

# Exploring new substance use settings

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Substance use is a versatile activity, continuously spreading to new types of situations and contexts involving new substances and habits. In new and old user settings negotiations take place regarding the proper, risky, good, joyful, dangerous, or efficient way of acting. An important objective of substance use research is to keep track of and describe substance use and its logics, and so it must follow the prevalence of substances – new and old – in all user milieus, cultures, and contexts. In this issue of *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, readers will find new research on user contexts as well as the annually published Nordic alcohol statistics, this time for the period 2010–2015 (Hellman & Kettunen, 2017).

Warne, Sinadinovic, Berman, Källmén, and Vinberg (2017) report results from their study on employees at ski resorts in northern Sweden. These resorts are a typical Nordic winter holiday milieu: millions of tourists visit resorts in Sweden, Norway, and Finland annually; Norway alone has more than 200 alpine ski resorts. In the most northern resorts, the winter sports season continues well into May. As in other alpine ski resorts in the world, the Nordic ones

are filled with night life and other substance-use opportunities – as are the corresponding summer vacation resorts in southern Europe.

While Nordic ski resorts are large seasonal night-time economies, there has not been much research on them as substance-use milieus. Previous research has shown that employees at tourist resorts tend to represent a high-risk population in terms of use of alcohol, drugs, and other negative lifestyle behaviours such as risky sexual conduct. Warne and colleagues (2017) proceeded with a questionnaire for ski resort employees, surveying different aspects of alcohol and drug use, psychosocial working conditions, and health. Compared to the general population, the ski resort employees scored higher on the AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) in all age groups except for men aged 35+ years. Furthermore, men in the 18–24 years age group scored higher on the corresponding test for drug use disorders identification.

The prevalence of risky alcohol and drug use was higher among seasonally employed individuals than among those who were employed all year round. Certain variables seemed to

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highly influence risky alcohol and drug consumption, such as having co-workers/friends who were often inebriated, while those who lived together with colleagues were more likely to report risky consumption of alcohol than were employees in other circumstances. The findings are in line with previous research about descriptive norms of drinking behaviours during and after work. People who work together tend to have the same kind of everyday habits in a common reference milieu and identify with each other through these everyday patterns. Spending time out together serves important functions of stress relief and fun.

### Virtual use cultures

A substance use culture which is not spatially fixed is the online use culture. Interactive online platforms open up a whole new world for discovering, buying, and discussing drugs. Online communities also offer researchers possibilities to study drug users' milieus from within a user-negotiation perspective while sitting in front of their computer screens. Before the internet, the inventory into reasons and negotiations underpinning drug use demanded research designs that either observed or asked substance users about the praxis and meanings attached to their drug use. New media platforms such as discussion forums offer access to more-or-less natural and direct speech on intoxicants and their use logics.

Novel psychoactive substances (NPS) are discussed in a study by Andersson and Kjellgren (2017), who examined the Swedish discussion forum Flashback.org to analyse the effects experienced by users of the NPS benzodiazepine flubromazolam. The study shows how drug cultures can move to a forum such as Flaskback.org, which contains detailed information about new types of drug use, which is interesting for understanding use phenomena but also enlightening for people at risk. In the forum discussions, flubromazolam emerges as highly addictive not only with potent and long-lasting effects but also with many, possibly severe, side

effects. Memory loss and loss of control are common adverse effects, and withdrawals appear to be severe for many users. These types of new experiences and knowledge of use can spread rapidly online between people who share an interest in more-or-less technical circumstances on the substance use in question.

Identifying new settings and cultures of substance use requires a certain level of sensitivity from scholars. Also required is a level of integrity, if one is to sustain this focus of inquiry. In the "For Debate" section, scholars discuss today's positivist science mythological atmosphere, in which it is important to keep reminding jurisdictions, funders, and colleagues about the added value of continuing the exploration of spatial and cultural characteristics in human behaviour related to substance use.

### Support of qualitative research

In a recent seminar arranged by the Finnish alcohol and drug researchers' society, the society's newly appointed president Anu Katainen pointed out that when she set out as a student of sociology, alcohol research was one of the most important and valid sociology fields in Finland, but that this has since changed. The justification of certain inquiries in the fields of social sciences and humanities needs to be reproduced and explained for decision-makers and society at large. What, then, has happened?

In the "For Debate" section of this issue, we want to continue the Norwegian discussion initiated this winter regarding the premises under which alcohol and drug research – and qualitative endeavours in particular – function in current funding structures (Buvik et al., 2017; Kraft, 2017; Meisingset, 2016). Editor in chief Matilda Hellman (Hellman, 2017) asks whether mythologies of progress are angled in ways that do not allow for an identification of the unique and valuable contribution of Nordic research in social sciences and humanities. Johan Edman (2017) questions the constancy of governing epistemic truths and related zeitgeists by applying a historical perspective: "Ever changing

etiological explanations are born and forgotten; such methods as aversion therapy, applied eugenics, or vitamin injections have all had their (scientifically motivated) heyday” (Edman, 2017, pp. 196–197).

As a result of what started as a Norwegian debate on the premises of qualitative research, *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* has decided to provide extra support for qualitative manuscripts that proceed to review stage. The trial will be evaluated and discussed with the editorial board and will eventually also be reported in the journal. Furthermore, the journal will organise a qualitative publishing workshop in conjunction with a qualitative thematic event hosted by the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) in September 2017. A prime mover of this workshop, and also a main figure behind a unique monthly gathering of qualitative researchers is Johanna Järvinen-Tassopoulos at the THL. Järvinen-Tassopoulos (2017) also takes part in the discussion in this issue of *NAD* to explain the lack of understanding for qualitative research. She argues that it is simply difficult for scientists unfamiliar with qualitative research to assess its relevance and to understand what is evidence-based and what is simply theorisation. She suggests that, instead of trying to justify the relevance of qualitative research in the public health field, social scientists should remind themselves of some of the major contributions made by academics and professionals in the past and their positive impact on addiction research.

The point of departure and driving factor in all these support endeavours of qualitative research is the circumstance that high-standard craftsmanship of qualitative research is so difficult. Hellman writes (2017, pp. 194–195): “In order to produce qualitative pieces of knowledge, the researcher needs to be a skilful theorist, philosopher, author, and empirical scientist – all at once. At their best, the projects and articles resemble nothing that has been conducted before”. This journal hopes to be able to

publish such unique pieces to an even higher degree in the future.

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