

MOTIVATION FOR USING ILLEGAL DRUGS AT FREETEKNO PARTIES

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Abstract

The knowledge acquired about the freetechno subculture by the general public in the Czech Republic has been obtained exclusively through its negative image associated with consumption of socially illegal drugs as it is depicted in the mass media and which has also been substantiated with results of addictological and sociological surveys.

The objective of our paper is to identify whether there is a connection between the type of drugs used at freetekno parties and the freetekno subculture in the sense of subjectively perceived connection between the type of used drugs and the specific type of a dance party. Another objective is to outline whether the possibility to buy/use a drug represents the priority motivation for visiting a party or only makes the atmosphere of an even as such complete.

We selected the qualitative research, techniques of semi-structured interviews and participant observation in the party environment as the research method. The research set comprised of participants in randomly selected freetekno parties (N=10).

The results of the research show that music and the overall atmosphere of an event with an accent on its tribal character are stated by respondents as the principal motivation for visiting a party. Respondents perceive drugs that are usually used there as connected with the subculture (or rather the subculture considers some drugs to be appropriate, while rejecting others). Hallucinogens and cannabinoids predominate among illegal drugs at freetekno parties. Although most respondents state they are also able to enjoy a party equally well without them, in their answers, they keep referring to drugs being the very thing creating the atmosphere of a dance party.

Key words: *subculture; freetekno; dance music; motivation; illegal drugs*

INTRODUCTION

The professional as well as general public usually associate dance music not only with entertainment, but also with using of various types of socially acceptable and illegal drugs (cf. Tanec a drogy 2007... 2008). Thus, we talk about so called dance drugs (MDMA, but also stimulants; in our

country especially pervitin, LSD, GHB and other) (e.g. Saunders 1996). Dance music does not comprise any compact whole, it consists of many trends creating individual subcultures, the best known among which are techno, trance, house, drum and base in the Czech environment (Dorážka 1998), and furthermore such branches as the tekno that we pay our attention

to in our paper. A subculture developed in connection with a specific music style also expresses itself through a specific life style (Hedbig 1981). Individual branches of dance music and individual life styles that may develop in relation to them then also bring along specifics in using illegal drugs (Forsyth et al. 1997), which are the special focus of this paper. Socially accepted substances, i.e. especially alcohol and nicotine, can be found at music events of probably all types and are comparably represented there (Tanec a drogy 2007... 2008). While for example the techno scene in various Czech (Tanec a drogy 2007... 2008) as well as foreign (Tossmann et al. 2001, Bogt et al. 2002) studies shows polymorphic occasional using of ecstasy, marihuana and pervitine primarily, it is especially synthetic and natural hallucinogens and marihuana that are found at participants in freetekno parties (Kajanová and Pešek 2009).

The community built around freetekno, which is based on the rave movement, is known especially for its protest against commercial parties and the effort to return to nature, tribal traditions and rituals (Wimmer 2006) and in the media discourse due to the Czechtek festival (Kajanová 2010). Unannounced open-air parties lasting several days were traditionally based on the DIY (do it yourself) principle, i.e. in principle, they were gatherings of freetekno fans around so called soundsystems (mobile sound units). The party was thus financed from the funds raised by selling food and drinks that were offered by individual soundsystems to their listeners, and admission was free for listeners (Wimmer 2006).

The objective of our paper, or rather of the research the paper is based on, is to identify whether there is a connection between the type of drugs used at freetekno parties and the freetekno subculture in the sense of subjectively perceived connection between the type of used drugs and the specific type of a dance party. Another objective is to outline whether and how important it is for people visiting a party to have an opportunity to use a drug there and whether this represents the priority motivation for visiting a party or only makes the atmosphere of an even as such complete. Understanding the connection between used drugs and a specific type of subculture represents not only a precondition

for any targeted intervention, but also understading of the life-style of a subculture as such.

The research is based on the bachelor thesis titled "Freetekno a komerční technoscéna z pohledu odlišnosti preferovaných drog" [Freetekno and the Commercial Technoscene from the Point of View of Differences among Preferred Drugs] (Klečáková 2011).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

For the purposes of data collecting, with respect to the specifics of the target set and to the objective and focus of the research, we selected the technique of semi-structured interviews based on prepared circles of questions and participant observation, i.e. staying directly at a party with its participants for several days. Information was recorded by means of field notes that were subsequently transcribed and analysed. Hence, they were research methods and techniques corresponding to the combination of the sociological and ethnographic research which is usually applied to study subcultures. Although data collecting for the purposes of the paper was conducted during one year, authors had already been establishing contacts with the research environment during several years before its beginning.

The subjects of our research interest were randomly selected participants in freetekno parties held in the South Bohemia and West Bohemia regions (specifically, they were parties in Borotín, Rožmitál pod Třemešínem and Růžené) from May to September 2009. There were addressed ten male (N=5) and female (N=5) respondents willing to testify, at the average age of 22 years. All respondents stated that they visited nearly exclusively events of the same type as was the one where the interview took place, and only exceptionally also other dance parties of a different type. The most frequent range of visits to parties by the interviewed was once a week to once every two weeks (8 respondents), while 2 respondents stated the frequency of once a month. However, we assume a higher frequency of visits in summer months when the research was conducted.

At the same time, all the interviewed identified themselves with the freetekno

subculture or actually stated they felt being a part of the subculture.

RESULTS

Motivation for visiting a party and the connection between a “good party” and drugs

First of all, we studied the motivation of respondents for visiting parties, while monitoring whether drug using would be mentioned among the motivations.

As we presumed, the common denominator of answers provided by most respondents was music. Seven out of the ten respondents stated that music comes first as their motivation. The remaining respondents stated the “specific atmosphere” related to the subculture as such and was also mentioned in the other 6 responses. This included a combination of the following responses: “*I feel free there. Without any restrictions.*”

This was followed up with freedom, meeting new people or, as the case may be, meeting the existing acquaintances:

“The atmosphere, mood, people, ‘to clear one’s head’, visualisations, decorations, dogs, when a place is well chosen, the ‘spirit’ of the place, but actually the party as the whole, all its parts fitting together.”

“Of course, good music and sound quality. Then I also like meeting new people, video projections with crazy hallucinations appearing there which make me quite zonked out at the end, and then any diversity of colours, visualisations and decorations...”

Respondents perceived the “specific atmosphere” as the know-how of freetekno events, and although their responses were differentiated to a certain extent, the main characteristics were repeatedly mentioned in most of them.

The association of a drug did not appear in any of the responses to the question about the reason for visiting an event.

We were furthermore ascertaining the connection between the motivation for visiting a party and drug using by asking a question whether it was possible to enjoy a good party without illegal drugs. A negative answer was given by one respondent only, and he furthermore referred to the fact that he had

never tried it so he could not imagine how he would be able to enjoy himself.

The other respondents stated that a good party did not a priori mean using a drug: “*It is definitely possible. I thought it wasn’t, that drugs make a part of it somehow as they enable better distraction and perceptions inspired by the music, but it’s not like this. I experienced a party without any drugs, including legal ones, and it was even better than the ‘drug’ ones. One pays attention to other things and is there for oneself. When it is a quality party, I think it can be enjoyed equally well with or without drugs.*” However, they mostly referred to their “saturation” with socially acceptable drugs, especially with alcohol. “*Yes, it is possible, I have been doing it like this for quite a long time, I can do with a bottle of rum or vodka, and it makes no difference to me...*”

If we work on the hypothetical assumption that participants in a party visit it because it is easier to obtain illegal drugs there (among other things), it will be good to focus on the fact whether participants look for drugs directly at a party or bring them in from another place. Respondents usually answered to a question asked in this manner using a combination of both possibilities, i.e. drugs are available at a party, however this is not a required condition:

“Well, you can mostly come by something, but it’s a question what you want to get. LSD for example, it’s not a problem, but you wouldn’t get mushrooms so easily, so must bring them with you...,” or their quality is not required: “*When you don’t know the people, you don’t know what you may buy from them, I wouldn’t like to rely on that...*”

All our respondents stated that mostly they bring some drugs along with them or they know somebody at a party who will have them.

Drugs used at a party and reasons for their selection

As regards specific types of drugs used at parties, respondents assessed their scene subjectively as being different from other types of parties. We asked about both the specific party and regular using of drugs at parties in general. Answers to the questions were largely identical – respondents stated they had their “favourite drugs” they usually

used at parties and that they had also used or planned to use at the specific party, therefore we do not differentiate the answers provided herein under. The reasons mostly given by respondents for using a specific drug (in response to the question “Why do you use the specific drug at a party?”) were that it is appropriate for a party or that using a drug is a standard there.

Generally, alcohol was prevailing (8 out of 10 respondents): *“I perhaps don’t know anybody who would not have at least some beer or a shot of something at weekends. This is simply a part of life, and so of a party, too.”* Alcohol (together with nicotine, and in several cases with marihuana in addition to it) also belonged among the most frequent polymorphously used substance, specifically in combination with anything, or rather respondents stated they did not think about combining alcohol with another drug (as opposed to combinations of other types of substances that we however did not pay closer attention to in our research).

The same number, i.e. 8 respondents, furthermore stated hallucinogens (natural – psilocybe mushrooms as well as synthetic – LSD). The reasons given for using them included the nature which is a more pleasant environment for a trip than an enclosed premises of a club: *“... because it’s great to have visual or auditory hallucinations somewhere in the countryside where you have places where you can hide away, and when it’s just the case it starts working badly, it’s not so terrible as it would be somewhere in a club. But the good thing is you enjoy everything and examine the nature and countryside and animals and everything is somehow different...,”* or the “specific atmosphere” of a party that has already been mentioned herein above, completed with visualisations and other sensual stimuli, and presence of nice people, acquaintances: *“It’s also about people who are at the party, and about the atmosphere...”*

Another socially acceptable drug, nicotine, was regularly used by 7 respondents. We consider interesting that cigarettes were evaluated as a persisting bad habit, addiction, while none of respondents described other used substances as an addiction: *“And tobacco is just a disgusting addiction I can’t get rid of.”* Nicotinism thus represented kind of a

link between the party life and everyday life. When mentioning illegal drugs, respondents talked about their weekend using and their connection with a party and the subculture.

Seven respondents furthermore mentioned using marihuana at a party: *“Recently, I have cannabis instead of alcohol. One is not hungover, effects on health are not so bad...,”* while three of them also used it outside a party environment, i.e. regularly. Marihuana was perceived as a substance comparable to alcohol as regards frequency of its using.

Ecstasy was mentioned by 5 respondents. While four of them, nevertheless, did not find this drug typical for the freetekno scene: *“Ecstasy and pervitin are rather used by people from commercial events, at clubs so as they would be able to stay dancing until the morning...,”* one respondent contrarily stated that ecstasy as well as hallucinogens were more appropriate for outdoor events: *“... it’s simply more pleasant to experience any hallucinogens and MDMA under the open sky than in a crowded club at 40 °C...”*

Stimulants (or more precisely pervitin and, in one case, cocaine) appeared in three responses. One respondent stated that he had used opiates (specifically fentanyl) at a party several times. The respondents did not connect these drugs with the subculture at all and neither did the drugs belong among substances frequently or commonly used at parties. On the other hand, contrary to these respondents, others stated that they had a negative attitude to the abusing of pervitin at the freetekno scene because of the disintegration of traditional subculture values in participants caused by this substance. It is often the case that leaflets promoting future similar events contain the “pervitin kills tekno” phrase.

DISCUSSION

The results of our research, although we are aware of its limits with respect to its qualitative character and the random selection of respondents, provided information on the abusing of drugs which corresponds to the results of quantitative surveys (e.g. The National Report... 2005), i.e. these include especially alcohol and nicotine, and marihuana, hallucinogens and MDMA from

among illegal drugs (cf. for example Kučera 2008). Here we would however like to draw attention to the fact that the drug scenes in the Czech Republic and abroad are difficult to be compared, although the type of a party is the same, because drugs available there are generally different. For example ketamine, which is commonly used among French and British ravers, belongs among substances that are used relatively less frequently in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, participants subjectively perceive the preference of these types of drugs to be connected with their subculture that creates the specific atmosphere. The above specified preference was also expressed in contrast to hypothetical reasons for non-preference of the respective substance in a club environment.

Illegal substances, especially pervitin, or substances that visitors identify as typical for other types of dance events – for example ecstasy as a club drug (cf. Weber 1999, stating crack and intravenous use in general to be the only drugs not acceptable at the rave scene) occur at freetekno parties as much as the preferred substances. This finding may also be related to the outcomes of the Tanec a drogy 2007... (2008) study, stating that despite the high prevalence of using various types of drugs, including pervitin, presence of problematic users among participants in dance parties is low.

For our respondents, drug use or rather availability of drugs on the freetekno scene did not represent the primary reason for visiting this type of events, which is a finding contradicting, to some extent, for example McCaughan et al. (2005) who state the presence of so called chemi-kids at parties who participate in such events primarily so as they could get drugs there. At the same time, the authors consider their presence to result from presentation of such events in the media,

depicting such parties as events where drugs are easily available. On the other hand, Weber (1999) and Bednaříková (2010) state music and meeting friends to be other reasons for joining a party. In other words, parties are associated with a higher occurrence of drugs, however they are not the only reason for visiting a party.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes of our research have produced several interesting findings that, although we do not want to generalize them, attest more to the fact that there is a connection between drug using and a specific type of dance parties. Participants to freetekno parties mention the atmosphere consisting of largish amount of stimuli – be it a location, the feeling of freedom, nature, people or drugs. They perceive parties in a complex manner, in the spirit of tribality that is one of the principles of this subculture (cf. Wimmer 2006). This specific character as well as the character of an event may then determine types of drugs (or rather groups of drugs) that are used at parties. Although respondents, in most cases, were able to imagine a good party without illegal drugs, they emphasized that at least presence of socially acceptable drugs – alcohol and tobacco – was necessary.

Apart from the area that was the subject matter of our research, we came to no less important outcomes concerning self-identification with the subculture or rather delimitation of the subculture in opposition to others (which Hedbigge /1981/ considers to be the very characteristic feature of a subculture) or as this was summarized by one of the respondents who noted: *“And write there we are not the commercial tweakers from clubs.”*

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