

Breaking Convention 2013

Conference abstract

Psychedelic Harm Reduction and Beyond: Support Services at Festivals

Levente Móró

University of Turku, Finland

leve@utu.fi

Electronic dance music events are popular recreational mass happenings among adolescents and young adults worldwide. However, multi-day outdoor festivals may pose increased safety risks to visitors due to their isolated location, harsh environmental conditions, and prolonged psychoactive substance use. While many of these risks are preventable or manageable by the visitors, there is also need for trained outsiders to help less fortunate risk-takers on the spot. For this purpose, harm reduction interventions may be assembled as special “party service” teams. Provided help services may include distributing drinking water, disseminating substance-related information, giving first aid, offering psychological help, and analysing drugs.

Contemporary psychedelic subculture is also strongly associated with its own electronic musical genres (e.g., Goa, Psytrance, Chillout). Not surprisingly, several previous studies found a manifold higher prevalence of hallucinogenic drug use among visitors of these types of events. Hallucinogens, such as LSD, DMT, psilocybin, and mescaline, may indeed cause extraordinary life-enriching experiences, especially in a supportive sociocultural environment. Although „set” and „setting” may seem ideal for drug use at these events, there are always substantial risks associated with the ingestion of psychoactives. Impurities, dosing errors, misidentifications, drug interactions, pre-existing medical conditions, or a reckless attitude toward substance use may cause physical and/or mental discomfort, which in turn may lead to serious health consequences or accidents.

A special type of harm reduction service, “psychedelic support” (or “psycare”), aims to intervene in psychedelics-related problem situations. Hallucinogen-induced temporary alterations of consciousness may occasionally turn into a “bad trip”, “psychedelic emergency”, or “spiritual crisis”. Perceptual changes, recurrent thoughts, hallucinations, and delusions may cause anxiety and fear, as repressed emotions, traumatic memories, or identity problems may surface. Persons under such conditions may be difficult to access verbally, and their behavior may be unpredictable. Moreover, helpers should be familiar with medical emergencies and psychiatric disorders, both of which may also be involved in these situations.

In my presentation, I will firstly introduce harm reduction and party services in general, and psychedelic support services in particular. Special requirements, especially psychological suitability for voluntary psycare work will be discussed. Then I will systematically describe the psychedelic consciousness alteration process, its resulting mindbody states, and methods to help out people with negative experiences. Finally, I will tell from experience some fascinating, educating, and hopefully entertaining example cases of psychedelic support at the two biggest European “psychedelic tribal gatherings” (Boom festival in Portugal; O.Z.O.R.A. festival in Hungary) in summer 2012.