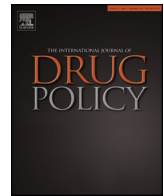




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Research paper

# Drugs at the campsite: Socio-spatial relations and drug use at music festivals

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Music festivals have received relatively little research attention despite being key sites for alcohol and drug use among young people internationally. Research into music festivals and the social contexts of drug use more generally, has tended to focus on social and cultural processes without sufficient regard for the mediating role of space and spatial processes.

**Methods:** Adopting a relational approach to space and the social, from Actor-Network Theory and human geography, I examine how socio-spatial relations are generated in campsites at multiple-day music festivals. The data are drawn from ethnographic observations at music festivals around Melbourne, Australia; interviews with 18–23 year olds; and participant-written diaries.

**Results:** Through the analysis, the campsite is revealed as a space in process, the making of which is bound up in how drug use unfolds. Campsite relations mediate the formation of drug knowledge and norms, informal harm reduction practices, access to and exchange of drugs, and rest and recovery following drug use.

**Conclusions:** Greater attendance to socio-spatial relations affords new insights regarding how festival spaces and their social effects are generated, and how they give rise to particular drug use practices. These findings also point to how festival harm reduction strategies might be enhanced through the promotion of enabling socio-spatial relations.

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Music festivals are becoming increasingly popular among young people internationally as places for leisure, entertainment and socialising (Martinus, McAlaney, McLaughlin, & Smith, 2010; McCarthy, 2013). Festivals are often highly anticipated events, seen as a break from normal life, and can provide an occasion for alcohol and drug use (Borlagdan, Freeman, Duvnjak, Bywood, & Roche, 2010; Luckman, 2003). Young festival attendees tend to have higher rates of drug use than the general youth population, and accordingly, festivals may provide key sites for targeted prevention and harm reduction activities (Hesse & Tutenges, 2012; Lim, Hellard, Hocking, Spelman, & Aitken, 2010; Martinus et al., 2010; Wilson, Bryant, Holt, & Treloar, 2010).

In order to develop effective setting-specific approaches to drug use, research must account for how specific contexts are involved

in mediating local drug use practices (Dilkes-Frayne, 2014; Duff, 2012). To date, research has not sufficiently accounted for how spatial, material, temporal and affective dynamics of festivals feature in shaping drug use alongside more commonly recognised social or cultural factors (Dilkes-Frayne, 2014). This is particularly necessary given that numerous characteristics of music festivals differentiate them from more well-researched nightlife settings like nightclubs and bars. Festivals are unique in their size, location and layout; are held at both day- and night-time; and are relatively infrequent (often annual), of long duration and large crowd size.

In this article, I focus on campsite spaces at multiple-day music festivals, and the socio-spatial relations that inform how festival spaces come to mediate drug use practices. Employing notions of relationality and the social from Actor-Network Theory (ANT), and the concept of relational space in human geography, I present socio-spatial relations as the way in which spaces, social processes and drug use are generated relationally in shifting collectives of people, objects, materials, drugs, and climatic features. Drawing on ethnographic research at music festivals around Melbourne, Australia, I demonstrate how campsites are made, and how they mediate drug use, drug knowledge, use norms, informal harm reduction practices, access to and exchange of drugs, and rest and

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recovery following drug use. I suggest that greater attendance to socio-spatial relations should avail new insights into how festival spaces and their social effects are created, and how they give rise to drug use practices. The findings also point to how festival harm reduction strategies might be enhanced by promoting socio-spatial relations that enable people, drugs and spaces to generate alternatives to harm.

## Background

Research on music festivals has commonly focused on the festival experience and people's attraction to it (Gilmore, 2010; Luckman, 2003; St John, 2009), employing notions of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984); liminality, communitas, ritual (Turner, 1987); and neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1995). Drug use has not been the central concern of festival research, as researchers have argued that it is not a crucial aspect of festival participation (Gilmore, 2010; Tramacchi, 2000). Where drug use has been specifically addressed, studies have tended to survey use prevalence among festival attending populations, rather than examine how drugs are used at the festival itself (Hesse & Tutenges, 2012; Jenkinson, Bowring, Dietze, Hellard, & Lim, 2014; Lim et al., 2010). Exceptions include survey research identifying alcohol and drug use practices at an outdoor festival in Scotland (Martinus et al., 2010), a qualitative study of harm reduction practices among attendees at Goa trance parties in Belgium (Van Havere, Tutenges, De Maeyer, Broekaert, & Vanderplasschen, 2015), and research identifying alcohol sponsorship, branding and marketing at festivals in Australia (Borlagdan et al., 2010). In the accounts they provide, social and cultural aspects of festivals, such as norms, group solidarity and music scenes, are used to explain the drug use evident at festivals.

Recently, research in human geography and alcohol and other drug studies has emphasised the need for greater recognition of the active role of space and place in mediating drug use (Cooper & Tempalski, 2014; Fraser, 2006; Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2008; Malins, Fitzgerald, & Threadgold, 2006; Saldanha, 2007; Vitellone, 2010; Wilton & Moreno, 2012). This work proposes that space ought to be recognised as a vital constituent of drug use practices, pleasures and experiences, rather than a passive backdrop to human or social forces (Böhling, 2014; Duff, 2008; Jayne et al., 2008). Accounting for how contexts are active in generating particular drug use practices requires recognition of the interplay between social, spatial, material, temporal and affective processes (Dilkes-Frayne, 2014; Duff, 2012). There is also a need to demonstrate how spaces are themselves *produced* in these processes (Dilkes-Frayne, 2014).

A small segment of music festivals research has addressed how their specific spatial characteristics relate to drug use. Festival venues like bushland or desert have been suggested to produce a liminal quality and feelings of being away from normal life, facilitating connections with other people and nature, and enabling different norms and identities to emerge, including those around drug use (Gilmore, 2010; Luckman, 2003; Tramacchi, 2000). More broadly, however, festivals research has tended not to draw connections between how a festival's layout, people's movement around sites, or particular climatic environments, for example, relate to drug use practices specifically.

While it may be assumed that the dance floor is where the action of drug consumption happens, and where its effects take place, much action relevant to consumption, use experience, and potential harms takes place off the dance floor, in spaces such as festival entrances (Demant & Dilkes-Frayne, 2015) or campsites, for example. In seeking to understand how consumption practices and psychoactive effects arise in particular spaces, research needs to examine what flows into and out of these spaces, and how

people move through and around them, including in analysis what has been prefigured by pre-purchasing, pre-drinking, and movement to and around venues (Dilkes-Frayne, 2014).

In relation to reducing drug-related harm, on-site health care services at music festivals attend to drug- and non-drug-related harms, including illnesses, injuries, environmental (e.g. heat exhaustion) and mental health presentations, at higher incidence rates than other kinds of mass gatherings (Hutton, Ranse, Verdonk, Ullah, & Arbon, 2014). As it is now well recognised that the environments in which drug use takes place are involved in generating the risks and harms that can be associated with drug use (Fitzgerald, 2009; Rhodes, 2009; Tempalski & McQuie, 2009), and as increasing attention is being paid towards setting-based approaches to drug-use prevention and harm reduction (Martinus et al., 2010; Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, 2011), the specific characteristics of music festivals warrant further investigation (Hesse & Tutenges, 2012; Lim et al., 2010). Recent research has suggested that harm reduction must involve mitigating drug-related and environmental risk factors, while also attending to how use environments can be made more "enabling" (Duff, 2010; Moore & Dietze, 2005; Rhodes, 2009). Enabling places or environments are those which provide social, material and affective resources that facilitate the prevention of harm (Duff, 2010), and remove barriers to protective action (Moore & Dietze, 2005). Resources, however, are not "innately enabling", their utility depends on how they are put to use in specific contexts (Duff, 2010, p. 342). Making places that enable the reduction of harm, therefore, requires a close examination of the specific relations in which resources are made available and put into practice. While the focus of this research was not on harm or harm reduction interventions directly, the findings have implications for how festival-specific harm reduction interventions may be approached, with a view to enabling people, drugs and festival spaces to act towards harm reduction.

## Socio-spatial relations and drug use

For attending to how spaces are bound up with social practices, relational thinking in Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and human geography hold particular promise. ANT scholarship now comprises a wide diaspora of approaches, extending into numerous fields (Law, 2009). My primary aim with ANT in this paper is to draw upon the notion of relationality, as articulated by Bruno Latour (2005), to explore how both spaces and the social are generated in relational processes. Latour (2005) argues that rather than treating humans as the sole actors through which sociality is generated, social research ought to move beyond an artificial divide that is often imposed between the human and non-human, to recognise that "the continuity of any course of action will rarely consist of human-to-human connections ... or of object-to-object connections, but will probably zigzag from one to the other" (Latour, 2005, p. 75). The agencies, actions, and characteristics of actors (be they human or non-human) are said to be enacted in relations of mediation: an association formed between things, where something acts on another by transforming it in some way. Through mediation, people and things modify one another, and new possibilities for action and relation are created (Latour, 2005). This does not imply a deterministic or causal relationship; rather, those mediated may be allowed, encouraged, dissuaded or blocked from acting in particular ways (Latour, 2005).

While ANT is best known for its (at times controversial) focus on the non-human aspects of these relations (Sayes, 2014), it is not incompatible with a focus on the human (Dilkes-Frayne, 2014). Far from precluding human aspects from social analysis, ANT insists that we examine how human agencies, capacities, and knowledge, along with organisations and society as a whole, are produced as

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