More than just a party: youth nightlife movements as key agents in the promotion of harm reduction programs

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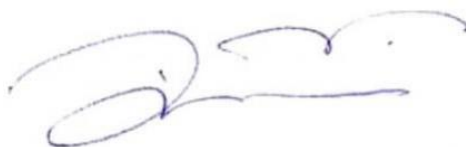*Supervised by Professor Julia Dianne Buxton*

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Author's Declaration

I, Rebeca Marques Rocha, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language. This is a true copy of the thesis, including final revisions.

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Abstract

Progressive drug policies, changing the traditional intervention's scope from criminal to health approaches, have come to divide substance consumption into two categories: problematic and recreational drug use. Over the years, researches and harm reduction programs have been particularly focused on the first pattern, as it is perceived to bring collective outcomes to society. Consequently, policies for recreational drug users became limited to strategies of surveillance and intervention targeting the behavior of young people – generally classified as a group involved in "risky activities". Assuming youngsters to be ill-informed and indifferent to the harmful consequences associated with recreative drug use, policymakers and researches fail to recognize the networks created by youth for managing the risks of psychotropics consumption in their leisure time. This qualitative research aims to demonstrate how young rave organizers - rather than just passive, uneducated, and irrational actors - are important agents for the design and implementation of harm reduction programs. Building a bridge to a hidden and hard-to-reach population, they become an essential tool for health promotion. The research brings the case study of Mina, a music collective in Portugal. The year 2020 was marked by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which directly impacted Mina's activities and harm reduction programs in the country. However, more than an obstacle, the pandemic proved to be a valuable opportunity for assessing the group's importance. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews with rave organizers, public officials, and harm reduction agents, this study also investigates the challenges brought by the crisis and the measures adopted by Mina to respond to it. Ultimately, the research seeks to shed a light on an overlooked stakeholder, revealing the positive contributions it could bring to drug policy approaches.

Keywords: Drug policy, Decriminalization, Harm Reduction, Youth, Nightlife, Recreational Drug Use.

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"What they fail tae understand is that drug and club money is not a luxury. It's an essential. […] It's like at a rave we create a kind ay environment, and it isnae just the E – although it's maistly the E - that encourages that kind ay feelin. It's the whole vibe. I'm coming up in a big way as that invisible hang grabs a hud onto the roof because the music is in me around me and everywhere […]"

– Irvine Welsh, *Ecstasy: Three Tales of Chemical Romance,* 1996

Introduction

The behavior of young people has been of long concern among academics and policy researchers. In the specific debate of leisure time and substance use, youth is often perceived as a highly vulnerable sector of the population, generally involved in "risky activities" (Ettore & Milles, 2002; Parker, 2005; Hunt et. al, 2007). Consequently, events attended by youngsters and traditionally linked to drug consumption – i.e. parties, festivals, and raves - are classified as troubling and unsafe (Campbell, 2000), with studies and policies supporting approaches based on surveillance and intervention (France 2000; Cieslik & Pollock, 2002).

On the other hand, progressive drug policies, changing the traditional intervention's scope from criminal to health approaches, have come to divide substance consumption into two categories: problematic and recreational drug use. Over the years, researches have been particularly focused on the first pattern, as it is perceived to bring collective impacts and outcomes to society. As a result, studies on youthful recreational drug use assume a marginalized position in the policy agenda, with few harm reduction programs designed to address the needs of this population.

The appearance of novel psychoactive substances (NPS) and the increase in rates of recreative drug use among young people (EMCDDA, 2019; UNODC 2019) challenge such a posture towards the drug phenomenon. The lack of knowledge on the composition of narcotics circulating in the market and the side-effects their use might bring to an individuals' health transform youngsters' patterns of leisure drug consumption into a potentially lethal issue.

Although efforts have been made in the field of social sciences to understand young people's experiential relation and knowledge associated to substance consumption (Parker, 2005; Hunt et. al, 2007; Kavanaugh and Anderson, 2008; Hunt et. al, 2010; Mountian, 2013), much of the prevention literature assumes that youth is ill-informed and fail to fully understand the harmful consequences of drug use (Bukoski, 1991). In this sense, the group becomes an often-neglected stakeholder in the policymaking process (Buse, 2005).

Young recreational drug users are a hard-to-reach audience. For usually not experiencing addiction, they do not regard themselves as conventional psychotropics consumers (Cousto, 1999; Stetina, 2008). However, by placing youth under passive categories of victims or uneducated individuals (Paglia and Room, 1999), policymakers and researches forsake the complex and diverse features existing within this parcel of the population. The inability to observe the issue from a youth perspective undermines the capacity in designing harm reduction programs to address the risks associated to youthful recreational drug use.

Most importantly, they fail to recognize the networks created by young people for addressing such matters. Rather than just passive, uneducated, and irrational actors, youth movements operating in the nightlife scene can be important agents for the design and implementation of harm reduction programs. Building a bridge to a hidden and hard-to-reach population, they become an essential tool for health promotion.

This research analyzes the topic of recreational substance use through the lenses of event organizers in the electronic music scene. As the evolution of harm reduction networks, the history of rave scenes is a story of resistance and resilience. More than just parties, these events seem to promote the creation of spaces that aim to construct safer

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environments for the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of risks associated with drug use. At the same time, they offer a room for resistance, where ideas and experiences are shared, and marginalized youth is given a voice. In a context where young people grow increasingly frustrated at the promises of political and neoliberal economies (UN, 2017; Kitanova, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2019), these spaces become an arena for vectoring such discontentment and promoting the feeling of embracing and belonging to a community (Hunt et al. 2007; Room, 2015).

The research focused on the case study of Mina, a music collective organizing raves and parties in Portugal. The study sought to investigate how the movement perceives the topic of youthful recreational drug use and what actions are taken by event organizers to deal with the risks associated with the phenomenon. The year 2020 was marked by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which directly impacted Mina's activities and harm reduction programs in the country. However, more than an obstacle, the pandemic proved to be a valuable opportunity for assessing the group's importance. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews with rave organizers, public officials, and harm reduction agents, this study also investigates the challenges brought by the crisis and the measures adopted by Mina to respond to it.

Ultimately, the research seeks to shed a light on an overlooked stakeholder. The results obtained in this qualitative research evidence the importance of working closely with nightlife youth movements, and the positive contributions such an interaction could bring to the harm reduction field. Overall, these groups represent a bridge for accessing a population difficult to reach, offering valuable first-hand insights on their substance consumption patterns and the drug market trends. Moreover, they can be a key instrument

in the promotion of public health, raising awareness on safer drug use practices, and preventing its chances of developing into problem behaviors.

This thesis is divided into 8 chapters, followed by a final concluding section. The first chapter brings a historical overview of the international drug policy system's development and the debates existing in the field. The second section builds a literature overview from studies differentiating problem and recreational drug use, while the third section places the debate under the scope of youth behavior and rave scenes. An explanation of the methodology used in this research is given in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter introduces the case study chosen to illustrate the argument of this thesis. Results are discussed in the sixth chapter, while the seventh chapter brings a summary of the overall findings, the lessons learned and the reasons for building strong cooperative relations between youth nightlife movements, local NGOs and public administration. The conclusion of the research is the eighth and final chapter of this work.

1. Historical background

1.1 The origins of the international drug policy framework

Humanity has long lived with psychotropics - which for millennia have been used in various situations, from indigenous rituals to contemporary festive events. Throughout history, drugs have had multiple uses, fueling, and mirroring the societies in which they were introduced (Keefer and Loayza, 2010). They gave rise to religions, traveled the planet with commerce, provoked wars, changed cultures, music, and leisure (Carneiro, 2005). However, in the 20th century global prohibitions on the use of narcotics began to emerge.

In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled an extension of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) jurisdiction to retail stores, allowing the body to stop illegal sales of drugs by pharmacies including barbiturates and amphetamines (*U.S. v. Sullivan*, 1948). Since then, the country assumed a pivotal role in the formation of the legal framework currently regulating psychotropics status' globally. The international drug policy regime as we presently know has its foundations on the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, which establishes the obligations of all signatory nation-states in working cooperatively to achieve a "drug-free world". Such an apparatus was further reinforced with the formulation of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic (McAllister, 2000; Bewley-Taylor, 2003). The adherence to these treaties is remarkable; in July 2007, 183 states were part of the first two conventions, while 182 were part of the third (IDPC, 2020).

The anti-drugs effort, led by the U.S., came to define the debate terms used in the psychotropics policy field to this date (Buxton, 2010). In such a context, drug use is

perceived as a deviating pattern bringing risks to society, with any form of illicit psychotropic consumption classified as unhealthy and dangerous (Nicholson, 2002). For decades, policy responses to the phenomenon have focused on curbing the supply side of the drug market, framing the behavior under the jurisdiction of criminal legislation (Husak, 2018). In this sense, drug possession and consumption are regarded and treated as a felony, following the rules designed by the 1961 Single Convention and the 1988 Convention on Illicit traffic – both emphasizing punitive sentencing for these offences.

Thus, the way in which substance retail and consumption are framed, problematized, and dealt with is greatly shaped by a discourse based on political powers and interests reflective of an outdated picture. The "war on drugs" approach used as a response to the psychotropics "problem" disregard a "2,000-year-long history of drug cultivation, production, trading, and use" (Buxton, 2010; p. 62), unleashing negative side-effects at times more harmful to society than the substances they were aiming to eradicate (Levine, 2003; Keefer and Norman, 2010; Barret, 2011; Muggah et. al. 2015; Barret, 2016).

Most importantly, such an approach is based on the flawed premise that any use of illicit psychotropic is problematic (Nicholson, 2002), overlooking the differences among substances' composition, consumption environments, user's socio-economic backgrounds, cultural norms and other relevant trends connected to the phenomenon (Carneiro, 2005; Parker, 2005; Shaw, 2013). Deeply linked to ever-changing social dynamics, drug consumption patterns are not a static subject (Soares, Carvalho, Valbom, and Rodrigues, 2017).

The importance of a paradigm shift, introducing new terms into the debate and adopting policies sensitive to the myriad aspects related to substance use and abuse, gained political support in many contexts globally in the past years (Sher, 2003). Currently, a growing list of countries has embraced a new approach for dealing with the

matter of drug use. Such a posture perceives the phenomenon as a medical issue, placing it under the scope of the public health system (Hough, 2001; Hughes, 2010).

The next section of this thesis will further analyze the foundations of the decriminalizing discourse with critical lenses. While the change in the debate's scope from criminal to health terms brought valuable improvements to the field, it leaves drug policy highly conditional of crisis emergence. Most importantly, it frames drug consumption under the scope of health interventions whose ultimate goal lies in the gradual dissuasion of any substance use.

1.2 Decriminalization: a paradigm shift

Decades of traditional drug policy implementation have resulted in a series of negative side effects spread worldwide. The war on drugs has brought wicked health, social, economic, and security consequences. For instance, many studies have already evidenced the links between drug strict prohibition and the increase in the spread curve of diseases associated with intravenous substance consumption (Rhodes et al., 2006; Cohen and Wolfe, 2008; Jürgens et al., 2010) and the high rates of incarceration numbers of drug users (Wacquant. 1999; Duke, 2006; Drucker, 2011).

With prohibitionist drug policy interventions resulting, at times, in higher social costs than illicit substance consumption itself, the traditional approach for dealing with the matter proved to be not only inefficient but also a serious threat to human rights (Goldstein, 1990; Buchanan, 2000). By fitting all drug consumers into the single label of "criminals", governments end up stripping individuals in need of medical treatment from their essential right to healthcare (Barret, 2009). Ideological resistance to more sensitive drug policies also come to violate the fundamental rights of the people not consuming illicit substances. In

2016, the director of the International Centre on Human Rights and Drug Policy wrote an online article denouncing the side effects zero-tolerance approaches brings to the general society:

> "Billions of people, four-fifths of the world population, lack access to opiates for the relief of pain. These are people with cancer, late-stage AIDS, injuries from accidents, and so on […] It marks the institutionalization of a racist and colonial lack of tolerance for difference, culture, and expression that is anathema to human rights." (Barrett, 2016)

Governments in countries suffering from critical and long-dated issues connected with illicit substances use became progressively more open to innovative solutions challenging the status quo (Wodak, 2006). Most importantly, these changes seize a discretional level left available to countries by the 1961 Single Convention. Indeed, the document requires signatory nations to forbid certain substances only if governments judge their country's prevailing condition to "render it the most appropriate means of protecting the public health and welfare" (United Nations, 1961).

Decriminalization, thus, becomes justified by the need of responding to crisis contexts, in order to enlarge and guarantee health access to populations often marginalized in society, ultimately safeguarding their human rights (Barret, 2008). This political trend is often backed by the implementation of harm reduction programs deeply founded in the inalienable character of human rights. As Cohen and Wolfe wrote in 2008,

> "The link between harm reduction and human rights goes deeper than legal arguments in support of a particular set of health services. […] Where traditional drug policy relies upon detention, forced treatment, and stigmatization as a means of deterrence, harm

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reduction recognizes that engaging in illegal activities does not mean forfeiting claims to healthcare or other basic protections." (Cohen and Wolfe, 2008: p.94)

In this sense, the paradigm shift in drug policy relies on a human rights approach towards the demand side of the curve. Recognizing drug consumption less as a criminal deviating behavior and more as a public health issue, legislation change comes sustained by the aims of providing health access to a parcel of the population at critical need (Goldstein, 1990; Hunt, 2004; Barret, 2008; 2009; 2016). Thus, policy goal becomes to minimize the risks associated with individual drug consumption to those who cannot – or will not – stop using drugs, as well as the potential collective threats their consumption could bring to the broad society (Cohen and Wolfe, 2008).

Decriminalization comes linked to the creation and promotion of harm reduction interventions. These programs are based in human rights principles and consist in practices seeking to modify drug users' behaviors and surrounding conditions in an effort to prevent the risks posed by drugs to individual and collective health and safety (MacCoun, 1998; Collins et al., 2012; Soares et. al 2017). The design and implementation of harm reduction services calls for the need to categorize the different substance use patterns observed within society. In this sense, drug users become broadly divided into two groups according to their consumption behaviors: recreational and problematic users.

The next chapter of this research will further analyze the differences between these two categories of drug use. It will adopt a critical gaze towards the dichotomic classification, evidencing how such a discourse might contribute to aggravating stigmatization of users of substances perceived as "problematic" while neglecting consumers of the so-called "recreational" drugs.

2. Drug use: problem vs. recreational

According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), "problem drug use" (PDU) is classified as "injecting drug use or long duration or regular use of opioids, cocaine and/or amphetamines" (EMCDDA, 2004). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime described "problem drug users" (PDUs) as "people who engage in the high-risk consumption of drugs", such as injecting drug habits, consumption on a daily basis and/or "people diagnosed with drug use disorders (harmful use or drug dependence), based on clinical criteria [...]" (UNODC, 2018). Often taken through injections, when done in poorly sanitized conditions, PDU can become a vector to the spread of infectious diseases, such as Hepatitis B and C, HIV, and others (Weiss, 2012). As levels of purity are usually unknown, the intravenous practice also aggravates the risks associated with the consumption of substances deemed as "notably dangerous" (Degenhardt and Weier, 2017), increasing the chances of overdosing and eventual fatality rates.

Traditionally, studies aimed at investigating drug-related topics have been particularly concerned with spotting and understanding PDU patterns – in other words, those types of consumption that can unleash fatal outcomes or generate long-lasting negative effects on both individual and public spheres (Smith & Smith, 2005; Seddon, 2011). The costs and burden generated by the infection's outbreak as well as the number of hospitalization connected to drug consumption and overuse serve as a political incentive for a change in the legislation framework (Lempert, 2010). In this sense, PDU is perceived as a pathology, and those with such behavior come to be seen as ill individuals, with intervention programs aimed at helping drug users to overcome dependency (Hunt, 2004).

Thus, decriminalization and risk mitigation policies become justified by the need of intervening in PDUs, offering individuals the means for safely and gradually revert their

health condition (Sher, 2003). Such a causal relation tends to put the focus of the debate on the group of people consuming a particular list of substances, and, consequently, harm reduction programs are designed to address their needs (Lempert, 2010). For instance, injecting opioids have occupied an important place in the political agenda of decriminalizing countries, with policies focusing on the control, cleanliness, and safety of heroin users and other intravenous drug users through methadone-treatment programs (Drucker, 2013), and through the creation of injecting safe-places (Rhodes et al., 2006).

As much as the paradigm shift constitutes an advance in the way public opinion perceives drug consumption - gravitating the focus from the criminal to the health sphere - it is important to note how such a discourse might contribute to further stigmatize problem drug users (Radcliffe, 2008). Studies have already evidenced the negative perception towards PDUs among the general public and non-specialist professionals, at times posing a barrier to individuals' treatment and recovery (Nealle, 1999; 2006; Lloyd, 2013).

Most importantly, the focus on PDUs makes invisible an important population: recreational drug users. According to the last Global Drug Report released by the UNODC (2018), it is estimated that, in 2016, about 275 million people worldwide had used drugs at least once in the previous year. These numbers have been experiencing steady growth since 2008, currently accounting for 5.6% of the global population aged between 15 to 64 years old. Nevertheless, an important feature of the estimates is the existing prevalence in consumption patterns. Approximately one in nine people who use drugs suffer from dependence and other usage disorders - which means that about 89% of drug consumers worldwide can be classified as recreative drug users.

Rather than motivated by chemical dependency, recreational drug use happens for enjoyment or leisure purposes (Parker et. al., 1999; 2002; Smith & Smith, 2005; Hunt 2004; 2007). The range of substances consumed constitutes a broad list, encompassing

psychotropics classified as stimulants – such as cocaine, "crack" cocaine, amphetamines, and methamphetamine – relaxants – i.e. ketamine and poppers - and hallucinogens – such LSD, peyote, psilocybin, and MDMA (Ecstasy) (Stetina, 2008; Uosukainen et al., 2015; Soares, Carvalho, Valbom et. al. 2017). In essence, any psychotropic substance can be used for recreational purposes.

The usage techniques are also diverse, as substances can be inhaled, smoked, or consumed via oral or anal routes (IDPC, 2020). Although these administration methods might not bring the same risk implications than intravenous practice, the impact and consequences of recreational drug use should not be undermined. A report by EMCDDA (Fletcher et. al., 2011) developed a comprehensive study about the direct consequences and risks of recreational drug use, particularly among the youth population. The findings highlight the physical and mental side-effects of occasional or recreational drug consumption, ranging from depression and paranoia to cardio and respiratory problems. The indirect outcomes of the behavior are also of crucial importance, including accidental injuries, self-inflicted injuries, suicide, unsafe sex practices, driving under psychotropics influence, among others (Soares, Carvalho, Valbom, and Rodrigues, 2017).

However, recreational drug use has traditionally occupied a modest space in national harm reduction guidelines. Even though it represents a significant, broad and complex share of the global psychotropics' demand, resources to implement harm reduction practices addressing the matter are usually scarce or simply do not exist (Silva, 2005). Thus, decriminalization comes to liberate occasional and recreative substance consumption, but with the focus disproportionally oriented to PDUs, the pattern is often poorly supported in the national strategy for drug's risk mitigation.

Moreover, research in public policy have, for years, overlooked the category, failing to fully understand the many aspects involved in the behavior. "Recreational drug use"

becomes an umbrella term for a too broad list of practices, cultural aspects, population groups, and substances. For instance, some studies have pointed the links between socio-economic background and the recreational use of substances such as cocaine, MDMA (Ecstasy), and heroin (Barton, 2003; Duff, 2009; Caiata-Zufferey, 2012). Others have sought to evidence the higher propensity for occasional using drugs among individuals attending cultural environments – i.e. music festival attendees' (Hoegeberg, 2018), and nightclub patrons (Keough, 1999; LeBeouf, 2014; Sañudo, 2015). Sexual orientation has also been pointed out as an important variable linking drug use, type of substance consumed, and risky behavior (Corliss, 2010; Lanfear, 2013). In all of these studies, however, the defining terms of recreational use seem to differ in quantities, periodicity, purpose, environment, as well as nature and effect of psychotropic (natural vs. synthetic; stimulant, relaxant, or hallucinogens).

In the attempt of depicting such a complex and diverse sample, a great share of studies on recreational drug consumption has sought to identify the most significant group engaging in the practice and the contexts in which they do it. These studies indicate a strong link between recreative drug use and the environment where the consumption is made (Hunt et. al., 2007; Mey et. al., 2018). These studies have often served to corroborate the idea that certain parcels of the population are more prone to become recreative drug consumers, thus justifying the need for interventions focused on the "hot spots" attended by the group. In this sense, the behavior of young people towards recreational substance consumption becomes a concern among academics and policymakers, with youth often classified as a group involved in "risky activities" (Parker, 1999; 2005; Hunt et. al, 2007; Fletcher et. al., 2011). Policies aimed at addressing the phenomena of drug consumption among youth are also justified by the need of intervening at the early stages of the behavior to prevent first drug use and/or the development of problematic drug consumption (Fletcher et. al., 2011).

Portrayed as inherently negative, studies on substance use among youth commonly fail to understand how the phenomenon appears to young people themselves (Paglia and Room, 1999). Although efforts have been made in the field of social sciences to understand young people's experiential relation and knowledge associated to substance consumption (Parker, 2005; Hunt et. al, 2007; Kavanaugh and Anderson, 2008; Hunt et. al, 2010; Mountian, 2013), much of the prevention literature assumes that young people are ill-informed and fail to fully understand the harmful consequences of drug use (Bukoski, 1991). Thus, youth comes to be an often-neglected stakeholder in the policymaking process.

In the drug field, in-depth investigations of cultural expressions associated to substance consumption are often given a second-class position, as it seems to exist a preference for quantitative studies over qualitative ones (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). As any other research areas, studies depend on the acquisition of financial support, which might contribute to the pression for adopting a problem-issue/problem-solving approach. As a consequence, public policy studies on youthful drug consumption are often framed under the scope of a social problem or public health paradigm, failing to recognize how the phenomenon, rather than occurring within a social vacuum, is deeply connected to the framework of how young people understand and relate with leisure activities, identity and social relations (Hunt et. al., 2010).

The next section of this thesis will analyze the existing literature on recreational drug consumption and events organized and attended by the youth population. It will focus particularly on nightlife and raves compressed under the scope of techno and house music. The chapter will investigate how, historically, these movements have represented more than just a site for risks and pleasures, becoming, at times charged with political nuances. Most importantly, it will shed a light on how they come to develop a fundamental role in the enlargement of health access to the overlooked category of recreational drug users.

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3. Rave scenes, youth and recreational drug use

The previous chapter of this thesis evidenced how the study of the multidimensional phenomenon of drug consumption is greatly focused on the pathologic features and consequences of the matter. The existing efforts to produce quantifiable data tend to put less emphasis on comprehending the social aspects surrounding the topic, and although researchers have found certain substances are taken by specific groups in the context of particular environments, they fail to explain how and why such a thing happen.

Other areas, however, have already dedicated valuable qualitative researches on exploring the topic of rave scenes, club/dance music, and youth culture with broader lenses. There are remarkable studies on the field of social sciences, anthropology, and cultural expressions about the phenomenon, particularly among UK and US scholars. A significant share of these studies has investigated the heyday of rave/dance movement, in the context of Great Britain, in the early 1990s (Redhead 1990; 1997; Thornton, 1999; Malbon, 1999; Measham et. al., 2001, Pini, 2001). These investigations have successfully analyzed the context's specificities while also shedding a light into how youth perceive themselves, relate to electronic music dance events, and approach recreational drug consumption.

To understand the interactions between recreational drug use, youthful cultures, and rave scenes it is necessary to understand the concepts and origins of such movement. While there are particularities between the scenes placed in different contexts, raves and dance events usually consist on spaces designed to maximize the sonorous experience of music composed by electronic elements, where youngsters get together to dance, socially interact and/or view the main musical attraction – the DJs (Ferreira 2008; 2017). Although electronic music dance and parties are generally attributed to youth expressions in Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the origins of the genre and the incorporation of illegal substances to

enhance individuals' relational experiences with the rhythm comes from the US context (Hunt et. al., 2010).

According to Wilson (2006), the rave scene has its foundations in four related movements. The first one took place in New York, in the 1970s. Dance events were organized and attended particularly by gay African Americans in the city's downtown. The second movement dates back to Chicago, where house-music was initially developed in the late 1970s. Around the same period, we observe the third movement that contributed to the development of rave scenes. The Detroit "techno" sound was led by DJs influenced by the electronic and futuristic sound of European Pop and New Wave trends. Lastly, the fourth movement to influence contemporary rave scenes has its roots in the cultural exchanges of nightlife patterns between Ibiza and the UK. Such a movement eventually gave rise to the increase in the popularity of rave scenes among youngsters across Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In all of these movements, the recreational consumption of drugs could be observed. However, it is interesting to note how the differences in the scenes' music genre, style, and context led not only to a division of music taste among these event's attendees, but also variations on the substances consumed by them. While the audience in Chicago - who tended to be older – was keener to use acid and MDA, in Detroit the audience tended to use cheaper drugs which induced maximum energy, such as PCP (Wilson 2006). As social and anthropological researchers Geoffrey Hunt, Molly Moloney, and Kristin Evans pointed out, "[t]he identification of different drugs with different musical styles was to become a significant feature of the contemporary fragmentation of the rave and club scene" (Hunt et. al., 2010).

Historically, these events have raised from social struggles and dynamics, and, at times, assumed a political tone. In New York, the movement was of particular importance in the

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promotion of leisure spaces for the community of gay African American man, often marginalized from other sites in the city (Wilson, 2006). In the UK, raves can be linked to the economic endeavors faced by youngsters frustrated at the austerity policies that characterized the Margaret Thatcher's administration (Easton, 2014).

Not rarely, these movements have been stigmatized and directly targeted by security strategies. In the UK, The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act approved in 1994 brought a series of changes to the law that ultimately reduced existing rights, retrained unlicensed rave parties, and predicted greater penalties for some types of "anti-social" behavior. The specificity of the act was remarkable, prohibiting public performances of music "wholly or predominantly characterized by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats" (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1994 c.33). The legislation change attracted widespread criticism among youth and the music scene, unleashing a series of protests opposing the document.

Overall, stigmatization and criminalization in certain time periods have forced rave scenes and dance music parties to go underground, becoming increasingly hidden – and so did their audiences. Perceived as spaces incentivizing the engagement of youth with risky behavior, such as the recreative use of drugs, these events are often interpreted as problematic environments. Indeed, the link between rave scenes and drug consumption became widespread and accepted, with a list of substances classified as "club drugs" (Arria, Yacoubian, Fost, & Wish, 2002; Stetina et. al., 2008; Duff et. al., 2009; Kurtz et. al., 2017). The list usually includes MDMA (Ecstasy), Cocaine and Amphetamine, stimulant substances maximizing clubbers' levels of energy, to allow improved performance and resistance throughout the night (Mey et. al., 2018).

Some remarkable studies have attempted to understand how the phenomenon is perceived through the lenses of young people. The "normalization thesis" brought some important qualitative highlights on the elements influencing youngsters' relation with

leisure, drug use, self-control and the meanings of risk and pleasure (Parker et. al., 1998;
2002; Shinner and Newburn, 1999; Blackman, 2004; Measham, 2004b; Hammersley 2005,
Hunt et. al., 2010). Among important contributions, the identification of the importance of
lay knowledge and the role of friends as consumption advisors deserve to be underlined.

Today, rave dance music is "the largest, most dynamic, and longest-lasting youth
subculture or counterculture of the postwar era" (D. Martin 1999: 77). Currently, the scene
seems to be living another boom. In the past years, techno/electronic events have globally
gained a rise in popularity among young people, and raving/clubbing has become a common
leisure activity for youth living in cities around the world. Some authors have already argued
that the new rave/club heyday has also modified the traditional political vein of the
movement (Carrington and Wilson, 2004; Hunt et. al. 2010). With nightlife entrepreneurs
seizing the trend to make profits, there appears to have a broad range of mainstream events
being organized under the framework of the varied genres of electronic music. Raves and
clubs - born to allow leisure spaces for a predominantly subcultural, disenfranchised, poor,
or underprivileged audience - increasingly banned the original audience to become a
recreational space for the average middle class, white, and heterosexual youth (Hunt et. al.,
2010; Ferreira, 2017)

Although the statement holds some truth, this thesis would disagree that the case is
extendable as a general rule. Instead, it argues that while there are innumerous examples of
clubs, festivals, and parties whose purpose orbits mainly around financial income, there is
also a growing list of movements arising in a multitude of contexts, opposition to this wave,
and reclaiming the roots of the rave scene. Particularly in great urban centers, these groups
appear denouncing the speculative activities behind mainstream nightlife economy and the
often-prejudicial door-policies these spaces will adopt when controlling audience access to
the events. Thus, more than just parties, these events seem to promote the creation of

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welcoming spaces and safer environments for the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of risks associated with drug use at the same time as offering a room for resistance, where ideas, experiences, and voice is given to youth.

The inability to perceive the differences between the trends behind the contemporary cultural expressions under the scope of electronic music dance scenes undermines the full comprehension of the phenomenon of youthful recreational drug use. Most importantly, although remarkable improvements were made towards understanding youngsters' rationale when consuming psychotropics, there are still few studies that attempted to see the topic under the specific scope of rave scene promoters and organizers. Ultimately, party organizers are overlooked, and not included in the analyzes as rational and active stakeholders, undermining researchers' ability to recognize the existing local, national, and international networks created by young people for addressing matters connected to recreational drug use in the rave scene.

4. Methodology

This research proposes to analyze the topic of recreational substance use, health prevention, and harm reduction through the lenses of event organizers in this new wave of rave scenes. Emerging from an eagerness to promote accessible and safe spaces where youth could gather moved by the common interest in music, and by the feeling of embracing and belonging to a community (Room, 2015), these events are charged with political nuances, becoming active political actors within their local contexts. The research focused on the case study of Mina, a music collective organizing raves and other events in Portugal. The study sought to investigate how the movement perceives the topic of youthful recreational drug use and what actions are taken by event organizers to deal with the risks associated with the phenomenon.

To achieve such a goal, in-depth qualitative interviews with Mina organizers were conducted. Public officials from local administration and NGOs agents working with harm reduction programs were also approached according to their relevance and relation with Mina. It is important to note that the interviews were semi-structured, based on open-ended questions and conducted in the local language – Portuguese – as an effort to collect high quality and detailed material. Participants were kept anonymous in the case such a status was requested. Interviews lasted an average of 1hour and 30 minutes, with members of Mina being approached on several occasions.

In an attempt of better understanding the cultural expression, participant observation in events organized by Mina was also made. These events ranged from outdoor raves and club parties to webinars and workshops. Media monitoring of the movement's online activities was also applied. For such, Mina's profile on social platforms, such as Instagram and

Facebook, was followed up, as well as publications made by or associated with the group in other partner's profiles.

Digital presence became of crucial importance in this research due to unforeseen global events. The year 2020 was marked by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a direct impact on Mina's activities and also on the research application stages of this study. However, more than an obstacle, the pandemic proved to be a valuable opportunity of assessing the importance of the group in the context of harm reduction. In this sense, the research also investigated the COVID-19's impact on the group, and the behaviors and measures adopted by Mina during the pandemic. For such, the movement's cooperation with the investigation was pivotal, with researchers being given access to online groups created by the movement in an attempt to keep in touch with their patrons during the extraordinary times.

The next chapter of this thesis will introduce the case study, providing more context on the Portuguese legal background, a brief description of the COVID-19 evolution in the country, as well as a historical narrative of Mina's origin and development. It will identify the activities organized by the group and the partnerships it has made with local harm reduction organizations and other rave scene movements operating in different contexts in the world. The results of the research will be followed by a critical discussion of the key findings. Lastly, the conclusion will summarize the lessons learned and the reasons for building strong cooperative relations between the youth nightlife movement, local NGOs and public administration.

5. Case study presentation

5.1 About Mina

In its webpage, Mina describes itself as "a queer trans-feminist sex-positive rave focused on techno"[1]. Like other similar groups worldwide, the movement's history is a story of friendship, experimentalism, and subversion. Born out of a cooperation between the DJs marum, Violet, Photonz and VIEGAS – all established members within the Lisbon electronic music scene – the group started to organize its first parties in the Portuguese capital in 2017. The events did not happen without a defined focus. Indeed, from its genesis, Mina's agenda proposed a space bringing together producers and ravers aiming to "catalyze alternative experiences in the clubbing scene while promoting an important debate on clubbing, music and community politics" (Mina, 2020).

Within one year, the group obtained remarkable popularity among the Portuguese underground youth. Today, events organized by Mina can gather up to 1,000 attendees – a notable number for a city of nearly 500,000 inhabitants, from which 39,209 aged between 20 and 29 years old (Instituto Nacional de Estatística Portugal, 2019). Events have spread to different regions in the country, receiving invitations to festivals and parties from North to South. Mina's quick success came to be recognized also by international platforms bringing together underground rave scene enthusiasts as well as artistic and activist queer movements. Currently, the group is a reference among promoters and rave organizers and has featured

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[1] *About Mina*. Mina, 2020. Available in: <http://www.minasuspension.com/about.html>. Accessed in: June 5th, 2020.

in several events, festivals, news, films, exhibitions, and streaming platforms focusing on youth and queer cultural expressions worldwide.

It is important to recognize the role the group had for the Portuguese youth, in particular for those belonging to often stigmatized groups. Since 2010, Portugal has been experiencing a boom in tourism, attracting the eyes of foreign investors (Villalobos, 2018). Since then, the country has been betting in an economic model focusing on market liberalization to attract an influx of foreign money. The strategy brought an unfortunate consequence for the local population. Between 2016 and 2018 the property prices in central Lisbon have raised about 30 percent, while the monthly average wage remained roughly €850 (Minder, 2018). In such a context, nightlife became a space predominantly designed for foreigners' leisure. With entrance fees and prices incompatible to the Portuguese youth financial limitations and, at times, prejudiced door-policies – Lisbon's clubs became aimed at making a profit out of wealth, white and heterosexual audiences.

Subverting to such a trend, Mina was born in a "spirit of radical acceptance" (Mina, 2020). It aimed to create a space welcoming of all populations, but particularly mindful of the safety and wellbeing of those groups traditionally excluded from the mainstream society: queer, trans, and black people. The collective has grown to become a notable name in the Lisbon underground clubbing scene, fighting actively for "sexual and gender liberation in the electronic music culture" (Mina, 2020). Today, Mina is an umbrella movement serving as a solidarity and support platform for the birth of other initiatives developing projects focused on more specific political agendas. It seeks to diversify not only the attending audience but also the artists and professionals working in the scene. In this sense, affirmative policies are introduced in the events' organization, offering a space for stigmatized groups to project their voices and work.

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Going beyond pure leisure, Mina's activities range from parties and raves to workshops and community work. Throughout the years, the movement developed different branches and parallel projects, designed to deal with a broad range of topics and activities. Currently, the group has evolved to become the comprehensive movement intitled Mina/Suspension. While Mina is responsible for organizing the parties and establishing the safety and clubbing "etiquette", Suspension is a curatorial platform, integrating performances, live acts, debates, informative sessions, and workshops with the community.

The topic of drug consumption has always been present and emphasized in the movements' work. Indeed, from the beginning, Mina's parties adopted a series of policies aiming to minimize the risks associated with recreative drug use and provide assistance to attendee's experiencing adverse side-effects from the substances. Drug use is not prohibited in the events; Instead, the organization focuses on spreading awareness and advice regarding psychotropics consumption, aiming to ensure safeness and improve the audience's experience. For instance, info-points are set in all events providing aid to the public, as well as food, condoms, lube, and earplugs. Currently, Harm reduction strategies and NGO partnerships are debated within the scope of Suspension, while implemented by Mina.

An important aspect of Mina's parties is noteworthy - these cannot be classified as legal events. Strict regulation on spaces conditions, minimum required standards, administrative fees, and normative procedures were never followed by the collective. Instead, the group seized an administrative loophole to throw their events. In an Interview with Marum, one of Mina's founders, the DJ explains:

"You see, nothing we were doing could be classified as legal. Technically, our parties are illegal events. The mechanism we found to allow them to happen was organizing the events as private parties. It was easy to do at the beginning, since our first parties were small, with fewer

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people. But as we became bigger and more known, our "private" parties would end up with a guest list with up to 800, 900 people... Fortunately, we never had any problems." (Marum, 2020)

Although the feature of the events could open room for legal controversies, Mina never had to face police force or administration backlash, as their events were never targets of law enforcement operations. For Marum, this is linked with the reputation the collective built from the beginning:

> "Police force already showed up in the events, and they know who we are and what is happening there, but the focus of the Portuguese police is different... And we have always had the support of spaces' owners. From the beginning, our events became known for not bringing any trouble. We never had cases of overdoses, collapsing, or deaths – neither from drugs nor from alcohol; violence and fights also never happened; we are careful to ask our audience to be respectful to the neighborhood; once the events are done, we don't leave rubbish behind... I think all of this contributed to protecting our events from police and administrative retaliation." (Marum, 2020)

The relationship just described is remarkable, as it contradicts the traditional perception of youth as a reckless, "spectacular" and "melodramatic" group (Miles 2000; Ettorre and Miles 2002). However, it is important to note how such a picture would be hard to reach in a different political and normative environment. To understand Mina's development, activities, and its importance it is fundamental to analyze the movement in light of the context where it is located. Portugal is a pioneering country in drug decriminalization, currently representing a global model of best practices in psychotropics regulation. The Portuguese drug policy adopts a public health approach to the phenomenon of substance consumption, with the focus particularly centered on PDU.

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The next section of this thesis will introduce the Portuguese framework. It will argue that, while 20 years of paradigm shift has at the one hand opened the necessary space to allow Mina's critical work, on the other hand, an important policy gap regarding harm reduction initiatives was left. With decriminalization oriented by the public health/pathological approach, the national guideline addressing the phenomenon of drug consumption is heavily focused on PDU, undermining efforts to properly design and implement risk mitigation strategies to respond to the needs of recreational drug users.

5.2 The Portuguese Model: a new approach to drug policy

It is challenging to talk about innovation in the drug policy field without mentioning the successful outcomes of the Portuguese model. The country struggled with a severe injectable psychoactive crisis during the late 1980s and 1990s, with years of prohibitionist responses and zero-tolerance policing resulting in severe social and public health consequences. In 1999, at the peak of the crisis, drug-induced deaths in Portugal summed 350 cases, while HIV infections were spreading quickly, with 1,482 new cases only in the 2000s (Loo, Van Beusekom, and Kahan, 2002). The country performed with the highest rate of drug-related HIV cases of the European Union, and the second-highest number of HIV prevalence among injecting drug users (EMCDDA, 2000).

In the meantime, drug-related crime became the new normal. Drug consumption, purchase, cultivation, and possession were regulated under the Portuguese Criminal law and considered as offenses punishable by fine or imprisonment of up to one year in confinement (Decree-Law No. 15/93, Article 40(1)). As a result, drug offenses tripled between 1990 and 1999, achieving an all-time high in the 2000s, with a total of 14,726 individuals arrested over drug-related charges (IPDT, 2000).

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Drugs demand, nevertheless, continued to surge. While in 1990 the number of recorded incidences of treatment for drug use remained in 56,438 cases, in 1999 the number had increased fivefold, achieving a total of 288,038 cases (SPTT 1999). With the statistics consistently evidencing the aggravation of the picture, the Portuguese government entered the new millennium recognizing the failure of the traditional drug policy approach. In 2001, contradicting international trends, the country decided to adopt a new model for addressing the crisis. The paradigm shift was framed as "a humanistic, pragmatic, and health-oriented approach explicitly recognizing the addict as a sick person rather than a criminal and acknowledging the inefficacy of criminal sanctioning in reducing drug use" (PORTUGAL, 1999a; EMCDDA, 2012; quoted from Lacquer, 2015).

Currently, the acquisition, possession, and use of small quantities of all psychoactive substances are decriminalized in Portugal. The change allowed for the creation of a robust system for data collection and measuring indicators, which ultimately guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of harm reduction services in the country. The Portuguese drug policy is aimed at addressing the drug consumption phenomenon through network management, with interventions focused on prevention, treatment, harm reduction, social reinsertion, and consumption dissuasion (SICAD, 2020).

Harm reduction services have become an integrated part of the Portuguese public health system, with the activities of NGOs being crucial for the provision of healthcare in the country (EMCDDA, 2017). The Risk Reduction and Harm Minimization policies were legally reinforced in 2001, with the approval of regulation supporting the creation of socio-health teams, support offices, opiate replacement programs with low threshold requirements, reception centers and shelters, as well as the inclusion of outreach teams and information points (CDT, 2001).

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Hence, decriminalization was implemented through the consolidation of a public network of supporting harm reduction services at a national level, aimed at addressing the needs of individuals with problematic patterns of drug consumption. Governance and implementation of such programs happen within the framework of the Operational Plan for Integrated Responses (PORI), managed by the General-Directorate for Intervention on Addictive Behaviors and Dependencies (SICAD, in Portuguese) – a branch of the Health Minister. The plan is a leading instrument, instructing interventions on drug consumption and dependence with evidence-based approaches.

Almost twenty years after the reform, the results achieved by the Portuguese model are remarkable. Drug-induced deaths decreased almost elevenfold, dropping from 350 in 1999 to 38 in 2017, while newly diagnosed HIV cases among people who inject drugs dropped from 1,482 in 2000 to only 18 new cases in 2017 (EMCDDA, 2019). These numbers perform among the lowest rates observed in the European region.

However, a closer look into the Portuguese harm reduction agenda reveals an important aspect of the country's drug policy: an almost exclusive focus on problem drug use. Created to respond to the injecting opioids crisis, the decriminalization legal foundation is based upon the pathologic perception of substance consumption. The national strategy, thus, aims to provide health programs to individuals with problematic patterns of drug consumption, offering them the necessary treatment to overcome dependence (Soares, Carvalho, Valbom, Rodrigues, 2017). Such a discourse brings important implications for recreational drug users, as the focus on PDU does not leave room for the analysis and design of proper interventions aimed at addressing the needs of other patterns of substance consumption. Consequently, recreational environments in Portugal are almost absent from adequate actions on harm reduction (Silva, 2005; Soares, Carvalho, Valbom, Rodrigues, 2017).

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Several reasons support the importance of expanding the scope of harm reduction programs in Portugal beyond the PDU focus, but before introducing this debate it is important to place this study in light of the global events unfolding as this thesis is being written. The year 2020 was marked by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, which quickly spread around the world. In less than 6 months, the pandemic infected more than 7 million people, resulting in about 400,000 fatalities[2]. The health crisis has put two-thirds of the world under lockdown, with several governments declaring a state of emergency and issuing restrictions on business operations and social activities (WHO, 2020). Borders were closed, offices moved to remote working, and events were canceled. The circumstances brought substantial impacts to all sectors and aspects of human life, posing important challenges to the harm reduction field and the existence of the youth movements described in this research. The next section of this thesis will expose the consequences COVID-19 unleashed in the Portuguese context, but, most importantly, it will investigate how the crisis is being felt by Mina, and how the collective is responding to the extraordinary events.

5.3 The COVID-19 crisis

The first cases of coronavirus in Portugal were confirmed at the beginning of March 2020 (General Directory of Health in Portugal DGS, 2020). Despite the geographic proximity to Spain – one of the most impacted countries in the European region – Portugal is a remarkable example of good practices and crisis management (Ames, 2020). The adoption of lockdown

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[2] Numbers according to the online platform Worldometer, with data reflecting the statistics released on June 9th, 2020.

measures from a very early stage prevented the virus spread and allowed the Portuguese public health system to address the cases in need of hospitalization without overburning.

The state of emergency was declared in the country on March 18th (Presidential Decree 14-A/2020 of March 18th, 2020). Airports were shut down and citizens were asked to remain confined in their councils of residence. Social gatherings of more than 5 people were prohibited, non-essential businesses and activities were closed, and pedestrian transit in public spaces was limited. The provision was revaluated and renewed every 15 days. The government's quick measures accompanied by one of the highest rates of COVID-19 testing in Europe allowed for efficient and effective crisis management, which ultimately enabled the government to lift lockdown restrictions relatively sooner than other countries in the region (CSSE at Johns Hopkins University, 2020).

The impacts of the crisis, however, are expected to be felt for longer in some sectors of the country. The lifting of restrictions on leisure activities gathering a big audience is still a distant reality, with nightlife events, festivals, and clubs facing an uncertain future ahead. In such a context, a core activity in Mina's agenda became hindered. In a world of social distancing, the organization of parties and raves carries a harmful potential to public health. On March 27th, Mina was to celebrate its third anniversary throwing a big party with over 1,000 confirmations on the event's page on Facebook. On March 13th, the event was canceled by the organization and a note was issued:

> "As a preventive measure to help contain the spread of COVID-19, we are canceling our next event which would celebrate our 3rd anniversary. [...] We were excited about this event and the love could be felt from the very moment we launched it. Yet, it is our responsibility to make sure we take all the possible prophylactic measures to combat the rapid spread of the virus and that includes avoiding at all costs big gatherings of people [...]" (Mina, 2020)

It is important to observe how the decision was made before the implementation of any official measure by the Portuguese public administration. Indeed, the first death from COVID-19 was confirmed in the country on March 16th, three days after Mina's decision, while the first presidential public speech on the topic was given on the 15th of that month.

Parties were an important part of the collective operations, as it enabled a direct contact and interventions with the audience. But these events were also an important element enabling the financial sustaining of the community members. In the interviews with Mina organizers, they explained how a great number of party attendees and contributors found in the events space for promoting and making a living out of their work.

> "Mina became this bigger and renowned platform ultimately opening the scene for the introduction of people who traditionally suffered to find a job in the 'conventional' world. It is hard to enter the mainstream job market being a trans person or having a specific appearance. Through us, these people got to be known by other clubs and nightlife events, allowing them to become financially emancipated. But there is still a long way to go, as this continues to be informal work, there is hardly ever a contract. For example, now with no parties, a lot of people had their incomes compromised […]". (Mina Crew, 2020)

Besides the economic downturn, the lockdown has also brought important changes to the drug market. With borders limitations and governments' emergency state, routes used for supplying the European demand for psychotropics were shut down. Most of the chemicals victualling the synthetic narcotics market in the region are shipped from China, while cocaine paste is shipped from Latin America. In an interview with a Harm Reduction agent

from the Portuguese NGO Kosmicare, she explains the impacts of the pandemic on the drug markets:

> "One thing we are anticipating is the alteration of drug markets due to lockdown measures. With borders closed, many substances will no longer be available or easily accessible, which will change the composition patterns of psychotropics. We believe the tendency is that substances are likely to become more adulterated, which can bring harmful consequences to all kinds of individual drug consumption." (Kosmicare 1, 2020)

It is important to note that although decriminalization made drug consumption an administrative rather than a criminal offense, drug cultivation remains criminally prohibited, even in cases for personal consumption purposes[3]. This predisposition brings critical implications, as it ultimately imposes drug consumers must rely on the illicit market to obtain substances (Laqueur, 2015). In other words, the decriminalization of only the demand side disables quality controls over the substances being consumed, leaving drug users vulnerable to lawless commerce.

At the same time, lockdown and social distancing can lead to changes in individuals' behaviors, unfolding severe consequences. In terms of substance consumption, isolating measures to prevent the COVID-19 spread has confined individuals to their homes, modifying leisure patterns and how they engage in social interactions. In the impossibility of throwing physical events, it seems that raves have gone online with a wave of live broadcasts coming to fulfill the leisure and social needs of youth. For instance, the streaming

[3] The Portuguese law states: "Article 40, save with regard to cultivation, and Article 41 of Decree- Law no. 15/93, of 22 January, are hereby repealed" (Decree-Law 30/2000, November 29, 2000).

platform Club Quarantäne was created with the proposal of offering a virtual nightclub throwing events on weekends. The website emulates an underground nightclub experience: there is a cue to enter the streaming session; the audience can create avatars, move around the different rooms of the club and interact with other spectators; there is a dance floor where many big names of the electronic music scene are invited to play, streaming directly from their houses. Interestingly, the virtual nightclub has also restrooms, where the audience goes and engages in social interactions and even recreational drug use. A worker at NGO Kosmicare shared her experience in one of these events:

> "This Saturday I attended one of these streaming parties and the experience was overall very interesting. Although the audience is physically not in the same environment, all the dynamics of a regular party are maintained. You see on the screen a DJ playing music, there is a live chat where people can talk, and there is even drug consumption. In the chat, people talk about drugs and synchronize use – each one from their own home. […] I have seen people coordinating the consumption of Ketamine and even MDMA and Ecstasy, which is remarkable, as we believed such substances – energy boosters – were going to decrease in consumption without the traditional spaces and situations in which they are taken." (Kosmicare 2, 2020)

The recognition of the harmful potential of recreational drug consumption and the introduction of the behavior in the priority list of the Portuguese drug policy was already a complex debate. The COVID-19 pandemic brought important game-changers to the policy table. The next chapter of this thesis will discuss the reasons why Portuguese authorities should work to include Mina as a stakeholder in the research and design process of novel harm reduction programs targeting recreational drug users. It will shed a light on the outcomes the crisis can unleash, as well as evaluate past partnerships and interventions in

which Mina has engage with and that could be adapted or brought closer to the public
administration scope.

6. Results and discussion: why should public administration care?

The latest available data on drug consumption patterns in Portugal reveal that cannabis is the substance most frequently used in the country, followed by MDMA/Ecstasy and cocaine (SICAD, 2019). Currently, the use of narcotics is more common among young adults (aged 15-34 years old). Two important aspects evidenced by the data are noteworthy. Firstly, according to the National Institute of Forensic Medicine, from the 307 deaths with the presence of illicit substances that happened in the country in 2018, 49 were considered to be cases of overdose. In 92% of these, more than one substance was detected, mainly involving the presence of cocaine, amphetamine-type stimulants, and alcohol. Secondly, regarding the other 258 deaths with the presence of drugs, they were mainly attributed to natural death (42%), accidents (38%), and suicide (14%).

The data reveals an important trend in the drug-related fatalities in Portugal: they carry the features of non-problematic substance use. Poly-drug usage is a dangerous trend associated with recreative substance consumption and often related to clubs, parties, and raves contexts. The lack of knowledge on the composition of narcotics circulating in the market and the appearance of novel psychoactive substances turn the behavior into a lethal and hard-to-intervein issue. Mina's founder Marum describes how the phenomenon was observed in the events organized by the group:

> "Yes, new substances appeared. But most importantly, this pluralization of the narcotic market brings a more dangerous phenomenon which is polydrug usage. The people are not taking only one pill or snorting one line. They mix it all: pills, coke, poppers, G, alcohol. […] These new substances inevitably give origin to gray areas in the medical field. They are constantly appearing, and studies cannot keep up with the rhythm,

in large due to the persistent criminalization we observe around the world. We already know little about illicit substances, but when it comes to the modifications they suffer in the market, or even about new substances… we don't know a thing. I think this makes it even harder to understand the outcomes polydrug use can have, and that is why it becomes so dangerous. We don't know what it can unleash." (Marum, 2020)

He continues by telling the example of GHB, recently introduced in the Portuguese club scene:

"For example, usually GHB comes associated with the consumption of alcohol and others 'downers' that overloads the liver. This was something we observed in the parties. In the first Mina events, we hadn't yet seen GHB use. But people are constantly experimenting with new stuff, traveling around the world. New people arrive, coming from other contexts, where other substances are used, and they translate these different patterns and substances into the scene." (Marum, 2020)

With the changes in drug levels of adulteration and leisure activities, recreative drug use can unleash harmful impacts on a consumption pattern often neglected by Portuguese drug policy. An agent from Kosmicare explains:

"We are observing important changes in the patterns of recreational drug consumption. A behavior that used to take place in social contexts such as parties, festivals, events has now moved to isolated environments. That is, drugs that were usually consumed among other people, are now being taken alone, where the traditional harm reduction interventions cannot reach in case of medical complications." (Kosmicare 1, 2020)

Delivering harm reduction services to recreative drug users is a challenging operation, as most of these consumers do not experience addiction in the conventional way (Cousto, 1999). Not perceiving their behavior as a problem, this population do not seek treatment or help (Stetina et. al, 2008). In such a context, it is imperative to rethink the terms traditionally used in drug policy debates. In the interview with Mina organizers they explain:

> "I think the Portuguese drug policy is focused only on the pathologic aspect of drug consumption, and because of that, it ends up viewing drug users only as people with a problem. So, they think everyone wants treatment, failing to understand that some people are not necessarily looking for help. Some people just want to experiment with substances or enjoy the outcomes drug use can enable not only in terms of pleasure but also in terms of self-awareness, trauma overcome, individual growth […]" (Mina Crew, 2020)

While parties were allowed, interventions for preventing harmful outcomes associated with recreational drug use had a channel for reaching consumers. In the Portuguese context, even if programs had their scope limited by legislation and budget constraints, NGOs could still pair with festivals and events' organizers for developing alternative solutions. For instance, drug checking services recently started to be provided in the two main Portuguese urban centers – Lisbon and Porto. The project, submitted by the NGO Kosmicare, had public funding approved by the central administrative body (SICAD) and launched operations at the beginning of 2019. The program allows individuals to anonymously check-in substances to be chemically tested by NGO workers, with results released in 24 hours (Kosmicare, 2020).

Nevertheless, due to legal restrictions, the program cannot offer on-site drug testing. Although not framed as a criminal offense, drug consumption remains an administrative infraction according to the Portuguese legislation. In this sense, processes can be either

charged with noncriminal sanctions [4] – such as a warning, monetary fines, or, in most extreme cases, the loss of the driver's license – or adequate medical treatment – subject to the individuals' consent (Fernandes, 2009). Hence, the capacity of providing an important service for mitigating the risks associated with recreational drug use becomes impractical in the contexts where the practice takes place.

With the impossibility of directly reaching recreational drug users in the leisure events they attend, Kosmicare opted for an alternative solution. Reaching for events' organizers, the NGO established a partnership with Mina. Having direct access to its audience, the group began to advertise the drug checking service in all of its platforms and the Facebook events created for their parties. Kosmicare, then, started to set especial drop-in schedules, seeking to receive substances and release the results from the tests before Mina's events. Besides providing important information for the safety of drug users, the program allows the collection of reliable data on drug supply trends, providing evidence on substance's composition. The knowledge on purity levels enables harm reduction programs to anticipate potential health impacts on the drug consuming population, designing, thus, suitable preventive measures.

The partnership between Mina and Kosmicare grew into an important part of the collective's work, becoming a permanent project in the scope of Suspension. With the successful results, Mina was included in another important initiative between Kosmicare

[4] Police force continues to serve as the primary source of detection and referral, responsible for bringing individuals found using or in possession of drugs - below the legal threshold - before one of the district-level Commissions for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction (CDTs) (SICAD, 2020). The CDTs are responsible for analyzing each case individually, to assess the most appropriate measure to be taken.

and the local administration of Lisbon. In the past years, chemsex has become a popular phenomenon among men who have sex with men (MSM). The practice consists of sexual relations combined with the use of multiple drugs, including crystal methamphetamine, mephedrone, and/or GHB/GBL, before or during sex (Reenan, 2020). To minimize the harmful impacts associated with the behavior, the Lisbon City Hall paired with Kosmicare and other grassroots movements for the creation and delivery of an online course aimed at educating and equipping people with important information regarding the practice. In an interview with Ricardo Fuertes, a city official, he explains the importance of youth nightlife movements to the project:

> "The night scene is becoming increasingly dynamic and, from a personal point of view, I find it to be an interesting movement. I know there are important groups working in the Lisbon nightlife to address the needs of the young population. Although a direct and official partnership with public administration was not set, these groups have been important for talks and discussions happening in the scope of Kosmicare, and they bring insights on how we could improve harm reduction programs." (Ricardo Fuertes, 2020)

Bringing Mina and similar groups closer to public administration can enable promising outcomes. Beyond the valuable inputs Mina can offer from the field, the collective is also a bridge for accessing the hard to reach youth population. Since the pandemic, the group has been working to develop new strategies for their existence, and alternatives for enabling the continuity of their community work.

> "From the beginning, Mina was very mindful to be outspoken about drug consumption and safety while doing so. […] In the absence of the events – moments in which we could reach people – we are thinking of alternative ways that we could get to

them and offer the same kind of support we were always concerned in providing."
(Marum, 2020)

Leisure has gone online, and so did resilience. In a private Facebook group, Mina has direct access to a network composed of almost 1,000 patrons. In such a space, all range of messages is shared. In an online post, one of Mina's DJs shares a local artist who had her work equipment damaged while also lost her income source during the pandemic. The DJ calls for the financial support from the community. In a few days, the crowdfunding put together 670 euros – 20 euros more than the goal amount.

> "[…] for now we are just trying to have it going online and the idea is to spread, so if someone knows someone else that is struggling or is alone, this person can use our platform to bring awareness and call for someone that could be looking after this person. […] we received a lot of emails since the pandemic started, of people saying the troubles they are facing, and thanking us for the things we have been doing and posting. Some people were struggling with anxiety and depression before COVID-19, and, ultimately, they relied on the community we built to overcome these issues. The pandemic brought a lot of changes to the environments these people are, and this is also impacting their relationship with drugs, which could potentially unleash problematic patterns". (Marum, 2020)

In the face of the new challenges brought by the exceptional times, Mina/Suspension have launched a new project. Ravelength appears as a collaboration with people from various scenes, fields, and harm reduction NGOs. Through the organization of webinars focused on different topics of the queer, nightlife, and substance consumption spectrums, the aim is to accelerate the communication among the collectives, the exchange of

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information, experiences, and resilience. Timely, the first event organized by the group talked about the changes observed in drug supplies in Europe (Ravelength, Webinar on May 21st, 2020). In the occasion, the results of a survey mapping the changes on drug consumption patterns during the COVID-19 and developed by the Scottish NGO CREW were presented. The survey had been previously vehiculated in Mina's Facebook page, calling the community to contribute to the study. According to Marum,

> "Ravelength is a collaboration between medical teams, harm reduction groups, and party collectives. The goal is to somehow acknowledge that clubs are not just spaces that enable drug consumption but also spaces that allow individuals' experimentation with substances in safer environments, surrounded by other people that can offer support if needed." (Marum, 2020)

It is important to recognize the international character of these movements, and how its members compose a network not only for leisure but also for cooperation, experience exchange, and resilience. Mina was a pivotal actor connecting local Portuguese youngsters with global trends in youth cultural expressions, and its members have already visited and worked with similar movements in different countries and continents. These spaces provided a rich environment for exchanging lessons learned and monitoring shifts in consumption patterns, substances, and leisure trends.

> "Before COVID-19 I think you can say we had an informal network for this. For example, we traveled to a lot of countries to play and represent Mina, contributing to other parties and festivals, and we were constantly meeting people from other collectives doing similar work to Mina. In these situations, we would always talk about what we were observing in our contexts, exchanging tips on how to better organize somethings, how to communicate with others. But without the parties and international contributions,

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this informal exchange is lost… so this is why we created Ravelength now." (Marum, 2020)

The next chapter of this thesis will summarize the key findings of this research supporting the argument for the introduction of youth movements as relevant stakeholders in the Portuguese harm reduction strategy. Such a cooperation has the potential of improving the quality and range of the Portuguese services currently provided, filling the gap left by 20 years of focus on PDU. In a context of uncertainty due to the outcomes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis could represent a window of opportunity for advancing with further progressive approaches in the national drug policy.

7. Youth nightlife movements: a tool for reaching hidden populations

The results obtained in this qualitative research bring some important findings. Firstly, it contradicts the traditional perception of youth as an ill-informed and reckless population. By focusing the interviews on young rave organizers from the Mina collective, the research has shown how youth is not an amalgamated population, and how some sectors of it can promptly organize to effectively address issues neglected by policymakers. Most importantly, it has shown the complexity of such movement, and its resilience and adaptation capability when confronted by crises.

The study has also evidenced the different partnerships in which youth nightlife movements are involved. Mina has engaged in collaboration with grassroots movements, local and international harm reduction NGOs, and public administration projects in indirect ways. Thus, the group can be a valuable ally for the delivery of public health services through the coordination of communication strategies with NGOs, the contribution to data gathering and monitoring surveys, and the provision of firsthand insights for the design of harm reduction programs. Ultimately, it could play a significant role in the improvement of indicators and the construction of a robust dataset for evidence-based interventions.

Another important finding of this research regards the globalized feature of these movements. The interviews highlight the connection existing among young rave organizers, composing an informal network for the exchange of experiences, lessons learned, and best practices. It also reveals promising perspectives for such network with the development of Ravelength, a new project aimed at consolidating a space for these exchanges. Such a platform could be a useful tool for harm reduction programs, enabling the forecast of

international changes in substance consumption trends and drug markets before they are translated into the national context.

Moreover, youth nightlife movements can be a powerful access door to a hard-to-reach population. For usually not experiencing dependence in the conventional terms, young recreational drug consumers do not regard themselves as traditional psychotropics consumers (Cousto, 1999; Stetina, 2008), and do not perceive the need to reach for a harm reduction system targeting PDU. In the past, alternative risk mitigation programs developed by NGOs and grassroots movements have found ways of achieving the group through the events in which they attended. With the pandemic and the restrictions of social gatherings, young recreational drug users will likely become a hidden population. In this sense, Mina is a pivotal tool for public health promotion and access, raising awareness on existing harm reduction services, and offering a resilience network to youngsters in a period their relationship with psychotropics become more vulnerable to changes. The COVID-19 crisis can ultimately trigger unbalances leading to higher prevalence rates of problem drug use among young people.

Lastly, Mina represents a key communication tool for educating youngsters about substance consumption and safeness while doing so. The importance of lay knowledge in youthful attitudes towards drug use has already been pointed out by several studies in the field (Parker et. al., 1998; 2002; Shinner and Newburn, 1999; Blackman, 2004; Measham, 2004b; Hammersley 2005, Hunt et. al., 2010), while friends have been consistently pointed out as one of the main sources for drug-related information among youngsters (Schroers and Schneider, 1998; Wundsam, 2006; Stetina, 2008). The COVID-19 pandemic has forced leisure to go online, resulting in a boom of rave streaming, which take place associated with socially isolated drug consumption. With the potential impact lockdown will bring to substances purity levels, working closely to movements such Mina becomes an urgent need.

The case study of Mina in the scope of the Portuguese drug policy offers a unique opportunity. Although the country remains focused on PDU, it is important to recognize the developments achieved in the Portuguese drug debate in the last years. Since 2013, Harm Reduction programs deal with a broader scope of addictive behavior beyond those concerning illicit substance use, adding new partners and new action strategies in its health strategy (PNRCAD, 2012). The current National Plan for the Reduction of Addictive Behaviors and Dependencies is foreseen until 2020, when it shall be replaced by a new plan designed to address the latest diagnosed demands in the national context.

With the prospect open for changes, the outcomes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic could represent a window of opportunity for introducing new stakeholders in the Portuguese drug policy strategy. The public administration has already shown its receptiveness in broadening the scope of harm reduction programs and the list of issues within the policy agenda. Ultimately, the crisis can set a favorable stage for pushing innovative and progressive approaches into the national risk mitigation strategy.

Conclusion

This qualitative research analyzed the topic of recreational substance use through the lenses of event organizers in the Portuguese rave scene. Through in-depth, open-end, and semi-structured interviews, the study approached the founders of the music collective Mina, agents from local harm reduction NGOs, and public administration officials. The study sought to understand how the movement perceives the topic of youthful recreational drug use and what actions are taken within their scope to deal with the risks associated with the phenomenon. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a valuable opportunity for assessing the group's importance for the Portuguese harm reduction efforts. Shedding a light into an overlooked stakeholder, this research investigated the challenges brought by the crisis and the measures adopted by Mina to respond to it.

The results obtained in this qualitative research evidence the importance of working closely with nightlife youth movements, and the positive contributions such an interaction could bring to the Portuguese harm reduction field. Overall, these groups represent a bridge for accessing a population difficult to reach, offering valuable first-hand insights on their substance consumption patterns. Moreover, they can significantly improve the quality of monitoring data in the country, becoming an instrument for evaluation programs, as well as a tool for the application of researches and surveys on drug use behaviors. The globalized feature of these movements also enables them to contribute in forecasts on international shifts and trends in substance consumption that could potentially be translated into the Portuguese context. Moreover, they can work as an access door to harm reduction programs, bringing awareness of existing services, and offering a resilience network to drug consumers. Lastly, in a population prioritizing lay knowledge and friendship circles as the main source for drug-related information, youth

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nightlife movements can be a key communication tool for educating youngsters about substance consumption and safeness while doing so.

The research also brings questions on the usefulness of the dichotomic separation between substance consumption patterns currently guiding the drug policy debate. The changes unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic in youthful substance consumption and leisure time behaviors are likely to blur the differences between problem and recreational drug use. Ultimately the failure in properly designing risk mitigation for addressing these changes could bring fatal outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced leisure to go online, resulting in a boom of rave streaming, which take place associated with socially isolated drug consumption. With the potential impact lockdown will bring to substances purity levels, working closely to movements such Mina becomes an urgent need.

This study comes to challenge traditional studies on youth behavior, substance use, and leisure time. Rather than passive, uneducated, and irrational actors, youngsters can be important agents for the design and implementation of harm reduction programs. Building a bridge to a hidden and hard-to-reach population, they become an essential tool for the promotion of public health. As part of a globalized trend, Mina is not an exclusive case. Similar events are emerging and gaining importance in different contexts from the global North and South. By promoting a better understanding of these still overlooked stakeholders, this research hopes to create a bridge to incentive the communication between public officials and civil society in the making process of fair, inclusive, and comprehensive drug policy.

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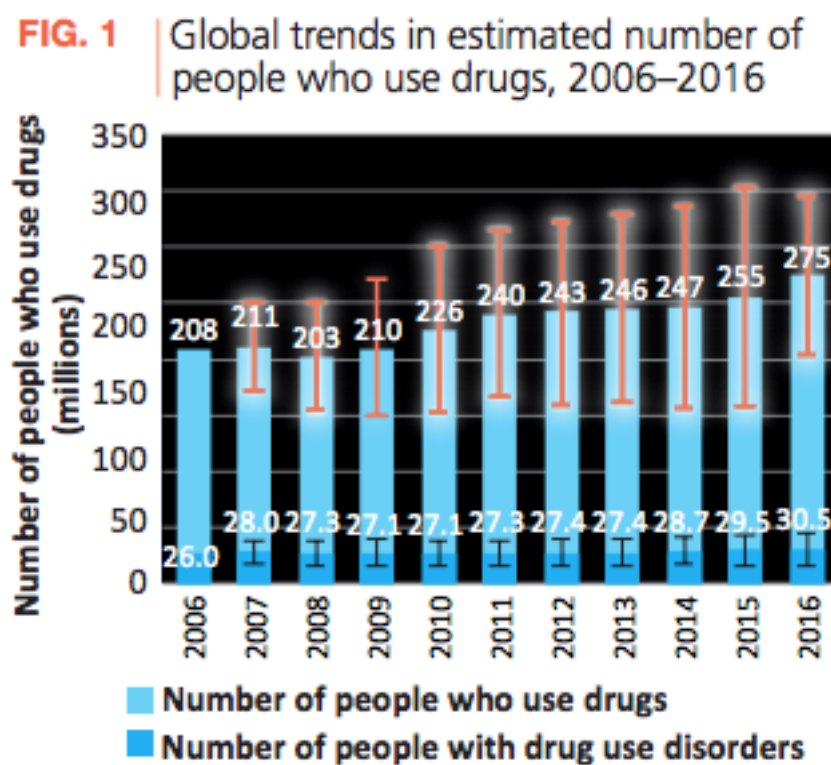
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Global trends in estimated number of people who use drugs (2006-2016)

FIG. 1 | Global trends in estimated number of people who use drugs, 2006–2016

Number of people who use drugs (millions)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of people who use drugs	208	211	203	210	226	240	243	246	247	255	275
Number of people with drug use disorders	26.0	28.0	27.3	27.1	27.1	27.3	27.4	27.4	28.7	29.5	30.5

■ Number of people who use drugs
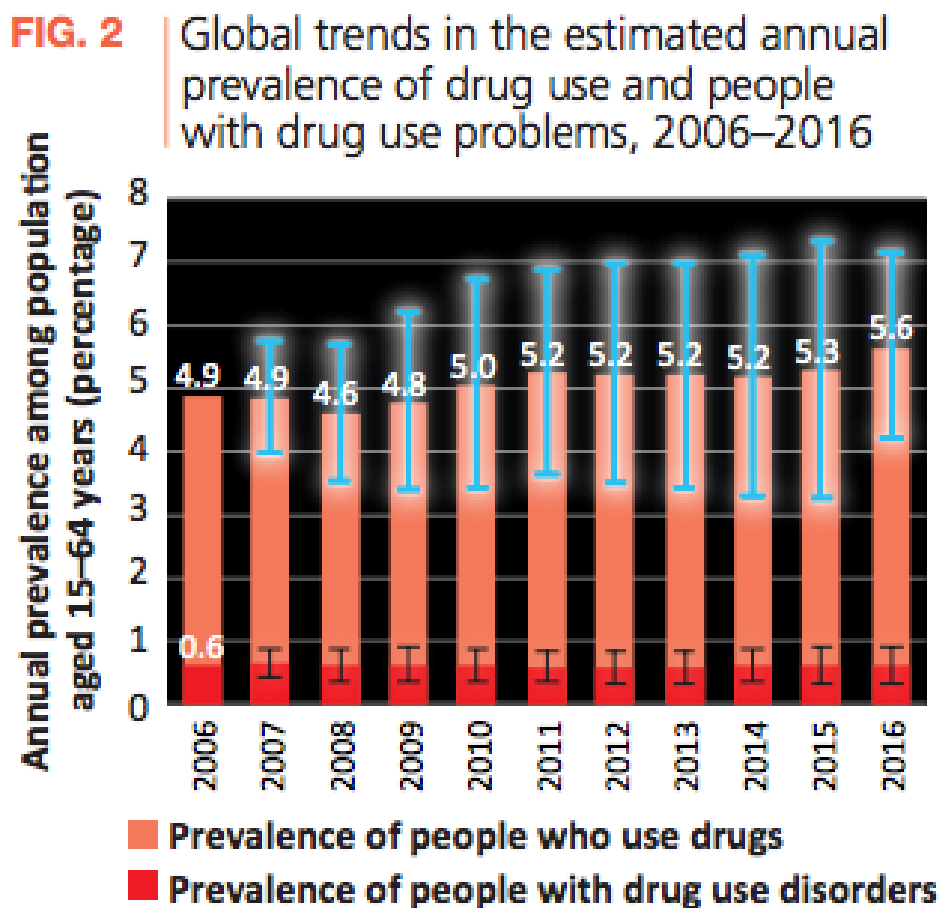■ Number of people with drug use disorders

Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire.
Note: Estimates are for adults (aged 15–64 years) who used drugs in the past year.

Source: World Drug Report 2018, UNODC, United Nations (2018).

Appendix 2: Global trend in the estimated annual prevalence of drug use and people with drug use problems (2006-2016)

FIG. 2 | Global trends in the estimated annual prevalence of drug use and people with drug use problems, 2006–2016

Source: UNODC, responses to the annual report questionnaire.
Note: Estimated percentage of adults (aged 15–64 years) who used drugs in the past year.

Source: World Drug Report 2018, UNODC, United Nations (2018).

Appendix 3: Mina communication strategy aligned with harm reduction services provided by Kosmicare

mina
24 January · ⊕

At mina, we've been quite vocal about pressing urgencies in our scene - one of them is the affinity of queer club culture with narcotics and voluntary-collective intoxication. This ancestral practice comes with great wows and woes - both chemical enhancement of intimate togetherness and self-medication tools for a deeply damaged community of queers.

Many of you manifested interest in the drug-testing services of Kosmicare - the expert team in harm reduction that joins our Rav...
See more

Source: Mina Facebook Profile. Accessed in June 9, 2020. Available in: https://www.facebook.com/pg/minasuspension/posts/?ref=page_internal

Appendix 4: Mina communication about event cancellation due to

COVID-19

mina
13 March ·

[MINA CANCELLED]

As a preventive measure to help contain the spread of COVID-19, we are canceling our next event which would celebrate our mina - 3rd anniversary.

We were excited about this event and the love could be felt from the very moment we launched the event. Yet, it is our responsibility to make sure we take all the possible prophylactic measures to combat the rapid spread of the virus and that includes avoiding at all costs big gatherings of people - especially peopl... See more

Source: Mina Facebook Profile. Accessed in June 9, 2020. Available in: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=mina%20%203rd%20anniversary%20[cancelled]&epa=SEARCH_BOX

Appendix 5: Summary table on the drug problem in Portugal
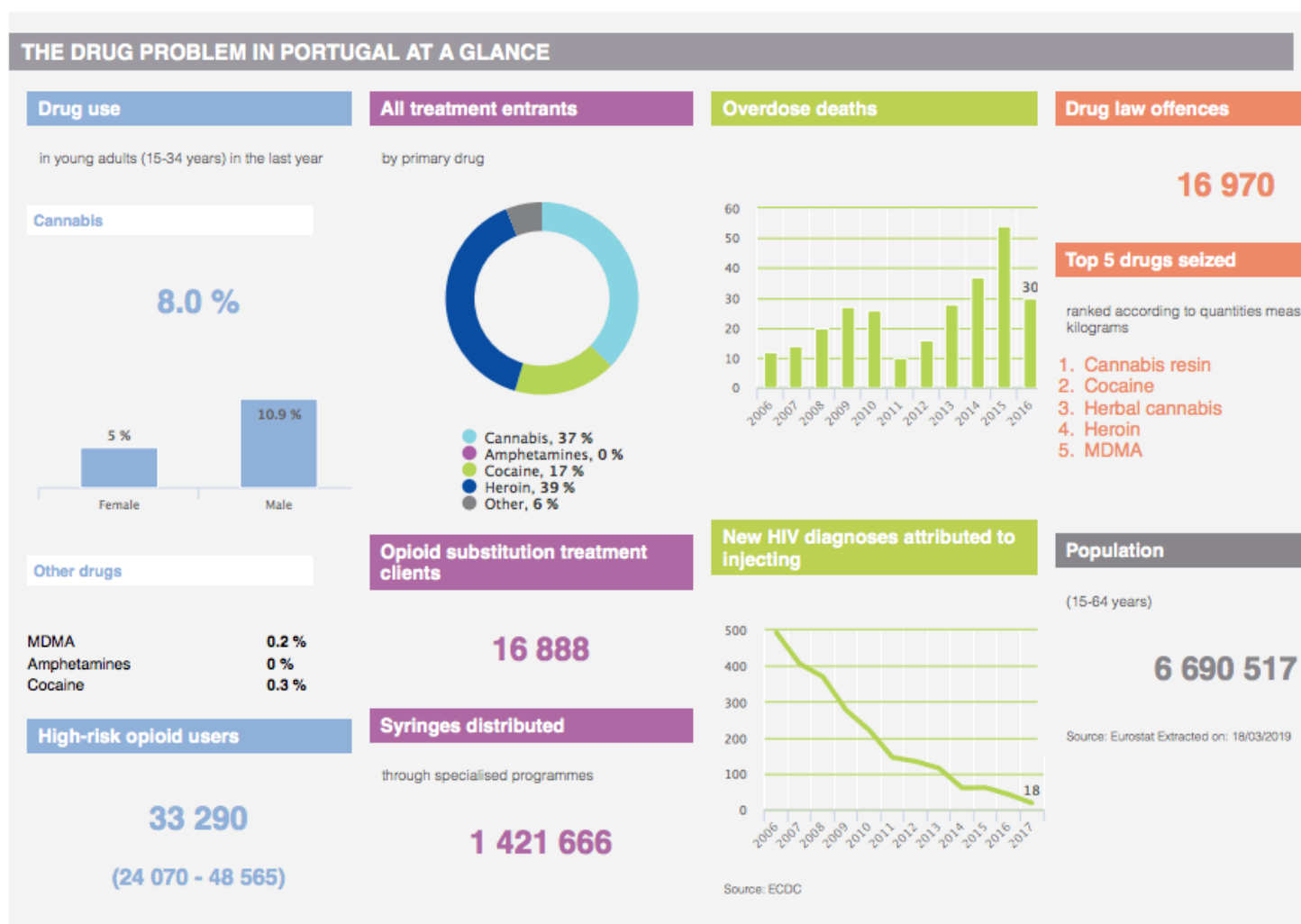
Source: EMCDDA, Portugal Country Drug Report 2019. Accessed in June 9, 2020.

https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2019/portugal_en

Appendix 7: Portugal's Drug Laws Governing Psychoactive Drugs

	Before 2001	After 2001
Personal possession/use	Criminal Offense	Administrative Offense— "Decriminalized"
	Law 15/93 of January 22, 1993, Chapter IV, Article 40–41	Law 30/2000 of 29 November 2000, Art 2. (Entered into force July 2001)
Production, sale, and distribution	Criminal Offense	Criminal Offense
	Law 15/93 of January 22, 1994, Chapter III, Article 21–28, & Chapter IV, Article 40 regarding cultivation for consumption	Law 15/93 of January 22, 1992, Chapter IV, Article 40–41