

OPENING SESSION

Nightlife, clubbing and risk behaviour in Slovenia

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Most people are not aware how strong an influence nightlife has upon our life. Let us ask ourselves how many wedded, unwedded or just sexual partners and friends we met during our nightlife activities. And also how many problems and unnecessary costs we had because of that (e.g. traffic accidents, offences, injuries and illness due to drunkenness and drug use, risky sex, hearing problems because of noise, involvement in fighting, vandalism of private or public property etc.). It is a fact that a very small part of the population has no experience with nightlife activities. Globalisation, development of information and telecommunication technology and especially reduction of airfares has influenced a large group of young people to become so-called party nomads. They go to party not only in other cities, but also in other countries. Modern society is more or less oriented in profits. Thus a workday is longer and longer and spare time is limited to evenings and nights. There have been huge increases in different incidents during the nights in the last decade throughout the world. We should be worried especially because of the fact that more and more young people go out with the wilful purpose to drink too much and use illicit drugs to 'feel better and more relaxed'. We have been more and more confronted with these problems in last years also in Slovenia, but prevention strategies and policies related to nightlife are still in the early stages.

Dear friends and colleagues,

On behalf of Slovenia, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to our country. We hope that you're enjoying your stay in our beautiful country. And of course, please don't worry, we provide some nightlife activities for you too, so you will have a chance to experience in practice what we are going to talk about in the next two days.

Most people are not aware how strong an influence nightlife has upon our life. Let us ask ourselves how many wedded, unwedded or just sexual partners and friends we met during our nightlife activities. And also how many problems and unnecessary costs we had because of that (e.g. traffic accidents, different offences, injuries and illness due to drunkenness and drug use, risky sex, hearing problems because of noise, involvement in fighting, vandalism of private or public property etc.). It is a fact that a very small part of the population has no experience with nightlife activities. Some of you already know that I don't belong to that part of non-experienced population and I strongly believe that none of you do too. (Please, let's raise a hand the one in this room who has no experience with nightlife ...)

Globalisation, development of information and telecommunication technology and especially reduction of airfares has influenced a large group of young people to become so-called party nomads. They go to party not only in other cities, but also in other

countries. In our case a lot of British young tourists come to our capital Ljubljana every day for last few years (thanks to Easyjet and Wizzair airlines) and of course they bring with them also some problems, especially related to drunkenness, loud singing and violence. With the help of the Centre for Public Health from Liverpool John Moores University, who is financing the project, we have developed a survey among British tourists travelling to Slovenia to have fun and experience our nightlife activities and other risk behaviour during their visit. I think the results will be very interesting and they will probably prove that there is not a significant difference between Ljubljana, Ibiza, Palma de Mallorca, Liverpool, Rimini, Melbourne or some other places.

Modern society is more or less oriented in profits. Thus a workday is longer and longer and the spare time is limited to evenings and nights. Furthermore a large group of young workers and students who work, still live with their parents and have no costs with food, residential rent and other regular residential costs. They have quite a lot of money to be left over for entertainment and nightlife activities.

There have been huge increases in different incidents during the nights in the last decade almost all over the world. We should be worried especially because of the fact that more and more young people go out with the wilful purpose to drink too much and use illicit drugs to 'feel better and more relaxed'. This year I spent a wonderful holidays in Palma de Mallorca (thanks to my friends Amador, Montse and Marga from IREFREA Spain) and except marvellous beaches I also experienced nightlife there. I was surprised that a large number of young people start to drink alcohol on the beaches and get drunk before they enter the night clubs and discotheques. It looked scary, believe me! I suppose that the same trend is also in some other countries.

Related to that I want to say something about some risk factors we often forget to include in our discussions. Do you remember what Robbie Williams said in his concert in front of a huge audience of young people at Knebworth in the UK in the summer of 2003? He said: 'Alcohol - yeah, drugs - boo'. What was the message to the young people at that concert? Of course, alcohol is 'cool' and drugs are bad. One of our most popular rock bands was showing a cigarette of marihuana (so-called joint) on the stage for many years and the cigarette was approximately 1 metre long and there was also smoke coming out of the cigarette. Nice promotion of smoking cannabis among young people in public, right?!

Even if it is true without any doubt that a lot of very quality pop and rock music was written under the influence of alcohol and illicit drugs (especially under the influence of marihuana and LSD) we should be worried what those songs are trying to tell young people and what kind of influence songs like Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds (by Beatles), Brown Sugar (by Rolling Stones), Cocaine (by Eric Clapton), Cold Turkey (by John Lennon) etc. have on their risk behaviour. So, we should be aware of the influence of pop or rock stars on the behaviour of young people and tell them they shouldn't behave in such harmful way.

We should also be more aware of hidden tobacco and alcohol advertising in the media, especially in the movies and music videos, showing sex without condoms in pornographic movies and showing violence on TV etc.

We have been more and more confronting with these problems in last years in Slovenia, but prevention strategies and policies related to nightlife are still in the early stages. We have a new strategy in the field of drugs, changes to alcohol and tobacco policies almost every few years, but there is almost nothing written in those documents about prevention in nightlife, even though it is very significant that the problems related to that are increasing very fast in the last few years. There is no serious intension from our government to prepare a strategy or action plan in the near future to prevent these risk behaviours in young people in nightlife settings and nightlife environment in general.

You have come to a country which has experience of extensive discussions on nightlife of young people nine months ago. A very emotional discussion followed about the tragedy in a very popular discotheque when three young girls died because of a terrible crush and faulty security provide by a security company and the organisers. The media challenged pro et contra debate and the public demand immediate measures. The government and the parliament adopted some ad hoc measure a few months later and prohibited entry to night clubs and discotheques to the young people under 16 years old after midnight. There were no analysis, no studies and no research carried out, so we don't know what the real objectives were in that case and what the results were.

Let us see the practice of those measures. Do you really think that the majority of young people go home after midnight? I personally don't think so. They often go in the city parks, river-banks, beaches, forests etc. and continue parties with alcohol and illicit drugs and (what is the most important) without any kind of control and security. In the case of emergency it is more difficult to help youngsters if they get too drunk or (even worse) overdosed with illicit drugs. Is this really prevention and a quality measure?!

Research in Slovenia shows the increase of risk behaviour among young people. That is the fact. Especially we should be worried about alcohol abuse. There has been no research or studies on nightlife among youth in Slovenia up to this year. With the help of the European Commission who are co-financing the project of professional network of researchers and research institutions in Europe (called IREFREA) we accomplished the survey among young people in 8 different European Union member states. Slovenia was also a part of the survey.

The general conclusion we can get out of that survey in our country is that the majority of young people who often experience nightlife activities are very healthy and don't have many psychological problems in their life. Their risk behaviour is more or less the result of their intention to live like that or even way of life to some extend. We will have to do more in the future in relation to preventive activities in nightlife. But first of all we need to decide what we want to achieve and prepare relevant strategies and policies.

And finally, we as adults should set a good example to the young people with our own behaviour too. And we should start today, tomorrow may be too late ...

Thanks for your attention and welcome again in Slovenia!

Matej Kosir