

# VI

## ENGLISH SUMMARY

In 2008, many in Amsterdam nightlife were harking back to the advent of house music (the precursor of dance) some 20 years ago. Even urban DJs began playing house, creating a crossover genre called urban house. Traditional house came back into the ascendant, and connoisseurs reported more vocals, more warmth and melody on the dance floor. Minimal techno, so popular in alternative scenes in 2007, grew more mainstream, prompting techno pioneers to seek other types of events as well as new music styles such as dubstep. The wide diversity in music styles remained, as did the highly varied array of venues both in the mainstream club scene and in more alternative milieus – which included creative workspaces in vacant office buildings plus other places and activities not listed in the weekly event guides. Judging from the ubiquitous small-scale events, a substantial segment of Amsterdam nightlifers seem to prefer alternating between a range of locations for revelling. They experience fewer barriers there than in the more mainstream clubs, plus lower door charges, later closing times, and fewer drug checks on the door and inside.

### **the Antenna monitoring scheme**

Since 1993, Amsterdam Antenna has collected qualitative and quantitative data in order to document and analyse trends in substance use among adolescents and young adults in the city. Our **panel study** traces the latest developments by conducting individual, semi-annual interviews with a panel of avid nightlifers and professionals from various nightlife scenes. The focus is on trendsetters who try out new types of music, events, nightspots and drugs, or create new variations on older themes. They also lead the way as drugs or styles go out of vogue. The panel study also focuses on neighbourhood and problem youth. It reports trends, signs and rumours from all these groups, but provides no exact figures.

Our annual **survey**, in comparison, delivers quantitative data about substance use in specific groups: school-going adolescents, young clients of youth services, cannabis coffeeshop customers, pubgoers and clubbers. The 2008 survey focused on club life. As previously in 1995, 1998 and 2003, we polled patrons of Amsterdam dance clubs. Although there were trendsetters among them, most respondents could be labelled as conventional or mainstream, as trend-followers.

A total of 646 nightclub patrons completed our questionnaire. Their average age was 25. The majority were female and had ethnic Dutch or other Western backgrounds. About half were enrolled in school, college or university; one out of three lived outside Amsterdam.

Other statistics we report here derive from sources we call **substance use prevention indicators**. These provide quantitative data on the alcohol and drugs market from several sources: requests for information or advice received via a telephone help line and a website; substance use education contacts at dance events; and results from the testing of voluntarily submitted drugs. Altogether, the information reported in the various components of Antenna yields a diversified picture of developments and trends in Amsterdam's world of recreational substances.

## **alcohol**

The supply of alcohol in Amsterdam nightlife remains utterly inexhaustible. This by no means confines itself to beer and wine. Chic, pricey drinks are in high demand in some places. New concoctions are regularly launched, or old ones promoted anew. Prosecco has become the new rosé. There were virtually no clubgoers in our survey who abstained from alcohol. Drinkers were even in the majority among non-Western ethnic minority clubbers, who are traditionally less likely to drink. If alcohol use was widespread in 1995, it was even more so in 2008 – at least in terms of percentages of drinkers, though not in the quantities consumed. The average number of units reportedly consumed per drinking day actually declined in 2008. One out of 10 clubbers were sticking to soft drinks on the night they were polled. The remainder drank an average of six units of ethanol that night. More than half reported pre-club drinking. Most of those few clubbers who drove a car after their night out did take it easy with alcohol.

Alcohol is also the recreational substance used most by neighbourhood and problem youth. Moroccan neighbourhood youth, in particular, have acquired more experience with alcohol in recent years. Although ethnic Dutch and Surinamese young people drink more, alcohol is now less taboo for the Moroccan youth. Among the problem youth, a high proportion drink alcohol every day.

The extent to which excessive or problematic alcohol use occurs depends largely on which definition one chooses. One indicator is that four out of ten surveyed clubgoers rated their own alcohol use as sometimes excessive or too frequent. The Jellinek Prevention information and advice services have for years been receiving more questions about alcohol than about any other substance.

## **tobacco**

Although smoking restrictions introduced in Dutch bars and clubs in July 2008 did trigger some commotion, there were ultimately few real problems. Many nightlifers who were smokers reported visiting pubs less frequently after work or before clubbing, and that they now felt the club atmosphere was less enjoyable than before. Non-smokers, for their part, were happier with the new situation. The quality of some of the smoking rooms still permitted in large clubs was below par; they were described as dingy or filthy – except for the corporately sponsored ones, where smokers were treated like kings and queens. It remains a moot point whether or not smoking pure cannabis is allowed in the smoking rooms. Neighbours of pubs and cannabis coffeeshops regularly complain of noise and stench from smokers outside such establishments.

Despite the smoking ban, considerable smoking still occurs in clubs, but the time when everyone smoked a pack a day is long gone. The majority of the clubbers we polled did report they smoked tobacco, but half of these did not smoke every day. Since our first survey of clubgoers in 1995, the number of daily smokers has fallen by almost half. The total number of smokers has not declined much, but many of them are apparently cutting back, and there are more 'occasional smokers'.

## **cannabis**

Cannabis is smoked in all networks represented in our panel, and most of the clubbers we polled reported having smoked cannabis at some point in their lives. Yet current (last-month) cannabis use has declined over the years. Increasingly, cannabis is a drug people still experiment with but are more likely to give up, especially as they reach older ages. Many neighbourhood youth smoke cannabis to be sociable and to relax, but also out of sheer boredom. For many homeless youth, being stoned is one way to get through the day.

## **cocaine and ecstasy**

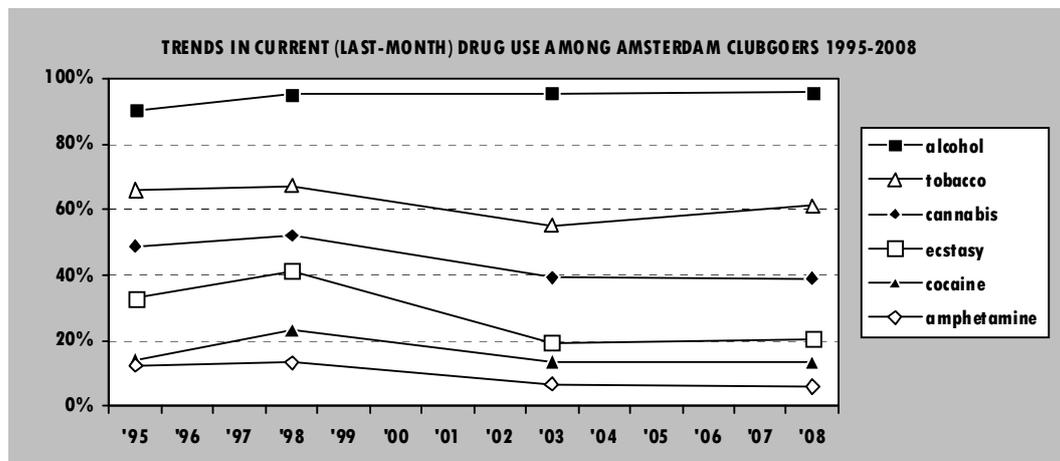
In comparison to ecstasy, cocaine use is much less connected to particular times and settings. Cocaine is taken most frequently in private settings, followed by clubs, dance events and pubs. It is usually ordered from what are called 'line couriers' and 'wrap services', whose delivery times range from 15 to 30 minutes. A gram of cocaine now costs about €50. Despite the drug's popularity, users express ambivalent attitudes towards it. More than a quarter of our surveyed clubgoers sometimes felt they were sniffing too much cocaine or were doing it too frequently. Regarding cocaine, Jellinek Prevention receives relatively high numbers of enquiries from friends and relatives of users, in addition to those from users

themselves. And even though many clubbers say they have misgivings about coke sniffers who take the drug on weekdays or alone at home, such behaviours are still regularly reported in our panel networks. People are quick to associate cocaine with 'addiction'. This may also reflect a much higher degree of problem awareness than is evident among ecstasy users. For despite the long-term cocaine use of some panel members, this has only rarely resulted in any real addiction problems.

After a sustained decline in ecstasy use by trendsetters in the panel study, ecstasy now equals cocaine in popularity. The level of cocaine use has remained stable. Figures from our surveys show a peak for both drugs in 1998, followed by a decline that was steeper for ecstasy. Besides ecstasy tablets, MDMA powder is now also rather common. Ecstasy-like substances such as MDA, MDEA and 2-CB are seldom seen any more. Prices on the ecstasy market mirror the declining popularity of the drug in recent years. The average price per pill has sunk to below 4 euros. Yet if signs do not deceive, the interest in ecstasy is now reviving slightly in a new, younger nightlife generation. Late in 2008, nonetheless, it emerged that the ecstasy market was seriously adulterated with the drug mCPP – allegedly attributable in part to a shortage of the precursor PMK. This has resulted in ecstasy with lower dosages on the market.

Despite the popularity of ecstasy and cocaine, most people apparently do not take them when they go out to clubs. More than eight in ten of our respondents were either completely sober, had limited themselves to alcohol, or had smoked a bit of cannabis at the most on the night of the survey. At large dance events, the stands operated by Unity (a project for drug and alcohol education) attracted surprising numbers of partygoers who had not consumed any drugs.

Neighbourhood youth still show little enthusiasm for cocaine or ecstasy. Cocaine in particular has a negative image among the problem youth.



## other drugs

The use of other illicit drugs was low among the surveyed clubgoers; only a small percentage at most reported taking them. Our panel indicates that the use of certain drugs is confined to tiny circles.

**Amphetamine** continues to play a marginal role in comparison to ecstasy and cocaine. The Amsterdam speed market is less accessible than the ecstasy or cocaine markets, and amphetamine use is closely tied to certain alternative nightlife subscenes. **Methamphetamine** circulates mainly in small niches of the gay scene and remains difficult to come by.

The use of **GHB** is stable to slightly rising, according to the panel; the figures for the surveyed clubgoers were slightly higher in 2008 than ten years previously. GHB is taken mainly in private settings (such as afterparties) or in clubs. Real devotees also take GHB on weekdays. Users often know the people who make and sell GHB. The drug still sparks controversy among its users. Some swear by it, while others point to the high accident factor. They certainly have a point, given the number of GHB-related ambulance callouts in Amsterdam.

The psychedelic anaesthetic **ketamine** has secured a firm foothold on the Amsterdam drugs market, though it is less common than GHB. Despite an increase in the number of ketamine dealers, the drug is now more difficult to obtain than in previous years. Ketamine use is now accepted in some limited circles. It is especially popular in the alternative dance and nightlife segments. Higher doses are taken preferably in private settings. Some users try to avoid the tripping stage, while others seek it out. **Laughing gas (nitrous oxide)** is most often taken in circles of home users who like to 'have a balloon' after a night out.

The use of **psychedelics** such as LSD, magic mushrooms, DMT and ayahuasca is mainly confined to psychonauts and (mostly experienced) trippers who are part of small scenes. Psychedelics play but a marginal role in nightlife, because most nightlifers do not associate tripping drugs with going out. The clubgoers we surveyed also no longer reported any appreciable use of these drugs.

**Viagra** is generally used only by small groups of people within certain networks. The erectogenic is most common in gay and fetish networks. It may be used to overcome temporary impotence after taking stimulants or to enhance sexual enjoyment. The same applies to **poppers**, which, in addition to the head rush it gives, may also be sniffed to achieve brief sexual euphoria. Poppers are traditionally used mostly in the gay scene.

substance use by Amsterdam clubgoers, 2008

	lifetime	last month	night out
alcohol	99%	96%	87%
tobacco	81%	61%	49%
cannabis	83%	39%	17%
ecstasy	48%	21%	9%
cocaine	33%	14%	5%
MDMA powder	34%	8%	3%
amphetamine	24%	6%	4%
methamphetamine	3%	1%	.
GHB	16%	5%	2%
ketamine	9%	2%	<0.5%
laughing gas	24%	3%	.
magic mushrooms	32%	2%	.
LSD	8%	<0.5%	.
poppers	25%	5%	1%
Viagra	6%	2%	<0.5%
crack	5%	1%	.
heroin	1%	0%	.

. = not recorded

## conclusion

Five years ago we detected a 'new sobriety' in Amsterdam nightlife. Then, as now, this did not apply to alcohol. Yet apart from alcohol, 'sobriety' still aptly characterises the use of recreational substances in Amsterdam nightlife in 2008. Illicit drugs are still widely used, but on a far smaller scale than in the late 1990s. In recent years, the use of most such substances has remained at stable but lower levels. On an average night out in the Amsterdam club scene, drug use is now more the exception than the rule.