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# From escape to seeking: understanding drug tourists

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## ABSTRACT

Studying the relations between travel, daily life, and drugs will help understand why these tourists use drugs. Hence, the article aims to explore the social behaviors that shape the reasons and causes tourists to use drugs while traveling to a destination. For this purpose, unstructured interview and participant observation techniques were used in the study, applying the ethnography research approach. In this context, data were collected in Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey as drug destinations between 2016 and 2020. Accordingly, while drug use in daily life is for escaping from daily life and recreational purposes, drug use while traveling occurs within the pursuit of happiness. As a result of their pursuit of happiness, drug tourists (as neo tribes) engage in social behaviors such as building strong social relations, feeling a sense of freedom, being in an entertaining atmosphere, and living the local culture. As a result, drug tourists see travel as a process from escape to seeking.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism movements are handled in the context of the change of place and its perception of the place differs. Tourists travel for specific purposes and to meet other tourists in their target places (Atsız, Cifci, & Law, 2021; Aydın & Sezerel, 2018; Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; MacCannell, 1973; Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai, 2002). Some groups that met in these places create new communities as a result of high interactions. One of these communities is drug tourists. These tourists travel to enjoy pleasant moments by communicating with other drug users. Also, instead of routine, they travel where some rules are loosened, and with or without different norms of behavior. Therefore, more studies are needed to understand the travel behavior of drug tourists in the destination. Hence, this study has been handled in this context to understand drug tourists.

Drug tourism could be viewed as the travels embraced intent on getting drugs, which are not accessible or are illicit in the traveler origin spots (Pereira & de Paula, 2016). Drug tourism is also characterized as an experience that includes the use of drugs both in visited destinations or in the place of origin of tourists (Uriely & Belhassen, 2005). So, drug tourism would allude to a movement where the essential goal is to get drugs

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(Hoffmann, 2014). In this context, a drug tourist can be defined as a tourist who travels using drugs to have new experiences in different destinations.

*Neo tribal theory* (Maffesoli, 1996) was used to understand the communities formed by drug tourists in this study. According to this theory, neo tribes are communities that display emotional loyalty behaviors like the ancient tribes. However, unlike ancient times, they emerge as social structures formed by people from different societies based on interests, ways of life, ceremonies, and language (Hardy, Gretzel, & Hanson, 2013, p. 48). In this context, the study aimed to highlight the originality of the social behavior of drug tourists in traveling towards common values, desires, and aspirations as a neo tribe. In these travels where small and temporary communities were formed, their behaviors in the environment they desired were examined at meeting points in less known, secluded, and private areas. In doing so, the social behavior of drug tourists was addressed with the neo tribal theory. Also, the characteristics of drug tourist communities were explained within the framework of this theory.

The study aims to investigate social behaviors that shape reasons for drug use by drug tourists while traveling. Using the qualitative research method for this purpose is important to understand the community. The ethnography research approach for this research was considered as the most appropriate approach and deemed more appropriate for this community (i.e. drug tourist), which is also a subculture. Since the characteristic of the ethnographic research approach is that the researcher reflects an existing social reality by analyzing the experiences, he/she has acquired by participating in this social life (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Thus, ethnographic research is ideal for understanding the travel behavior of drug communities as neo tribes.

## 2. Neo tribes and drug tourists

The neo tribal theory was first developed by Maffesoli (1996). Since then, the neo tribal theory has been accepted as an alternative to subculture theory. The theory is first used in sociological researches (Bennett, 1999; Hetherington, 1998; Hughson, 1999), then in marketing researches (Cooper, McLoughlin, & Keating, 2005; Cova & Cova, 2001), and recently in recreation and tourism researches (Goulding & Shankar, 2011; Hardy & Robards, 2015; Hardy, Dolnicar, & Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2021; St John, 2018; Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Lewis, 2021; Wang & Xie, 2021; Weaver, 2011; Wu & Dai, 2019). Therefore, neo tribal theory can be considered as a guide to understanding the social behaviors of travelers or tourists.

Neo tribes are described as 'fluid communities where people from different societies come together based on common interests, lifestyles, rituals, and language' (Hardy et al., 2013, p. 48). Neo tribes are formed according to a specific setting and mood rather than the usual rigid forms of organization (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 98). Here, the word tribe is used as a metaphor to describe today's society, emphasizing the change in lifestyles of past communities (Cova & Cova, 2001). Neo tribes are seen as a network of individuals who are heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, and travel behavior. Different individuals meet through a common value that emerges from shared passions or feelings. Neo tribes are characterized by four aspects, '*common emotion, rituals and symbols, fluidity in membership, and space*' (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018). These characteristics are the main characteristics that determine where, when, and how

a neo tribe will meet. Malpas (2012) states that the place has become an environment for the cultural and social values of the tribe and that the sense of freedom here forms and changes values of tourists. Hetherington (1998) defines the place as where neo tribes' identity are clearly manifested. Furthermore, Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) argued that places served as socializing areas for neo tribes. Thus, neo tribes build a new community by traveling and meeting with other individuals to reach their ideal places.

The concept of the neo tribe moved past conceptualizations of subcultures and was proposed as an elective model, whereby people from altogether different backgrounds turned out to be essential for a neo tribe because of style and the feelings excited through activities (Bennett, 1999, 2011). When considered within the scope of common consumption patterns, which is a feature of new tribes, studies conducted within the scope of special interest tourism types in the tourism literature draw attention. In this context, recreational vehicle (RV) users (Hardy et al., 2013) motorcycle groups (Dolles, Dibben, & Hardy, 2018), festival followers (Hannam & Halewood, 2006; Wu & Dai, 2019) have been defined as the new tourist tribes in tourism literature so far. In their study, Hardy et al. (2013) studied to understand whether neo tribalism could add insight to current knowledge of RV users. Findings show that the neo tribe concept is useful to understand travelers' motivations, behaviors, and needs, adding new perspectives to our understanding of the RV experience. In another study, Richards (2015) had a survey of youth travel to indicate travel behaviors related to *nomadism*. He found that backpackers can be seen as a neo tribe gathering in independent areas. Using neo tribal theory, Kriwoken and Hardy (2018) examined passengers on an Antarctic expedition. Results showed that the theory offers insights into the lifestyles, rituals, and meeting places that form amongst these tourists.

Hardy et al. (2021) investigated Airbnb host communities as neo tribes that explored practices of a Tasmanian Airbnb Host Forum. Results revealed the origin of the neo tribe, as a support mechanism for homeowners and a challenge to perceived marginalization by the tourism industry that refuses to embrace their hosts. Within the theoretical framework of neo tribes, Wang and Xie (2021) explored the mobilities of road travelers on the Sichuan-Tibet Highway in China and explained their social interactions. They found that social interactions during road travels are '*easily meet, easily part.*' Vorobjovas-Pinta and Lewis (2021) examined pride events by applying a neo tribal theory perspective. It is argued that while the LGBTQI+ communities together represent a neo tribe with a purpose, the individual communities form sub tribes based on their sexual and gender identity.

The traditional and cultural use of sacred plants has created a new phenomenon that Dobkin de Rios (1994) calls *drug tourism*. In his study, he explained this phenomenon that emerged in the Amazons with the seeking of Europeans and Americans for the use of a traditional drink known as *ayahuasca*. In this context, travels for the use of other plants and substances like *ayahuasca* are described as drug tourism, and those traveling for this purpose are described as *drug tourists*. Therefore, drug tourists create a subculture and build neo tribes. Drug tourism is defined as 'people traveling to a specific location due to the accessibility of legal or illegal drugs and related services' (Valdez & Sifaneck, 1997). The definition indicates three questions regarding the phenomenon of drug tourism. First, who is the drug tourist, then where are the drug tourism destinations, and finally, what substances are considered drugs. Following this definition, the places

where tourists reach and use drugs are considered drug tourism destinations. Uriely and Belhassen (2005) categorized the question of who a drug tourist is, where drug use is an important travel motivation, and tourists with prior knowledge of the accessibility of drugs in touristic destinations. Accordingly, they argue that the drug tourism experience begins when drug tourists become aware of the presence of drugs in touristic destinations.

Tourists who are aware of the accessibility of drugs in a particular destination and use these substances during their stay in these places can be defined as drug tourists. This definition refers to tourists interested in touristic destinations where drugs are available and drug use may not be the main travel motivation for them. These tourists may also view drugs as a by-product of other tourist experiences. Because the purpose of tourists in their travels is seldom for one purpose or activity (Oppermann, 1999). Based on all these statements, drug tourists, who build a neo tribe, are tourists who deliberately use drugs in the destination visited. Drug use while traveling is seen as another tourism activity that individuals do in their leisure time (Kraus, 1984; Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004). On the other hand, the social connotations often attributed to general tourism activities and drug use are quite different. While general tourism activities are usually appreciated, drug use is often seen as abnormal activity for both tourists and residents (Rojek, 1999). Such social perceptions have led researchers to view drug use as an abnormal behavior in the past (Goode, 1970). Therefore, such studies have associated drug users with small groups (hippies, musicians) excluded from the community (Becker, 1953; Merton, 1968; Rojek, 1999). Similar attitudes are that drug use is often seen as a distinctive behavior of backpackers in tourism literature (Adler, 1985; Cohen, 1973; Cohen, 2011; Riley, 1988; Scheyvens, 2002; Westerhausen, 2002). Such an approach accepts these movements as part of the phenomenon of drug tourism (Uriely & Belhassen, 2005, p. 239). However, today, drug use (especially smoking marijuana) has become much more common as a leisure activity in many societies. Therefore, studies started to focus on the normalization process of recreational drug use (Belhassen, Santos, & Uriely, 2007). The literature discussing this normalization process has revealed that drug use becomes a common activity of individuals and is integrated with entertainment and socialization (Korf, 2002).

According to Bellis, Hughes, Bennett, and Thomson (2003), most people who have visited Ibiza have used illegal drugs in the UK. Almost all users continue to use it in Ibiza. Their results show that destinations like Ibiza offer tourists the opportunity to try different drugs in a suitable atmosphere. In his study on the use of ayahuasca in the Amazon, Winkelmann (2005) discussed whether these tourists should be qualified as drug tourists seeking spiritual opportunities. Another study investigated the nature of drug-related tourist experiences, based on data collected in various drug tourism destinations through ethnographic interviews (Uriely & Belhassen, 2005). Accordingly, it turns out that drug-related tourist experiences are heterogeneous. They also concluded that drug use while traveling may be linked to the pursuit of different tourist experiences (using drugs) rather than an escape from daily routines. In the studies of the same researchers published in the following year, the study was conducted to examine drug use during travel, and thus to investigate risk perceptions in selected drug tourism destinations (Uriely & Belhassen, 2006). Their results showed that these tourists are aware of the legal, medical, and social risk aspects,

often take measures to reduce these risks. They also perceive drug use as less dangerous than their daily use while traveling.

Belhassen et al. (2007) focused on the relation between drug use and tourism. As a result, they emphasized that the use of drugs during traveling is affected by the normalization process of drug use in Western societies. Based on the results of their study, Grobe and Lürer (2011) indicated that there are traveling to use drugs, but there are some difficulties. Legal barriers and potential health problems faced by travel agents. Therefore, tourists have highlighted the major challenges associated with drug tourism. According to Hoffmann (2014), drug tourism was initiated by North Americans and Europeans, especially with the Hippie movement, by the middle of the 1960s, and has undergone many changes over the years. According to the study, the spread of drug use has resulted in the needs of drug tourists and the emergence of new destinations.

Studies show that drug use should be seen as an extension of other similar behaviors that a tourist follows while traveling (Belhassen et al., 2007; Hoffmann, 2014; Pereira & de Paula, 2016; Uriely & Belhassen, 2005, 2006; Wen, Meng, Ying, & Belhassen, 2020; Wen, Meng, Ying, Qi, & Lockyer, 2018). There is a relation between pleasure-oriented activities such as alcohol, drug, and sex during leisure time and tourism. It reveals the necessity of examining drug use during travel concerning the travel behavior of tourists. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the social behaviors that form tourists' drug use while traveling. Accordingly, discussions can be made to examine the findings on the relationship between travel, daily life, and drug use. As a result, revealing the causes of drug use by these tourists will improve the effort to understand them.

### 3. Method

The research is built on the social behavior of drug tourists, who emerged as a neo tribe, using the qualitative research method. Designed as exploratory research, it was aimed to determine how travel shaped neo tribe behavior with the ethnographic research design. Therefore, it will be possible to understand the subject of examining the culture created by social behaviors with ethnography research (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). Ethnography focuses on an entire group sharing the same culture (Emerson et al., 1995). The researcher acts with this qualitative research design in which the values, behaviors, and expectations of a group with a common culture are defined and interpreted (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Ethnography is not the study of culture, but rather studies of the social behavior of an identifiable group. So, the main purpose of ethnography is to define the culture that is the subject of the research and to convey the perceptions and attitudes of the individuals from their perspective in this process (Creswell, 2017). Therefore, the findings are presented in the language of the group studied and direct quotations are included.

The universe of the research is all tourists traveling to use drugs in an *independent environment*. An independent environment is a destination where drug tourists do not feel pressured by the law or other people. In fact, the free environment is the destinations and places where these tourists can use drugs comfortably. Places have become an independent environment for social values of tribes and the sense of freedom here forms and changes values of tourists (Malpas, 2012). For this reason, first, the necessary information was obtained by reaching a person using drugs as a result of detailed and careful research. Then, other drug users were reached through a snowball sampling technique. After

reaching the sufficient number, it was determined which destinations in the world were traveled for drug use. Then Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey were chosen to travel and collect data. Thus, the sample of the study was identified as tourists who used drugs by traveling to these destinations. Collecting data using unstructured interviews and participant observation techniques were identified as the most effective methods to understand the social behavior of drug tourists in traveling towards common values, desires, and aspirations (Neuman, 2014). As a result, data were collected five years period between 2016 and 2020.

Fieldnotes were written both during the observations and the in-depth interviews and immediately afterward. Because of the sensitivity of the subject being examined, a special effort was made to gain the trust of the participants as well as ethical issues. For this reason, a preliminary interview was held with each participant, and information was given about the aims of the research. In addition, the participants were promised that their identities would remain anonymous. Particular attention was paid to interviews in places such as hostels, campsites, private islands, beaches, and festivals where the participants feel comfortable. In these places, various topics such as the reasons for traveling, the meaning they attribute to drug and travel experiences, and ways of acquiring-using drugs were discussed. Each interview was analyzed before the next interview took place. Required translations were later made for the interviews in English and Turkish. During the translation process, two experts who knew both languages were consulted besides the researcher to increase the reliability of this process.

The data analysis sought to explore social behaviors that shape the reasons tourists use drugs while traveling. After reading question forms and research notes thematic content analysis was made to identify the codes and themes. Developing an effective coding and theme scheme is the first step of the analysis in the qualitative research method (Patton, 2002, p. 463). In this context, data analysis was started following the three-step coding process (Neuman, 2014). The coding was conducted by NVIVO 11, a qualitative data analysis program. During the coding process, the data was first analyzed line by line. The text created by interviews, observations, and notes was examined. The data were then compared to create categories by organizing the information.

The data analysis process began with emphasizing the concepts, writing notes, linking concepts, and finally creating relations between categories. With the coding process, common themes and sub-themes that create these themes were reached. Finally, the text generated by the interviews and observations was studied closely and resulted in the generation of concepts that are important in expressing the importance participants attach to their drug experiences. Accordingly, themes were created with the expressions of the importance given by drug users' experiences. Themes were consistent with the interviews. The process was repeated until it reached the stage where no other categories emerged. The data saturation was applied for this research since no additional data were obtained (Charmaz, 2006; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

#### **4. Findings**

This research aims to explore the social behaviors that shape the reasons and causes tourists use drugs while traveling to a destination. Using thematic content analysis, the data

were examined to determine whether drug use in daily life is for escape and recreational purposes, drug use while traveling occurs within the pursuit of happiness.

#### **4.1. Demographic characteristics and interviews**

Firstly, a table was created to give detailed information about the participants and interviews (Table 1). In this way, a comprehensive evaluation opportunity was provided regarding the demographic characteristics and interviews of 52 drug tourists. According to the data, the age range of most of the participants emerged as 22–35. Although the number of males is higher, there is no serious difference between males and females. All but two of the drug tourists, who are predominantly single, took part in university life. Although the occupations of drug tourists vary, it can be said that the middle-income class is the majority. Most of these tourists live in the developed countries of Europe and North America. While the drugs used are mostly cannabis, some use more than one type of drug.

#### **4.2. Pursuit of happiness**

According to Aristotle, happiness, *eudaimonia*, is a concept that coincides with continuous improvement or success rather than momentary pleasures (Warburton, 2012). He argues that people reach true happiness by experiencing a sense of achievement and continuous improvement. True happiness is not momentary or about how one feels. When the right emotions are experienced at the right time, people try to increase those right times. The effort of drug tourists is to reach happiness by traveling. In addition, the possibility of equality, happiness, and freedom being together means that travel takes place in this direction. Because *happiness is not in happiness, but in seeking it*. Therefore, these tourists travel to destinations where they can use drugs in pursuit of happiness.

Drug-related tourists may seek to involve a mere pursuit of pleasure or quest for deeper experiences. Traveling for drug use mainly involves the pursuit of happiness. In this context, it may involve an attempt to enter local cultures or drug-related subcultures by building social relations. With the expressions of drug tourists, it is seen that happiness requires strong social relations, a sense of freedom, an entertaining atmosphere, and local cultures. These tourists are in pursuit of happiness to live a freer life and to spend time with tourists who are like themselves, by building social relations comfortably. At the same time, there are efforts to reach people with places where they can get to know local cultures.

During drug use, the atmosphere suddenly becomes entertaining and a crowded chat with laughter causes the pursuit of happiness to be combined with drugs. Likewise, the fact that they do not feel any pressure after drug use or that the drug makes them feel freer rather than restricted has created different meeting points for drug use. At these meeting points, they feel freer by building social relations and in an entertaining atmosphere. In addition, by getting acquainted with the local culture, they gain new scopes and feel belonging to their neo tribe to which they float. They integrate all this with drugs. Therefore, because of their pursuit of happiness, these tourists engage in social behaviors such as building strong social relations, feeling a sense of freedom, being in an entertaining atmosphere, and living the local culture.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics and interviews.

P. (T = 52)	Age	Gender	Marital status	Education	Profession sector	Interview destination	Origin country	Drug type
P1	22	Male	Single	Bachelor-O	Student	Thailand	UK	LSD, Ecstasy, Cannabis
P2	26	Female	Single	Bachelor	Advocacy	Thailand	UK	Cannabis
P3	29	Female	Single	Bachelor	Engineering	Thailand	Argentina	Cannabis
P4	30	Male	Single	Bachelor	Medicine	Thailand	Germany	Cannabis
P5	28	Female	Single	Bachelor	Medicine	Thailand	Germany	Ecstasy
P6	42	Male	Single	Bachelor	Administration	Thailand	Japan	Meth
P7	26	Male	Single	Bachelor	Not working	Thailand	Italy	Cocaine
P8	23	Female	Single	Bachelor-O	Student	Thailand	Italy	Cannabis
P9	27	Female	Single	Bachelor	Not working	Thailand	Canada	Cannabis
P10	30	Female	Married	Bachelor	Education	Thailand	USA	Cannabis
P11	33	Male	Married	Graduate	Education	Thailand	Turkey	Cannabis, Cocaine
P12	25	Male	Single	Bachelor	Education	Thailand	Turkey	Cannabis
P13	24	Female	Single	Bachelor-O	Student	Cambodia	Spain	Cannabis
P14	29	Female	Single	Graduate	Education	Cambodia	Spain	Cannabis
P15	30	Male	Single	Bachelor	Medicine	Cambodia	France	Cannabis
P16	30	Female	Single	Bachelor	Unemployment	Cambodia	France	Cannabis
P17	35	Female	Single	Bachelor	Art	Cambodia	France	LSD
P18	29	Male	Single	Bachelor	Engineering	Cambodia	UK	Cannabis
P19	27	Female	Single	Bachelor	trade	Cambodia	Australia	Cannabis
P20	36	Male	Single	H. School	Administration	Cambodia	Belgium	Cocaine, Ecstasy
P21	33	Male	Single	Bachelor	Administration	Cambodia	Netherlands	Cannabis
P22	24	Female	Single	Bachelor	Aviation	Cambodia	Germany	Cannabis
P23	26	Female	Married	Graduate	Education	Malaysia	Germany	Cannabis
P24	28	Male	Single	Bachelor	Engineering	Malaysia	Turkey	Ecstasy
P25	25	Male	Single	Bachelor	Engineering	Malaysia	Australia	Cannabis, Cocaine
P26	29	Male	Single	Bachelor	Medicine	Malaysia	Australia	Cannabis
P27	31	Female	Single	Bachelor	Medicine	Malaysia	Germany	Cannabis
P28	32	Male	Married	Bachelor	Engineering	Malaysia	Italy	Cannabis
P29	40	Male	Single	Bachelor	Trade	Malaysia	USA	Cannabis
P30	26	Female	Single	Bachelor	Trade	Malaysia	UK	Cannabis
P31	22	Male	Single	Bachelor-O	Student	Malaysia	Netherlands	Cannabis, Ecstasy
P32	29	Female	Single	Bachelor	Not working	Malaysia	Greece	Cannabis
P33	32	Male	Married	Bachelor	Tourism	Indonesia	Germany	Cannabis
P34	30	Female	Married	Bachelor	Tourism	Indonesia	UK	Cannabis
P35	30	Female	Single	Bachelor	Sport	Indonesia	Australia	Cannabis
P36	35	Female	Single	Bachelor	Sport	Indonesia	Australia	Cannabis
P37	29	Male	Single	Bachelor	Engineering	Indonesia	USA	Cannabis
P38	27	Female	Single	Graduate	Education	Indonesia	USA	Cannabis, Cocaine
P39	36	Male	Single	H. School	Education	Indonesia	Germany	Cannabis
P40	33	Male	Single	Bachelor	Not working	Indonesia	Germany	Cannabis, LSD
P41	24	Female	Single	Bachelor	Medicine	Indonesia	Australia	Cannabis
P42	26	Female	Married	Bachelor	Governance	Indonesia	Denmark	Cannabis
P43	28	Male	Single	Bachelor	Trade	Turkey	Russia	Cannabis, Cocaine, LSD
P44	25	Male	Single	Bachelor	Advocacy	Turkey	Turkey	Cannabis
P45	29	Male	Single	Bachelor	Education	Turkey	Turkey	Cannabis, Ecstasy
P46	31	Female	Single	Graduate	Science	Turkey	Germany	Cannabis
P47	32	Male	Married	Bachelor	Advocacy	Turkey	Germany	Cannabis, Ecstasy
P48	40	Male	Single	Bachelor	Host	Turkey	UK	Cannabis
P49	26	Female	Single	Bachelor	Trade	Turkey	Netherlands	Cannabis
P50	22	Male	Single	Bachelor-O	Trade	Turkey	Russia	Meth, LSD
P51	29	Female	Single	Bachelor	Education	Turkey	France	Cannabis
P52	32	Male	Married	Bachelor	Not working	Turkey	France	Cannabis

P: Participant; T: Total; O: Ongoing; Meth: methamphetamine; LSD: lysergic acid diethylamide.

#### **4.2.1. Social relations**

As social beings, people do not want to be alone. For this reason, they are in constant contact with many people, especially family and friends. There is no difference for drug users. In addition, these individuals want to build communication by getting to know new people. Each person dealing with drugs is a new friend for them. Therefore, the more crowded the drug atmosphere, the better it is seen. For drug tourists, travel means new destinations, new people, a new atmosphere, and crowded communities. Hence, taking drugs by traveling for social relations is the result of the pursuit of happiness. A 30-year-old male tourist from England traveling to Thailand had the following thoughts about social relations:

It is important for me to meet new people. Being in contact with different people from every country keeps me alive. So, I feel like I live more than exist. That is, why I travel often. Marijuana also takes this to the next level. Because then everyone is incredibly open to talking. The more crowded it is the more talk return. Everyone looks pretty happy. That's why I'm happy too.

For drug tourists, social relations are not perceived as simply communicating. Interacting with others like them, feeling like they are, is extremely important. Finding places where they can achieve this can be seen as the first step in initiating interaction. Knowing that other tourists use drugs like themselves means building social relations easier. We can understand this better than the words of a 29-year-old woman who traveled from France to Cambodia and stayed in a cheap traveler's hostel:

The world has changed a lot now. I feel closer here to other travelers in this hostel than French. We have more in common with them. They are more like me. That's why we can talk much longer. We can laugh more. Our troubles are the same. Even if our language is different, we can get along better. I knew I would find it here. When we feel a little higher, we get closer.

On a different day, a young Spanish interviewed in the same hostel said that drugs provide sincerity and closeness with foreigners, so they are no longer foreigners, they are like me. Similarly, a middle-aged Belgian man said the following with the same emotions, even though he did not stay in the same place:

I had a lot of friends until I was 36 years old. Still, many of them in my life. However, I make new friends here. Because everyone is open-minded to everything. I have not seen anyone look at me badly. On the contrary, everyone wants to meet and talk. This also increases my energy. After two ecstasies, I always feel high. I think they are high too. With high energy, everyone is close to each other.

#### **4.2.2. Sense of freedom**

Perhaps the most important of the drug tourists' seeking is a feeling sense of freedom. Certain drugs, such as cannabis or ecstasy, indirectly reveal the sense of freedom. However, drugs alone are insufficient to provide a sense of freedom. Therefore, drug tourists attempt on new seeking to reinforce their sense of freedom. For this reason, by traveling to various destinations, they arrive at freer places. The insistent travels of these tourists ensure that some places become drug tourist destinations. The combination of drug use and the trust provided by the place emerges the sense of freedom these tourists seek. A 30-year-old woman from the USA built her relations with cannabis, Thailand, and freedom:

Thailand is a must for weed smokers. Those who want to hang out freely on the islands, beaches, nightlife come here. Anyone who loves weed should come to Thailand at least once in their life. Although the capital of weed is seen as Amsterdam, Thailand is much better. Because there is also a traveler culture here. Special events are often held for weed smokers. In these atmospheres, everyone is completely free.

When freedom, travel, and drugs are all considered together, drug tourists can be easier to understand. Because while they feel freer while traveling, drug use also supports their sense of freedom. In addition, the special places in the destination arrived also strengthens the feeling sense of freedom. Regardless, drug use is somehow linked to these movements. Because it is perceived as a means that reinforces the sense of freedom. Likewise, in a spontaneous drug atmosphere during trekking in Bali, a 35-year-old Australian female emphasized that happiness means being freer:

I believe nobody can be happy without being free. That's why I came here. I am trekking for this. I smoke marijuana for this. I was also using marijuana in Australia. But I did not feel comfortable like Bali. For me, being on the move is a sense of freedom. I feel better with marijuana.

It can be considered as a natural behavior for the pursuit of happiness to develop social behaviors to feel freer. As a result, traveling and then using drugs allows this feeling to reach its peak. The fact that the drug directly affects the brain causes an important feeling, while this feeling becomes more complex and makes it feel different, causing the behavior of individuals to be shaped (Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, Loftus, & Wagenaar, 2009). This feeling of happiness at different levels, felt by each behavior, causes the integration of travel, drugs, and the sense of freedom. Living in Turkey, a 29-year-old man traveling in his own country as an educator, explained this relationship as follows:

Bro, everything is clear. Cannabis and other drugs are everywhere in Turkey. But using it everywhere does not feel the same. I cannot feel high without being completely free. That's why I come here. I also go elsewhere. So, I feel more comfortable. And I smoke freely. Then I enjoy it. Everything is getting better. Nobody judge because everyone is the same.

#### **4.2.3. Entertaining atmosphere**

The main characteristic of seeking a place for drug users is that it offers an entertaining atmosphere. In addition, drug use by being affected by the social environment also reveals the relation between tourism and drugs. Having fun, especially with a crowd, is the characteristic of tourism and recreation activities. The entertaining atmosphere that drug tourists seek emerges with drug use. Perhaps the entertaining atmosphere encourages more drugs. A 31-year-old German female, who finds herself in this atmosphere in a traveler hostel in Malaysia, was talking about just that:

Initially, I had no intention of smoking marijuana as I had never tried it before. However, the atmosphere in the hostel attracted me very much throughout the day. Everyone was very generous in sharing marijuana. This encouraged me. I was a little nervous, but also excited. I did not understand much when I first tried it, but I always felt pleasant afterward.

Actually, drugs mean festivals and parties. In addition to the parties and festivals that are formed spontaneously only for drug use, there are also festivals and parties where drug use is intense because it offers a free atmosphere, even if this is not its purpose. In these recreational activities, drug use is becoming common, often with unlimited

entertainment and alcohol. A 29-year-old Turkish male who was interviewed in Turkey says the following about the entertainment atmosphere:

I go to fun parties where I can use a few ecstasies. If I have enough ecstasy, I do not need marijuana and alcohol. Usually, two are all it takes for more fun and partying. But I use it more at festivals. I want to be limitless. Because the atmosphere affects me to take more.

The belief that the peaks of entertainment have been reached with the effect of drugs reinforces the notion that entertainment and drugs are thought together by drug tourists. The intense feeling experienced in the first experience creates an addiction to both drugs, activities, and entertainment. The entertaining atmosphere is now becoming a necessity for drug use. The 33-year-old male participant traveling from the Netherlands to Cambodia described his cocaine experience and what is the entertaining atmosphere for him:

When I used cocaine for the first time, it was the most important experience I have ever had. I cannot imagine a life without cocaine. I am not affiliated with any culture, language, or identity. My place is in pleasant atmosphere with cocaine. I continue to use it as I enjoy it, as I have fun. Without fun and drugs, life has no taste.

#### **4.2.4. Local culture**

Drug tourists are often attracted to other cultures and make additional efforts to get to know these cultures. It includes values that drug tourists define as authentic aspects of local culture in touristic destinations. In this regard, drug use while traveling is part of an attempt by tourists to experience various aspects of local culture. Meeting with residents in the destination and learning about their culture can actually be explained by Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia. These tourists travel and meet local cultures to learn and develop continuously. A 40-year-old male from the USA, who has traveled almost all South Asian countries and met in Malaysia, described the combination of experience and culture:

Asia was a great experience for me ... Traveling in Thailand, dining in Yogyakarta, and staying in Bali for three months was an authentic experience ... Exploring Asian culture offers deep experiences. Reading a book or watching a movie about a place is no longer a way to explore the local culture. Seeing, feeling, living, and crowning it with marijuana ...

The local culture itself is perceived as an experience. Drug use with tourists who just met in a different culture is also part of this experience. Both exploring the local culture and participating in drug use rituals in this culture lead the experience to the next level. Apparently, drug use in the travel destination means the travel experience is complete and the local culture is included in this experience. A 29-year-old Argentine female associated the authenticity of Thai culture with drug use:

When I think about Chang Mai, Koh Phi Phi, Koh Phangan, and other places in Thailand, it is a great feeling to be in Thailand. Both its culture and nature are extraordinary. There is a possibility of having an authentic experience at any moment. Although I am not a regular weed user, I feel myself in a different life in a completely different culture while using weed here. Even the looks and smiles of the people here are different. Moreover, I feel this culture, even more, when I go to more local places away from tourists. I also want to feel high in this different, authentic culture. Therefore, I enjoy weed more.

The combination of travel, local culture, experience, and memories with drugs induce a deep impression on drug tourists. In a way, it is thought that it is drugs that make

everything better. For these tourists, travel without drugs, other tourists, experiences, and cultural activities do not make a difference. Therefore, a 25-year-old young man Turkish interviewed in Cambodia combines culture, and travel and felt there is a relation between drug and better experience:

I learned about this village from the internet before coming to Cambodia. But everyone who came to Cambodia heard the name of this village during their journey. Moreover, an incredibly special experience. This place is an important part of their journey in Cambodia for those who are interested in culture, not just weed. I mean, Cambodia itself, this village, and weed live together for me.

## **5. The relation between daily life, drugs and tourism: from escape to seeking**

Understanding the relation between daily life, drugs, and tourism will make it easier to understand the travel behavior of drug tourists. Fact that these tourists have a travel culture, the use of drugs as an enjoyable activity in daily life may cause more intense drug use in the destinations they arrived. However, while the use of drugs in the daily life of these tourists is mostly entertainment-oriented, drugs during travel are perceived as a complementary product of the pursuit of happiness. The presence of drugs alone is insufficient when making travel decisions, including travel for easier access to drugs. Because, regardless of the place of residence, access to drugs can be achieved. Therefore, drug use at the travel destination must offer different experiences than daily use. Therefore, the destination choice of drug tourists is much more than having access to drugs. An example of this deep relation, 32-year-old German traveler backpacker talked about cannabis use in Turkey:

I think about the life I have created for myself ... I am a good person. I have done everything right in my life. At school, at home, on the street ... For this reason, I wanted to escape from everything before returning to work as a lawyer. I will repeat this often. I can always smoke weed after a stressful workday. This relaxes me. But here the situation was a little different. I have fun and meet people while I am completely relaxed. It is like I found what I am looking for.

While drug use in daily life means to escape from routine, the meaning attributed to drugs in tourism is deeper. As a result of the pursuit of happiness in tourism, drug use is popular to build social relations, feel sense a of freedom, take part in an entertaining atmosphere, and participate in the local culture. Drug use in tourism represents a seek rather than an escape, as travel itself means an escape from the routine of daily life. Therefore, it is seen that only entertainment is common in daily life and drug use behavior in tourism. In tourism, drugs are seen from many angles as a complementary product. A 26-year-old British woman interviewed on an island in Malaysia explained this relation:

I think the use of marihuana everywhere should be legal. Because anyone who wants to use it anyway. I see this as a reward for hard work or school life. It is perfect for relaxing and having a good time. But smoking marijuana in Malaysia makes me feel different. Although I feel no pressure, I smoke. Because I enjoy it. Rolling and smoking marijuana on an island against the endless ocean makes the view more beautiful.

In a way, drug use is used as a part of leisure activities in daily life. The use of cannabis has already started to normalize and become widespread in North America and European countries. This normalization increases the number of people who say they use drugs in

daily life. Although not legal in most places, this normalization means the proliferation of drugs to escape the difficulties of modern life such as boredom and stress. Ultimately, while drug use represents escape in daily life, it is identified with the seeking in tourism. Seeking is based on the premise that tourism activities are the result of independent choice.

I traveled for a year. I have never met anyone bad. But I met incredibly good people ...  
Nobody did evil anyone. But many were always ready to have done a favor ...

## 6. Discussion, conclusion and suggestions

Drug use in tourism is a topic that has not received much attention in the tourism literature in general. Given the lack of previous studies, this study was conducted to provide a perspective for further discussion of the under-researched topic. In the study, the use of drugs in tourist destinations related to the pursuit of happiness of drug tourists came into prominence. In this context, the study involves taking the definition of drug tourism to the next level of travel experiences, rather than the tendency of tourists to travel to a tourist destination solely for drug consumption. Considering the multi-purpose and multi-activity nature of tourism, this type of approach shows how the links between drug tourists' travel and drug use affect their behavior.

The study, which revealed different causes of drug use while traveling, used the neo tribal theory to solve this complexity. Firstly, the reason why drugs are used as a recreational activity in tourism shows that it is linked to the experiences of drug use in daily life. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting a continuity regarding drug use in tourism (Belhassen et al., 2007; Hoffmann, 2014; Pereira & de Paula, 2016; Uriely & Belhassen, 2005; Wen et al., 2018, 2020). However, along with social relations, a sense of freedom, an entertaining atmosphere, and local culture have emerged as behaviors different from daily life. These behaviors, which emerge as a result of the pursuit of happiness, are integrated with drug use. In other words, it can be said that with drug use, social relations become stronger, a sense of freedom increases, the atmosphere becomes more entertaining, living with local culture prefers. It is observed that drug use while traveling positively affects travel and shapes social behaviors. These results coincide with the research conducted by Uriely and Belhassen (2005). According to this research, they emphasized that drug use while traveling may be the result of the seeking for different tourist experiences (using drugs) rather than an escape from daily routines. Moreover, drug tourists as neo tribes are closely related to Sørensen's (2003) concept of tourism culture since it expresses a dynamic process shaped by culture, social behaviors, and activities in tourism.

Drug use becomes a complementary and necessary product while enabling all activities to be upgraded. Therefore, after a while, travel and drugs coalesce for drug tourists. So, destination and drug use become exactly alike. Another important point is that tourists who use drugs in daily life also use drugs while traveling. In a way, to crown their travels and to use different types of drugs in different places becomes a goal. Those who do not use drugs in their daily life live this experience with the effect of the atmosphere. So, while travel increases drug use, extreme experiences at the destination remain powerful memories. This causes the destination to leave an impression on these tourists. Because in daily life, while drugs are mostly used for entertainment and self-expression, different emotions and behaviors are shaped while traveling. Therefore, in addition to

the emotions offered by daily life with drug use, the emotions offered by travel are much more intense. Ultimately, the drug, which is an escape means in daily life, emerges as an important aspect of seeking travel.

It turned out that drug-related tourist experiences are heterogeneous and involve the pursuit of happiness. As Bellis et al. (2003), Uriely and Belhassen (2005), Hoffmann (2014), and Wen et al. (2020) indicate that experiences connected with drugs are not homogeneous and drug use while traveling may be linked to the pursuit of different tourist experiences. As a result, countries, cities, or administrators cannot create places where drug users can be happy. Therefore, despite knowing the mental, physical, and financial harms they suffer, they seek happiness with drugs. Blaming these individuals seems to be the simplest and quickest way. However, to understand these tourists, it is necessary to get to the root of the problem. There must be an alternative to the drug in daily life. Activities and free environments that can respond to the pursuit of happiness should be created. The nature, culture, and activity-based practices of travel should be increased and presented to these tourists. Perhaps it may be appropriate to legalize the use of cannabis, which is seen as the least harmful, to reduce the demand for other dangerous drugs. Since drugs like cocaine, MDMA, amphetamines, heroin cause the serious mental problems (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction [EMCDDA], 2020). The legalization of cannabis in the US has created new touristic services (Kang & Lee, 2021; Skliamis & Korf, 2019). One solution may also be to increase the control and punishments for drugs other than cannabis. All these decisions should be made by gathering different experts from many fields.

It should not be forgotten that there are many more destinations preferred by drug tourists. Therefore, future studies could explore the way these destinations are associated with drug use, the impact that this relationship has on the image of destinations, and the role of both tourists and local tourism authorities in promoting this image. In addition, the relation between the length of travel, the frequency of drug use during travel, and changes in attitude towards drugs that were previously seen as deviant activity can be addressed. It is clear that these tourists who use drugs at every opportunity have strong human relations and are eager to get to know local cultures. It is observed that they feel freer while traveling and can find the destination and atmosphere they want. Therefore, it is important to attract their pursuits of happiness to volunteering projects in tourism rather than drugs. In this way, they can have a purpose in life that will make them happy. Eventually, offering other activities would limit the use of drugs.

## Notes on contributor

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