

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

Author(s)

Dilkes-Frayne E.

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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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