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An Exploratory Study of Cannabis Festivals and Their Attendees in Two European Cities: Amsterdam and Berlin

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to explore the nature and features of cannabis festivals, characteristics of festival participants, and reasons for attendance. A field study in two European cities (Amsterdam and Berlin) included participant observation at the festivals, interviews with local organizers, and a survey among festival attendees ($n = 728$). Both festivals had common features, but also showed distinct differences. At both festivals, nine out of 10 participants were current, often daily cannabis users. Participants were mainly young adults (mean = 26.2 years), but younger in Berlin than in Amsterdam. Common reasons for festival attendance were “protest/activism” and “entertainment.” Protest/activism was more likely in Berlin, among daily cannabis users, and participants aged 25+ years. Entertainment was more likely in Amsterdam, among non-daily cannabis users, and participants younger than 25 years. Although similar in political aim, cannabis festivals are characterized by distinctive local features, as well as differences in attendee profile and reasons for festival participation. Findings suggest that the latter differences are driven by differences in cannabis policy, with a stronger tendency towards protest/activism in countries with a less liberal, or more restrictive, cannabis policy. Future research should include more countries, representing a wider variation in cannabis policies.

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In the past decades, cannabis use has spread globally and has become common among young people (Hall 2015). Worldwide, approximately 183 million people have used cannabis in the past year (UNODC 2016), including 22.1 million in the European Union (EU; EMCDDA 2016). Scholars argue that cannabis use has normalized; i.e., has moved from the margins to the mainstream (Parker 2005; Sandberg 2012), and can be seen as an unremarkable facet of an otherwise conventional way of life (Asbridge et al. 2016), including, more recently, among older people (Lau et al. 2015). Although legalization is gaining momentum, with Uruguay and Colorado (US) as the most quoted examples (e.g., Queirolo et al. 2016; Subritzky, Pettigrew, and Lenton 2016), cannabis remains illegal in most countries. Despite its broad use, cannabis is the drug where public opinion remains polarized, contributing to an ongoing debate (Mounteney et al. 2016). Interest groups attempt to influence drug policies from varied perspectives (Haines-Saah et al. 2014). Voices from civil society calling for cannabis policy reform include activists and advocates of legalization. One strategy is the organization of “cannabis festivals,”

which constitute a public space for protest against cannabis prohibition.

Cannabis festival is a term used in a variety of contexts, ranging from political protests against cannabis prohibition to commercial fairs dominated by entrepreneurs in the cannabis industry. In the current study, cannabis festivals are defined as social gatherings organized by civic society movements, where people congregate to oppose cannabis prohibition and advocate cannabis law reform.

Cannabis festivals can be understood as a representation of a wider social phenomenon. Festivals are among the fastest growing types of events in the world and are considered important cultural practices (Quinn 2005; Cudny et al. 2012). Festivals range from small street fairs to extravagant events (Wynn and Yetis 2016) and affect societies in economic, political, and socio-cultural ways (Arcodia and Whitford 2006). Festivals can be considered a “link between culture and politics,” and they provide a vehicle through which people can advocate or contest certain notions of identity and ideology (Smith 1995). On the other hand, festivals are being used as commodities by entertainment industries (Jeong and Santos 2004), and are

vulnerable to overcommercialization (Rogers and Anastasiadou 2011).

Variation in aims, characteristics, and context may explain why festivals are often studied individually (Cudny et al. 2012). National cannabis policies differ significantly across the EU, from liberal to restrictive prohibitionist approaches (Blickman 2014). Nevertheless, cannabis festivals in different countries share the aim of decriminalization or legalization and may have other common features. This explorative study on cannabis festivals included research in two different European capital cities: Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and Berlin (Germany). While the local organizers of cannabis festivals have a common aim (cannabis policy reform), festival attendees and their reasons for participation have not been investigated. Therefore, we were particularly interested in studying the attendees.

Our aim was to: (1) describe and contextualize distinctive and common characteristics of cannabis festivals; (2) assess socio-demographic and cannabis use characteristics of participants; (3) identify reasons to attend cannabis festivals; (4) assess whether reasons for attendance vary across festivals and to what extent these differences can be explained by the attendees' socio-demographic and cannabis use characteristics and/or are context-specific (i.e., differ between cities).

The Netherlands has probably the most liberal cannabis policy at the consumer level in the EU. Although cannabis is officially an illicit drug, the Dutch retail cannabis market has been decriminalized under the policy of "toleration" via so-called coffeeshops where adults (18 years or older) can buy and smoke cannabis (Wouters 2013). Amsterdam is the most outspoken example of this policy, with approximately 170 such coffeeshops (Korf, Liebrechts, and Nabben 2016). On the other hand, cannabis supply to coffeeshops has not been decriminalized and every year thousands of cannabis growers are arrested (Korf 2011). At the same time, activists, politicians, and local councils are calling for more liberal cannabis reform by regulating or legalizing cannabis production and supply to coffeeshops. In comparison, German cannabis policy is more restrictive, but in recent years has been moving towards a more liberal approach. As with all illicit drugs, possession of cannabis is a criminal offence, but German drug law leaves room to refrain from prosecution when small amounts for personal use are involved. Enforcement of federal law mainly falls within the responsibility of the 16 *Länder* (states), including the definition of "small amounts" of cannabis (EMCDDA 2016). In the state of Berlin, rules are less restrictive (cannabis possession for personal use is tolerated up to 15 grams). Selling cannabis remains subject to prosecution.

In both the Netherlands (24.1%) and Germany (23.1%), lifetime prevalence rates for cannabis use among 15- to 64-year-olds have been reported close to the EU average (24.8%), but last year use among young adults (15–34 years) in the Netherlands (15.6%) was higher, and in Germany (11.1%) lower than the EU average (13.3%) (EMCDDA 2016).

Cannabis festivals can attract people for a variety of reasons. They may come to protest current cannabis policy, but they may also have other reasons. Reasons for attending cannabis festivals can be derived from reasons for attending festivals in general, where often-mentioned reasons are "curiosity," "escape from routine," or "entertainment" (Scott 1996). Analysis of over two dozen empirical studies found similar as well as other "motivators," but revealed *socialization* as the most common dimension in motivators for attending music festivals (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia 2013). Given that music usually is an important element of cannabis festivals, socialization could similarly be a major reason for attendance. Research has also shown that the specific type or theme of a festival may alter the motivations of attendees (Yolal, Çetinel, and Uysal 2009); e.g., wine in the case of a wine festival (Yuan et al. 2005) or food in a wine and food festival (Park et al. 2008). In the same vein, one of the expected reasons for attending a cannabis festival would be to use cannabis.

We first give an overview of the qualitative and quantitative methods applied in this research. Subsequently, from participant observation and interviews with the local organizers, we describe the *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* (Cannabis Liberation Day) in Amsterdam and *Hanfparade* (Hemp Parade) in Berlin in the summer of 2016. Next, we present the methodology of a survey among attendees at both festivals, followed by the results from this survey.

Methods

We used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. To capture the distinctive and common characteristics of the two cannabis festivals, the local organizers were contacted in the weeks before the festivals to collect information about the festival (background, aims, and program), to discuss the research, and to arrange a second interview after the festival. This second interview was conducted about one week after the festival with the same representatives, collecting more details about the background, purpose, organizational structure, and characteristics of the festival.

At both festivals, the first author performed participant observations; in Amsterdam together with four

field assistants (each one during part of the festival, collectively covering the whole festival), and in Berlin with one field assistant (from start to finish). Observations were structured around the following themes: characteristics of the festival site; general atmosphere; police presence; and participants' demographic profile, behavior, and substance use. On the day after the festival, the observations were entered into the computer, and in subsequent days observations were completed with additional input from the field assistants and photos acquired at the festival.

In addition to these qualitative methods, we conducted a quantitative survey among festival participants. This method will be described after the next section.

Two cannabis festivals

In 2016, *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* (Amsterdam) took place on June 12 and *Hanfparade* (Berlin) on August 13. *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* started in 2009 as part of the worldwide celebrations and demonstrations of the Global Marijuana March (GMM), an annual rally held at different locations across the world. A total of 730 cities from 63 nations have signed up for the GMM since 1999 (Toronto Global Marijuana March 2016). *Hanfparade* also participates in the GMM movement, but is not a GMM event. The local organizer stated that the *Hanfparade* is older than the GMM movement. In Germany, many cannabis events take place in May under the GMM, and the organizers of the *Hanfparade* send delegations to GMM events in other German cities (e.g., for speeches, information booths, and promotion); if the *Hanfparade* became a GMM event, it could undermine other German cannabis events (Geyer, August 19, 2016, personal communication).

Both festivals had similarities in aim, basic characteristics, and organizational structure. According to local organizers, both festivals have an activist identity, aim to end cannabis prohibition, and support cannabis policy reform. Both festivals strive to participate in the political process and try to influence public opinion in favor of cannabis legalization. At *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag*, discussions about cannabis and the “war on drugs” were organized in a special tent, and speeches took place at the main stage of both festivals. Considering the size of the cities and the public transportation, both locations were easily accessible by the public. Regarding the organizational structure, both of the cannabis festivals are based on volunteerism, with more than 50 volunteers working on the day of the festival. Concerning their economic

sufficiency and autonomy, both festivals depend on sponsorship and revenues from the rent in the market area. Neither one had an entrance fee, nor an age limit. Finally, both festivals offered a variety of activities, and we observed similarities in music, the artist line-up (including “cannabis culture music styles” such as reggae and hip hop), and sound systems.

We also observed local differences. *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* took place in Flevopark, one of the biggest green areas in Amsterdam, located next to a lively multi-ethnic neighborhood a few kilometers from the inner city. The festival began at 2:00 PM and ended at 10:00 PM. In contrast, *Hanfparade* was a rally that started at Central Train Station at 1:00 PM, continued through the main avenues of Berlin, with a politically symbolic 20-minute stop at the Federal Ministry of Health, and finished at Alexanderplatz, the biggest central square in the city at 4:30 PM, where the festival continued until 10:00 PM. During the rally, marchers carried banners calling for legalization of cannabis for medical and recreational use.

Another difference was that the organizers in Amsterdam had to go through bureaucratic procedures to get permission for the festival (e.g., responsibility for safety, loudness of music, protection of flora and fauna) that took many months (Bergman, June 29, 2016, personal communication). However, this process applies to all types of events in the city that are not identified by the municipality as political events. In contrast, the *Hanfparade* was accorded a political march by the municipality and there were almost no procedural obstacles in organizing the festival in Berlin (Geyer, August 19, 2016, personal communication). According to the organizers in both cities, typical rules for a variety of practical issues were respected and participants complied with the “house rules” of the festivals. No complaints were reported by the organizers or city officials.

A striking difference regarding the nature of the festivals, derived from the interviews and observations, was in the different levels of politicization and commercialization. In Berlin, several left-wing and liberal political parties (representing a coalition of political parties in Berlin that had agreed to strive for partial decriminalization of cannabis) participated in the *Hanfparade*. In Amsterdam, only the small “*Piratenpartij*” officially took part in the festival. However, representatives from other political parties participated in panel discussions, and one of the keynote speakers at *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* was Dries van Agt (Christian Democrats), who was prime minister when cannabis was decriminalized in 1976. The presence of several Dutch companies

related to cannabis cultivation, sponsors, and a market area with 53 stands promoting or selling cannabis paraphernalia (electronic devices in particular), cannabis seeds, books, clothes, and 17 kiosks in the food and drinks area, gave the cannabis festival in Amsterdam a more commercial character. Because, in Berlin, the *Hanfparade* was identified as a political event, selling products or services was not allowed. However, there was a market area (20 kiosks) where advertising and promotion were allowed, including some big cannabis industry companies (similar to Amsterdam). Nonetheless, the *Hanfparade* had fewer commercial features than we observed in Amsterdam. In Berlin, there are other events—e.g., Cannabis Business Conference (ICBC) and Cannabis Expo (Mary Jane Berlin)—which have an exclusive commercial character.

The organizers estimated the number of participants at 5,000 in Amsterdam, and 10,000 in Berlin. While at *Hanfparade* the vast majority were White, at *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* a more multi-ethnic group of participants was observed. Also, many adolescents were observed at the festival in Berlin, but not in Amsterdam. Smoking joints was common at both festivals, but there was a difference regarding alcohol consumption. While in Berlin many attendees were drinking beer at the festival, we rarely observed this in Amsterdam. Finally, there was a difference in police presence. In Amsterdam, we saw police only once (a car parking incident that was not related to the festival). In contrast, dozens of police officers accompanied the rally in Berlin and, after the rally, many police officers came to have a look at Alexanderplatz and stayed until the end of the festival. In Berlin, on several occasions, the police approached groups of adolescents and kindly but decisively asked them to put out the joints they were smoking. Overall, this took place in a friendly atmosphere.

Survey methodology and analysis

We also conducted a survey among a convenience sample of participants at both festivals, using a one-page custom-designed questionnaire. To approximate representativeness, with a small interview team (the same that did the qualitative observations), taking into account gender and age distribution as much as possible, respondents were approached at various places at the festivals (i.e., music stage, food area, market area, park, and sound-systems area). The purpose of the survey was explained, the respondents' anonymity was ensured, and they verbally consented to participation. Non-response was not recorded,

although the participants were generally cooperative, and the response rate was estimated at over 90% in both cities. The questionnaires were in Dutch and English in Amsterdam, and in German and English in Berlin. The questionnaire included five items about sociodemographic characteristics (gender, age, place of birth and residence), three items about cannabis use, and one question concerning reason for attending the festival (protest/activism; entertainment/leisure; to meet people/socialize; to use cannabis; curiosity; and other/don't know/don't want to say). Completing the questionnaire took 2–3 minutes.

All data were processed with SPSS 24.0. Continuous variables were analyzed using t-tests, and categorical and nominal variables were analyzed with chi² tests. The variable "residency" was created by combining age, country of birth, age at arrival in the country of study (the Netherlands or Germany), and place of residence, leading to the formation of four categories: (1) *Locals*: persons born or living ≥5 years in the Netherlands/Germany and a resident of Amsterdam/Berlin; (2) *Non-locals*: persons born or living ≥5 years in the Netherlands/Germany and resident of this country but not of Amsterdam/Berlin; (3) *Expats*: persons not born in the Netherlands/Germany but living there for <5 years; (4) *Tourists*: persons not born nor living in the Netherlands/Germany. The "five years" criterion constitutes the Dutch national minimum to obtain a passport, as well as the German minimum for a permanent residence document.

To assess the relationship between the main reason for attendance (dependent variable) and other characteristics, binary logistic regression analysis was performed. For this analysis, age was recoded into <25 vs. ≥25 years, residency into *nationals* (locals and non-locals) vs. *non-nationals* (expats and tourists), and cannabis use into daily use (≥20 days past month) vs. non-daily use. A significance level of .05 was used for all the analyses and only significant results have been reported.

Results

Respondents ($N = 728$) included 387 from *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* in Amsterdam and 341 from *Hanfparade* in Berlin. Demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. At both festivals, six out of 10 respondents were male. In the total sample, age ranged from 14–70 years (mean age 26.2 years). On average, respondents in Berlin were more than six years younger than those in Amsterdam. In both cities, 18- to 24-year-old respondents constituted the largest age category, followed by 25- to 34-year-olds. However, while minors

Table 1. Demographic and cannabis use characteristics of festival participants, and main reason for festival attendance.

	Total (<i>n</i> = 728)	Amsterdam (<i>n</i> = 387)	Berlin (<i>n</i> = 341)	Test	<i>p</i>
Gender					
Male	59.3%	60.2%	58.4%	Chi ² .257 (df1)	.612
Female	40.7%	39.8%	41.6%		
Age (years)					
Range	14–70	17–70	14–57	<i>t</i> (728) = 9.84	<.001
M (SD)	26.2 (9.29)	29.2 (10.48)	22.8 (6.18)		
Age categories					
14–17	7.3%	0.5%	15.0%	Chi ² 103.1 (df 4)	<.001
18–24	47.3%	41.6%	53.7%		
25–34	30.6%	34.6%	26.1%		
35–44	9.6%	14.2%	4.4%		
45–70	5.2%	9%	0.9%		
Residency					
Locals	41.5%	27.6%	57.2%	Chi ² 80.6 (df 3)	<.001
Non-locals	30.4%	33.3%	27.0%		
Expats	13.7%	21.3%	5.3%		
Tourists	14.4%	17.8%	10.5%		
Cannabis use					
Lifetime	97.4%	97.4%	97.4%	Chi ² .002 (df1)	.963
Last month users %	89.7%	88.4%	91.2%	Chi ² 1.571 (df1)	2.10
Days last month* M (SD)	20.6 (10.54)	22.3 (10.34)	18.3 (10.49)	<i>t</i> (653) = 4.19	<.001
Daily use*	64.0%	71.1%	56.3%	Chi ² 15.451 (df1)	<.001
Non-daily use*	36.0%	28.9%	43.7%		
Cannabis use at the festival					
Yes	81.5%	80.6%	82.4%	Chi ² .382 (df 1)	.536
No	18.5%	19.4%	17.6%		
Main reason					
Protest/Activism	29.8%	19.4%	41.6%	Chi ² 48.7 (df 5)	<.001
Entertainment/Leisure	38.3%	44.7%	30.8%		
To meet people/Socialize	9.6%	10.6%	8.5%		
To use cannabis	4.5%	3.6%	5.6%		
Curiosity	15.2%	18.3%	11.7%		
I don't know/Other	2.6%	3.4%	1.8%		

*Last month users only (total population *n* = 653; Amsterdam *n* = 338; Berlin *n* = 311).

(<18 years of age) were rare in Amsterdam (0.5%), they represented 15.0% of the respondents in Berlin. Conversely, respondents aged 45 years and older were rare in Berlin, but represented 9.0% of respondents in Amsterdam. Between both festivals, we also found differences in residency, with over half of those in Berlin being locals versus one in five in Amsterdam, with many more expats and tourists in Amsterdam.

In both cities, the vast majority of respondents had used cannabis at least once in their lifetime, and nine out of 10 had used cannabis in the past month (Table 1). On average, last month users had used cannabis on 20.6 days, four days more in Amsterdam than in Berlin. About two-thirds of respondents were daily users, but more often in Amsterdam than in Berlin.

The most prevalent reason for participating in cannabis festivals was “protest/activism” or “entertainment/leisure” (Table 1). However, there were differences between the two cities, with “protest/activism” most often reported in Berlin (41.6%), and “entertainment/leisure” in Amsterdam (38.3%). “Curiosity” ranked third, although this was a more common response in Amsterdam than in Berlin.

Other reasons—i.e., “to meet people/socialize” or “to use cannabis”—were less often reported. Table 1 also reveals that, in both cities, eight out of 10 respondents used cannabis at the festival.

To explore differences in reason for attending cannabis festivals, we first assessed the demographic characteristics and current cannabis use in the full sample. As shown in Table 2, with increasing age, respondents were more likely to choose “protest/activism,” while the opposite was found for “entertainment.” That is, the younger respondents were, the larger the proportion reporting “entertainment” as the main reason. Regarding residency, locals and non-locals more often reported “protest/activism” than expats and tourists, and expats most often chose “entertainment.” Daily users were more likely to report “protest/activism” than non-daily users, while the latter were more likely to report “entertainment.”

Given that two main reasons (protest/activism and entertainment) were most prevalent, to different extents in Amsterdam and Berlin, logistic regression analysis for two models was performed: one with “protest/activism” as the dependent variable, and the

Table 2. Main reasons by gender, age, residency, and daily cannabis use (%).

Categories	Gender Chi ² 3.49 (df 5) (<i>p</i> = .625)		Age Chi ² 39.06 (df 20) (<i>p</i> = .007)					Residency Chi ² 29.48 (df 15) (<i>p</i> = .014)				Daily use Chi ² 13.53 (df5) (<i>p</i> = .019)	
	M	F	14–17	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–70	Locals	Non-locals	Expats	Tourists	Yes	No
Protest	31.0	28.0	24.5	26.5	28.3	47.1	44.7	33.8	30.3	22.0	24.8	35.2	23.0
Entertainment	36.6	40.5	49.1	42.7	35.4	28.6	15.8	37.1	34.8	51.0	36.2	33.7	45.5
Socialization	9.3	10.1	1.9	9.9	12.1	5.7	10.5	9.9	10.9	9.0	6.7	9.1	8.9
To use cannabis	4.2	5.11	9.4	4.7	4.5	2.9	0.0	6.0	3.6	1.0	5.7	5.5	4.3
Curiosity	15.7	14.5	13.2	14.0	17.0	11.4	26.3	10.6	18.6	16.0	21.0	14.1	15.7
Other	3.2	1.7	1.9	2.3	2.7	4.3	2.6	2.6	1.8	1.0	5.7	2.4	2.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

second with “entertainment” as the dependent variable. Age, gender, residency, daily use, and city were used as independent variables. Although gender was not significantly associated with the main reasons in the previous step, it was included as a possible independent variable in the analysis.

Results are presented in Table 3. City, frequency of cannabis use, and age added significantly to Model 1 (protest/activism, yes/no). City was the strongest predictor, with respondents from the Berlin festival being four times more likely to choose “protest/activism” than those from the festival in Amsterdam. Daily users were 2.4 times more likely to choose “protest/activism” than non-daily users, and respondents 25+ years of age did this 2.1 times more often than younger respondents. Residency and gender did not contribute to the prediction of this reason for attendance. The latter was also found for Model 2 (entertainment, yes/no). As with Model 1, city, age, and frequency of use added significantly to Model 2, but in the opposite direction. Again, city was the strongest predictor, but in Model 2 respondents from the Amsterdam festival were 2.5 times more likely to choose “entertainment” than their counterparts in Berlin. Respondents younger than 25 years of age were twice as likely to choose “entertainment” as older respondents, and non-daily users were 1.9 times more likely to choose this as their main reason than daily users.

In sum, differences in motivation (protest/activism or entertainment) were explained by city, age, and frequency of cannabis use. Participants in Amsterdam

were older and more often daily users than those in Berlin. These differences are reflected in the characteristics of the protesters/activists and entertainers (Figure 1). In Amsterdam, within the group of protesters/activists, close to three-quarters were 25 years of age or older and an even larger majority were daily users. In Berlin, less than half of the protesters/activists were 25 years of age or older and almost two-thirds were daily users. In Amsterdam, about half of the respondents in the entertainment group were younger than 25 years of age and over half were daily users. In Berlin, a large majority of the entertainment group were below 25 years of age and less than half were daily users. However, notwithstanding these differences, city (Amsterdam vs. Berlin) was a stronger predictor of protest/activism and entertainment than age or frequency of cannabis use.

Discussion

Cannabis festivals are organized by civil movements striving for policy reform. We described and contextualized characteristics of two cannabis festivals that took place in the summer of 2016, one in Amsterdam and the other in Berlin. Both festivals share the aim of cannabis legalization. Participant observations lead to the conclusion that *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* in Amsterdam had a less political and more commercial atmosphere than the *Hanfparade* in Berlin. This difference in character of the festivals could be explained by differences in the official status accorded by the

Table 3. Binary regression analysis to predict main reasons of “protest” and “entertainment.”

	Model 1 – Protest				Model 2 – Entertainment			
	OR	95% CI Lower – Upper	<i>p</i>		OR	95% CI Lower – Upper	<i>p</i>	
Residency (national = 1; non-national = 0)	1.290	.843 – 1.973	.241		.888	.611 – 1.290	.531	
Gender (male = 1; female = 0)	.962	.710 – 1.637	.837		1.001	.712 – 1.409	.994	
Age (+25 yrs = 1; ≤25 yrs = 0)	2.118	1.444 – 3.106	<.001		.491	.345 – 699	<.001	
Daily User (yes = 1; no = 0)	2.386	1.603 – 3.550	<.001		.528	1.336 – 2.684	<.001	
City (Berlin = 1; Amsterdam = 0)	3.966	2.653 – 5.928	<.001		.397	.275 – .572	<.001	
Constant	.073		<.001		2.051		.003	
Cox & Snell R square = .104; Nagelkerke R square = .147					Cox & Snell R square = .067; Nagelkerke R square = .092			

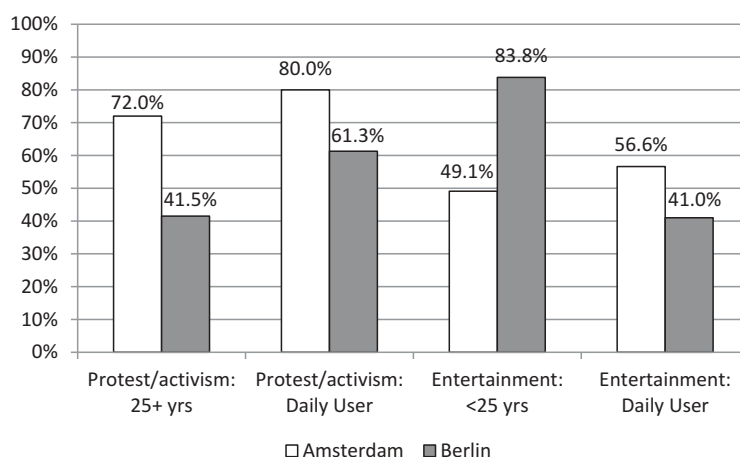


Figure 1. Percentage of younger/older respondents and daily cannabis users within motivation groups “protest/activism” and “entertainment” in Amsterdam and Berlin.

municipalities (i.e., a political march in Berlin not allowing for commercial activities or a festival like many others in Amsterdam), as well as by differences in current cannabis policy. Dutch drug law and cannabis policy allowed for the presence of Dutch cannabis-related companies (e.g., coffeeshops, cannabis seeds, electronic devices for using cannabis). Although Dutch politicians plea for next steps away from criminalization, particularly decriminalization of supply of cannabis to coffeeshops (Blickman 2014), the political debate on cannabis policy reform appears less fundamental than in Germany. German cannabis policy is more restrictive. Therefore, it can be argued that, for cannabis reformers, there is much more to be gained in Germany than in the Netherlands.

Despite differences in legal context and cannabis policy, and even though police were much more present at the cannabis festival in Berlin than in Amsterdam, police in Berlin tolerated the use of cannabis (except for young attendees). At both festivals, cannabis was widely and openly used. A major difference was observed in drinking alcohol in public, with many attendees in Berlin drinking beer at the festival. This difference appears to reflect a cultural difference between the two cities, with a widely spread practice of drinking beer while walking or hanging around in the streets of Berlin, a phenomenon that in Amsterdam would not be appreciated and may lead to a fine. In addition, and more specifically for cannabis users, in order to prevent the simultaneous use of cannabis and alcohol, the use of alcohol is not allowed in Dutch coffeeshops. A special license is required to sell alcohol, which cannot be combined with a license for a coffeeshop.

Both festivals were less male-dominated than one would expect from the gender distribution in the user

population. In Europe, last year male cannabis users outnumber females by a factor of two (EMCDDA 2016). In our survey, among festival attendees in both cities, over half of respondents were male, with four out of 10 respondents female. The majority of respondents were youth and young adults (aged 18–34 years), the age group reported to have the highest rate of current cannabis use in the EU (EMCDDA 2016). However, many more minors (<18 years) were interviewed in Berlin (15%) than in Amsterdam (less than 1%). One explanation could be that, in Dutch cannabis policy, a clear distinction is made between minors and adults. Since the mid-1990s, the minimum age to be allowed in a coffeeshop is 18, and this legal restriction is actively enforced (Wouters 2013). Although this policy does not keep Dutch youth from using cannabis—lifetime prevalence among students aged 15–16 years was 22%, above the EU average of 16% (The ESPAD Group 2016)—the minimum age policy for coffeeshops might discourage youth from attending a cannabis festival. In terms of residency, respondents in Berlin were twice as likely to be locals as in Amsterdam. One explanation could be that *Cannabis Bevrijdingsdag* in Amsterdam is the only annual cannabis festival in the Netherlands, whereas in Germany annual cannabis events take place in other cities as part of the Global Marijuana March. In addition, the Netherlands is much smaller than Germany, with relatively short distances from and frequent public transportation to Amsterdam, making a trip to the cannabis festival in that city much easier for residents of the Netherlands living outside of Amsterdam.

The majority of festival participants were current cannabis users, often daily users, and most respondents used cannabis at the festival. However, when asked for their main reason for attending the festival only a few reported “to use cannabis.” This indicates that, at least in cities like Amsterdam and Berlin, they do not need the

public space of a festival in order to smoke a joint. The most prevalent reasons were “protest/activism” and “entertainment/leisure,” but not in the same order in the two cities. In Berlin, respondents more often opted for protest and in Amsterdam for entertainment. Various aspects might explain a stronger preference for protest in Berlin. With a more repressive cannabis policy, there might be a stronger need and desire for reform. Also, the cannabis festival in Berlin was framed as a political event; it was officially labeled as such, and several political parties were represented. Finally, within a wider cultural and historical context, Berlin can be characterized as a city with a proclivity to a “culture of conflict,” reflecting how many Berliners have imagined and represented themselves and their city over time (Davis 2010). A strong activist scene has been maintained as a legacy from the urban social movements in the 1980s and 1990s, and the highly politicised urban social movement has remained strong in Berlin (Colombo 2013). This could also explain why the demand for the legalization of cannabis is expressed through a political march. Regarding Amsterdam, it can be argued that, with a more liberal cannabis policy, there is less urge for reform. Also, in Amsterdam, urban social movements from the past (i.e., the squatter urban movement that emerged in the 1970s) have become weaker over time (Uitermark 2004).

Our study also suggests that younger festival participants are less interested in political activism for cannabis reform. Across the two cities, older respondents (25+ years of age) were more likely to choose protest/activism as the main reason for attending the cannabis festival. One explanation could be that, in statistical terms, this age gradient suggests a “survival bias.” That is, the cannabis users who keep attending festivals are the ones that are more ideologically dedicated to cannabis. Another explanation could be that the older cannabis users, whether because of more social responsibilities (e.g., job, family) or based on personal experience, are more afraid of the negative consequences of repressive cannabis policies such as legal sanctions and stigma (Hathaway, Comeau, and Erickson 2011) and are more inclined towards activism for legalization. Alternatively, it could be that today’s youth and young adults tend to worry less about cannabis legalization. They may believe that cannabis is available anyway, whether in coffeeshops (Amsterdam) or from other sources (Berlin), so why not choose to attend a cannabis festival for entertainment rather than for activism?

Finally, daily cannabis users were more likely to choose protest/activism as the main reason for attending the cannabis festival. It can be argued that, with more frequent use, cannabis users would benefit more from legalization. Assuming that cannabis is a more important aspect in the

self-defined identity of daily users (Liebregts et al. 2015), it may be that they are more inclined to consider cannabis use as an inalienable civil right—a right that calls for protest and activism.

Study limitations include restriction to only two European countries. A recent study reported strong variation across countries in the sentencing practices regarding drug offenses (EMCDDA 2017). For example, according to national experts, sentences for the supply of 1 kg of cannabis resin varied within the EU from zero to 10 years. Expected median sentences are lowest in the Netherlands and highest in Greece, while Germany has an intermediate position (EMCDDA 2017). Although our study in Amsterdam and Berlin guaranteed some variation, future research should include more variation; for example, by including the capital cities of Greece (Athens) and a country with higher sentences than Germany, but lower than Greece (e.g., Italy).

Another limitation refers to the survey among festival attendees. The festival participant samples were not normative, and we used a very short questionnaire. However, given that festival attendees do not make up a well-defined population, the method we applied enabled surveying a large number of outdoor festival participants in a limited time. Statistical analysis of the survey data collected with the short questionnaire revealed both strong similarities and significant differences between the two cities. To validate our findings, replication at cannabis festivals in other cities is advised. Furthermore, qualitative interviews could deepen insight into attendees’ motivations for participation in cannabis festivals, as well as the role of age (or maturation) in this matter.

Cannabis festivals represent a category of special events in an era where cannabis legalization is gaining momentum. Cannabis festivals in Amsterdam and in Berlin have common features but also maintain and reproduce local, social, and cultural characteristics. Cannabis festivals, as well as their visitors, represent heterogeneous categories. They can be understood as an expression of cultural politics, a celebration of cannabis culture, or represent a protest movement.

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