

The D J Culture in Skopje in 2004

“Gimme Two records and I’ll make you a universe”

DJ Spooky

The aim of this text is to provide a portrayal of the current D-J culture in Skopje. This idea resulted from the research conducted throughout the public music events that took place in the centre of Skopje during the year 2004, which included D-J performances at the disco clubs since we observed them as creative live music performances. The data resulting from the processing of the fields in the database, especially the distribution according to the music genres and according to the number of visitors, show that these music events are of significant importance for our music environment.

As a world music trend, D-J parties in our country began in 1995, being a consequence to the huge popularity that this genre achieved at the western European music scene. Throughout the years, young population’s interest in electronic music through D-J performances marks continuous increase in the number of organized events and in the number of visitors. According to the data obtained from the interview with the first professional organizers of these parties – Balance (www.balance.com.mk/tockanatopenje.com.mk), in the year 2000 the popularity with visitors ranges between 500 to 1000 youths, whereas just four years after in 2004 this number goes up to 2000-4000. This increase in the interest in this type of music parties among the young population can be ascribed to the influence of:

The number of registered performances of D-Js in our clubs during 2004 is 117 i.e. 20% out of 584 events and it takes the second place according to the representation in the total genre distribution in our base. In fact, the real number of performances is much higher since from Wednesday to Sunday all the discotheques in the centre play electronic music exclusively and work with DJs. We have registered only those performances that inferred particular concert standards regarding organization of parties and, therefore, we

observed the rest as a regular programme of the discotheques. The difference lies in the fact that they are not classical forms of concerts but rather parties and gatherings of the young population, which results in the data that they are the most numerous ones. These performances are organized on weekly bases by the private clubs mostly in a form of festivals or visitings of representative names in this area.

Due to the conditional relation between the D-J culture nourished in Skopje and the one at the global level, in the lines below we shall briefly recollect the beginnings and the development of the D-J culture in the world.

The phenomenon of these parties marks its initial stages in Chicago, at the beginning of the 1980s of the past century. “ We have house music”- were the commercial headlines for the clubs around the city, which actually represented an abbreviation for the music played at the big warehouses and at the old factories visited by a huge mass of young people wishing to have a party and dance (Warehouse). In 1981 disco music was out, therefore D-Js had to develop new techniques that are described as remixes today. At that time, the disc-jockeys were sitting in the dark background of the clubs and acted as presenters of dancing music. Only after couple of years, the primacy was taken by the electronic dance music or house music, which was produced on synthesizers. Later on, with the development of the events, the D-jay becomes the key figure in the shaping of the new music form – the hip hop. He uses the complete new digital technology to provide musical background for the *parties* that are created at the very place. When we take into consideration the number of visitors at these parties, which rapidly increases at international level, this form becomes very competitive and it surpasses almost all other, with minor exceptions. This also results from a psychological instance that the organizers in the clubs and the discotheques have sensed and that is the phenomenon of alienation and the need for closer relations among the people. They offered freedom to the visitors through dancing and enjoying the music without burdening them that their coming should result in taking a side for the quality of the music (Gic 2001: 37).

Today, a DJ (digital jockey) is a synonym for a person playing with recorded sounds and various sound media (Nonevski: 2003).

Moreover, the D-J culture also presents a new model of audio history and memory, because the music history becomes a network of mobile segments free to be transformed into new lines, texts, mixes at every instance or, in other words, music history becomes digital with a casual approach. Today, by only writing the term 'd-j' on the Internet you can open numerous sites through which you can be informed about the history of this culture, about new magazines, interviews with D-Js, new technologies they use, places of performances, listen to music and etc. (www.djforums.com/ www.enpreneur.com/ www.jahsonic.com/).

The phenomenon of this culture primarily lies in the fact that it emerged as a subculture dedicated to the underground clubbing scene, but in only ten years of time it became a widely accepted competitive mass culture that surpasses almost all others, with few exemptions. (An example of this type is the opening of the Olympics in 2004 in Athens, where all the music for the opening parade was created by DJ Tiesto).

This can be attributed to the fact that the DJ presenters epitomize the global electronic music scene and they are also part of the music industry that consists of several conglomerates and a huge number of small independent producers. In that respect, this industry has turned the DJs into cult personalities who guide the mass into the party, at moments resembling shamans or preachers conducting religious ceremonies. Subsequently, the first rave parties started to take place (particularly in Berlin - [www.Love Parade](http://www.LoveParade.com/)), which were banned at the beginning according to the ethical standards of the society. In fact, a lot of young people found themselves in this tendency and they accepted the parties as a kind of new hippie movement. The major factors that had initiated this state of trance parties were:

- the electronic music with its hypno-propensity caused by its repetitiveness
- the synthetic drugs (because of which these parties were banned)
- the emergence out of the clubs into the main music scene.
- the trend (the implication) that the recorded music is lifeless and that, in fact, the DJs.

The music culture created by the DJs heralds a fundamentally new cultural space generated through:

- the change in the nature of the music production itself
- the opening of new channels for dissemination of music and

- the activation of new methods of listening to music

Therefore, there is no wonder that the D-J culture promotes new social practices and operates at the front line of the cultural policies.

After they had noticed the enormous popularity with visitors at these parties, the world production conglomerates started considering these consumers as their most important consumption group. In fact, this was the way in which the D-J culture experienced its culmination in the nineties, through the market and offer of clothes and various brands, and the music stores. Thus, a multibillion-dollar DJ industry was created, which had to expose the DJs as heroes in order to sell its own products to the ravers and young fans of these parties (according to www.entrepreneur.com/article/). (The market was dedicated to the teenagers who, for an instance, in 2000 in USA spent 180 billion dollars on clothes and technical equipment).

On the other hand, in order to have a performance the DJs have to have their own recorded CD. The connoisseurs of this music claim that they actually have everything recorded and that only their act as a predefined performance and the dynamic dance 'turn on' the mass. The electronic dance music scene itself encompasses a great variety of music styles (house, techno, trance, progressive trance, break-beat, garage, jungle, and etc.) and each one of them is further divided into at least ten subtypes (Temkov: 2003). Globally, this is a collage, spacey music without a structure and with a heightened rhythm. This is the reason why it is experienced as an integrated audio-visual act, as a kind of audio-visual and choreographic entirety in which many components are interwoven, such as: lights, dance, rhythm, colours, outfits, atmosphere, incense, etc.

In Skopje this trend started with the techno and trance music played at the first parties organized by the radio presenters and DJs on the Channel 103 radio (Kanal 103) in the middle of the nineties of the last century. At that time, these parties moved from the down-town cafés to the discotheques: Metropol, MNT, Sileks and Hard Rock. In fact, party organizers appeared who perceived quick and easy profit in this music genre. Afterwards, the club owners joined in and, thus, nowadays in Skopje, after a period of ten years, this music is still the only entertainment offered in the discotheques, even in the majority of the down-town cafés in Skopje, which necessarily include a DJ stand inside.

Even though there is no official representative of the big music labels, except for the club owners, there are promotional agencies that deal with this music trend exclusively.

According to the preferences, a large percentage of the audience have no differentiated taste and, therefore, it happens that from a turbo folk concert they go to see Tiesto, Carl Cox, and others. Moreover, there is an absence of a specialized music store and, therefore, the passionate listeners can only educate themselves through the Internet or by rewriting CDs, which the DJs themselves usually give to the audience at their performances (www.juno.com/www.submerge.com.Detroit).

In order to present the influences of the global DJ culture in our country, we shall use the data in our base. According to the representation of the organized events, through the DJ performances, the electronic music takes 20% in the total distribution regarding music genres. Momentarily, in Skopje these parties are most popular among the younger generations.

Further on, we shall present the data regarding DJ performances, through the following fields of the base referring to:

- Place of performance
- Organizers
- Origin of the performers
- Attendance and age of the visitors
- Ticket price

1. Place of performance

In table No.1, all the places where DJ parties took place in 2004 are shown:

As we can see in this table, in the central city area of Skopje during 2004 the electronic music, through DJ performances, was played in six discotheques, i.e. in two during the summer.

The capacity of the places reveals that they are clubs that provide space for a huge mass of visitors. As a comparison only, the places where classical music concerts take place can take 50 to 750 visitors.

places in 2004	capacity
1. Discotheque Colosseum	1500
2. Discotheque Process	700
3. Discotheque Element	700
4. Summer Colosseum	3000
5. Summer Element	2500
6. Discotheque La Fabric	1200
7. Skopje Fair Hall	5000
8. Youth Cultural Center	1000

table No. 1

2. Organizers

In 2004 in Skopje, mainly five organizations operate as organizers of DJ performances. They are the clubs themselves and the promotional agency Balance:

- Discotheque Colosseum
- Discotheque Process
- Discotheque Element
- Discotheque La Fabric
- Balance
- others

The owners of Balance (according to the interview with one of them, Mr. Ognen Uzunovski) organized parties in the Element club for several months in 2004. Balance were the first organizers of these parties in the Hall 1 at the Skopje Fair, on 6th October 2000.

The interviews with some of the club owners reveal that because of the massive population with visitors and the opinion that these parties bring quick profit some other subjects appear as organizers, but they only do it as a one-time event by renting space. Therefore, we paid attention only to those who were frequently present in 2004.

3. Origin of the performers

origin of performers	number of events	%
Domestic performers	27	23
Foreigner performers	/	/
Combined	90	77
<i>total</i>	117	100

table No. 2

As we can notice, the highest percentage (77%) goes to the events at which both domestic and foreign DJs had their performances. It primarily results from:

- the insistent promotion of this genre by the international manager's houses
- the opportunity for our DJs to present their creations to the guests
- the increased interest among the young population in the famous international names attributable to the possibility to listen to new music creations,
- the higher ticket price
- acquiring higher profit and the fashionable trends

The development of the DJ culture in Skopje has created a group of young people who professionally deal with this issue and look forward to be registered in the novel occupations in our country. The market price for the Macedonian DJs is about 100 euros per set, while the foreign DJ performances vary from 3000 to 20000 euros per concert (the highest price is for DJ Tiesto). On the other hand, domestic DJs have no opportunity to go out of the country because of: the strategy of the big music industries, the visa regime, and the economic standards.

In fact, in the recent period, the real aficionados of this music have been visiting domestic DJ performances more frequently since, as they claim, they try to improve the quality of entertainment and to use the opportunity to promote themselves. In that respect, we can underline the name of DJ Samoil Radinski (www.balance.com.mk/artisti) who has already had performances outside Macedonia.

4. Attendance and age of the visitors

Further more, in the table No. 3 you can see the distribution according to the number of visitors of all the music events registered in our base during 2004. We reckon that in this manner we can obtain an all-inclusive image and confirm the mass popularity with visitors for the DJ performances in Skopje visa vie the other music genres.

genres	attendance	%
1. Classical music	69 800	20
2. Spiritual music	3300	1
3. Pop music	85 400	25
4. Rock music	29 500	8
5. Folk (ethno) music	28 950	8
6. Jazz	20 950	6
7. Children's music	28 820	8
8. Electronic(DJ Performances)	54 650	15
9. Modern Ballet	3320	1
10. More genres	29 850	8
<i>total</i>	354540	100

table No.3

As we can observe, according to the number of visitors the events in the area of the electronic music participated in the total distribution with 15%. Regarding the global division of the audience, however, the visitors belong to the mass audience who experience the music in the function of entertainment only.

The structure of the audience according to their age is primarily consisted of the young population between 18 and 25. According to the data from the Statistical Office, the time spent on leisure activities has increased among the young population aged between 15 – 24, and decreased among the population aged between 25 - 64 down to 4.24h (www.statgov.com.mk). Many young people in Skopje still live with their parents and, therefore, they have much more spare time. (A. Koviloski 2005:45). The age limit goes up to 45 if a renowned international name in the electronic music is visiting.

The phenomenon of an early maturation of the young people that is constantly proliferated through the music programmes on our TV media in particular turns the young population towards an artificial production and a negative shaping of their music tastes when choosing music values. Thus in our city, the teenagers and the young people up to the age of 25 both massively consume turbo-folk music and massively attend DJ parties.

Foreign visits are organized during the week-end and, what is most remarkable, in all the down-town discotheques the same type of parties takes place. However, the real number of consumers goes between about 10000 to 12000 young people who truly prefer this kind of music.

5. Ticket price

The data in table No.4 shows that the ticket price and the demand for the DJ performances are inflexible.

place	ticket price	capacity	attendance
1. Discotheque Colosseum	150 - 600 MKD	1500	80%
2. Discotheque Process	150 - 600 MKD	700	80%
3. Discotheque Element	150 - 600 MKD	700	80%
4. Summer Colosseum	200 - 600 MKD	3000	90%
5. Summer Element	200 - 600 MKD	2500	90%
6. Discotheque La Fabric	200 - 400 MKD	1200	80%
7. Skopje Fair Hall	600 -1000 MKD	5000	100%
8. Youth Cultural Center	200 - 400 MKD	1000	70%

table No.4

This can be attributed to the marketing conducted by the organizers, who manage to convince the young consumers in the necessity of their product and, thus, create an impression that being present and being noticed at a particular music event is an important issue.

All these have contributed to the fact that in only ten years time these events have managed to take place at and pack the biggest spaces (Skopje Fair halls, for ex.) in Skopje, where the visitors' age can hardly be controlled. (www.vest.com.mk 6.11.).

The performances of electronic music have moved from the club scene and have located themselves at the concert scene (especially in 2005), being organized by private concert agencies, with a ticket price varying from 600 to 1000 denars. In the discotheques, these prices are lower and they mostly vary from 200 to 400 denars. In the recent period, since the fiscal policy does not allow the drinking fee to be included in the entry fee, tickets often cost 200 denars in the discotheques.

What is rather obvious from the table is that there is a huge and constant percentage of popularity with visitors. This is due to the circulation of the same young group of people that can pass around several down-town discothèques in one night. During 2005 this situation has changed due to the lower standard of living, which has impeded this circulating practice.

High percentages of these visitors registered in the table No. 5 have a free entry. Generally, the organizers confront themselves and attempt to take over the primate of the evening by disseminating large number of gratis entries.