

INTOXICATION IN A GLOCALISED WORLD

● Three Different Windows on the Changing European Landscape of Intoxication

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) have become a major challenge to public health and drug policies in Europe (EMCDDA, 2014). In 2014, 101 NPS were notified to the EMCDDA's Early Warning System (EWS), twenty more than in the previous year, when 81 new drugs were identified. By the end of that year the EWS had recorded over 450 substances in total since 2005, more than half in the last three years alone. Synthetic cathinones (31 substances) and synthetic cannabinoids (30 substances) represented almost two-thirds of the drugs newly notified in 2014 (EMCDDA, 2014, 2015).

This special issue of *Adiktologie* brings together a collection of papers from three EU-funded projects that touch on different aspects of the use of new psychoactive substances. It provides important information on a seemingly inevitable by-product of the present responses to the rapidly changing landscape of intoxication: the diffusion of powerful synthetic stimulants in both traditional and new cohorts of (young) people that are most vulnerable to the harms they pose.

The special issue also presents important information on the *Glocal* driver of the NPS phenomenon, the Internet, which is revolutionising the way humans relate to drugs and drug markets, just as it does for just about any other commodity, except perhaps mother's milk. Indeed, it is not so much that the drugs are new – e.g. many synthetic cannabinoids were already described in academic and commercial research in the 1970s – but the ease with which we gather information about drugs nowadays and the way we obtain these are unprecedented. *iDrugs* is perhaps a better term to capture today's and tomorrow's sweeping changes in Europe's drug culture. The glocalisation of drug trends makes the development of an appropriate and timely response a high priority for policy makers at every policy level in the EU, including that of local communities.

The third set of papers reports on a set of useful tools that local communities can use in developing information-based responses to NPS. The issue is completed by a discussion of the definition of "user quantities" (exempting one from prosecution for drug possession) in the Czech

Republic – a thorny issue of relevance to several other EU member states – and by a thoughtful expose on the need for epidemiological vigilance and continued government commitment to a health- and harm reduction-based response to the consumption of psychoactive drugs in the European Union by the Head of the Health Consequences and Responses Sector of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

"New Psychoactive Substances among Problem Drug Users – Towards Effective and Comprehensive Health Responses in Europe" (NPSinEurope.eu) focuses on the increasing diffusion of NPS into populations of people who use drugs heavily (PUDH) across the European Union. The EU-wide overview of NPS consumption, markets, and policy responses reported by Janíková and her colleagues and the five-country Rapid Assessment of new drug consumption patterns among PUDH, reported by Grund and his colleagues aim to inform, first of all, the development and implementation of pilot harm reduction interventions targeting NPS use among PUDH and the skills and capacity training of both professionals and peer service providers, reported by Schiffer and Schatz.

"As flowing water falls to seek the lowest point" (Woodward, 2008), these studies suggest that NPS are increasingly diffusing into those segments of the drug-using population that are most vulnerable to their potential harms. NPS use among PUDH is reported in 10 EU countries, mostly in local studies, while the injecting of NPS is reported in seven countries. Synthetic cathinones, phenethylamines, and piperazines are drugs that are commonly injected by PUDH, while synthetic cannabinoids and tryptamines are used less often (Janíková et al., this issue). While legislative interventions have reduced the overall availability of NPS to the general public, Grund and his colleagues describe how the closure of brick-and-mortar stores in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania and subsequent restrictions on Internet sales have probably contributed to the diffusion of synthetic stimulants among PUDH, in addition to various pull and push factors, such as the reliability of the quality of NPS and, in contrast, the continued punitive drug testing in drug treatment programmes. This RAR study describes important mental health harms asso-

ciated with heavy NPS consumption, greatly increased injecting rates, and other risks for BBV transmission and drug overdoses. The overall response to NPS lags far behind in most of the countries that are affected. Interventions specifically responding to NPS use by PUDH have only been identified in three countries; Finland, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.

Schiffer and Schatz describe the impressive efforts of the local partners in the Czech Republic, Greece, Poland, and Portugal that have implemented innovative new approaches to NPS among PUDH and towards heavy use in nightlife and party settings. An example is “Netreach”, a web-based harm reduction intervention, described by Pires, Valente, and Caudevilla. They argue that the emergence of empowered and global online drug cultures has shaped the way people purchase and use drugs, search for drug information, and share drug use experiences and information with their peers. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge to harm reduction services, according to the authors, who present the Netreach intervention framework and two examples of the methodology that adjusts the harm reduction philosophy and outreach practice to the online environment.

Drápalová and her colleagues present the outcomes of a literature review on the utility of existing risk assessment procedures for use at the local level and argue that an evidence-based drug policy demands systematic assessment of new drug trends before control measures and other interventions are developed – not only in national policy making but equally at the local level. This study was part of the EU-funded Local PASS project, which developed a standardised local system for *early identification, risk assessment, and intervention development* in response to new developments in psychoactive substance use. Otte and her colleagues present a short overview of the Local PASS project and summarise its results. In contrast with the drug trends we know from the 20th century, trends in drug consumption no longer necessarily start in (cultural) capitals or harbour cities. With the rise in the availability of *iDrugs* – both unscheduled and scheduled psychoactive substances sold via surface and Deepweb Internet drug markets – and the penetration of Internet technology into all corners of society, drug trends may now emerge in any community, large or small, urban or rural, largely independently from one another.

The principal outcome of the Local PASS project, a dedicated Toolkit, based on the principles of RAR, but sensitised to the 21st-century interaction between local drug-using environments and the virtual world of *iDrugs*, allows local stakeholders in drug policy to systematically and in a timely manner identify and assess local trends in (alcohol and) drug consumption in the various communities that make up the local population, with a particular focus on youth.

Grohmannová and her colleagues and Drápalová and Běláčková present the results of two studies that emanated from the i-Trend project and represent the two sides of *iDrugs* – their online sales and the vivid Internet communities that have emerged around any substance imaginable. Grohmannová and her colleagues report on the increasing online availability of new synthetic drugs (NSDs) to Czech citizens since 2010, with online outlets offering 145 different substances in 2015 – mostly synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones. 63% of those were not previously identified in the Czech Republic and are not controlled. Drápalová and Běláčková detail the wide range of information on NPS that is being shared online. (Young) Czech people go online and openly share trip reports and discuss their experiences with the use of NPS and their purchase, often supporting their posts with information from other sources, including references to scientific publications. Harm reduction and peer counselling are apparently an important component of the discussions that are analysed. Interestingly, an increasing number of studies have detailed the substance of the online discussions, which span a wide range of topics, which include acquisition sources and strategies, including home manufacture, quality control, accurate dosing and mode of administration and preventing problems or loss of control, and are characterised by a high level of concern for safety and harm reduction (Barratt, Ferris, & Winstock, 2014; Hearne, Alves, Van Hout, & Grund, 2016; Móró & Rác, 2013; Soussan & Kjellgren, 2014). In line with the findings presented by Grund and his colleagues, Drápalová and Běláčková’s analysis also suggests that after a number of popular Czech Internet shops were taken down in 2013, forum members simply started spending their digital crowns in online NPS stores registered outside the country.

Mravčík and his colleagues discuss the often mystifying issue of a “quantity greater than small” and compare the definitions used in the Czech Republic with those in selected countries. In anticipation of a review of the legal terminology on drugs by the Czech Constitutional Court the authors propose a legal definition of “illicit drugs” that they hope will fuel further expert and public debate. It is important to understand that whatever definitions politicians, researchers, or judges come up with, 68% of young Europeans consuming NPS sourced these drugs from friends (TNS Political & Social, 2014).

All the studies in this special issue emphasise the need for further research, information exchange, and dialogue between communities of people who use drugs, drug services, and Early Warning Systems. The tools developed in the NPSinEurope.eu, Local Pass, and i-Trend projects are apt and complementary. They build on the principles of RAR, which has proven its utility in a variety of contexts far beyond the drug policy area (Stimson, 2009; Needle, Trot-

ter, Goosby, Bates, & Von Zinkernagel, 2000; Stimson et al., 2006). These instruments will support stakeholders in creating information-based drug policies for the 21st century at all levels of policy making.

However, reliable fact-based information and appropriate tools are merely the instruments of policy making. As Hedrich points out in her excellent letter to the editor, these need to be complemented by political commitment and appropriate funding.

Utrecht, 24 February 2016

Jean-Paul Grund, PhD.

Department of Addictology, 1st Faculty of Medicine,
Charles University in Prague and General University
Hospital in Prague, Czech Republic,
CVO – Addiction Research Centre,
Utrecht, the Netherlands,
Freudenthal Institute for Science and Mathematics
Education, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

REFERENCES / LITERATURA

- Barratt, M. J., Ferris, J. A., & Winstock, A. R. (2014). Use of Silk Road, the online drug marketplace, in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. *Addiction (Abingdon, England)*, 109(5), 774–83. doi:10.1111/add.12470
- EMCDDA. (2014). EMCDDA | European Drug Report 2014: Trends and developments. Retrieved January 2, 2015, from <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/edr/trends-developments/2014>
- EMCDDA. (2015). *New psychoactive substances in Europe: An update from the EU Early Warning System*. Luxembourg. doi:10.2810/372415
- Hearne, E., Alves, E., Van Hout, M., & Grund, J.-P. (2016). Home Manufacture of Drugs and a Toxicological Reality Check of Online Discussions on Drug Chemistry. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* (Under re-submission).
- Móró, L., & Rácz, J. (2013). Online drug user-led harm reduction in Hungary: a review of “Daath”. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 10(1), 18. doi:10.1186/1477-7517-10-18
- Soussan, C., & Kjellgren, A. (2014). Harm reduction and knowledge exchange—a qualitative analysis of drug-related Internet discussion forums. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 11(1), 25. doi:10.1186/1477-7517-11-25
- Stimson, G. V., Fitch, C., DesJarlais, D., Poznyak, V., Perlis, T., Oppenheimer, E., & Rhodes, T. (2006). Rapid assessment and response studies of injection drug use: knowledge gain, capacity building, and intervention development in a multisite study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 96(2), 288–95. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2003.035899
- Stimson, G. V., Fitch, C., Rhodes, T. I. M., Ball, A. & V. Stimson, C. F. (1999). Rapid assessment and response: methods for developing public health responses to drug problems. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 18(3), 317–325. doi:10.1080/09595239996464
- TNS Political & Social. (2014) Flash Eurobarometer 401 Young People And Drugs Report. (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_401_en.pdf)
- Trotter, R., Needle, R., Goosby, E., et al. (2001). A methodological model for Rapid Assessment, Response and Evaluation: the RARE program in public health. *Field Methods*, 13(2), 137–159.
- Woodward M. (2008). Gravitare to Humility. CowPi Journal, Thursday, 13 Mar 2008. (<http://cowpi.com/journal/2008/03/gravitate-to-humility>)