

Becoming Sustainable, Underground: Outdoor Parties Resisting Cultural Extractivism in the
Pandemic Summer of 2020

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Abstract

In the pandemic summer of 2020 in Helsinki, *UG* outdoor parties were able to disengage electronic live music practices from profit making and the logics of cultural extractivism, offering a sustainable practice by and for the local techno music scene.

In this article, the *UG* parties are understood as a learning experience, in which sustainability gave access to a different way to produce and consume culture, in particular thanks to: (1) safe space and pedagogy, (2) ecological awareness, (3) non-profit and community building, (4) music curating, and (5) randomness and exploration.

The *UG* party scene moved outdoors, with no profit to be made, and mostly on public land located in wastelands, shorelines, and forests. This operation suspended cultural extractivism through means that had been previously developed, but that acquired a new dimension because of being performed outdoors. The physical borders of indoor private spaces, and their real estate dimension, is the key issue in relation to music extraction. When played in public natural settings, with no clear borders or limitations, music is able to regain a political dimension.

The mixed-methods approach I used here involves interviews, digital ethnographies and post-party on site explorations and was based on a thoughtful reflection on how to overcome ethical research issues on one side, and the fear of contagion on the other.

A scene as a local actor in times of crisis plays a significant role in keeping social practices alive, and in defining ways to overcome and learn from difficult times.

Keywords: COVID-19, underground, Helsinki, cultural extractivism, sustainability, techno

Introduction

During the pandemic, live music and nightlife all over the world faced restrictions and limitations (Nofre et al. 2021). Clubs, bars, restaurants, and theatres remained closed over long periods of time, and their capacity, opening hours, and accessibility were limited and regulated. Most of these regulations were a means to contain the spread of Covid-19, and were lifted in several countries throughout 2022. At the beginning of 2020, spontaneous reactions to these restrictions targeting the creative sector started appearing, ranging from street protests to digital *Ersatz* events, from “plague raves” (Gillett 2020) to speakeasies (Zaveri 2021) and balcony singing (Barcellona Scorza 2020; Pollice and Miggiano 2020). These reactions worked as forms of protest, or as relief valves. Illegal open-air events, connected to electronic music such as techno, also emerged among these. In this article, I examine these latter happenings in Helsinki and reveal how they were able to disengage themselves, at least temporarily, both from regimented nightlife and from the logics of cultural extractivism in urban environments.

According to a UNESCO global report, ten million jobs were lost globally in the creative sector in 2020 (UNESCO 2022). The pandemic, as a health crisis, cascaded and provoked other kinds of crises in the economic and political spheres (Walby 2022). As we

are experiencing right now, political turmoil, inflation, rising prices for energy and basic goods, and delays in industrial production are affecting societies around the post-pandemic world. Despite the lifting of previous restrictions, the live music industry is still facing enormous difficulties. For this reason, it is important to learn from music experiences and practices that enhanced music making in sustainable ways during the pandemic.

In the summer of 2020 in Helsinki, thanks to a temporary suspension of everything else, *UG* outdoor parties were able to disengage electronic live music practices from profit making and the logics of cultural extractivism, offering a sustainable practice by and for the local techno music scene. For a limited time, the live music industry and nighttime economy did not matter. Music was able to accompany the basic celebration of a rediscovered social experience: hanging out and dancing in a crowd to a repetitive beat. *UG* is a slang Finnish acronym, which has been widely used in the scene since before the pandemic: the two letters are spelled out in Finnish, but they stand for the English term “underground”. In the same vein, they refer to events, situations, and even people who are not mainstream, and whose identity is bound to a subcultural or scene-based form of belonging (Bennett and Guerra 2018).

In this article, the *UG* parties are understood as a learning experience (Kolb 2015), in which sustainability gave access to a different way to produce and consume cultural practices, in particular thanks to: (1) safe space and pedagogy, (2) ecological awareness, (3) non-profit and community building, (4) music curating, and (5) randomness and exploration. From an academic point of view, “COVID clubbing” has been previously analysed in terms of its digital live-streaming implementation during lockdown (Payling and St John 2020; Vandenberg, Berghman, and Schaap 2021); street level institutions in Electronic Dance Music scenes (Madden 2021); challenges to nightclubs (Mazierska and Rigg 2021); well-being and nightlife (Nofre 2021); governance (Garcia-Ruiz et al. 2021); and in the context of

heritage building and music history (Strong 2021). These publications were written during the pandemic, and reflect the difficulties of delineating an end to it, or being overly optimistic in declaring it over. The urgency of publishing about the pandemic in the competitive neo-liberal academic world generated interesting reflections and apt ideas for making sense of a state of emergency during its unfolding.

In this article, I am arguing that some of the problems and concerns about music during the pandemic were already present before 2020. The exploitation of music scenes and ecosystems, in relation to place marketing and real estate boosterism, were evident in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis and the consequent financialization of housing (Aalbers 2017), touristification (Sequera and Nofre 2018), and commodification of urban space. The pandemic represented a chance for cultural practices to disengage from these dynamics of cultural extraction, and constituted a moment to reflect on the chances of organising sustainable events, freeing music from exploitation and accelerating the existing political nature of clubbing.

Methods-wise, this article is based on semi-guided interviews with disc jockeys, organizers, and participants in these parties, anonymised to safeguard them in respect to the illicit nature of these happenings. Some of the interviews happened with informants I had already talked with in relation to previous pre-pandemic nighttime research; these suggested others through snowball sampling. The interviews were conducted in person, practicing safe distancing and masking, or remotely thanks to videoconferencing. They were transcribed and analysed via content analysis, revealing values, narratives, and topical issues through clustering and cross referencing (Krippendorff 2004).

Moreover, I explored several areas of Helsinki where these parties were taking place, at various times of the day, mostly in connection to strolls I was taking to maintain a work-life balance during the lockdowns (Niitamo 2021). The areas where these parties were

happening were sometimes already known in pre-pandemic times as skating and graffiti spots, as outdoor recreational areas, and as sites for marginal activities such as illegal saunas. They were easily reachable, secluded but also close to important transportation nodes. There were plenty of party *clues* to be observed on site, ranging from littering to graffiti, from abandoned bicycles and electric scooters to trash bags gathered for later collection, from gazebos to forgotten clothes. Health precautions limited an ethnographic approach based on participant observation at the parties, and therefore my own direct presence in these has been minimal and not research-motivated. However, it is important to note that I have participated in, and researched, Helsinki music scenes and nightlife for more than a decade. The observations on site were inspired by a materialist media ecological approach (Despard 2016): I reflected on how these places are able to generate for themselves a particular way to make and consume culture in a socio-spatial setting, where no strict physical borders are present and where the infrastructures are either borrowed, temporary, or co-opted. Moreover, I was interested in understanding how to deal with the political dimension of land and its use, and how natural, in-between, and post-industrial spaces could be used through eventfulness to shake off the extractivist dynamic from music.

Moreover, this article is also based on digital ethnographies (Kaur-Gill and Dutta 2017), making sense of social media and online cultural realities. I monitored news, party invitations, pictures and videos, posts and comments that appeared in social media in connection to the parties, for instance on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The combination of interviews, on site strolling observation and digital ethnography provided sufficient data to get an insight into the origin and evolution of these parties during the pandemic. Content analysis was applied consistently to interviews and digital documentation, while the observations on site were inspired by a materialist media ecological approach.

Music, city and cultural extractivism

A time of crisis always has an effect on culture, and some crises have long tails whose effects can be felt even across generations (Linkon 2018; Walby 2022); nevertheless, cultural production and consumption themselves can often become mediators in imagining a transition towards an “after” the crisis. Music ecosystems dominated by Do It Yourself (DIY), fair trade, and commitment to scenes outside the logics of capitalist exploitation (Straw 1991), such as for instance punk and post-punk, brought a temporary and partial democratization of the music industry (Hesmondhalgh 1998), and offered ways for shrinking cities to revitalize and prosper (Bottà 2020). These experiences were based on sustainability, which can be seen a means for subaltern resistance to the logics of extractive capitalism, therefore empowering live music practices for themselves, and disengaging them from institutional cultural industries on one hand, and from their ancillary role to real estate on the other. In this article, I claim that the pandemic has weakened and disrupted the live music industry, but its fragility was already apparent before the spread of Covid-19: it was connected to a complex set of dynamics involving the idiosyncratic role of music in processes of urban financial extraction, and the mainstreaming of underground and scene-based practices in the context of the nighttime economy. More broadly, this was also connected to a global economic instability originating in the 2008 economic crisis, and still ongoing, for instance in relation to the European sovereign debt crisis.

Sustainability has been widely addressed (Wheeler and Beatley 2014), starting with the classic definition provided by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This definition has been expanded by the reference to three pillars: the economic, the social, and the ecological (Purvis, Mao, and Robinson 2019). The relationship between culture and sustainability has also been examined relative to heritage and cultural vitality, to economic

viability, to diversity and place, and to eco-cultural resilience (Soini and Birkeland 2014). Extractive capitalism was first used in reference to the massive dispossession occurring through mining and fracking in Latin America, and to forms of resistance to it (Veltmeyer 2016; Kröger, Hagolani-Albov, and Gills 2021). Lately, this concept has opened from the literal definition bound to natural resources, to a more expanded one, including the realms of organization, space, digital content mining, and culture in general. In this regard, cultural extractivism has, for instance, been examined as affecting the urban environment “by the stretching of work beyond traditional ‘points of production’” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2017: 195). Moreover, in cities this is “continually prompted by the appropriation and expropriation of spaces, values, infrastructures, and forms of life that are submitted to capitalist valorisation” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2017: 196).

Music has become an interesting element in this transformation. Its presence in certain neighbourhoods increases real estate value by amplifying simple imaginaries of community, buzz, nightlife, and vitality that can be sold; this means that music can be used to extract rent. For instance, clubs are tolerated and even welcomed as significant partners in areas under redevelopment (Cohen 2007). First of all, they fill empty industrial properties quickly, only thanks to superficial initial modifications. Moreover, they create a buzz around a particular derelict block, district, or part of town, and embalm them with a certain atmosphere. This can be marketed and used to sell properties in that area, which is then in need of silencing, and therefore clubs are turned into restaurants, envisioning a quieter but still “authentic” (Zukin 2008) life for future rich residents and tenants.

Holt (2014) focuses on gentrification on the Lower East Side of New York City, and on its impact on middle-sized rock clubs. For Holt, gentrification implies an adaptation of venues to the “tastes and lifestyles” of the new population through an “indie aesthetic” focused on originality, safety, collectivity, and sophistication, and through a capitalist-

oriented optimisation of spaces, facilities, and sound. To the middle-sized club owner, he assigns the role of accelerator of the gentrification process and the consequent closure of smaller independent venues. Regarding London, Kolioulis (2018) identifies the relation between gentrification and clubs as two-fold. On one hand, this process of spatial renewal and social displacement (Smith and Williams 1986; Mele 2000) deeply affects the diversity of music ecosystems by bringing about the closure of independent clubs, often thanks to noise disturbance regulations implemented by new affluent inhabitants. On the other, new fancy mega-clubs are being embedded into processes of neighbourhood uplift, and redevelopers are deliberately funding clubs to create additional value and income through place-making. Kolioulis defines this new form of extraction as “financialization of clubbing”, which transforms clubbing into a “tradable urban product” (Kolioulis 2018: 214). I speak of cultural extractivism rather than cultural financialization, because the assets of music in urban spaces cannot only be quantified into economic values, but are also determined by intangible elements, verging on the non-representational (Thrift 2007) and ephemeral, often described through references to a buzz (Vanolo 2018), or to an atmosphere (Böhme 1993). Kolioulis suggests interesting governance actions in contrast to this phenomenon, such as the institution of a nighttime parliament, and focuses on the democratisation of the night, and on the more proactive attitudes of night workers, club owners, and organisers.

Forced operationalization of music in the context of urban renewal is also linked to discourses surrounding creativity, and its role in revitalizing post-industrial cities. In particular, the work of Richard Florida (2002) and Charles Landry (2008) has generated widespread attention to the role of creativity and the creative sector in cities, and their determinative function in the national and global competition for talent and capital. Criticisms of the creative city paradigm have been mostly connected to its vague and underdeveloped definition of a creative class, and to its lack of attention toward just and

sustainable urban transformations (Ponzini and Rossi 2010; Pratt 2011). However, it is impossible to deny their success in providing theoretical foundations, and narratives for recent urban transformations.

“Mining city districts with music” has continued to transform urban space, all around the world. Moreover, the so-called nighttime economy has itself contributed to this process (Stahl and Bottà 2019). Trying to establish its importance at the level of governance and legislation, it has celebrated fragile music ecosystems as best cases and therefore making them prey of financial interests embedded into urban renewal. All these mobilizations have put music as cultural practice in a weak position, among other places, in Helsinki Finland. It is therefore significant to now trace the story leading to the emergence of the *UG* parties as subaltern strategy of resistance.

Helsinki and its music ecosystem

On a general level, Helsinki experienced a wave of cultural liberalisation throughout the 2010s, involving a top-down action based on participatory planning (Kuokkanen and Palonen 2018), place-making experiments, and a “hands-off” attitude in connection to spontaneous local activism (Krivy 2012). This attitude was linked to a political change within the municipality, with a younger generation of youth workers, bureaucrats, and elected politicians taking office. They were revising previous authoritative and repressive policies towards the underground, such as *Stop töhryille*, which criminalized graffiti making and tagging through zero tolerance, between 1998 and 2008. These liberalizing policies were rolled out in connection with a new comprehensive urban plan involving housing densification, and a restructuring of the mobility system, in connection with new strategic planning. This put a new quest for urbanity and urban life on the forefront (Lilius 2021).

A coeval new wave of local civic activism brought the creation of bottom-up projects such as local festivals, temporary cafes and restaurants, food co-ops, open flea markets, and

an innovative form of “city-making” more generally (Faehnle et al. 2017). This new activism began to be increasingly successful in engaging local citizens willing to invest in a livelier, more equal, and more sustainable environment, and in attracting the attention of companies and start-ups working on peer-to-peer and circular economies (Mäenpää and Faehnle 2017). In this context, social media became a fundamental instrument for ideating, discussing, organizing, marketing, and benchmarking ideas, events, and products, but also for assessing, criticizing, and even rewriting official policies and city plans. However, this also created a roll out plan for the exploitation of activism for profit making, and for the real estate financial interests targeting certain districts over others.

For instance, the former working-class districts of Kallio and Vallila, north of Helsinki city centre, have been at the forefront in terms of activism, thanks to their young populations organising block parties, and opening galleries and small cafes. This has attracted the attention both of the city, which incorporated the districts in its tourist offerings (Bottà 2021), and of the real estate sector, causing rises in rent and eventual gentrification, at both the housing and retail levels. Moreover, a clustering of licensed techno clubs has been settling into a few nightlife clusters within these districts (Bottà 2021). This has generated a more widespread shift of the city’s whole nightlife towards the area, including restaurants and bars. This was paralleled by the 2020 closure of *DTM*, *Virgin Oil*, *The Circus* and *Nosturi*, four consolidated clubs in the city centre, due to noise disturbance and fear of rent rises, which sealed a long process of silencing in the centre, and in its neighbouring district of Punavuori (Venäläinen 2020).

The techno scene, co-opted into the new clusters, flourished to the point of overflowing into neighbouring dive bars and attracting mainstream night punters. Underground techno parties began within the scene, as a response, to the mainstreaming of techno taking place in Kallio and Vallila. Before the Covid-19 outbreak, *UG* events were

already taking place secretly in a variety of indoor locations, which were leased, rented, or simply occupied temporarily in industrial, post-industrial, and other in-between zones scattered throughout the city. Their proliferation was based on both regular weekly clubs and more spontaneous, irregular happenings. Moreover, these parties were strictly by invitation only, and guest list were often passed on only via a closed-knit network of insiders.

These parties have been a response of the independent scene toward the more mainstream techno club clustering, toward local civic activism co-opted by the municipality, and toward the exploitative attitude of the real estate sector towards formerly working-class districts. They have also opposed a culture of activism based only on utility and the greater good, by celebrating pleasure (Petrilli 2020) and hedonism. In this regard, one informant stated about the *UG* parties, that:

people think it is good to keep it a bit esoteric and secret, and people are a bit neurotic about it, just like they only talk about it with people who know what it is about, and then that's why it is very hard to defend it in public and politicians don't have knowledge of these things and maybe because in Finland there is a bit a mentality that everything has to be useful and like good for the . . . economic sector and something that Finnish people can bring onboard as innovation or something like that, and it seems just like a waste of time for general people. (Participant/DJ #1 6.10.2020)

Techno going underground was therefore a consequence of a series of urban redevelopments, which affected Helsinki as a whole. However, it was also a response to global issues that might be understood as a “long tail” of the 2008 economic crisis, with central scenes in north America and continental Europe exploring DIY as an antidote to the unstable logics of global neoliberalism (Fisher 2014), and practising accelerationism (Noys 2014).

As previously noted, clubs in cities have been closing in association with gentrification, and the contemporary financialization of urban properties all over the world. As pointed out by Assiter in relation to London, “where many nightclubs already inhabited a precarious position in gentrified, financialised urban space, the pandemic has served to emphasize club culture’s existent fragility” (2020). Music practices taking place during the pandemic cannot only be examined through the lens of exceptionality; they have continued cultural practices of resistance towards extractivism, which are at the same time critical toward urban renewal via music, and toward the coercion of nightlife into municipality-led utilitarian activism. Moreover, these practices are embedded into a global political quest for more sustainable, and ultimately more human, public and social life.

COVID-19 and the *UG* parties moving outdoors

The first cases of Covid-19 in Finland appeared at the end of January 2020, in connection with tourism to Lapland, and several individual cases were reported throughout February and March. On 16 March 2020, the Finnish government declared the Emergency Power Act: schools were closed, activities limited until May, and targeted expenditures were budgeted for unemployment and education. On 25 March, the *Uusimaa* region surrounding the capital was sealed off from the rest of the country for a few weeks (Moisio 2020). Throughout 2020, clubs and restaurants were continuously limited in their operations, both in terms of opening hours, and of capacity. Festivals were postponed or cancelled, live music and indoor dancing were banned (the ban was lifted only in October 2021, and reintroduced for a few months in 2022). There was no formal lockdown: people were advised to avoid social contact and stay inside, which was duly respected.¹

In the spring of 2020, the first streaming electronic dance music events appeared. For instance, *United We Stream*, which involved 115 cities around the world, starting with Berlin

¹ I will refer to the spring of 2020 and its social reclusion as lockdown, even if it was not enforced legislatively.

and the Resident Advisor's *Club Quarantäne* started gathering momentum throughout the virtual world. Live streaming events also started happening in the Finnish-speaking context, ranging from produced live gigs by bands in empty clubs, to goofy bedroom DJ sets.

Individuals and collectives of the *UG* scene began hosting online events revealing their resourcefulness and resilience; the online community of *Habbo Hotelli*, designed as a social world-building game by the Finnish company Sulake in 2000, was revamped thanks to *Swägo*, a series of virtual clubs building on participants and performers in the *UG* parties. People were able to choose avatars and nicknames to attend these events and explore, hang out, chat, and interact, while a DJ streamed a live set. The reception was mixed; one informant revealed how

it was quite funny that they had certain similar dynamics in interaction as in actual parties . . . the way people were behaving in the chat was quite loose and sometimes even chaotic . . . it was a great idea but that novelty lasted for a couple of times and that played out already during the spring. (DJ/organizer #2 6.11.2020)

However, someone else states that “Habbo Hotelli . . . I was totally not interested in that, I visited and I was thinking I couldn't get the sound on and I browsed off, this is boring. It was really interesting as experiment” (DJ/organizer #3 29.10.2020). Moreover, “many of the DJs just waited that this is over” (Participant/DJ #1 2020).

The beginning of the summer felt like a sudden moment of liberation after several stressful months. Cases kept on diminishing throughout July, with several days showing minimal contagion and no deaths throughout the country. The typical exhilarating feeling of summer light (which can reach nineteen hours a day in Helsinki in June) augmented the

illusory feeling of the end of the pandemic. An informant points to the hallucinatory experience of walking outside and seeing people:

there was this weird feeling of awakening of some point, I think early June, I remember this feeling because I had spent a lot of time home . . . and then when there is sunshine and you get out and you see that people are getting out . . . even in normal conditions this change of season has quite a massive impact but you were seeing these kids and these people who looked like the movie *Dazed and Confused* . . . people were looking more 1990s like grunge and all that. (DJ/Organizer #2 6.11.2020)

The idea of outdoor *UG* techno parties is not new; electronic music events have often explored outdoor locations in rural and secluded areas. In the Finnish electronic music context, raves and Goa trance parties were already happening in the late 1980s (Finnszene 1995–2017). However, 2020 *UG* parties should not be understood as *teknivals*, raves, or “free parties” (O’Grady 2015; Petiau 2015). They were in fact small, and the area from which they drew participants was limited to the Helsinki metropolitan area. They did not last several days, and they were not directly connected to the neo-tribes of new age travellers and its itinerant circuits and lifestyle (Bizzell 2008).

Outdoor summer festivals based on popular music acts have been organised in Finland since the 1960s, and the tradition of summer *tanssilavat*, outdoor terraces for couples dancing, is even older (Musikkiarkisto Music Archive Finland 2022). If summer is therefore an established time for musical celebrations, what happened in the summer of 2020 has more to do with the continuity of *UG* parties that were already happening indoors, and of their network of organisers, DJs, technicians, and audiences, which had been active for years. Every weekend between the end of June and mid-August, several *UG* parties were held in

Helsinki in urban forests, shorelines, wastelands, and areas under construction or renewal, sometimes in places occupied by DIY skateboard ramps and saunas. Some of them were happening near urban redevelopments, such as the *Kalasadama* district, and exploited wastelands, construction sites, and in-between spaces. Some explored underused shorelines, since sound systems could be directed towards the sea, or green patches of the *Keskuspuisto*, a vast natural park, north of the city centre. There were logistical elements such as seclusion, distance from housing, and proximity to public transportation behind these choices; other elements were aesthetic, in the attempt to curate a pleasant outdoor experience to placate collective anxiety. Locations ranged from post-industrial ruins to leafy natural amphitheatres.

These parties are music practices disentangled from the music industry, the nighttime economy, and also real estate, in respect to the use of mostly public land. The City of Helsinki owns over 60% of the land and most of the shoreline (City of Helsinki Real Estate Department 2022), thus being the major real estate actor in town. This monopoly has allowed the city to maintain mixed housing and, from a cultural point of view, to rent out for free several open-air green spaces and properties, often equipped with sound systems, thanks to the city's online booking system *Varaamo* (www.varaamo.hel.fi). However, as stated above, many people involved in the *UG* parties maintain a cautious, and sometimes hostile, attitude toward the municipality, and its willingness to manipulate hedonist and subaltern scenes into "public good". The electronic music scene is resistant to collaborating with the city, thinking that this would dilute the subaltern status and undermine the dedication to these events. 2020 saw a particular scene taking music into their own hands, and setting up their own rules in relation to behaviour, values, and meanings considered central to the scene itself, distancing themselves from the music industry, the city, and the private real estate sector. My interviews revealed five major elements in this regard, which can be understood as practical manifestations of cultural sustainability: (1) safe space and pedagogy, (2)

ecological awareness, (3) no-profit and community building, (4) music curating, (5) and randomness and exploration.

Safe space and pedagogy

The safe space discourse emerged in connection with providing an arena where identities could be played out freely, safely, and comfortably, on and off the dance floor. There are several interpretations and understandings of safe space, ranging from separatist tendencies to inclusive ones, that is from providing a haven for specific minoritarian identities only, to allowing everyone to join in (Roestone Collective 2014). Moreover, the concept of *safer* space has also gained momentum in relation to a conscious expansion of the understanding of safety on one hand, and of identities, abuse, and power relations on the other (Barrière 2021). The outdoor *UG* scene took care of providing online resources, instructions, self-help tips, and a set of rules stated, for instance, on invitation posts and messages; in general, there was a tendency towards inclusivity, fuelled also by the attempt to keep parties small so as to have a sort of overview and control. Moreover, there was the continuous fear that without clear rules, the party could spiral out of control, especially in connection to “drunk teenagers”. For some organizers, this has also taken a pedagogical meaning, where for instance the *MYÖS* collective (<https://www.facebook.com/myosclub>) and the *Valomerkki* campaign (<https://valomerkki.club/>) became central in providing a network of care. Safety should also be addressed here, on a public health level: these parties were still happening during the heart of a pandemic, and opinions about the possibility of outdoor contagions diverged. These parties addressed these issues with simple rules involving hand sanitising, inviting people to stay home if experiencing symptoms, and suggesting mask use and distance. Moreover, news about possible contagion was shared on social media after some parties.

Ecological awareness

Ecological awareness was also an essential element. For instance, being an open air event in a public natural landscape, the problem of littering needed to be addressed consistently. The organizers provided differentiated waste collection points, and they cleaned up spaces after parties with volunteers from the crowd. Moreover, several organizers and participants shared a clear view on climate change and care for the environment, which for instance translated into travelling from and to these events via public transportation, bicycle, or on foot.

No-profit and community building

No profit was also a defining element to these events. The organizers were able to borrow sound systems, mixers, and turntables, or use their own private equipment, keeping it essential. People brought their own food and drinks; something might have been sold from food trucks, or some spontaneous barter market established on site. Sometimes the organizers would provide a sign with a phone number for Mobile Pay to collect donations. My informants often stressed the community dimension: “I think many of my friends who go to *UG* parties are either DJing or doing radio or selling tickets or throwing after-parties, it cannot be that you are just consuming something, it has to be more of a community thing” (Participant/DJ #1 6.10.2020).

Music curating

Several of my informants referred to the centrality of music in the open-air events, that is, to the possibility to focus on music itself in a group of people who are there exactly because of it. The spring lockdown gave DJs the possibility to stop and reflect on music, without the urge to please crowds and provide a clubbing experience in competition with one another. In this regards one DJ explained how:

I don't have any more needs to play for other people, and if you only play for other people your sense of music can be shallower because you only think about the reaction: is this cool etc.? So, I listened to a lot of different music, more or less experimental, and music that you don't hear in clubs like ambient and downtempo and drone music and dark ambient etc. (DJ/Organizer #4 25.11.2020)

Also, DJ/organizer #2 refers to the fact that:

we wanted this liberty in terms of the music, of the content, not to imitate a night club too much . . . for example in the first party we had very distinctive phases, first playing this weird psychedelic whatever tunes during the daytime, and then this EDM downtempo, and then late at night it was full-on techno and it got out of hand, we didn't plan the end and we ended up going on till 5:00, 5:30 AM, the sun was up already I thought the latest would be when the sun rises, but it went on even more than that. (DJ/Organizer #2 6.11.2020)

These statements indicate both a keen attention towards curating the music selection and, at the same time, more freedom in terms of distancing oneself from the professional DJ habitus and the indoor clubbing experience.

Randomness and exploration

The outdoor location and the summer natural light allowed for a more relaxed and diluted music experience. Some of my informants referred to a picnic atmosphere, with people sitting on the grass, chatting, and listening to records for several hours before the late sunset and techno would provide the right atmosphere for dancing. In reference to the outdoor

dimension of these parties, it is also possible to find interesting new elements that informants underlined several times. One of these is surely the celebratory atmosphere:

it felt special, it's outdoor and it still felt better to go there in comparison to an inside venue, but I mean it kind of felt like the end of corona there. Because it was the time when there were zero cases daily cases, and we were just out there, completely forgotten (sic) everything about what had happened. (Participant #6 30.10.2020)

Moreover, the exploratory dimension played a significant role. For instance, one informant referred to the fact that "there were two parties going on like simultaneously and they were maybe 200 meters apart, we could actually walk between the parties and have the weirdest mash-ups of this Ibiza techno meets underground techno" (Participant #6 30.10.2020).

Another tells that:

We didn't know the actual spot yet where it was, and then we walked around in Verkkosaari and tried to find it and found a party, but it was a different one, there were actually two parties happening in Verkkosaari at the same time and it was a very small one and we were... ok is this it? Is this what people are talking about? And then we finally found the right one. (Participant #5 30.10.2020)

Randomness, casual encounters, sonic cross-pollination, and exploration of unknown wastelands were often mentioned as key elements in the *UG* party experience. This was made easy visually by the presence of natural light, and sonically by the fact that sound waves from the sound system travelled around, providing reference points. Of course, organizers tried to mitigate the risks of having too many people in one party, which for

instance might have attracted the attention of the police. The methods ranged from inviting only via certain social media (with Facebook for instance being used deliberately to avoid attention from the younger generation), or by playing music such as “boring 90s techno” (DJ/Organizer #4 5.11.2020).

Conclusions

During the summer of 2020, music as an instrument for the extraction of value and atmosphere stopped working. The *UG* party scene moved outdoors, with no profit to be made, and mostly on public land located in wastelands, shorelines, and forests. This operation suspended cultural extractivism through means that had been previously developed, but that acquired a new dimension because of being performed outdoors. The physical borders of indoor private spaces, and their real estate dimension, is the key issue in relation to music extraction. When played in public natural settings, with no clear borders or limitations, music is able to regain a political dimension. The *UG* scene was able to develop pedagogical features that will affect future clubbing. It activated talent and resources, without having to submit to the rules of economic impact, growth, and profit. This carries political consequences that cannot be ignored. Previous understandings of urban activism emphasise social and economic sustainability (Mäenpää and Faehnle 2017), while this form of subaltern community building puts cultural sustainability first, that is the attempt to preserve and celebrate electronic music as the expression of a community, outside the nighttime economy and music industry infrastructure such as clubs and bars. Moreover, the scene provided the pedagogical means to replicate and expand this experience, as seen throughout the summer. This case also showed how music, as the main ingredient in an intensified nighttime socialisation, can operate also with limited resources, as long as it is organised and lived within a scene. Moreover, the sensory exploration of liminal outdoor spaces, following aural traces, hints at a participatory and playful dimension, which

corroborates the idea of experiencing something authentic and at the same time shareable, and therefore less elitarian than the indoor equivalent, where strict door policies were enforced.

The mixed-methods approach I used here was based on a thoughtful reflection on how to overcome ethical research issues on one side, and the fear of contagion on the other. I was doing so with a naïve attitude, that is through “surprise, learning, and failure” (Despard 2016: 54), which was generated by the sense of living and working through a global emergency, and through a moment of suspension which was genuinely changing the world as I knew it. With the end of the summer and the feared beginning of a second wave, these parties have been blamed in the Finnish media as vehicles for the spread of the virus, or more generally for drug abuse, noise disturbance, and loitering (Räty and Timonen 2020). Also due to the decreasing temperatures, they dismantled. The municipality also got involved with a timid attempt at night governance with an *yöluotsi*, the pilot night liaison, negotiating for sustainable solutions in view of a post-Covid-19 night recovery. As Kröger, Hagolani-Albov and Gills stated:

There are many different forms of resistance to extractivism, types of tactics, types of collations, and different terrains of struggle – whether very local or globalized – and many mediascapes and global formations. Yet, so much of the character of extractivism ultimately is local and is experienced as local by real beings who are under either attack or threat from extractivism. (2021: 245)

A scene as a local actor in times of crisis plays a significant role in keeping social practices alive, and in defining ways to overcome and learn from difficult times.

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