate ways to approach people in need. Each member of the group must therefore attend a compulsory training weekend organized once a year by DrogArt. The course provides future outreach workers with basic information on the features and effects of drugs, the causes and characteristics of drug and alcohol related health complications, and with methods behind disseminating information among users in the field. Apart from that, they must also complete a 40-hour training course in first aid as the absence of an ambulance or medical staff at club events demands that DrogArt's outreach workers react and administer CPR in cases of cardiac or respiratory arrest.

Training and education must continue throughout and for this purpose, outreach workers attend regular monthly meetings with mentors to exchange new information and discuss current issues. Meetings usually focus on a single relevant subject depending on the situa-

tion on the scene (for example a new drug appearing on the market, specific complications, etc.), but they are also intended for an evaluation of intervention measures by outreach teams and to tackle issues faced by the group in their line of work. At times, this includes relationships between outreach workers themselves. We dedicate particular attention to those kinds of issues because it is vital to foster mutual trust and understanding between outreach workers in order for their mission to succeed.

To perform outreach work, volunteers have to be over eighteen or, with parental consent, seventeen. Upon admission to the team, a newcomer must sign a statement pledging to abstain from psychoactive substances (nicotine and caffeine excluded) while carrying out DrogArt's programs and to maintain a respectable image off duty as well, which means that while attending parties on their own time, members should continue to abide by principles of harm reduction.

In addition to providing first aid, DrogArt's outreach workers are also tasked with disseminating information among partygoers on the dangers and risks behind drug use. This is done via leaflets featuring information on drug and alcohol-related harm reduction. Furthermore, users receive information through posters put up in bathroom stalls (presenting information on the purity of cocaine) and through post-it note-sized papers that can be used for snorting, whereby the underlying purpose is to discourage the joint use of snorting implements and to raise awareness of the risks of the transmission of diseases (principally, hepatitis).

Outreach efforts also entail the distribution of free isotonic beverages to encourage people to drink those instead of water. Drinking large quantities of water namely increases the risk of a cerebral edema linked to MDMA use.

In recent years, we have noticed substantial changes in the trends of drug use at raves, which have brought about new risks for ravers. One recent development has been the surge in alcohol use among partygoers. One reason behind this is the fact that the scene has been subject to rigorous commercialization and has climbed from the confines of a subculture into the mainstream. In the late 90s, when we first initiated the Dance smart ;) action, the fledgling rave scene in Slovenia was dominated by ecstasy, which was the most popular dance drug, second only to marijuana. Amphetamines were also present, while other illicit drugs were scarce. In step with the situation, our outreach efforts were geared mainly towards ecstasy related harm reduction.

Nowadays, electronic music no longer carries a subculture label as dance events witness an influx of 'regular' nighttime revelers. Popular electronic artists like DJ Tiesto or David Guetta attract thousands of listeners who attend events not because of any particular appreciation for the musical genre, but merely because these events are 'happening' at the moment and visitors are simply looking to have fun.

In light of this, we have expanded the scope of our activities at events to include conveying alcohol-related information and implementing alcohol-related harm reduction measures. Outreach work places strong emphasis on the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs. Within the Safe Coast and Choose Yourself projects, we distribute flyers entitled Furam 0,0 (a slang term for driving sober with '0,0' referring to the number shown by a breathalyzer; roughly translated as 'I Ride With 0,0') to inform users on the penalties for drunk driving. We also put up posters in bathrooms with the same message. Our outreach teams offer a breathalyzer test before the ride home to prompt people to think twice before getting behind the wheel while under the influence. When approached, DrogArt members who administer the test discuss with partiers to find alternative, safer ways of getting home such as a taxi ride sponsored by the After Taxi project.

Apart from the increasing use of alcohol, Slovenia's nightlife scene has also witnessed the rise in popularity of cocaine. This occurred during a two-year period when the supply of ecstasy pills containing MDMA in the Slovenian market dried up and users eventually shifted to cocaine. Our research into the use of cocaine in nightlife (described in detail in the section Cocaine Use in Nightlife) has shown that more than three quarters of cocaine users occasionally share snorting implements. This gave us the idea to start distributing sticky note-sized papers to be used for snorting while at the same time cautioning and instructing people on the danger of the transmission of hepatitis through shared use of snorting utensils.

In order to prevent the transmission of hepatitis and HIV, we began to hand out free lubricated condoms, bearing in mind that the use of stimulants increases the chances of unprotected sex.

At dance events and in clubs, our outreach teams perform their duties in three ways:

- The number of volunteers working at a larger electronic music event ranges from 10 to 60, depending on the size of the venue and the number of attendants. The team leader is usually the one with the most extensive experiences with outreach work, and is responsible for communicating with the organizer and for the smooth operation of the team. The leader also drafts a work schedule, dividing the group into pairs with each pair receiving a particular assignment. Eventually, pairs switch positions

and carry out another task before switching again. For example, a pair of workers might start out at the booth and work there for one hour, dispensing fruit, isotonic drinks, condoms and printed prevention materials. After one hour, they switch with another pair and move on to making the rounds about the site looking for people who might be in need of assistance. After the second hour, the pair is free to unwind for a while. Three hours before the lights come on, two outreach workers take to the booth to administer breathalyzer tests. Work hours at larger events usually last between eight and ten hours.

- At smaller-sized events (mainly club events), our work is directed towards informing. Two or three outreach workers attend an event from 11 p.m. until 2 a.m. with the principal aim of spreading information on the hazards of drug and alcohol use by handing out flyers or putting up posters or snorting papers in bathrooms.
- Our campaign to raise awareness of the importance of sober driving includes bars which are open during daytime as well. Putting up posters and handing out flyers, we seek to encourage people to drive sober and responsibly. Our printed materials contain mainly information on penalties for driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and promote the principal message – I Ride With 0,0.

Outreach teams are financed in part by public funds and partly by contributions from organizers. The amount contributed by organizers depends on the number of attendants at an event since an outreach team working a club might consist of up to five people, whereas a team attending a large event includes anywhere between 10 and 60 people.

A decade ago, the bulk of interventions were due to panic attacks and psychological shocks resulting from the consumption of ecstasy. There were two cases of heat strokes and two tragic cases of cerebral edema as a result of the use of ecstasy and other stimulants. Today, a large share of interventions is related to alcohol, indicating that the nature of interventions has changed with the rising prevalence of other drugs. On average, we carry out five interventions during a single event.

Our team of outreach workers has been in existence for nearly twelve years, and in that time we have managed to forge a constructive relationship with almost every Slovenian organizer of electronic music events. Nowadays, organizers understand the benefits of our work and have begun to request the presence of DrogArt's outreach team on their own, finding it reasonable even to contribute a share of the funds. Nevertheless, we still occasionally run into organizers who feel our presence to be of no significance or who feel it is up to them to decide whether the presence of an outreach team is necessary considering the age groups and music genres making up their event.

# Partners in Efforts to Assure High-Quality Harm Reduction Services in Nightlife

## Collaborating with the Police

Joining efforts with the police has proven to be extremely beneficial mainly due to the possibility of testing various substances pervading the nightlife scene. DrogArt cooperates with the Early Warning System group, although it is not common for a non-governmental organization to be part of such a group. Elsewhere, the EWS group consists principally of governmental institutions, whereas the Slovenian branch includes alongside DrogArt also the NGO Stigma, a support group for injecting drug users. Whenever an unusual substance (such as an ecstasy pill with uncharacteristic effects) is reported by users to be circling the black market or is detected through our interventions in the field, we call on users to bring a sample to the DrogArt info point where a preliminary test is conducted with chemical reagents. If the test indicates the presence of an atypical substance, we forward the drug to the Central Forensic Laboratory of the General Police Directorate. There, a thorough analysis is performed to identify the substance, after which all relevant information regarding the presence of the substance is passed on via the EWS network to a specific circle of users. The group of users to receive that information is determined by the EWS. In the past, there have been several cases where this approach allowed us to identify a harmful ingredient and spread the news promptly among users, which undoubtedly helped reduce complications resulting from the use of that substance.

## Working with Healthcare Professionals

At large electronic music events, an ambulance and a medical staff are always present. The DrogArt team works side by side with medics and most calls for interventions where the situation indicates that a user's life might be in danger are dealt with jointly. In order to facilitate cooperation it is crucial that the medical staff understand exactly what it is that the DrogArt team does at electronic music events.

Our outreach workers are closely acquainted with potential medical complications that may result from drug use. Furthermore, they belong to roughly the same age group as the major-

ity of users, which means that partiers are more likely to confide in them and state which drugs they have taken.

The consumption of dance drugs may result in a number of health problems which medical workers are still not familiar enough with. An example of this would be the cerebral edema caused by MDMA. Many physicians working in the field are unacquainted with this potential threat and it is the task of our outreach workers to inform them on the matter. In such cases, the abovementioned understanding on the part of medical workers of the purpose and function of DrogArt's team plays an essential role for the physicians to be able to trust the information conveyed by a younger person who is not, strictly speaking, a medical expert. Therefore, it is necessary for us to continually supply information to medical professionals about our work and any new substances popping up on the scene so that physicians may know what to expect when a casualty of dance drugs is wheeled in to the emergency room during the night.

Substantial progress in terms of joint efforts by us and medical workers was made in 2005 following the second ecstasy-related death in Slovenia. Conducting informal discussions with doctors on the tragic incident caused by a cerebral edema related to MDMA use, we determined that physicians still lacked sufficient knowledge of specific complications arising from the consumption of stimulants. To rectify the situation, we joined forces with the Center for Intoxication of the University Medical Center of Ljubljana and the Institute of Forensic Medicine, and with the financial support of the Ministry of Health, we conducted regional training courses on acute complications and procedures to tackle those complications for doctors working in emergency wards. Apart from raising awareness among doctors of the specifics of amphetamine type stimulants use, the training also contributed to improved communication between emergency physicians, the Center for Intoxication and DrogArt as an institution working in the field of harm reduction.

## Cooperating with Organizers

Working closely with event organizers is vital for achieving results, especially in light of the fact that Slovenia still lacks adequate legislation to effectively regulate conditions at electronic music events and club events. Since 2001, event organizers and promoters have been a close ally in formulating the conditions in which nightlife activities unfold. For the majority of larger events and even in some clubs, organizers request that the DrogArt outreach team

be present during the event and even provide part of the funds, thereby indirectly contributing to safer circumstances for partygoers. After an event, we submit an assessment from the perspective of harm reduction, and by engaging in dialogue, we encourage organizers to ensure the necessary conditions for safety at parties.

The evaluation is based on the following criteria:

1. **The number of attendants relative to the size of the venue:** unlike some other countries, Slovenian regulations do not mandate the use of an attendance meter for club events or mass gatherings. The number of attendants is regulated to some extent by the number of tickets on sale, however, this form of control has proven to be too lax as there are still cases of overcrowded venues. We appeal to event organizers to prevent the venue from becoming overpopulated as an uncontrollable number of people vastly increases the risk of incidents and also impedes the ability to control room temperature since every single individual emits a certain level of heat. Ensuring a safe and suitable entrance point is likewise vital for avoiding incidents and injuries which may result from large crowds attempting to enter the venue (for example during a rush to enter an event at a lower price at a specific hour). A horrible example of such incidents was the tragic death of two young girls, who were suffocated by a mass of people attempting to enter a club a few years ago.
2. **Room temperature:** an appropriately low temperature at the site of an electronic music event greatly reduces the risk of a heat stroke. For this reason, we urge organizers to restrict the number of attendants at events and to ensure adequate air conditioning.
3. **Proper security services:** provision of security services at nightlife venues is yet another poorly regulated area in Slovenia. There have been several deplorable incidents resulting from inexcusable actions on the part of security personnel. Therefore, organizers are prompted to hire well-trained security staff adept at dealing with individuals under the influence of drugs and recognizing health complications in order to react appropriately. In cases of good cooperation, security guards escort individuals with drug-related health problems to the DrogArt booth where our outreach workers can assist and provide care. In such instances, the security staff represents a vital element of the support network for users at dance events. On the other hand, under-trained security staff members have been known to react inappropriately by simply removing unconscious people who have consumed too much alcohol or drugs from

the venue. This may have disastrous consequences because the person in need fails to receive adequate help.

4. **Access to cool running water:** it is important to provide access to drinking water in order to stave off the possibility of dehydration and minimize the risk of a heat stroke, particularly among those who have run out of money to buy drinks at the counter.

## The Main Problems Faced by Event Organizers

Channels of communication between DrogArt and event organizers must be open at all times to facilitate cooperation. In March 2010, we held a meeting with organizers of electronic music events to obtain first-hand information on the problems they encounter in their line of work.

The two main issues reported by organizers were:

1. **Problems pertaining to security services.** In order to obtain a permit for an event, an organizer must provide suitable security services. For this purpose, they must hire one of several security agencies licensed to perform security services at events. However, at the meeting, organizers pointed out that security staff members frequently do not conduct themselves in a professional manner, and noted that there are no security services specializing in electronic music events in Slovenia. Those who had been present on the scene for a longer period reported that while certain agencies had indeed shown themselves to be up to the task, oftentimes venue owners did not allow them to be hired. Instead, the owners were said to frequently insist that the organizers employ a different security agency, one with which owners already had a working relationship.
2. **The predicament of allowing anyone to organize an event.** Those who had been in the business of organizing events for a while supported the idea of issuing licenses to organizers. As it stands now, any legal adult can put together an event without requiring any particular skillset or assuming any special responsibilities. Under these circumstances, some organizers tend to hold events only occasionally, whereby they devote very little attention to making sure a particular event is organized well, focusing rather on how to cut back on expenditures to increase profits. This of course casts an appalling light on the entire group of organizers, many of whom do have a vested interest in providing good-quality services.

## Cooperating with Government Bodies

Active cooperation with government bodies is critical if we wish to bring about any meaningful improvements in the state of nightlife in Slovenia. NGOs therefore actively participate in drafting the national drugs program of the Ministry of Health.

We are also working alongside the Ministry of Internal Affairs to formulate rules governing the organization of entertainment events featuring electronic music.

In spite of a relatively good working relationship, it must be noted that non-governmental organizations could be cast in a much more active role in these activities, as they are the ones who have a direct link to the scene, understand the situation on the ground most clearly, and can legitimately represent the needs of partygoers, thereby making an invaluable contribution to a safer nightlife environment.

## The Partygoers' Perspective

In order to devise effective harm reduction strategies, it is important that those who engage in nightlife activities be treated as equal partners in the process. After all, harm reduction measures are intended for their benefit, which is why we must maintain close contact with them at all times. Only in this fashion can we pick up on changes as they occur and respond quickly and effectively. With this in mind, members of the DrogArt online forum were asked which areas of nightlife they thought needed improvement. Their answers most frequently concerned security services at events and in clubs, and the incidences of overcrowded venues. In terms of security services, the major complaint pertained mainly to the attitude of security personnel towards partiers as well as to violent incidents, which commonly ensue in spite of the presence of security staff members. Respondents also noted that instead of feeling reassured by the presence of security personnel, they were more likely to fear them. The second prominent complaint concerned overcrowded clubs and some events. In spite of a limited number of tickets on sale, there were still numerous occasions where too many people had been allowed into the venue.



# AN EVALUATION OF THE STATE OF NIGHTLIFE IN ITALY

Silvia Pallaver  
and Paolo Rizzi

## A Few Facts about the Nightlife in Italy

When speaking about nightlife in Italy, one cannot avoid making generalizations as the Italian Peninsula is extremely heterogeneous in this respect, both on the state and local levels. Various traditions, trends and nightlife activities are closely related to particular geographic locations as well as the season of the year – it goes without saying that characteristics of partying are strikingly different between, say, the Adriatic coast and the Aosta Valley.

Apart from the legal provisions prescribed by the Italian legislation, the state of affairs depicted in this chapter is most deeply influenced by the social context of northeastern Italy's Triveneto territory. For years now, the popular trend in this area has been the so called 'aperitif', which is a sort of prelude to a typical night out. Although more popular during the warm summer months, aperitif-time has become a kind of tradition reminiscent of English pubs teeming with men in suits and ties who have dropped by for a drink after work.

Similarly, after winding up their workday or studies, Italians like to head to bars in city centers for a so called 'spritz' before dinner. This popular pastime was named after one of the trendiest drinks (a mixture of white wine, soda and spirits) and usually also includes snacks or appetizers. In order to keep up with the high demand, bars offer the winning combination of drinks and free food to best their competition. Anything from salty snacks to veritable meals can be included at a lower price along with a large order of drinks. 'Aperitif-time' has thus become an important source of income for establishment owners, who continue to expand up their offers and make sure the action never slows down during the week in order to attract more guests. The combination of drinks and hefty snacks typically replaces dinner-time so that people can enjoy their evenings without a stop-over at home.

For youngsters, who mostly cannot afford to drink in pricey bars, the evening starts out in the supermarket<sup>1</sup> where the shopping trolley is loaded up with spirits and non-alcoholic drinks in plastic bottles to be mixed later and knocked back at a friend's place or at different locations throughout town (public squares, parks, etc.). This habitually leads to drinking and chatting late into the night (a trend referred to in Italy as 'beverone'). Before the stores close, youngsters scramble to replenish their stock of drinks, which has to last them until the end of the evening, totting their arsenal around in plastic bags or knapsacks. The last trip to the store late in the afternoon to make sure alcohol does not run out usually also guarantees that the copious amounts bought are actually consumed as well.

<sup>1</sup> Due to the ever growing practice throughout Italy of purchasing alcohol in supermarkets, the Ministry of the Interior released a letter addressed to all prefects in the republic on 1 June 2011 stating that the prohibition of the sale of alcohol to persons under the age of 16 provided by Article 689 of the Penal Code applies also to the sale in supermarkets.

Once a group finishes off its supplies, they have already reached very high levels of intoxication although the evening is only in its early stages. This kind of alcohol consumption, particularly when coupled with marijuana, frequently results in young people winding up the evening fairly early, stopping off on their way home perhaps in fast food restaurants.

For the most part, people remain in bars or, weather permitting, in public squares or outside in front of bars and pubs until around midnight when they disperse in different directions to whatever else the city might have in store, such as special events, festivals or concerts. Dance-floors tend to fill up relatively late, usually after 1 a.m.. To save costs, some clubs feature two events in one night. Until midnight they showcase a live musical performance, which normally involves bigger expenditures that are difficult to recover. After midnight, however, the clientele suddenly changes as DJs take to the turntables and the night continues against the backdrop of dubstep, techno or other subgenres of electronic dance music. But the party does not last until the morning as current law prohibits the sale of alcoholic beverages after 3 a.m.<sup>2</sup> This provision is part of a strategy to reduce the number of traffic accidents during nighttime, which is part of the larger government program to ensure greater road safety. In the past, the prohibition applied only to establishments providing nighttime entertainment, which caused a great imbalance between those establishments and others which were allowed to sell drinks without that restriction. According to the 2010 legislation, it now applies to anyone who serves alcoholic beverages in public spaces or within any societies operated by private individuals, institutions or associations. In spite of this, in practice, many establishment owners violate the restriction, which mostly hurts the profits of discotheques, which keep their doors open after three o'clock. Left with virtually no competition, discos should ideally be free to push up profits for the rest of the night, yet many club managers rather risk incurring legal sanctions and continue to sell alcohol after 3 a.m.. Until now, the prescribed penalties have done little to affect the working hours of clubs or to increase road traffic safety. On the other hand, increasing the number of sobriety checkpoints and prescribing stricter penalties for drunk driving has been instrumental in altering the practices involved in nighttime entertainment in recent years. People venture to their destinations on foot or by taxi, oftentimes staying within city limits and moving beyond only for special occasions like concerts or festivals. It is also becoming commonplace to designate a driver to abstain from alcohol to be able to drive the others.

<sup>2</sup> Act No 120/2010, 'Provisions on Road Traffic Safety'. Prior to that, Act No 160/2007 determined that the sale of alcohol be discontinued at 2 a.m., which triggered loud opposition from establishment owners and their associations.

## Event Organization

In terms of organizing events, establishments and individual promoters who organize special events must adhere to the standards and requirements set out by a special commission for the supervision of public events, which inspects the adequacy of facilities and venues. The commission includes experts working for the municipality (construction engineers and electricians), the Health Inspectorate (medical workers), the local Police Directorate and Fire Department, ARPA (Environment Protection Agency) and the police.

The commission examines reports submitted by establishment owners or managers, evaluates the adequacy and safety of the venue, inspects electric installations and facilities intended for attendants, and verifies whether all provisions necessary for ensuring safety are in place. Then, it determines the measures and issues recommendations intended to prevent any incidents.

The most important criteria for ensuring safety at events are the following:

1. **Capacity:** the commission determines the number of people that may be allowed to enter on the basis of the surface available for attendants (for closed spaces, the ratio is 0,7 people per m<sup>2</sup>; for open spaces, the ratio is 1,4 people per m<sup>2</sup>) and the number of emergency exits (50 persons for every 0,6m of opening leading outside);
2. **Ventilation:** closed venues which have a capacity of more than 200 people must provide an air purification system in addition to air filters;
3. **Minimum number of sanitary facilities:** closed spaces require at least one sanitary facility per 100 people, segregated facilities for both sexes, and one separate facility for disabled persons. However, there are no requirements to provide access to cool drinking water;
4. **Maximum sound level:** although regulations stipulate that the level of sound should not exceed 90 dB, entertainment venues regularly crank up the volume to reach 110 dB, basically because inspections and the use of sound level meters are rare;
5. **Number of security personnel:** there are no specific provisions relating to this aspect. The proprietor is obliged to obey the instructions issued by the Police Directorate, which examines conditions and determines the minimum number of security staff members;
6. **Mandatory medical equipment and materials:** this matter falls within the purview of the Health Inspectorate, which determines the number or quantities of medical instruments and equipment based on the conditions and number of attendants. Closed venues are normally not subject to this requirement.

With respect to the last criteria cited, it must be added that in some areas with a dense concentration of nightclubs and partygoers, the presence of medical equipment is not necessarily mandated by law, given the fact that each establishment obtains a permit for a specific number of people and thus does not involve the Health Inspectorate. Following the completion of the inspection, the commission issues a permit, which remains valid for two years. Unless any changes have been made during that period, the proprietor may request to have the permit renewed.

At this point, it is important to note the role played by promoters who are not directly responsible for running an establishment, yet organize more or less regular events on a contract basis. Poor cooperation between owners and promoters can cause problems with attendance. Sometimes, a promoter or group of promoters virtually assume control of running an establishment and proceed to violate regulations set out by the technical commission, usually those pertaining to capacity. At other times, young and inexperienced promoters underestimate precautionary measures or surround themselves with an unprofessional staff usually picked out among their circle of friends and acquaintances. Some simply fail to take into account a venue's capacity and while all efforts are invested into diverse promotional activities to make sure the place is packed, safety regulations are routinely overlooked, which can seriously jeopardize the safety of partygoers (the lack of emergency exits or an overcrowded venue, for example, can lead to nausea or loss of consciousness).

Some of these issues can be avoided by establishing a good work relationship between a promoter and an establishment manager, who maintains a presence in the establishment throughout the evening and may entrust certain aspects of the evening to the promoter. On the other hand, there are some promoters who demonstrate an even greater sense of responsibility than the managers in terms of ensuring the wellbeing of their guests. Setting strict conditions concerning admission, technical assistance, sale of drinks, general safety and the presence of security staff helps ward off risks, maintains a high standard in this line of work and ensures the satisfaction of customers.

Mainly due to financial reasons, owners are not always able to meet the standards of quality regarding every aspect of their operation. In spite of turning to specialized agencies, they may end up with unqualified personnel. This is particularly noticeable with regards to security staff members. Because of regulations<sup>3</sup> which have been implemented recently, secu-

<sup>3</sup> Article 1 of the ministerial ordinance dated 6 October 2009 and enforced in accordance with Paragraph 9 of Article 3 of Act 94 of the Regulations on Public Safety approved on 15 July 2009 states that in each prefecture, the local government body must maintain a list of individuals responsible for supervising entertainment activities. In order to be included on the list, a certificate confirming the completion of special training courses is required. The deadline for registration was 31 December 2011.

urity personnel are frequently selected merely on the basis of their appearance (preferably a fear inspiring appearance) instead of their professional approach to difficult situations. As a result, a proprietor may end up with a staff which was picked at the last moment because two events happened to coincide and which lacks the necessary training to tackle problems which repeatedly ensue during an evening and have to do with intoxicated guests. A properly trained security staff which can detect problems on time, respond by calming rowdy guests and prevent an escalation of the situation is therefore essential for a safe and trouble-free evening. Subduing a particularly troublesome individual inside the establishment instead of tossing the person out also precludes any other problems that person might have caused in the vicinity.

Making sure that establishments provide cool drinking water free of charge remains an uphill battle. In Italy, establishments that offer free drinking water are scarce. In most places, water is sold behind the counter along with other beverages and may even cost as much as a glass of beer. To be sure, water has become just another source of income. A clear example of this is the fact that faucets in many discotheques dispense only warm water. This precious natural resource has become a commodity because of high demand – apart from individuals who do not drink alcohol, there are those who consume any of the so called dance drugs and avoid drinking alcohol, sticking to water the entire night instead. With the exception of large events where chemical toilets do not contain drinking water, dance clubs should be encouraged to provide free water at least in restrooms. Customers would surely appreciate it even more if water were available free of charge at counters.

## The Use of Various Illegal Substances in Nightclubs

The consumption of various illegal substances in night clubs is pervasive, particularly during late hours. Clubbers tend to consume drugs mainly in restrooms or in their cars parked outside the venues. They rarely use drugs in front of the club's staff. Unlike marijuana smoking, which is impossible to cover up due to the unmistakable whiff, the consumption of other drugs can easily be concealed. Some establishments adopt a lenient policy towards drugs, whereby a culprit caught in the act is merely escorted out by security and forbidden from re-entering. In general, owners oppose drug dealing inside their places of business, particularly in the big cities where they fear their establishment acquiring a reputation as the place to go to get drugs. Unfortunately, they fail to take any decisive action to control or stop the flow of substances inside their venue as that would be too difficult and expensive – surveillance and



control of such venues, which are the most popular sites of drug consumption, is not an easy task. It is up to plainclothes policemen, who enter the site as regular guests and patrol the area, to exert control. Initial controls can be followed up by planned police actions resulting in arrests and seizures of drugs. In Italy, the strategy for preventing drug use is fairly aggressive. Searches targeting mostly the youngest partygoers are carried out inside and outside establishments to check for drugs possession. The repercussions of such actions are by no means negligible regardless of the amount confiscated at the end of the evening<sup>4</sup>. The manager has to bear the brunt of financial losses as well as a tarnished reputation – once the police arrive, the music falls silent, the lights go on and the party is over. Potential customers take their business somewhere else instead and regular customers stop showing up because of the frequent presence of uniformed police or undercover officers, all of which results in diminished profits. If a large quantity is seized, the club risks disrepute by making the front page of the local newspaper. Furthermore, the proprietor can be subject to charges of violating Article 79 of the Fini-Giovanardi Act, which states that any person who provides the facilities of a public establishment or any type of private association for the congregation of individuals who use the facilities to consume drugs or psychotropic substances can be sentenced to between three and ten years in prison and subject to a fine in the amount ranging from EUR 3.000 to 10.000. Something of this nature befell the leading members of the Rototom Cultural Society, which holds the annual Rototom Sunsplash Festival, a massive gathering of reggae fans which, until 2009, took place each year in Udine. During the last Italian edition, which attracted a crowd of 15.000, the stage-area and the campsite were swarming with police officers carrying out searches one after the other. After the festival, the chief members of the society were prosecuted for violating Article 79 mentioned above. With strong support from the world of culture and music, notable public individuals and many others, the society decided to discontinue its activities in Italy.

In 2010, the festival moved to Benicassim, Spain, where it was greeted with open arms by the Spanish authorities, mainly because of the cultural and financial benefits entailed by the society and because of the high quality of its program<sup>5</sup>. The current legislation and stricter

<sup>4</sup> The law which governs the area of drugs is the Presidential Directive No 309/90, 'Consolidated Legislation Pertaining to Drugs and Psychotropic Substances' together with the Fini-Giovanardi Act (No 49/2006), which equates so called 'light drugs' and 'hard drugs'. Whether a culprit is charged with possession (Article 75) or with possession with intent to distribute (Article 73) depends on the quantity of the main psychoactive ingredient in the substance found. Article 75 prescribes an administrative sanction in the form of a temporary withdrawal or refusal to grant either one or several of the following documents: driver's license, passport, firearms permit, and residency permit. In case of possession with immediate availability of a motorized vehicle, the driver's license is suspended immediately for up to 30 days. In addition, the prefecture may recommend the culprit attend a drug rehabilitation program.

<sup>5</sup> The director Tommaso D'Elia shot a documentary about the Rototom Sunsplash Festival entitled 'Exodus, Finding Shelter' (Italy, 2011)

control practiced across the country have reduced, but not abolished, the number of illegal electronic music events, which are relatively popular throughout Italy, especially during the warm seasons. In an interesting turn of events, the Etnoblog Association was approached by a group of young people looking to organize goa trance and psy trance parties at Etnoblog's facilities. During wintertime, such events are scarce and take place mostly in abandoned warehouses, which partygoers must drive hundreds of kilometers to reach, especially those from Trieste. After the group accepted a few rules and searched for reliable organizers, the association was persuaded to allow one party as a trial run. Parties of this nature are risky from a financial viewpoint – people frown upon an admission fee and business behind the bar is typically slow. The likelihood of drug use as well as the attention attendants at these kinds of events attract from the police would dissuade any club owner from holding such parties, which are indeed rare in this part of Italy. But Etnoblog felt that this kind of joint endeavor could prove beneficial if invested with a focus on a trouble-free evening and attended by the team of outreach workers of the Safe Coast project. In case of any incidents, the party would have been called off and stricken from the event program. The Etnoblog team knew that if their request had been rejected, young people looking to party would have simply gone elsewhere to get their fill, perhaps to remote parts of Italy or even Slovenia, which would increase the risks associated with long drives or with the isolation provided by a forest clearing or an industrial park. The organizers lived up to expectations; the event has become a regular feature which attracts hundreds of young people and boasts a clean record free of any incidents. The tremendous success can be attributed to a strong sense of responsibility and respect for the venue hosting the event and the Etnoblog team as well as to the Safe Coast volunteers who are present throughout the entire evening.

## Harm Reduction Programs

Particularly in northern and central Italy, there are many programs aimed at preventing the risks connected with alcohol and drug use. Unfortunately, they remain underfunded due to unstable financial support, which is always dependent on the political and ideological bent of the current administration. Nevertheless, there are still a number of excellently conceived programs which provide valuable services to customers in clubs and keep up with the latest trends and dangers involved in drug use among young people. Due to a lack of familiarity with their methodology and practices, the work of a team dedicated to raising awareness and reducing risks is often made more laborious by unsympathetic establishment managers, whose main reservations usually have to do with:

- Setting up information booths, which owners see as a tacit acknowledgement that their establishment is a site of excessive drug and alcohol consumption. For this reason, they may refuse to take part in a project, stating that their clientele does not engage in those kinds of activities;
- Individual project teams, which are often connected to local institutions, which in turn oversee managers and issue permits. This might lead an owner to feel that he/she is being placed under close supervision and refuse to host a project at an event;
- Arrangements to host a project made with the promoter instead of the manager or vice versa. This may lead to disagreement concerning event organization and impede the work of a prevention group.

On account of the abovementioned concerns, owners sometimes complain about the lack of space or inconvenient logistics organization. While some do allow a prevention group to attend their event, they do not facilitate its efforts, which leads to misunderstandings and hampers cooperation. On the other hand, project workers occasionally fail to adequately explain what it is they are attempting to do, or worse, they assume a position of judgment.

A productive working relationship can only flourish when all sides understand their respective duties and are closely familiar with one another. The Overnight and Safe Coast projects both benefited from the contributions of Etnoblog, which had had first-hand experience with running a club and helped boost the presence of outreach teams using its wide network of contacts. After the first meeting, it became clear that the only winning strategy was to establish credibility and demonstrate professionalism on the part of outreach teams. After all, a team which responds quickly and effectively throughout the entire evening takes much of the burden off the personnel. It is also necessary to strictly follow instructions issued by a manager and, whenever possible, to include the manager in the planning of the event. A particularly successful strategy has been developed by the Overnight project, which brings together various trade organizations and institutions to offer seminars for establishment managers on new regulations and requirements for permits, using these meetings as a platform for engaging managers in prevention and risk reduction programs and for securing their permission to let outreach teams visit their establishments.

In the current context of stringent supervision focused on the use of illicit drugs, it is necessary to maintain alliances with establishment managers in order to ensure the presence of diverse programs for reducing risks at dance events. A proprietor lacking the necessary experiences and knowledge might react incorrectly by expelling a person suffering from ef-

fects of drugs from the establishment in order to avoid having to deal with the police or an ambulance. Such decisions carry negative consequences for the wellbeing of partygoers. Similarly, fear can induce youngsters to take foolish decisions when one of their friends experiences problems resulting from drug use. Healthcare providers have noted that young people often react by calling an ambulance and then abandoning the person in need, or even hesitate to call for help for fear that the person in need will have trouble with the law if the presence of drugs is discovered. In such cases, an outreach team can assume the key role of mediator between the group and the management. Thanks to education programs intended for owners and to practical demonstrations and advice conveyed to partygoers on site or via different multimedia channels, significant progress has been achieved in fomenting a sense of personal responsibility concerning abovementioned incidents, which has significantly contributed to prevention efforts.

## Harm Reduction Measures

The nightlife is characterized by unpredictable events, complicated situations, and a number of stakeholders involved, each bringing along a distinct set of interests. In this respect, the proprietor holds the key to enhancing the quality of nightlife activities by adhering to harm reduction strategies, whereby each measure must take into account the manager's main objective to make a profit. From experience, we know that the majority of establishment managers are perfectly willing to forgo a share of the profit in order to avoid incidents, which they know also carry negative impacts. However, while some measures are very basic and easy to implement, others are far more costly and require long-term efforts.

Below are a few practical steps which we believe are particularly important and should be taken during events:

- **Fresh drinking water must be available free of charge.** To reiterate, this is not yet common practice. Frequently, bathroom faucets dispense warm water only and waiters refuse to serve tap water. Patrons are aware of the importance of drinking alcohol-free drinks, but these tend to cost as much as or even more than alcoholic beverages. Promoting free water in a club helps prevent cases of dehydration or nausea while also discouraging uninterrupted consumption of alcohol, even to quench one's thirst, due to a lack of alternatives. Furthermore, managers could also expand their offers to include other kinds of non-alcoholic drinks offered at a lower price to customers who arrive by car (German pubs, for example, offer a selection of special

non-alcoholic beverages).

- **The number of attendants must be limited match to the capacity of the venue.** The temperature in overcrowded venues rises to dangerous levels, which can cause nausea and jeopardize the wellbeing of guests. Minding the venue's capacity and ensuring proper ventilation whenever possible is therefore crucial. It is often the case that ventilation fans are turned on after the party has started and the room temperature is already very high. On the contrary, the temperature in the venue should be controlled before the arrival of partygoers and maintained at a low level throughout the evening to prevent the temperature from rising due to a growing crowd. In this respect, it is equally important to allow guests to move freely in and out of the venue without charging them when they attempt to re-enter.
- **Well-trained personnel.** It bears repeating that a properly trained security staff is another indispensable element of a safe evening. Staff members should be present inside the venue as well, surveying the dance-floor especially when large throngs begin to ensue. It is up to security members to detect people suffering from nausea or a heat stroke on time. The significance of proper training applies equally to bartenders as they are in constant and direct contact with customers. Apart from attending obligatory courses mandated by regulations concerning catering services<sup>6</sup>, bartenders oftentimes lack the necessary training and take up bartending simply because of the high demand, which peaks during weekends or special events. This means that many staff members lack any real experiences or even a clear understanding of the duties and tasks they assume in their capacity, confining their work instead only to pouring and serving drinks. A higher level of professionalism is more typical of establishments where guests stand by the bar (discotheques, concert halls, etc.) and the bartender can pay closer attention to them as he/she spends several hours virtually in the same spot. That is not the case in smaller venues where drinks are handed out to go, whereby the bartender cannot establish any sort of contact with customers. A bartender who develops a keen sense of the surroundings can do wonders to reduce harm, for instance by refusing to serve alcohol or offering a non-alcoholic drink to customers who are visibly intoxicated<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Provincial Law 21/2005 and Protocol No 9916 and the Regulation of the European Commission No 852/2004.

<sup>7</sup> Any person serving alcohol to or facilitating the consumption of alcohol of persons who show clear signs of intoxication (acute intoxication due to the consumption of an exogenous substance, a severe state of inebriation) shall be subject to a penalty in accordance with Article 691 of the Penal Code. In the event that the person responsible for the violation is the proprietor, he shall be subject to a suspension of the operating permit for up to two years and a loss of goodwill followed by a revocation of the license (Article 92 of the Consolidated Act of Public Safety Laws – TULPS; Provision No 287/1991, and Provincial Law).

A subtle method any bartender can apply when dealing with inebriated individuals is simply to mix in less alcohol when preparing cocktails or 'long drinks' or to drop in some extra ice. Of course, we also advise against all types of promotional campaigns which incite guests to drink more and result quickly in high levels of inebriation, which in turn can lead to a number of problems. It goes without saying that the main task of a bartender is to prepare and serve drinks, however, with a large number of intoxicated guests tensions tend to run high resulting regularly in scuffles or health complications, which require intervention on the part of the police or emergency services. Ultimately, this too affects the take at the end of the night. Although it represents a substantial financial burden, it would be ideal if every staff member engaged in preparing and serving drinks were trained in first aid. In this part of Italy, programs for reducing risks also provide courses in the field of healthcare. Additionally, such programs are a prime promotional vehicle for endorsing the practice of designating a sober driver by offering free drinks to the person responsible for making sure everyone makes it home safe.

**Regular meetings with the police.** Nightclub managers are regularly confronted with dangerous situations such as fighting, attempts to tear down barriers and threats. Although we have no official statistics in this field, we can safely say that recent years have seen a surge in the number of violent incidents in nightlife, which might be related to the rise in popularity of drugs like cocaine or speed. Maintaining a constructive relationship with the police can contribute to the prevention or a hasty resolution to such situations, whereby the police should not simply monitor and supervise the work of the managers, but should provide support in diffusing potentially 'explosive' situations.

**Ensuring a space for resting.** The so called 'chill-out zones' are intended for resting, relaxing and retreating away from the crowds and the loud music. Some people go there to rest before getting in the car to drive home. Resting spaces which also provide candy and fresh water are typically included in programs aimed at reducing drug-related harm.

We also strongly advise against 'kicking' people out. Italian law prohibits the sale of drinks after 3 a.m., so owners seek ways to sell as much alcohol as possible as the hour approaches to increase the night's take. However, if this is followed by an abrupt end and if customers are herded out in order to save expenses, it may lead to crowds of heavily drunk people milling in the streets, which often results in brawls or health problems. Due to widespread consumption of stimulants, working hours of clubs tend to be too short for some people, who proceed to search for other venues, frequently also by car, which again entails great dangers for them and for others.

It would be interesting to hear an idea on a consolidated strategy for working hours of nightclubs, whereby permits for longer working hours would be granted successively to those establishments which would adhere to the conditions set out by public institution to manage and diffuse dangerous situations.

Although we felt it was unnecessary to restate our joint efforts with the projects Overnight and Safe Coast, it should be clear that such efforts have a strong influence on ensuring safety in nightlife activities. Apart from the obvious advantages in the area of public safety, they help boost the quality and reputation of an establishment.

## What Nightclub Visitors Want

It is important to preface this chapter with the following: nightclub visitors comprise a heterogeneous group with an array of interests and expectations, which depend on age, the place where they live and the destinations they go to for entertainment. We have attempted to summarize and crystalize the findings made during our years of working in the area of nightlife. Some of the following items on the list logically follow from already mentioned facts:

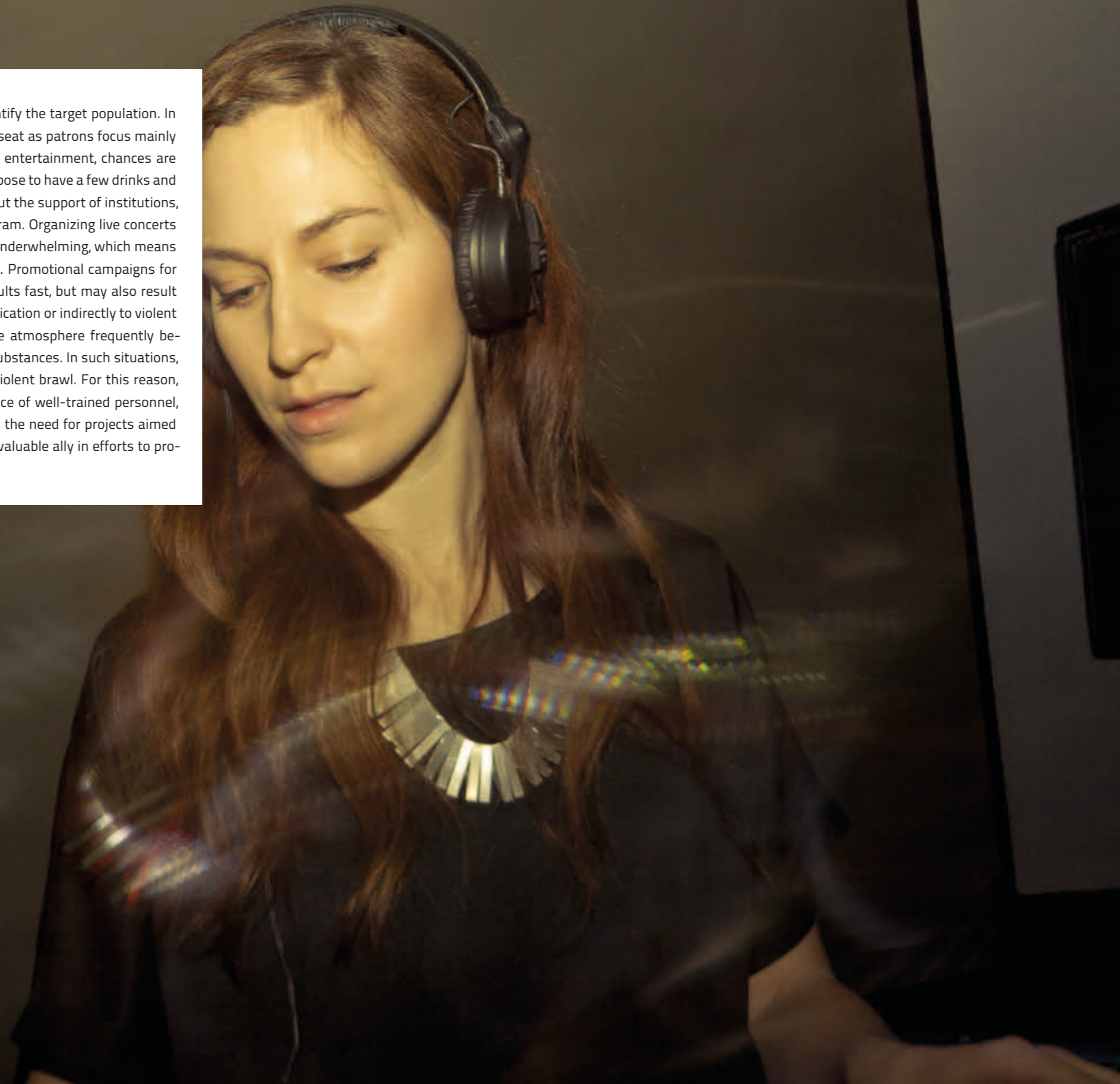
- **Public transport during nighttime.** In many Italian cities, the lack of public transport during nighttime is a much debated issue among partygoers. While the number of sobriety checkpoints is growing, many establishments have to move their operations to less populated areas after being shut down due to public disturbances. Oftentimes, such areas are distant and impractical to reach unless by private car. Although the practice of taking a taxi is commonplace among young people aged 25 and above, it has yet to take hold among the younger population, mainly because of the higher costs (it is often impossible to predict the price of a fare, which tends to run much higher during the night) and a lack of familiarity with this form of transportation. Frequently, the situation also leaves people with no choice but to take one's own car. While the practice of designating a sober driver is becoming more and more popular, driving under the influence remains firmly entrenched in our habits. The provision of public transport in the form of vans and taxis which would cater to the specific needs arising on weeknights and offer fares at reasonable prices thus certainly makes the wish-list of partygoers.
- **A friendly reception.** Whether the atmosphere of a venue is 'friendly' or not is surely a matter of personal perception and evaluation, however, it should be noted that certain steps can be taken to ensure that guest feel welcome. Proper ventilation, cool temperatures and access to drinking water preferably free of charge have al-

ready been highlighted. Furthermore, guests desire a secure wardrobe, which they can easily access at any time to be able to step outside now that smoking indoors is prohibited. Cleanliness in washrooms is another factor which should be attended a few times during the night. And finally, the provision of salty snacks at the bar can help alleviate drunkenness and make up for the loss of minerals and salt resulting from intense dancing and sweating.

- **Instead of getting kicked out...** We have mentioned already that some establishments scramble to close up shop, whereby the patrons still sitting inside are practically driven out into the streets. Of course, guests certainly do not appreciate such treatment and would instead prefer to be allowed to linger for another half hour to get ready to go home safe or continue their evening somewhere else.
- **Blood alcohol content tests before exiting.** Legal Act 160/2007 demands that establishment managers provide breath alcohol testers for customers. In the first years, establishments were supplied with more or less reliable devices for carrying out tests, then, in 2010, regulations stated that it was enough to provide a chemical or electronic version of a tester to measure the presence of ethyl in one's blood. In any case, the application of the device is far more reliable when carried out in the presence of an experienced person who can provide assistance. In addition, projects to reduce risks also propose separate facilities for sobering up, resting and withdrawing from the crowds and loud music.

It is interesting to note that whenever we ask young people about what they would like to see in terms of nightclub offers, many of them respond with 'free entry'. Partygoers often roll their eyes when they have to pay for a ticket or buy a membership card, which is quite popular in Italy. They would prefer to spend their money in different ways. This opens up an interesting question about how much people are willing to pay for a good-quality event. Partygoers are not familiar with the actual costs involved in running a nightclub or a discotheque and want to have it both ways – high quality for free. Which decisions does the proprietor have to make in order to make ends meet at the end of the night? We are going to look at a few general strategies and characteristics of operating an establishment in light of the current economic crisis (rent costs, unexpected and sometimes stiff fines, and costs of extraordinary maintenance). In order to recover expenses incurred by the organization of a concert or DJ performance, establishments charge an admission fee, which must also cover the share owed to booking agencies. If there are no vast expenses with the artistic aspect of the evening, some managers decide to forgo the fee hoping they will raise enough money with the sale of drinks. Alternatively, some establishments offer a free drink with the purchase of a ticket.

Marketing decisions such as this one can serve to quickly identify the target population. In clubs which showcase concerts, drinking usually takes a back seat as patrons focus mainly on the performers on stage. Where there is a dearth of such entertainment, chances are greater that people will set foot in establishments with the purpose to have a few drinks and to party, which takes place in several different contexts. Without the support of institutions, it is nowadays difficult to provide a good-quality cultural program. Organizing live concerts involves tremendous expenses and the turnout is frequently underwhelming, which means that the proprietor cannot turn a profit or at least break even. Promotional campaigns for alcoholic beverages, on the other hand, produce favorable results fast, but may also result in incidents. Excessive drinking may lead directly to acute intoxication or indirectly to violent situations. Where large quantities of alcohol are present, the atmosphere frequently becomes tense, particularly when alcohol is coupled with other substances. In such situations, the slightest misunderstanding or taunt may devolve into a violent brawl. For this reason, we find it necessary to reiterate and emphasize the importance of well-trained personnel, which includes the catering staff and security staff, as well as the need for projects aimed at reducing the abovementioned risks. Such projects are an invaluable ally in efforts to promote safety in nightlife.





# GUIDELINES FOR HARM REDUCTION AND PREVENTION ORGANIZATION

Mina Paš and  
Matej Sande

In recent decades, nightlife in the EU has witnessed certain novel developments in terms of drug use and risky behavior among young people. The market has seen the arrival of new designer drugs such as mephedrone, which has been among the most popular in recent years and is frequently used at electronic music events as well. Our survey on the use of cocaine and other drugs in Slovenia's nightlife showed that 20,8 % of respondents had tried mephedrone.

A separate survey conducted among mephedrone users revealed mephedrone addiction as the most prevalent problem. Another disconcerting trend has to do with the rise of cocaine use in the EU and the increased health risks related to its consumption (EMCDDA, 2010). According to the EMCDDA report, a large share of drug-related emergency interventions in hospitals resulted from cocaine use. The findings of our study showed that in Slovenia's nightlife, 57,2 % of respondents had tried cocaine, whereas in Italy's (in specific regions) the share was 42,2 %. Apart from the specific effects of new and old substances, the practice of mixing various substances with large amounts of alcohol is also becoming increasingly popular. Alcohol remains the most widely used drug in nightlife. Because of this, our future efforts will have to be directed towards limiting excessive drinking as well as towards alcohol-related harm reduction, promotion of alternative means of transport to and from parties and education of young people on the risks and dangers as well as on strategies to stave off those hazards and ensure a safe night out. Considering the increased popularity of new synthetic drugs, it will also be necessary to devise and plan new, quick and specialized preventive responses adapted to recently developed circumstances.

In the field, direct harm tends to result from mixing stimulants with alcohol, dehydration, heat strokes (related to long periods of dancing in poorly ventilated spaces), hyperhydration

and driving under the influence. All of these complications are relatable to recreational drug use which takes place in clubs and discotheques, on the way to the party or on the way back.

Because of these complications (which relate mainly to the use of amphetamine type stimulants and cocaine) prevention measures in the field of recreational drug use focus principally on synthetic drugs. In the EU, the standard practice is to attempt to raise awareness among users of the essential steps to take when using synthetic drugs, to ensure safer and regulated venues, and to analyze substances pervading the market. Prescribing standards (or guidelines for event organization) and regulations pertaining to electronic music events has already improved conditions on dance-floors in Slovenia and other European countries.

In 2002, the Council of Europe and representatives of member states proposed a resolution on prevention related to recreational drug use (Olszewski and Burkhart, 2002), which will require member states and associated member states to:

- bear in mind the importance of interactive information directed towards the general public and the young population;
- ensure easy access to information, e.g. via the internet;
- promote alternative ways of spending free time;
- reduce the risks associated with recreational drug use;
- include (principally) youth organizations, families and the general public in prevention measures;
- endorse prevention programs and communication strategies centered on the problems affecting the target population;
- continue pursuing measures to curtail offers and promotions of addictive substances to young people, thereby undermining demand.

In terms of formulating policies concerning the recreational use of drugs, the EMCDDA recommends adhering to the following six guidelines (Ibid.):

1. Relatively widespread drug use in recreational settings calls for targeted and adjusted interventions which must be based on targeted research into patterns of drugs use, social contexts of drug use, and the perceptions of young people concerning the risks related to drugs.
2. The entertainment industry and alcohol manufacturers should be regulated and invited to take part in devising measures aimed at diminishing the offer, demand and promotion of harmful psychoactive substances (including alcohol).

3. Consequences and risks of recreational drug use should be evaluated by experts. At present, we still have insufficient knowledge of the risks of long-term drug use. Unambiguous findings should be the basis for planning appropriate responses in the fields of social services and healthcare.
4. In order to reduce the risks relating to public health or the health of the individual, we must provide factual, relevant and balanced information on the lasting effects of drug use on health. Simply attempting to control the supply of drugs will not suffice to tackle the risks.
5. Instructions and guidelines for safer club and dance events offer promising and practicable measures to undermine the hazards of drug use. Safety within recreational settings is a matter of legislation, which regulates the area.
6. The European Union and its member states should aspire to exchange information and work closely with the EMCDDA in order to come up with effective solutions.

To summarize the main points of the resolution of the Council of Europe and the guidelines of the EMCDDA, we can say that recreational drug use among young people in nightlife settings is indeed very common, that specific groups of users require specific and targeted information, that the domain of electronic music events must be regulated, and that those who make a profit off of nightlife entertainment should adopt an active role in efforts to tackle related problems. Lastly, it is also imperative that prevention programs receive the necessary support.

The resolution and guidelines are based on a three-pronged approach. The first entails attempts to reduce drug-related harm (disseminating information, targeting particular groups, ensuring safer conditions at events), the second approach tackles the demand for drugs (promoting alternative ways to spend free time) and the third is directed towards curtailing the supply of drugs (restricting advertising and sales of legal and illegal drugs). The EMCDDA guidelines focus mainly on the first two, while the third is considered less suitable for reducing risks related to recreational drug use.

Because of its specific nature, recreational drug use demands adjusted prevention programs directed at the target population and closely linked with the 'scene'. It is important that they maintain a frequent presence at events in order to become recognizable. 'Fluctuating social circumstances necessitate that experts and relevant social subsystems also diversify their responses. This means that the risks associated with drug use must be differentiated and contemplated individually in order to devise versatile measures which should, ideally speaking, target distinct groups and adapt to their specific needs' (Dekleva, 1999, p. 285).

Calafat et al. (2001) note that of the 52 programs geared towards reducing the demand for (synthetic) drugs, which were subject to their evaluation, 39 included publishing and distribution of prevention materials conveying the risks and dangers behind drug use. However, a relatively well-constructed information network notwithstanding, experts find that counseling and maintaining a close relationship with the scene produce significantly greater effects (than mere informing). Vulnerable groups benefit more from face-to-face interactions than from impersonal information (ibid.).

Problems stemming from recreational drug use cannot be solved merely by publishing information on the internet or printing and distributing prevention materials. It is necessary to construct a support system to back up the so called harm reduction programs (related to synthetic drugs). This implies the training and education of experts with different backgrounds to furnish them with the necessary skills for treating young people who engage in drug use regularly and have pronounced problems connected with synthetic drugs. Although the number of such individuals is relatively low at present, current trends indicate clearly that problems related to regular consumption of stimulants will intensify and spread in the years to come.

The annual report on the state of the drugs problem of the EMCDDA reveals that in the EU, only 13 countries report implementing prevention strategies and strategies to reduce harm in recreational settings, whereby these strategies focus on providing information and counseling (EMCDDA, 2011). The overview of harm reduction strategies (ibid.) notes that existing programs mostly center on club staff training.

In the last ten years, several guidelines for safer clubbing have been published in the EU. The London Drug Policy Forum published its 'Dance Till Dawn Safely' document in 1996, which became the basis for the 2002 'Safer Clubbing' guidelines. The 2009 annual report by the EMCDDA warns that the health and safety of persons who visit clubs and consume drugs has become an urgent public health issue. Although twelve countries reported that they had formulated a set of guidelines, only the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and Slovenia were said to actually implement them. According to the EMCDDA, the objective of these guidelines was to reduce the possibility of harm resulting from drug use, to secure free access to drinking water, first aid and prevention activities in the field.

The guidelines are grounded in a number of sources from the past decades (Webster, 2008; Healthy Nightlife Toolbox, 2010), they are practical, and have similar foundations. Essential elements for ensuring safety in nightlife are:

- **ensuring a secure physical environment** (minding the capacity of the venue and preventing excessive crowds, proper ventilation, access to drinking water, offering drinks in plastic instead of glass bottles, sound level control...)
- **reducing harm resulting from drug use** (providing information on drugs and on the dangers of individual drugs, outreach work, first aid, peer approach, safe transportation, drug testing...)
- **reducing harm related to STDs** (providing information on STDs, distributing condoms and lubricants, disseminating information on testing for HIV and hepatitis...)
- **collaborative efforts in formulating drug policies and regulations governing event organization** (including the field of recreational drugs and nightlife in national drug programs and strategies, adhering to guidelines and recommendations, establishing legality of work of clubs and discotheques, personnel training, educating physicians...)

Stemming from the preceding guidelines and our own experiences, we have worked out a set of guidelines pertaining specifically to Slovenia and Italy.

## The Main Flaws of the Current Systems of Slovenia and Italy and Guidelines for Future Regulation

- **establishing legal grounds for safe clubbing.** Venues where nightlife activities take place should be licensed as clubs, not as catering establishments with recorded music. Suitable conditions in venues help stave off fatal complications related to the use of stimulants, therefore it is imperative that standards and norms be prescribed, which will define proper conditions. Clubs should ensure proper ventilation, restrict the number of attendants to allow for a safe evacuation and prevent overheating, provide a 'chill-out' space, and facilitate the provision of information on drug-related risks to partygoers.
- **providing proper training of personnel working in clubs and at electronic music events.** Bearing in mind that the use of stimulants is far more pervasive at electronic



music events than at other entertainment events, it is necessary that the staff working at such events be trained specifically for such settings. Particularly the area of security personnel requires additional attention as it is still frequent that security staff members are unqualified. Proper licensing of personnel responsible for security at such events would be highly beneficial.

- **Introducing a system for testing substances.** Following the exemplary practice in the Netherlands, users should be offered the means for analyzing drugs. One of the main risks involved in drug use relates to the fact that one cannot be sure what exactly a particular drug contains. Providing a chance to verify purity and identify the ingredients would help reduce risks and place the responsibility for one's body in the hands of the user.
- **participation of different stakeholders.** Considering the many benefits of cooperation, this area requires further systematic regulation to prepare the field for the active involvement of various players from the nightlife arena. The successful formulation and implementation of rules is predicated upon the close cooperation of government ministries, who have the ability to impose regulations, municipalities, organizers, establishment managers and non-governmental organizations.
- **initiating a public and alternative transit system for the nighttime.** Partygoers in both countries complain about the lack of public transport on the weekends and in the nighttime. In light of this, it would be sensible to improve this area to substantially reduce the risk of traffic accidents. Clubs which are located beyond the city limits should be prompted to provide organized transportation to their guests. Furthermore, several measures can be taken to dissuade young people from consuming drugs or alcohol when they drive (designating a sober driver, I Drive With 0,0, Driver 0,0). Subsidizing taxi rides, for example, has been lauded in both countries, which indicates that similar projects certainly warrant support.
- **Introducing a quality label.** Some organizers and clubs invest far more effort to reduce risks and ensure the safety of their guests than others. For this reason, it seems reasonable to introduce a quality label which would signal to partygoers that a certain club meets specific conditions and complies with or exceeds the standards relevant to nightlife settings. The conditions to be met for obtaining the label should be the product of cooperation between the abovementioned stakeholders. The au-

thority for issuing the label and verifying compliance could be handed over to NGOs active in this field, which can actively monitor the establishment to see whether it provides the required quality of services. Equally important, the label might also induce clubs to compete with each other and strive to provide high-quality services to their customers.





# BEST PRACTICES IN THE EU

Ana Colja

Whereas only a few decades ago, drug consumption was related mainly to stigmatization and marginalization, changes in prevalence and patterns of drug use have since brought about a normalization of recreational drug use (whereby occasional consumption is viewed as one of the aspects of growing up in a risk society). Recreational use entails the occasional consumption of drugs for the purpose of amusement and pleasure (especially in nightlife), whereby users usually deny having any problems with drug use. Recreational drug use is closely related with partying, music, the nightlife and the nightlife industry (in nightlife settings, the number of users relevant to the number of users in the general population grows dramatically). In recent decades, the use of stimulants in connection with electronic music events has pushed its way to the foreground (Fletcher, Calafat, Pirona and Olszewski, 2010; Olszewski and Burkhart, 2002).

Drug use, even recreational drug use, implicates certain short-term (e.g. dehydration, heat stroke) and long-term risks (e.g. heart problems, mental health issues). In order to prevent risks, the various stakeholders involved respond by adopting any of a number of practica-

ble approaches ranging from curtailing consumption and passing drug legislation, through treatment and reintegration, to prevention and harm reduction. These approaches may target different groups, individuals, the general population or a selected group of users. Similarly, drug-related programs are spearheaded by a variety of players, from government institutions to non-governmental organizations (Fletcher et al., 2010; EMCDDA, 2011). For the purposes of this publication, we will focus mainly on programs directed towards minimizing the risks related to drug use in nightlife activities. The 2011 annual report of the EMCDDA notes a diminished availability of such programs. Most of them focus predominately on informing and counseling, while comprehensive approaches taking account of the distinct nature of drug use in nightlife are scarce in Europe. Here, we will present a few best practices, i.e. programs and projects, which adopt diversified and innovative approaches to address the problems.

#### The London Drug and Alcohol Policy Forum (LDAPF), England<sup>8</sup>

Active since 1991, **The London Drug and Alcohol Policy Forum** offers support, advice and assistance to policy makers in drafting drug policies, whereby it aspires to promote best practices in the areas of education and prevention, ensuring the safety of the community, and improving services provided to drug users.

The LDAPF works together with a wide specter of partners, among them the central government and regional governments, local bodies, voluntary organizations, communities, the private sector and commercial enterprises. It also acts as a middleman in the provision of information on UK's drug policies to foreigners.

In 2008, they published the **Safer Nightlife** document (which was based on their earlier publications dealing with nightlife safety issues), which includes basic information on drug legislation, the means for establishing safer settings and tackling drug distribution in clubs and bars, advice on risk reduction and information on the development of drug policies. The document is intended for establishment managers, promoters of music and dance events, licensing authorities, drug (and alcohol) action groups, service providers active in the area of drugs, safe sex and general health, as well as to all those involved in nightlife activities.

The key to the LDAPF's achievements in improving safety at music and dance events has been the **close cooperation** between all parties involved – the organizers and club managers,

<sup>8</sup> Sources:

- [http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL\\_Services/Community\\_and\\_living/Community\\_advice/London\\_Drug\\_Policy\\_Forum/Webster, R. \(2008\). Safer nightlife. London: Tradewinds.](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL_Services/Community_and_living/Community_advice/London_Drug_Policy_Forum/Webster, R. (2008). Safer nightlife. London: Tradewinds.)

the police, local communities, legislators, NGOs and users.

[http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL\\_Services/Community\\_and\\_living/Community\\_advice/London\\_Drug\\_Policy\\_Forum/](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL_Services/Community_and_living/Community_advice/London_Drug_Policy_Forum/)

#### The 26 London Drug Action Teams (DATs) – London Dance Safety Campaign, England<sup>9</sup>

The main objective of the London Dance Safety Campaign is to reduce the harmful effects of drug use at dance events by employing a multi-pronged approach comprising a number of activities:

- Using London's **public transport system** to put up **posters** featuring information on drugs;
- **Vital Information Pack (VIP)** – booklets distributed in London's clubs and featuring in-depth information on dance drugs, health and risks, and harm reduction advice;
- One-day **training courses** for club managers, door staff, field workers and paramedics;
- A phone-line for obtaining information about the campaign and dance events, and for ordering a VIP booklet;
- **Outreach campaigns** in nightclubs.

The campaign proved successful and was well-received by users, who found the information provided to be useful, non-moralistic and realistic. They particularly praised the harm reduction approach and the fact that the information provided was fact-based.

#### Drugline-Lancashire Ltd - Dance Drug Safety Outreach in pubs and clubs, Blackpool, England<sup>10</sup>

The project focuses on advocating safer drug use and safe sex in nightlife settings, and raising awareness of safer **clubbing and pubbing**. An important aspect of the project is the **close partnership** with licensed and other establishments, and the police with a view to promote guidelines for safer nightlife on the local level by providing free in-house training sessions. Activities are conducted by those working on the project as well as volunteers, who undergo extensive training in listening and communication skills, outreach work skills, the provision of health education, drug awareness, alcohol and sexual health awareness, and personal safety awareness. The project became well-known among users and is considered a major success, having strengthened partnership between the different stakeholders involved in nightlife.

<http://www.druglinelancs.co.uk/>

<sup>9</sup> Source: [http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item\\_intervention\\_full.aspx?id=19](http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item_intervention_full.aspx?id=19)

<sup>10</sup> Source: [http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item\\_intervention\\_full.aspx?id=11](http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item_intervention_full.aspx?id=11)

**VAD (Association for Alcohol and Other Drug Problems) – Partywise, Belgium<sup>11</sup>**

Partywise is a prevention program targeting mainly young drug users and partygoers who frequent music and dance events (particularly electronic music events). Their work methods involve disseminating information through websites, brochures, flyers and other prevention materials, the main objective being to encourage partygoers to act conscientiously and make responsible decisions in their nightlife activities. Apart from addressing the young population, they also conduct **education and training sessions for outreach workers and those working in the area of nightlife.**

<http://www.partywise.be/>

**ChEck iT!, Austria<sup>12</sup>**

The ChEck iT! project attempts to prevent the problematic trends in the use of psychedelic drugs and to forestall or reduce long-, mid- and short-term health impacts of drug usage (secondary prevention, harm reduction). Their methods include providing on-site services (i.e. at electronic music events) in the form of a combination of social services, **chemical analysis of substances** and in-house counseling in **clubs**. In essence, it is a scientific project aimed at acquiring information by documenting chemical analyses and distributing questionnaires among users to identify rising trends in drug usage. Efforts such as this are key for quick and targeted responses, and for proper planning of actions.

<http://www.checkyourdrugs.at/>

**Energy Control, Spain<sup>13</sup>**

First launched in the 90s, Spain's project was conceived as a response to emerging patterns of drug use, particularly synthetic drug usage. Targeting individuals who resort to synthetic drugs in the context of nightlife, the project seeks to inform, raise awareness among the target group and reduce health risks in nightlife. The organization behind the project comprises 120 volunteers adhering to a prevention action model and providing objective, factual and practical information on drugs to young people. They rely on a peer approach, which has been shown to be the most effective with regard to the target population. All Energy Control volunteers must undergo training and education to be able to conduct outreach work by **testing substances** and offering **tests for estimating the blood alcohol content from a breath sample** as well as providing information via printed materials.

<http://energycontrol.org/>

<sup>11</sup> Source: [http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item\\_intervention\\_full.aspx?id=11](http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item_intervention_full.aspx?id=11)

<sup>12</sup> Source: [http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item\\_intervention\\_full.aspx?id=62](http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item_intervention_full.aspx?id=62)

<sup>13</sup> Source: [http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item\\_intervention\\_full.aspx?id=69](http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item_intervention_full.aspx?id=69)

**Modus Vivendi – Quality Nights, Belgium<sup>14</sup>**

Quality Nights is a recent project helmed by the Modus Vivendi organization, which has been active in the field of safer clubbing for 15 years. The project focuses on developing a **quality label for nightlife venues** in Brussels. To obtain the label, establishments must agree to provide certain services such as free water, free or inexpensive ear plugs, free or reasonably priced condoms, various information materials on health-related issues, an 'early warning' system, and personnel training. The objective is to promote health matters in nightlife venues such as clubs, bars and at various events, with a special emphasis on establishing safer nightlife settings and raising awareness among those employed in nightlife settings. The project has made great strides in terms of raising awareness among managers and employees, improving compliance with safety regulations and agreements, and building up the label's reputation.

<http://www.qualitynights.be/>

These are only a few examples of best practices in Europe, all of which highlight the need for a **comprehensive multi-pronged approach involving a multitude of partners** to address the problems related to drug usage in nightlife. Comprehensive measures require **cooperation** between NGOs active in this particular field, the stakeholders involved in nightlife (from organizers, to the catering staff in clubs), and legislators. As Fletcher et al. (2010) note, narrow approaches produce only piecemeal effects unless they are augmented by other strategies (education in schools, long-term media campaigns, harm reduction targeting the nightlife). The 2011 annual report of the EMCDDA also calls for high-quality projects and approaches to address the drugs problem pervading the nightlife scene, in particular to detect new trends and patterns in drug usage and to tackle related risks.

<sup>14</sup> Source: [http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item\\_intervention\\_full.aspx?id=54](http://www.hnt-info.eu/File/item_intervention_full.aspx?id=54)



# COCAINE USE IN NIGHTLIFE IN SLOVENE NIA AND I ITALY

Matej Sande and  
Barbara Purkart

## Cocaine Use in the EU

According to the 2010 annual report on the state of the drugs problem in Europe published by the EMCDDA, seizures of cocaine as well as cocaine use in Europe have increased in the last decade. Cocaine is the second most commonly used illicit drug in Europe after marijuana (EMCDDA, 2010). Due to its growing popularity and decreasing price, traditional perceptions about cocaine users and the ways in which it is consumed no longer hold true. It is no longer the case that cocaine use is limited to wealthy social classes or elites only; it has spread to include a number of different groups of users with varying social statuses. While only a few years ago, the typical cocaine user was a young and successful member of the middle class and the main emphasis was on the rising popularity of cocaine in the nightlife context, today user groups include regular pub patrons, working-class members and marginalized groups of users who consume cocaine only or combine it with other opiates. Thus, in the last decade, cocaine use has perforated highly discrepant target groups, becoming increasingly popular throughout the EU due to the falling price and relatively predictable effects. In Great Britain, which is regarded as a relevant forerunner of emerging trends in the nightlife, a blurring of the lines between cocaine usage in clubs and discotheques on the one hand and pubs on the other as well as between usage in the middle class and the working class has been noticed (Sampson, 2007). There are no notable discrepancies in cocaine usage with regard to gender, normalization has begun to take hold, and the drug is perceived to be fuelling Britain's drinking culture (ibid.). Users discriminate between powder cocaine on the one hand and heroin and crack on the other and, in terms of effects, lump cocaine in with marijuana and ecstasy. Most users do not avail themselves of support programs or come into conflict with the law, therefore, cocaine use in recreational settings and bars remains difficult to study (ibid.).

Several studies have shown that the prevalence of cocaine in nightlife has nearly caught up with the prevalence of ecstasy (EMCDDA, 2006). For a long time, ecstasy was far more popular than cocaine in the nightlife and at electronic music events (Sande, 2007). In a survey on drug use in nightlife conducted in 2009/10 by Britain's Mixmag magazine, 48,4 % of respondents reported having used ecstasy in the previous month, while 47,4 % reported having used cocaine (Dick and Torrance, 2010). In spite of only slight differences in numbers, ecstasy remains the more popular of the two in Great Britain's nightlife (order of prevalence: marijuana, ecstasy, cocaine). Cocaine is perceived as the more 'appropriate' drug for bars than ecstasy (ibid.). Apart from having more predictable effects with a shorter duration, it can also be mixed with large quantities of alcohol (in a British survey, 61 % of those questioned reported always drinking alcohol together with cocaine and 16 % stated that three quarters of the

time they drank alcohol while using cocaine). Unlike ecstasy, cocaine use is not as closely connected with clubbing or partying in discotheques. Research into cocaine usage has found that the average amount consumed in one night (session) is 1,2 g, with 22 % of respondents consuming more than 5 g in one night. Nearly one half (48 %) of users stated that they had consumed cocaine for three consecutive days (ibid.).

In Great Britain, attention has also been called to the connection between alcohol, cocaine and violent incidents in bars and pubs. Among nearly one thousand individuals arrested for violent behavior (mostly in the nighttime and in the vicinity of bars and pubs), between one third and a quarter of them tested positive for cocaine, while half of them tested positive for illicit drugs (Daly, 2009).

General population data shows that 4,1 % of Europeans aged 15-64 years have tried cocaine at least once in their lifetime (EMCDDA, 2010). There are considerable differences between individual European countries in terms of cocaine use, with lifetime prevalence ranging from 0,1 % (Romania, Greece) to 9,4 % (Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom).

Figures also show that an average of 5,9 % of young adult Europeans aged 15-35 years have used cocaine at least once in their lifetime. The lifetime prevalence range is wider than in the abovementioned age group, ranging from 0,1 % (Romania and Greece) to 14,9 % (Denmark, Spain and the UK). The EMCDDA report notes that last year prevalence at least doubled in three of the 15 countries which measured cocaine use among young adults in the period between 2003 and 2008. A 50 % increase was reported in Ireland and the UK, while last year prevalence remained stagnant or decreased in eight countries.

The 2007 ESPAD survey (Hibell, et. al., 2009) conducted among 15- and 16-year-old high school students in European countries found that on average, 3 % of students had used cocaine at least once in their life.

In Italy, a 2008 survey using a stratified sample of adults aged 15-64 years found that 7,0 % had used cocaine at least once in their life, while 3,2 % had tried amphetamines and 3,0 % had used ecstasy at least once in their life (EMCDDA, 2010).

Thus far, in Slovenia, one survey which measured cocaine use among the general population (18-65 years) has been conducted. It was carried out in 2008 by the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Center at the Faculty of Social Sciences (and developed by the Institute of Occupational, Traffic and Sports Medicine) using a sample of 1.251 individuals. According to the results, lifetime cocaine prevalence was 1,4 %, below the abovementioned European average of 4,1 % (Stergar, n.d.).

According to information available to us, in the period between 2007 and 2009, one study was conducted in Italy which looked into drug use in nightlife (discotheques, bars, electronic music events, festivals and city squares). It included five Italian regions (Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria and Marche) and a sample of 1.571 individuals. Most of them (61,7 %) were approached at concerts and festivals and around 15 % were questioned in discotheques and at electronic music events. Questioners approached respondents in person, explaining the purpose before conducting the survey. According to the survey, cocaine prevalence in the sample was 25,3 %, whereas the prevalence in terms of ecstasy was 16,3 % (Sanza, Cicognani, Zani & Nasuelli 2011).

In Slovenia, surveys on cocaine prevalence among attendants at electronic music events (clubbers, partygoers attending discotheques and mass gatherings) were carried out in 2001 and 2005. The first survey found that 46,7 % of those asked had tried cocaine at least once in their life, whereas in 2005, that number had risen to 57,9 % (Sande, 2002; Sande, 2007). In the EU, lifetime prevalence of cocaine use in nightlife or recreational settings ranges from 6 % (Athens, Greece) to 74 % (Mixmag survey, United Kingdom). Surveys were carried out in the period between 2003 and 2005 among the population attending electronic music events or by use of an online questionnaire. Surveys on cocaine prevalence in nightlife conducted abroad rank Slovenia above Greece, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Netherlands, and below France, Italy and the United Kingdom where the number exceeds 60 %.

## Research Project Background

The following sections present the findings of a research project conducted in 2010 by the DrogArt and Etnoblog associations with the support of the European Commission and the Ministry of Health to investigate the prevalence of cocaine and other drugs in the nightlife in Slovenia and in Italy (NE regions).

The basic premises underlying the survey on cocaine use in Slovenia and Italy were the growing cocaine prevalence in the EU and the increased health risks related to cocaine use (EMCDDA, 2010). According to the EMCDDA report, cocaine use factored into a large share of emergency interventions carried out at hospitals. In developing the project, we also proceeded from the assumption that estimates of cocaine-related treatment demand in the EU did not adequately represent socially integrated users (EMCDDA, 2010). Cocaine was cited as the main reason for seeking treatment by 17 % of all drug treatment seekers in the EU

(ibid.). But data on the presence of cocaine in nightlife settings and on trends in cocaine usage among socially integrated users are relatively scarce and based principally on annual surveys conducted at electronic music events by the Mixmag magazine.

Although the media in Slovenia has in recent years been very keen to investigate cocaine use among social elites, celebrities, managers and members of parliament, no such attention has been afforded to the group which most likely consumes the largest quantities of cocaine, namely socially integrated young adults. In our pursuit to reduce harm related to cocaine use, we received loads of information pointing to a rising prevalence of cocaine use in bars, a growing presence of cocaine on the scene in general, and an emergence of the practice of using cocaine during regular nights out in bars. We also noticed an increased demand for treatment among socially integrated users. All these developments represented the background of the research investigating cocaine prevalence in the nightlife.

Our colleagues from Etnoblog confirmed that the situation in Italy was similar and that outreach teams were likewise noticing a rise in cocaine prevalence in nightlife settings.

**The main objective of the research project** was to obtain information on cocaine prevalence and trends of cocaine use in bars, clubs and discotheques of Slovenia and the northeastern regions of Italy. Furthermore, we sought to investigate which negative effects cocaine users suffered from, the economic aspects of cocaine use, the monthly consumption rate, estimates of quality, and the relation between prevalence and price.

**Our secondary objective** was to determine the extent of the need for treatment and additional cocaine-related information on the part of users. We were equally interested in finding out which forms of information and channels of communication users preferred or found most suitable.

**The final purpose** of the project was to identify the trends of cocaine use by employing a qualitative approach to obtain information directly from users from both countries.

The research was designed to yield practical results, which can be utilized in connection with harm reduction to improve existing support and treatment programs and provide updated services to cocaine users.

The survey was carried out simultaneously in Slovenia and Italy (in Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) in order to enable a comparison between Slovenia and Italy, the latter having one of the highest cocaine prevalence rates among young adults in the EU (EMCDDA, 2006; EMCDDA, 2010).

## Sampling and Data Collection

Sampling was conducted in Slovenia and Italy between May and October of 2010. In Slovenia, we approached individuals in bars in the country's biggest towns and at electronic music events, while part of the sampling was carried out via the internet using an online questionnaire identical to the one handed out in the field. In Italy, the survey was conducted in clubs, bars, festivals and electronic music events taking place in regions Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

While conducting the survey in bars, pollsters would stand at the entrances between 11 p.m. and midnight handing out questionnaires or they would approach guests sitting at tables and ask them to take part in the survey. Individuals were handed the questionnaire and asked to complete it at home and mail it back in a prepaid-postage envelope. At electronic music events, questionnaires were distributed near exits at the end of the night or when people began to depart. In this manner, respondents did not fill out the questionnaires on the spot.

In Slovenia, we handed out 4.700 questionnaires while 7.691 were distributed in Italy. The response was weak as we recovered only 7,8 % of distributed questionnaires, whereas in Italy only 6,5 % were completed and returned.

After verifying reliability and validity of responses, the remaining Slovenian sample included 607 respondents, of which 57,2 % were men and 42,8 % were women, the average age being 25 years in a 15-56 age group. Persons over 30 made up 21,3 % of the sample.

The final Italian subset consisted of 446 respondents, of which 52,9 % were men and 47,1 % were women. The average age of the 15-50 age group was 26 years (n = 446), with 19,1 % of respondents aged above 30 years.

The sample was not selected randomly, but was based on self-selection instead (respondents decided on their own whether to complete and return the questionnaire). We can therefore assume that it represents a more motivated segment of the population and we cannot make generalizations on the basis of findings.

A closer look at the sample population shows that we met our objective to capture a slightly older group of young adults (up to 35 years) with a higher employment rate (in the Italian sample, 62,8 % of cocaine users were employed, the average age being 26,5 years; n=157). Among Slovenia's users of cocaine in nightlife, 56,6 % were employed and 29,0 % were students (n = 311).

The majority of respondents were contacted in bars, at private parties and clubs. The sampling procedure implemented in the qualitative part of the research is described in the section Findings of the Qualitative Research.

## Findings Concerning Drug Prevalence in Nightlife in Slovenia and Italy

In our survey, we sought to investigate the prevalence of drugs consumed most frequently according to existing surveys on synthetic drugs and alcohol in Slovenia, which were conducted in 2001, 2005 and 2009 (Sande, 2002; 2007; 2009).

The most commonly used drug among nighttime revelers in both countries was marijuana (in both cases, more than 80 % of those asked had tried it). Amphetamines ranked second in Slovenia with cocaine in third place (n=607). In Italy, the second most prevalent drug was cocaine with hallucinogenic substances in third place (Table 1).

In Slovenia (statistical significance  $p = 0,001$ ), gender-based differences existed with regard to every legal and illicit drug except mephedrone and 2CB/2CE, whereas in Italy (statistical significance between  $p=0,001$  and  $p=0,05$ ) there were no statistically significant gender-based differences only with respect to heroin and crack. With respect to the majority of illicit drugs, the male population in both countries had a substantially higher prevalence rate.

Table 1: The prevalence of all drugs included in the survey (n = 446 ITA; n = 607 SLO).

DRUG	ITA (n=446) f	ITA %	SLO (n=607) f	SLO %
Marijuana	366	82,1	534	88,0
Poppers	183	41,0	407	67,1
Amphetamines	123	27,6	360	59,3
Cocaine	188	42,2	347	57,2
Ecstasy	143	32,1	329	54,2
Crack	51	11,5	227	37,4
Mephedrone	/	/	126	20,8
Hallucinogenic Substances	144	32,3	227	37,4
Ketamine	79	17,7	/	/
Heroin	50	11,2	73	12,0
2CB/2CE	/	/	49	8,1

With regard to drugs which ranked as the most prevalent in nightlife according to previous studies as well as to drugs which were of particular interest due to the specific nature of their use in Italy and Slovenia (ketamine and mephedrone), we also examined frequency of use. In Italy, the most frequently used was marijuana, with more than half of respondents reporting having used it more than 40 times, followed by cocaine and ecstasy in second and third place respectively and with much lower percentage rates. By comparison, in Slovenia, frequency of use with regard to marijuana, cocaine and heroin is similar to Italy's, however, frequent use of amphetamines and ecstasy is considerably more common in Slovenia. Mephedrone, which was not included among illicit drugs at the time of the survey, had a surprisingly high prevalence rate in Slovenia (20,8 %). Instead of mephedrone, the prevalence of ketamine was measured in Italy (at the time of the survey, ketamine was considered very popular in Italy) where 17,7 % of respondents reported having tried it at least once and 4,2 % stated that they had tried it more than 40 times.

## Findings of the Qualitative Research

In the qualitative part of the research, we conducted interviews with eleven cocaine users. We invited users to take part in the interview in several ways – by publishing ads on websites such as [www.kokain.si](http://www.kokain.si), distributing flyers at nightlife settings and by resorting to snowball sampling by asking respondents to invite their acquaintances to do the interview.



In general, it was difficult to find individuals willing to talk to us. Early on, we therefore relinquished the planned focus group sessions and decided to conduct one-on-one interviews or to interview individuals in pairs, which finally yielded a modest response. Part of the problem with recruiting subjects to interview could be attributed to age. Whereas in the past, we had conducted interviews and focus group sessions with young people, this time we were targeting a slightly older population, which might be more cautious or apprehensive about being interviewed. We conducted interviews with five women and six men from Slovenia and Italy, aged between 21 and 41. The qualitative research confirmed all findings obtained with questionnaires.

Each interviewee had had previous experiences with other illicit drugs before using cocaine in their late teens or later. All of them snorted cocaine, with one interviewee also injecting the drug. Some of them had tried freebasing as well as smoking powder cocaine rolled with tobacco. The latter method of consumption is popular in Italy, whereas in Slovenia, it is considered ineffective and is therefore rare among users. Every interviewee also admitted to having shared snorting implements at least once, thereby exposing him/herself to potential infections. All of them expressed a desire to receive more information on harmful effects in addition to the information they already had. They expressed curiosity about purity, health impacts and long-term consequences of cocaine use. There was also a clear demand for specialized assistance programs for cocaine users. In particular, Italy was reported to be lacking such programs. Interviewees reported having noticed certain impacts related to cocaine use, especially financial impacts and deteriorating personal relationships with family and friends. Some of them even admitted that because they use cocaine with other people, they are no longer able to discern between real friends and acquaintances only looking for a free hit.

When seeking help, users reported relying on their friends, but also on themselves, believing that they can cut back or stop whenever their habit spirals out of control. Some of them had indeed reduced their intake in this way, usually after being forced to do so by financial problems, worsening personal relationships or problems at work. Availability and low prices of cocaine were said to be the main reason for more frequent consumption. Interviewees unanimously declared that the quality of cocaine available on the market had declined in recent years. They reported using cocaine predominately in nightlife settings, while the majority had also used it at work. They attempted to conceal their habit to a certain extent, hiding sometimes in washrooms, cars or in sections of bars which afford more privacy. When using cocaine at parties, they felt less inclined to hide. None of them reported considering quitting

altogether, and they cited different reasons for using cocaine, mostly to feel good in their circle of friends, to feel relaxed, and for the relatively brief effects of cocaine, which wear off much quicker than those produced by other popular drugs.

## Conclusions

The results of the qualitative and quantitative research carried out in bars, clubs, discotheques and festivals in the larger towns of Slovenia and in Italy's regions Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia should not be used to make generalizations as the sample population was self-selected, which means that respondents and bars were not selected randomly. The survey was conducted in bars where nightlife activities take place and which our researchers determined to be the current hotspots of nightlife in the respective region. For this reason, the findings should not be used to make general statements about nightlife in Slovenia as the sample investigated by the survey was too small and unrepresentative. Similarly, generalizations should not be made about the state of nightlife in Italy given its striking heterogeneity and dynamic nightlife which differs from region to region. However, it was not the objective of our research to produce generalizations or to determine drug prevalence in nightlife. The main objective was to examine the trends of cocaine use, to determine the related risks, and to devise effective prevention measures.

Taking into account the limited nature of our sampling procedure, we can infer from the findings that cocaine is the third most prevalent illicit drug in Slovenia after marijuana and amphetamines. Although the share of those who stated that they used cocaine is relatively large (57,2 %) with 20,1 % of respondents saying they had used it more than 40 times, frequency of use remains relatively low (n=607). In Slovenia, 25,1 % of cocaine users consume cocaine several times a year and 13,3 % admitted to using it once or more than once a month. Furthermore, 11,4 % said that they had quit using cocaine (n=598).

Cocaine is the second most prevalent illicit drug after marijuana (in terms of lifetime prevalence) in the nightlife of the regions Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, with 42,2 % of respondents having used it at least once. Although the lifetime prevalence rate is relatively high, only 18,7 % of respondents reported having used cocaine more than 40 times in their lifetime. With respect to frequency of use, 4,4 % used cocaine more than once a month (but less often than once a week) and 5,0 % used cocaine once or more than once a week (n=436). It follows from this that less than 10 % of nighttime users used cocaine frequently.

Findings also show that cocaine users in both countries lack sufficient awareness of the possibilities of transmission of HIV or hepatitis through joint use of snorting implements. Snorting was the most common method of cocaine consumption among respondents (90 % in Slovenia, 93 % in Italy). Among cocaine users, 77,3 % of Slovenian and 87,6 % of Italian users also reported sharing snorting implements (a banknote or rolled up piece of paper) occasionally or always. One prominent difference between the results obtained in Slovenia and those obtained in Friuli-Venezia Giulia relates to the share of persons who smoked or injected cocaine. In Slovenia, only 8,0 % of users smoked cocaine, whereas in Italy the share of users who smoked it was 68,8 %. The practice of smoking tobacco cigarettes laced with cocaine is widely popular in the Italian region, whereas in Slovenia this form of consumption is relatively unknown and therefore rare.

Lifetime prevalence of cocaine was shown to be relatively high in the nightlife in both countries, whereas the share of users who consume cocaine regularly was significantly smaller. The high incidence of risky consumption of cocaine calls for additional efforts to raise awareness among the different target groups of the dangers of sharing snorting implements to encourage users to use their own exclusively. **The following recommendations are based on the similar results obtain in both countries and therefore apply both to Italy and Slovenia.**

In both countries, cocaine users perceive snorting to be the safest or least risky method of consumption which does not lead to addiction or involve the risks of virus transmission. In light of this, an appropriate strategy for harm reduction and risk minimization would be to raise awareness of the importance of using one's own snorting implements by supplying information to users in bars, clubs and discotheques.

Considering the fact that a large majority of users in both countries consume cocaine in washroom stalls, it would be sensible to take advantage of this fact and put up advertisements/posters featuring cocaine-related information in stalls. This method of providing information was deemed most suitable by 20,1 % of Slovenian respondents and 10,8 % of Italian respondents.

In addition to the importance of raising awareness of the dangers of viral transmission resulting from joint use of snorting implements, the results of our research also show that users in both countries want to be provided with information on the purity of cocaine and harmful substances added to it. According to the Forensic Science Center of the General Police Directorate, the mean purity of cocaine seized in Slovenia is around 30 %, which means

that it contains other ingredients, which may entail additional risks (the most common cutting agents used in cocaine are levamisole and phenacetin). For this reason, we recommend that information materials distributed also include data on the purity of cocaine and the presence of other harmful substances.

Information materials should additionally include data on medical complications and harm reduction. More than half of those asked in both countries expressed a desire for more information on the effects of cocaine on the body and the long-term psychological and physical impacts, while more than a third expressed a desire for information on harm reduction.

In terms of the provision of information, it should be noted that in both countries, more than half of those asked believed themselves to be acquainted with the issue of harmful effects of cocaine use, but would nevertheless like to receive additional information.

The majority of users in both countries felt that the most suitable method of providing information was through various media (the internet, posters, flyers), whereas counseling in person or by phone was less favored. With respect to harm reduction efforts, the most important points to be drawn from the findings are the facts that users indeed desire to receive information and that they would readily accept information provided via different media (particularly the internet).

The most common problems experienced by cocaine users were sleeplessness and depression, fear and anxiety, an inability to concentrate, and difficulties related to social life (relationships with friends, parents and partners). In spite of a wide range of problems resulting from cocaine use, the majority of users did not seek help. Only a miniscule share of users (below 6 % in both countries) reported having sought help. The percentage of users who had considered seeking help was larger in Italy (11,8 %) than in Slovenia (3,7 %). Furthermore, the majority of respondents (more than a third in both countries) stated that they would turn to a friend or partner when seeking help.

A smaller share (between 13 % and 17 % in both countries) stated that they would seek one-on-one counseling unrelated to a medical institution<sup>15</sup>, or turn to a non-governmental organization or a medical institution (such as SERT in Italy). In Slovenia, 12,7 % of users stated that they would not seek help, whereas in Italy that share was 20,9 %.

<sup>15</sup> In Italy, that would be a one-on-one session with a medical professional

Our findings concerning the demand for help conform with the results of a qualitative research conducted in Slovenia between 2004 and 2006 (Grebenc, Fojan and Kvaternik Jenko, 2007), which found that socially integrated cocaine users as well as cocaine users who are also addicted to heroin do not seek help for fear of losing their anonymity. Additionally, our research shows that more than half of cocaine users would, if they felt it was necessary, seek help by turning to organized or specialized forms of assistance. In Slovenia, cocaine users who are also addicted to heroin may enter heroin-related harm reduction programs or treatment programs. In Italy, users may avail themselves of the services provided by SERT – Drug Departments of Public Health Services.

Looking at the trends of cocaine use in the EU and the results of surveys, we may conclude that both Slovenia and Italy require specialized assistance programs related to cocaine use as well as improved cooperation in the field of treatment of diverse groups of cocaine users between existing programs offered by public institutions and those of non-governmental organizations.

Among those who use cocaine in nightlife, the share of employed persons was approximately 60 % in both countries (56,6 % in Slovenia, 62,8 % in Italy), with one third being students (n=311 SLO; n=148 ITA). In terms of assistance programs, this means that the majority of users in both countries fall within the category of socially integrated users, who require specialized forms of help. Programs must therefore be readily accessible, ensure anonymity, and should not require entry into full-time treatment.

To reiterate, the results contained in this report are not to be used to make generalizations, because the sampling was not random and the sample population is just too small. However, the key points concerning the specifics of the user population and the various difficulties they are faced with can serve directly to improve assistance programs. **Based on the research conducted in both countries, the three principal guidelines for efforts to reduce harm resulting from cocaine use in nightlife activities are:**

- the provision of information to users concerning the health implications of cocaine use and measures to be taken in case of complications should be based on a minutely planned and optimized system incorporating online content, online counseling and social marketing techniques;
- the provision of information should take place in the field – in clubs, bars and discotheques;
- socially integrated cocaine users should be provided with readily accessible specialized help programs which emphasize counseling and therapy, allow quick and easy entry, and ensure a high level of anonymity.

We further recommend that future research on cocaine include quantitative as well as qualitative research conducted among socially integrated users to check the findings relating to trends of use, the demand for help, and the negative effects as perceived by the users themselves. Additional efforts are also required to shed light on the trend of cocaine use at the workplace among regular users and the connection between alcohol, cocaine and violent behavior.

The combination of sampling in the field and through the internet proved successful, however, considering the number of returned questionnaires and efforts invested, the former method of sampling did not yield satisfactory results.

In spite of the preparation and planning, the distribution of questionnaires in bars and clubs consumed more time than we had anticipated. The most effective method turned out to be the personal approach, which included a brief exchange, whereas mere handing out of questionnaires proved to be the least effective method.

The modest response is perhaps attributable to a poor choice of method. This was the first time that we had attempted to examine the use of drugs in bars and having people take questionnaires home to complete and return them later may not have been particularly suitable. However, this was done in order to avoid having subjects fill out the form on the spot when they might be under the influence.

Future research should rely more on systematic sampling via the internet, which can reach a larger number of people frequenting bars, clubs and discotheques with an elaborate network of target websites.





# DROGAR T-APPRE SENTATI ON OFFPR OGRAMS

Barbara Purkart

**The DrogArt Association** is a private non-profit organization, which was founded in 1999 with the principal objective to reduce harm related to drug use among young people. The work of the association mainly takes the form of information and counseling provision, services rendered at our Info point, outreach work at electronic music events, workshops entitled Choose Yourself, which aim to reduce harm resulting from alcohol use among young people, publishing activities and research. In 2005, DrogArt was classified as a humanitarian organization. Founding our efforts on the principles of cooperation, help, development, education and training, we pursue our mission to reduce the risks associated with drug and alcohol use in Slovenia.

To this day, we have distributed over one and a half million prevention materials. Studies have clearly shown a positive connection between an adherence to the contents featured on prevention materials and safer drug use (Sande, 2007; Sande, 2009). In 2004, our Dance Smart ;) program was awarded the European Prevention Prize by the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe. The outreach work of the Dance Smart ;) program received in 2006 the Slovenian award for best practices – the Good Societies project helmed by the Umanotera Foundation included the outreach action among its Inspiring 6 list.

## Programs Helmed by the Association

### Info point

The DrogArt Info point is located in the center of Ljubljana and offers young people an array of information in the field of youth culture, parties and various forms of help. Visitors can access the internet and obtain information materials as well as flyers promoting upcoming parties. We also conduct workshops for young people (DJ-ing workshops, photography workshops) and organize lectures on various drug-related topics. The DrogArt Info point is part of the L'MIT network (Ljubljana's network of Info points for young people) and one of UNICEF's Safe Spots. Opening hours on weekdays are between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m..

### Choose Yourself

In existence since 2006, the Choose Yourself program seeks to reduce alcohol-related harm among young people and to instill in young people a sense of responsibility for making informed and safe decisions. By employing modern communication channels and working in groups (workshops), we wish to reduce the risks and unwanted behavior associated with alcohol consumption among the youth. Workshops are conducted by experienced youth workers and include up to 15 people including two group leaders. Depending on age, we target three sets of young people. With primary school students attending the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades, we discuss the myths and facts about alcohol, with students attending the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year of secondary school, we focus on alcohol-related violence and mutual support among friends, and with junior and senior students of secondary education programs, we debate the issue of safe transportation to and from parties. The workshops are interactive and varied, and subjected to constant evaluation with a view to improve the quality of services. We communicate with the target population through our Choose Yourself Facebook profile using the 'chat' application. Pertinent questions emerging in workshops as well as corresponding answers which our workers are unable to provide on the spot are regularly published on our Facebook page and the website [www.izberisam.org](http://www.izberisam.org). Workshops and materials provided there are developed in collaboration with young people. The program also includes outreach work at youth-oriented events as well as the provision of free-of-charge counseling to young people experiencing problems with alcohol, and their parents. Furthermore, within the scope of the program, we conduct lectures for parents and teachers at elementary and secondary schools across Slovenia. In 2007, we conducted a survey to investigate alcohol use at graduation tours.

### Dance Smart ;)

The Dance Smart ;) outreach action program has been in existence since 1999 and has become widely known to Slovenia's clubbers and partygoers. The main objective of the outreach program is to reduce the risks associated with drug use at electronic music events. DrogArt's outreach team, consisting of trained volunteers and professional youth workers, attends every large electronic music event in Slovenia as well as many smaller club events. There, team members hand out free fruit, isotonic beverages and prevention materials, and provide basic first aid to those suffering from effects of psychoactive substances. Three hours before events wind up, our team offers partygoers a chance to take a free breathalyzer test to dissuade them from driving under the influence. A major part of the program are also free counseling in person, counseling via telephone or internet and, since 2011, counseling via Skype, all intended for young people experiencing problems from drug use as well as their parents and people close to them. Our highly popular website [www.drogart.org](http://www.drogart.org) features loads of information on drugs, risk minimization and available forms of help, and offers users the option to ask questions anonymously. In addition, the website contains an online forum for users to exchange information concerning leisure time and the nightlife. Within the scope of the program, we provide guidelines for reducing risks to organizers of electronic music events, paying close attention to the implementation of and adherence to guidelines for organizing electronic music events in Slovenia. In order to monitor drug prevalence among the population attending electronic music events, we have thus far conducted four surveys. In any given year, the program includes more than 50 volunteers.

### Don't blow it

Don't blow it is a program dedicated to preventing cocaine addiction and reducing harm related therewith, and is intended for young people and young adults. The program offers anonymous counseling on cocaine-related issues. Users may also enter therapeutic counseling, where we attempt to uncover the underlying causes which may have led to drug dependence. Counseling and the provision of information is conducted through various channels – in person, by telephone, via the internet and Skype. The program is also open to parents, life partners, teachers and anyone faced with problems related to cocaine use. We have set up the website [www.kokain.si](http://www.kokain.si), which features information on cocaine and the negative consequences related thereto as well as answers to queries put forth anonymously. The scheme includes a well-prepared outreach team tasked with disseminating information in nightlife venues. Team members pass out flyers and put up posters on washroom walls featuring information on the purity of cocaine. Furthermore, by distributing post-it note-

sized pieces of paper for snorting, we attempt to call attention to the dangers of viral transmission involved in sharing snorting implements. The program has been running across Slovenia since 2007, and in 2010, we conduct a survey on the use of cocaine in the nightlife in Slovenia and Italy within the scope of the Safe Coast project.

## Projects Conducted by the Association:

### After Taxi

After taxi is a project which was successfully adopted in Slovenia as a best practice initially implemented in Trieste by Etnoblog. The primary goal is to bring down the number of traffic accidents resulting from drunk driving and to protect all those involved in road traffic. It encourages young people to work out a plan to get to and from their destination. By registering on the website [www.aftertaxi.si](http://www.aftertaxi.si), young people between 16 and 30 years of age can obtain coupons in the amount of EUR 20,00 for free taxi rides or reduced taxi fares. They can pick up their coupons at the info points MISC Infopeka in Maribor, KID Pina in Koper or at DrogArt's Info point in Ljubljana, whereby they also receive prevention materials on alcohol and safe driving, and advice on how to reduce the risks involved in nightlife. The project has been running since 2010 with great success.

### Empowerment of NGOs in the field of harm reduction – information, knowledge and networking

The project focuses on non-governmental organizations, whereby DrogArt acts as a mediator and coordinator for the civil society. The intention behind the project is to empower and aid the development of NGOs active in the Republic of Slovenia in the field of harm reduction associated with illicit drugs and alcohol. Empowerment in this case means the strengthening of the role of the NGO network in relevant discourses and fostering cooperation between non-governmental organizations, the government (ministries, local communities, government bodies, etc.), the expert community and the general public. The project has been running since 2010. Thus far, we have had great success in bringing together NGOs which provide social services, and collecting and coordinating comments and suggestions relating to currently proposed legislation. Within the scope of the project, we also organize education sessions for Slovenian NGOs on contemporary issues relating to social enterprising. [www.zmanjsevanje-skode.si](http://www.zmanjsevanje-skode.si).

### Safe Coast

The principal aim of the Safe Coast international project was harm reduction in relation to drug and alcohol consumption among young people attending electronic music events as well as the exchange of good practices implemented in this area. As the lead partner, DrogArt helmed the project in collaboration with the Italian non-governmental organization Etnoblog from Trieste [www.etnoblog.org](http://www.etnoblog.org). Together, we initiated a number of activities – promoting safe driving at electronic music events, conducting training sessions for outreach teams of our partner organizations (we also formed our own outreach team), setting up a bilingual info point at the coast modeled after the one in Ljubljana, and designing drug and alcohol-related harm reduction materials in the Slovenian and Italian languages. In 2010, we joined the Safe Coast project and the program Don't blow it to conduct a survey entitled Cocaine Use in Nightlife in Slovenia and Italy. Within the scope of this project, we monitored the implementation of the current drugs action plan in Slovenia and Italy. The project received 80 % of its total funding from the European Commission (<http://ec.europa.eu/>).

Združenje DrogArt

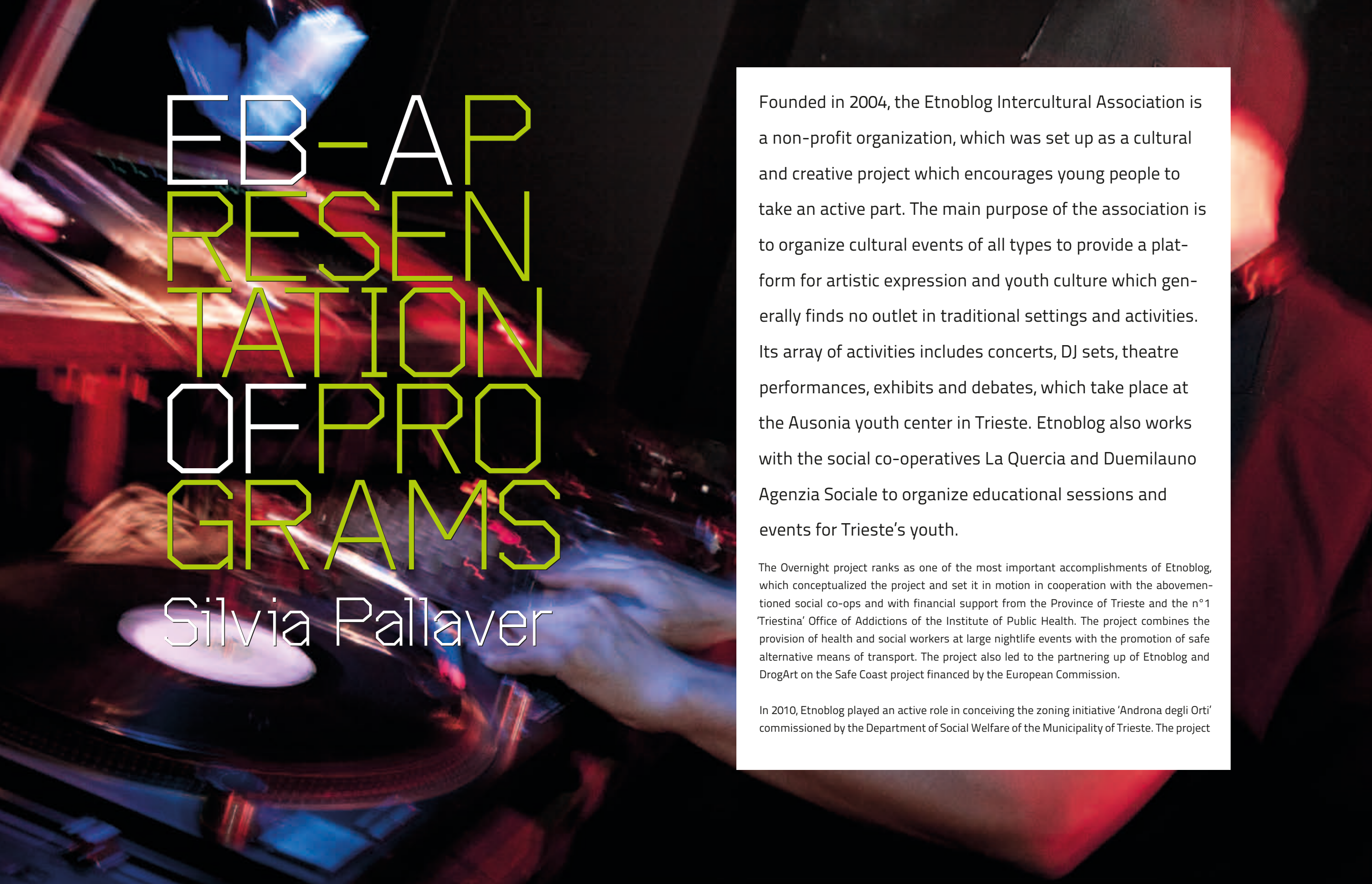
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# EB-AP RESEN TATION OF PRO GRAMS

Silvia Pallaver

Founded in 2004, the Etnoblog Intercultural Association is a non-profit organization, which was set up as a cultural and creative project which encourages young people to take an active part. The main purpose of the association is to organize cultural events of all types to provide a platform for artistic expression and youth culture which generally finds no outlet in traditional settings and activities. Its array of activities includes concerts, DJ sets, theatre performances, exhibits and debates, which take place at the Ausonia youth center in Trieste. Etnoblog also works with the social co-operatives La Quercia and Duemilauno Agenzia Sociale to organize educational sessions and events for Trieste's youth.

The Overnight project ranks as one of the most important accomplishments of Etnoblog, which conceptualized the project and set it in motion in cooperation with the abovementioned social co-ops and with financial support from the Province of Trieste and the n°1 'Triestina' Office of Addictions of the Institute of Public Health. The project combines the provision of health and social workers at large nightlife events with the promotion of safe alternative means of transport. The project also led to the partnering up of Etnoblog and DrogArt on the Safe Coast project financed by the European Commission.

In 2010, Etnoblog played an active role in conceiving the zoning initiative 'Androna degli Orti' commissioned by the Department of Social Welfare of the Municipality of Trieste. The project



was run by the Office of Addictions of Trieste and provided facilities for young people under 21 to hold various youth-oriented activities, which are also attended by educators and psychologists.

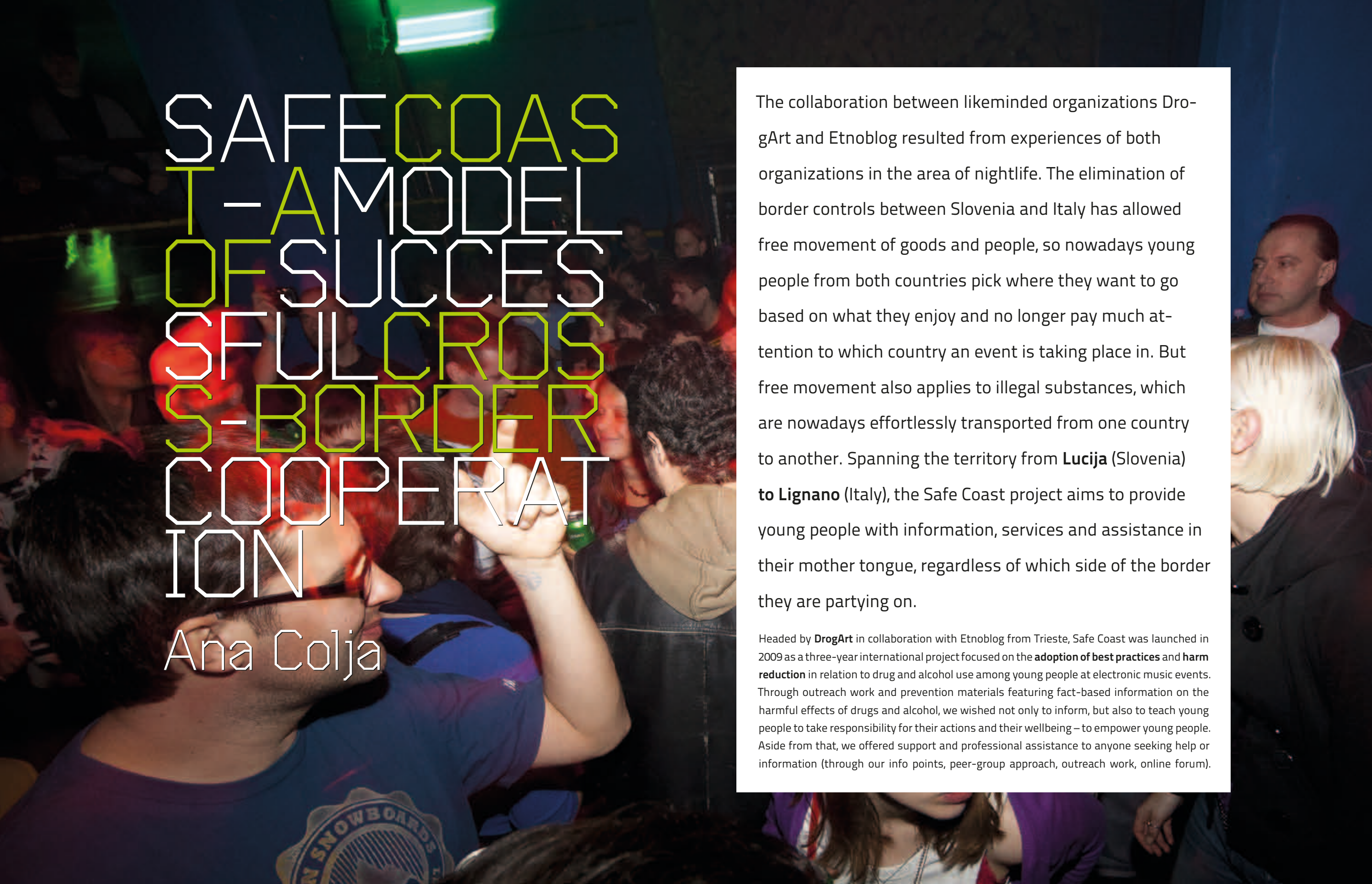
The other major area of Etnoblog's activities is immigration; in 2005, they launched the project Colors: Intercultural Communication and Information – an effort to promote the integration of immigrants and foreigners by virtue of communication and the provision of information grounded in intercultural dialogue. The main activities include producing radio broadcasts and short documentaries. In 2009, the association added its signature to the Territorial Plan for Immigration of the Province of Trieste.

After successfully conducting education sessions for various providers of nightlife services, which were financed by the regions Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a group of Etnobloggers founded On Stage, the only work integration social co-operative in Italy to work in the field of concert and event organization throughout Italy and abroad.

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# SAFE COAST T-A MODEL OF SUCCESS FUL CROSS S-BORDER COOPERATION

Ana Colja

The collaboration between likeminded organizations DrogArt and Etnoblog resulted from experiences of both organizations in the area of nightlife. The elimination of border controls between Slovenia and Italy has allowed free movement of goods and people, so nowadays young people from both countries pick where they want to go based on what they enjoy and no longer pay much attention to which country an event is taking place in. But free movement also applies to illegal substances, which are nowadays effortlessly transported from one country to another. Spanning the territory from **Lucija** (Slovenia) to **Lignano** (Italy), the Safe Coast project aims to provide young people with information, services and assistance in their mother tongue, regardless of which side of the border they are partying on.

Headed by **DrogArt** in collaboration with Etnoblog from Trieste, Safe Coast was launched in 2009 as a three-year international project focused on the **adoption of best practices** and **harm reduction** in relation to drug and alcohol use among young people at electronic music events. Through outreach work and prevention materials featuring fact-based information on the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol, we wished not only to inform, but also to teach young people to take responsibility for their actions and their wellbeing – to empower young people. Aside from that, we offered support and professional assistance to anyone seeking help or information (through our info points, peer-group approach, outreach work, online forum).

To ensure a high quality of services, our outreach workers underwent regular training. The know-how and good practices implemented by DrogArt with regards to **outreach work** were adopted by Etnoblog to enable independent work after the completion of the project. The adoption of good practices was based on joint training of professionals and outreach workers, outreach workshops, and joint outreach work (in both countries) to introduce the volunteers of Etnoblog to the methods employed by DrogArt's team. In the final months of the project, the Etnoblog team was already conducting work independently and has continued to do so after the project ended.

For the purpose of raising awareness among the young population of the risks involved in alcohol and drug use, the Safe Coast project produced a range of **prevention materials and pamphlets written in both languages** and designed to address the current needs of users. In line with DrogArt's practices, Etnoblog set up its own **info point** in Trieste, which holds on offer all information materials published under the Safe Coast project as well as other materials published by both associations.

We sought to raise awareness among young people of the need for **safe driving to and from parties**. For this purpose, we issued a pamphlet in both languages, which featured basic information on legislation related to alcohol and drug use, and initiated a **blood alcohol level testing campaign** to offer partygoers at electronic music events a chance to check their blood alcohol content before getting behind the wheel. This proved to be an effective way to attract young people and encourage them to approach our youth workers to discuss the dangers inherent in drunk driving or driving under the influence of psychoactive substances.

Another notable achievement was the successful **adoption of the best practice of subsidizing taxi fares**, a practice first introduced by Etnoblog's Overnight project in Trieste and later adopted by DrogArt within the scope of the After Taxi project. In the final year of the Safe Coast project, subsidized taxis operated in three locations in Slovenia (Maribor, Ljubljana and at the coast). The main objective is, of course, to improve the safety of road traffic by cutting down the number of traffic accidents resulting from driving under the influence. By subsidizing fares, we wish to spur young people between 16 and 30 years of age to plan their nights out and to include in their plan the means for a safe return home. The service is provided by means of an elaborate system of numbered membership cards and coupons, which users or their parents can pick up at info points in locations where the campaign is under way.

A **survey** was conducted among nighttime revelers on both sides of the border to **identify new trends in drug use and measure the prevalence of drugs**. By collecting first-hand information on the state of affairs and the needs of users, we can better plan our future efforts and design up-to-date prevention materials in step with the current situation and addressing the real needs of users.

The project also included **education sessions for healthcare workers** in both countries. In our line of work, we regularly work side by side with medical professionals tasked with providing emergency medical aid. Courses on drugs and emerging trends in drug use were emphatically praised by attendants, who admitted to lacking sufficient knowledge of these topics although they clearly needed it to be effective in the field. DrogArt and Etnoblog played an important part as **mediators between drug users and healthcare workers**, particularly in terms of relaying information on 'new' drugs, trends and potential medical complications.

Finally, the Safe Coast project recognized the importance of the active involvement on the part of **electronic music event organizers and promoters, and club and bar managers**. In addition to securing their permission to have outreach teams attend their events, we further cemented cooperation by asking for their input on specific needs and the state of affairs in the field of event organization. Working closely together, we determined the relevant issues (safety at parties, awareness on the part of partygoers and organizers) and sketched out feasible improvements which may be accomplished by the organizers themselves as well as those which require a comprehensive approach involving **multiple stakeholders** (NGOs active in this particular field, legislators, organizers, the police and, of course, the users themselves).

The project was financed by:

The European Commission, the Municipality of Izola, the Municipality of Koper, the Municipality of Piran and the Ministry of Health (survey).



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NIGHTLIFE RECONSIDERED

Trieste - Ljubljana, december 2011

© authors

Published by:

The Etnoblog Intercultural Association, Riva Traiana 1/3, Trieste

Editor: Matej Sande

Translation: Tadej Karoli

Photo: Kaja Božiček

Design: atelje Balant

This publication has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



