

Between street and screen

Traditions and innovations in the drugs field

Marije Wouters & Jane Fountain (Eds.)

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Acknowledgments

The European Society for Social Drug Research (ESSD) was established in 1990. Its principal aim is to promote social science approaches to drug research, with special reference to the situation in Europe. Organising annual conferences and producing an annual book are core activities of the ESSD. For this year's book, a number of participants who presented their research at the 25th annual conference in Nantes, France in September 2014 were invited to submit a chapter. However, this invitation was not restricted to the participants of the conference: other ESSD members were also welcome to contribute. After a first review of outlines by the editorial board, submitted papers were peer reviewed by distinguished scholars. This book contains only the chapters that were approved during this process. The editors would like to thank the authors for their diverse and original contributions to this book, their responses to queries and comments from the editors and peer reviewers, and their adherence to deadlines. We thank and appreciate the peer reviewers for their time: Marcelo Andrade, Jeroen Boekhoven, Gregor Burkhart, John Cameron, Pekka Hakkarainen, Alexia Maddox, Meropi Tzanetakis, and Freya Vander Laenen.

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Editors

Marije Wouters is an Assistant Professor at the Bongers Institute of Criminology at the University of Amsterdam. She wrote a PhD on coffee shop policy in the Netherlands, and has conducted several studies on cannabis-related issues over the years. Most recently, her evaluation of the new coffee shop regulations in the Netherlands was a key study. Currently, she is coordinator of an international project on new psychoactive substances (NPS) that involves six European countries and is partly funded by the European Commission.

Jane Fountain has been working in the drug research field since 1988. Until 2010, she was a Professor of Substance Use Research at the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom, and is now an Emeritus Professor there. She is a research consultant for several drug-related international organisations, her work has been widely published in academic journals and elsewhere, and she has edited several books. Jane's research interests focus on qualitative research methods and drug and drug service use among so-called 'hidden' or 'hard-to-reach' populations.

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

Dirk J. Korf

1. Between street and screen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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