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Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on the prevailing narratives regarding psychedelics in the Visegrad Countries' public opinion and the media's role in cultivating it.

The study focuses on the four states of the Visegrad Alliance, whose members gained independence from the Soviet Union and later joined the European Union simultaneously. Thus, ominous substances were introduced to their drug markets and wider societies around the same period, yet their current drug policies and international stances on drug related issues differ vastly.

The paper argues that although the so called psychedelic renaissance is rather visible and mediatized in wealthy occidental countries, due to a harsh stigma surrounding psychedelics in the former Eastern Bloc, the state of psychedelic science is lagging behind its potential. The discrepancy between the scientific promises of medical implications and the negative media coverage has not yet sparked an academic interest in examining the psychedelic stigma. Present project aims to fill this research gap by applying mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative, primary and secondary data collection. The effects of mass media and the impact of the respective cultural and legal environments of each country are compared and analyzed by multiple linear regressions, mediation and moderation analyses.

As frequent viewers of television demonstrate a lower level of informedness and a more negative attitude towards psychedelics, the findings of this paper are parallel to what is a frequent topic among psychedelic researchers and one that poses important institutional, financial and reputational challenges on the progress science. The vision of this study is to foster a public discourse that is more balanced and in which real and relevant risks are addressed.

Abstrakt **German Version**

Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit der öffentlichen Meinung in den Visegrad-Ländern zu psychedelischen Substanzen und beleuchtet die Rolle der Medien bei der Kultivierung ebendieser.

Die Studie konzentriert sich auf die vier Staaten der Visegrad Gruppe, deren Mitglieder gleichzeitig die Unabhängigkeit von der Sowjetunion erlangten und der Europäischen Union beitraten. Infolgedessen gelangten ominöse Substanzen im selben Zeitraum erstmals in die nationalen Drogenmärkte und in weiteren Gesellschaften. Nichtsdestotrotz ist die Drogenpolitik und internationale Haltung zu drogenbezogenen Themen in den genannten Ländern derzeit sehr unterschiedlich.

Die These argumentiert, dass die sogenannte psychedelische Renaissance in den wohlhabenden westlichen Welt zwar sichtbar und mediatisiert ist, der Zustand der psychedelischen Wissenschaft aber, aufgrund des harten Stigmas welches psychedelische Drogen im ehemaligen Ostblock umgibt, hier hinter ihrem Potenzial zurückgeblieben ist.

Bis jetzt hat die Diskrepanz zwischen der vielversprechenden medizinischen Nutzbarkeit psychedelischer Substanzen auf der einen Seite und der negativen Medienberichterstattung auf der anderen, noch kein akademisches Interesse an der Untersuchung dieses Stigmas ausgelöst. Das gegenwärtige Projekt will diese Forschungslücke mit Hilfe von qualitativen und quantitativen Methoden, sowie primärer und sekundärer Datenerfassung schließen. Die Auswirkungen der Massenmedien sowie, der jeweiligen kulturellen und rechtlichen Kontext jedes Landes werden mit linearen Regressionen sowie Mediation- und Moderationsanalysen verglichen und analysiert.

Parallel zu früheren Studien zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass Menschen die häufig fernsehen, weniger Informationen und eine negativere Einstellung zu psychedelischen Substanzen haben. Dies stellt eine wichtige institutionelle, finanzielle und reputative Herausforderung für den Fortschritt der Wissenschaft dar. Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es, einen ausgewogenen öffentlichen Diskurs zu fördern, in dem aktuelle, reale und relevante Risiken angehen werden können.

Introduction

There exist countless studies to prove how media narratives shape political discourses via implementing frameworks that consumers can adopt and institutions can embrace through policy (Brown 2013 – cited by Rothstein and Finnigan, n.d.; Glasser, 1995; Lewis, 2001). As it provides narrative and guides interpretation (Cohen & Weimann, 2000), public opinion is heavily influenced by the images and messages transmitted through popular media (Kruger and Wall, 2001). The manner in which media presents certain issues thereby influences our common understandings and thus attitudes towards societal issues, such as crime or drug use (Forsyth, 2001). Looking into mass media coverage issues is an important step towards understanding perceptions and concerns regarding drugs (Forsyth, 2001; Körner & Treloar, 2004) and the corresponding advances in science.

The salient discourse seems to narrate drug-related issues in ways that highlight the immorality and individual responsibility of drug use (eg. Ruthstein and Finnigan, n.d.; Szasz, 2001), rather than structural obstacles of rehabilitating addiction or utilizing empirically proven medical and therapeutic benefits. Beckett and Sasson (2004) argue that the wave of restrictive drug policies, known as the “War on Drugs”, is promoted by the “get-tough” narrative in popular culture for understanding drug related matters (mostly pictured in relation to crime). The result is a hospitable social environment and favorable public opinion on more restrictive drug policies. The harsh attitudes towards psychedelic drugs that emerged in the past sixty years (Williams, 1999) can therefore be argued to rely on the mediatized image of narcotics, over actual statistical volume of emerging problems in society (Beckett and Sasson, 2004) or scientific findings (eg. Nichols, 1999; Lüscher and Ungless, 2006; Krebs and; Johansen, 2013).

This project aims to assess the public perception of media narratives surrounding psychedelic substances with a focus on television in the Visegrad countries. The Visegrad Alliance is the concourse of the four former satellite states of the Soviet Union - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, that gained independence from the USSR and later, simultaneously joined the European Union. Thus, ominous substances were introduced to the state's respective wider societies in the same period, yet their current drug policies and international stances on drug related issues differ vastly. Despite the complex political relations and interesting cultural community of the region, the apparent discrepancy between the scientific promises of medical implications and the negative media coverage has not yet sparked an academic interest in examining the psychedelic stigma in Central Europe.

Since public opinion on drugs, and in particular psychedelics, has not yet been addressed, the study aims to measure the attitude of the Visegrad Four's citizens towards psychedelics and uncover the role that television plays in forming ominous attitudes. In the paper, an emergence of punitive attitudes and indisposition towards psychedelic drug use is argued and that it reflects the efforts of media's shifting impressions of social problems, including crime and addiction (eg. Beckett and Sasson, 2004), via depicting the substances as vehicles for deviancy, and by extension, as a part of a worsening crime problem, whilst lacking substantial coverage of scientific advancement in the utilization of ominous drugs for pharmaceutical use. As a result, scientific research on drugs that are illicit tends to be overlooked and their medical application is surrounded with suspicion (Sewell, 2006; Nutt et al., 2016). In the paper, it is argued that characteristics of drug depiction in popular media have created an environment that promotes a hostile attitude in relation to drugs, particularly psychedelics, and that this relationship is moderated by the cultural and legal context of the countries.

Theoretical Background

Cultivation Theory

Storytelling is an important tool in creating culture, whether we look at it on an individual or collective level; it helps people to make sense of their past and guides contemplation for the future. Stories tell us how things work, be it about inventions, experiences or intellectual connections (Gerbner, 1993). Moreover, according to Gerbner (1993) telling stories is, largely, what makes us human.

In modern times, as a conveyer of stories, television plays an important role in defining and understanding the world around us (Gerbner and Gross, 1980). People are born into the culture of television; they rely on it for information, education, entertainment, a sense of community, while making sense of their environment and their role in their World. As such, television is the primary instrument of mass storytelling of our days; it is a system of passing down lessons, fables, motives, symbols and keeping alive certain cultural values, along which people are suggested to think and act if they want to fit in with society.

Cultivation Theory, the guiding concept of this project, studies the “relationship between institutional processes, message systems and the public assumptions, images, and policies they cultivate” (Gerbner 1970, p71). In developing the theory, Gerbner and Gross (1976) collected data on the rate of harmful stereotypes portrayed in network television and argued that television had an enculturation effect on people; that regular consumption leads to a more pessimistic, fearful view of society. According to their findings, participants who watched the most television, tended to overestimate the amount of violence in society and their risk of becoming a victim, due to the enhanced interest in such stories on primetime TV.

Cultivation suggests that, although many times the viewer is unaware of the extent to which they absorb media, mass communication possesses a significant influence on the attitudes and beliefs of society; and those who absorb more, are more influenced.

Mass communication has been suggested to shape the collective mind by researchers from various fields (eg. Surette, 1992), and as television overcame historic barriers, such as mobility, social status, mobility and literacy, it is said to have become the primary medium to convey culture (Gerbner, 1993). Although television can serve as a proxy for learning from events that most people would never experience first-hand, forming opinions solely based on a mediated experience can cause certain distortions in perceiving reality. Amid several studies claiming that people use information that they receive from the media to construct a view of their world, regardless of the reliability of the source (Gerbner, 1980; Surette 1992; Dowler, 2003; Bissler and Connors, 2012), it has also been found that most television programs serve to reinforce the prevailing social order and follow a pattern of system stabilizing images (for an extensive review, see Schoenbach and Becker, 1995). Gerbner (1959) also had the idea that as television became more and more centralized, it industrialized storytelling and thus, consequent opinions are subject to the law of the market as messages became commercialized and uniformized to be easily digestible and to create favorable audience tastes.

This mechanism and the impact of television is particularly interesting, if one considers its power of stirring public opinion, in regards to topics that have high societal importance (McCombs et al, 1995) such as drugs and drug use. The importance of studying the cultivation effect of media narratives is supported by its record of shaping political discourses (eg. Brown, 2013; Schoenbach and Becker, 1995; Salmon and Glasser, 1995), and guidance of audiences' interpretation of public affairs (Cohen and Weimann, 2000).

When attempting to understand TV's effect on attitudes towards psychedelics, this project applies cultivation theory in order to assess the effect of the aggregate of TV messages on audiences' notion of psychedelics. In the paper, cultivation analysis is employed as a tool to observe how exposure to television and the "world of TV" affects the viewer's attitudes towards psychedelics in selected Central European countries.

The four selected countries still hold television in a high esteem when it comes to seeking out information on the effects and risks of drugs, especially Hungary, the only EU Member State where at least one in five people say they would turn to the media for information on illicit drugs and drug use generally. Media campaigns are one of the most respected sources of information about substances in Poland as well (Eurobarometer, 2014). And, even with the emerging role of the Internet in distributing information, researchers (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010) have pointed out that television content is the most sought after content.

The intention of this project is to examine the cultivation effect of mainstream media on viewer's perception of psychedelics; and by extension, public opinion on the matter.

Therefore, the central hypothesis of this paper is that people's conceptions of salient societal issues are primarily derived from television's dominant, hostile narrative of this particular social issue. Consequently, those who subject themselves more to receiving those messages will have a general attitude that is more compliant with the mainstream narrative.

This project will rely on previous research to grasp the prevailing context on the coverage of psychedelic substances and, due to lack of substance-specific literature, illicit drugs in general. The following chapters will explore that literature and the contrast between the prevailing public opinion and the state of art in psychedelic science.

The image of psychedelics in mass media vs. in science

To most accurately assess the present predicament of psychedelic substances and psychedelic science, the indications and patterns of one's interactions with mass communication is an important tool, as these make up cultures and its shared identities (Morgan et al., 2012, p.2), it communicates a system of shared values and projects desired social patterns.

When it comes to drug use and/or drugs of any kind, the currently prevailing media narrative focuses predominantly on the criminal aspects (eg. Belackova et al, 2011). Researchers of media coverage of illicit drugs have argued that the apparent undertone of such stories are primarily in relation to violent crimes, trafficking and sales, or secondary crime (Acevedo, 2007; Noto, Pinsky, & Mastroianni, 2006). Fatal incidents involving illicit drugs also proved to enjoy special attention (Murji, 1998; Manning, 2007; Belackova et al., 2011).

Although countless researches into the therapeutic advantages of psychedelic substances suggest that psychedelics can provide valuable aid to those seeking assistance with psychiatric disorders and conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety, cluster headaches or alcoholism (eg. Alper 2007; Vollenweider and Kometer, 2010; Nutt, 2016), the current public discourse broadcasts the use of these drugs to the general population by framing them in a criminal, deviant or plain socially undesirable context. As a result, people seek to create a social distance from those who consume drugs (Berry et al, 2014). Thus, besides securing funding, ethical approval of such research (and developing a treatment that is assisted by a yet illicit substance) is not without significant obstacles.

This one-sided discourse enforces a stigma, that hinders an entire field of science, corresponding research, careers of academics and medical professionals. “[There is a] tendency, when drugs become criminalized for their non-medical use, their medical use then subsequently also become suppressed”. (O’Neill, 2014)

Several studies (eg. Granfield and Cloud, 1996; Welch, Fenwick and Roberts, 1998 - cited by Roach, 2012) suggest that entertainment media often stigmatizes users as „the others” and the “ghettoization” of the setting of substances largely contributes to the shaping of the criminal image of all drugs. This salient criminal rhetoric interprets drug-use in a moral model that assigns weakness of will and social deviancy to the user. It understands drug use in a societal judgement-context. And even though this model slowly loses its prevalence in academic circles, it is very much present and even dominant in public opinion in Central European states (Demetrovics and Balázs, 2004; Szasz 2001).

The cumulative impact of exposure to such framing can be expected to prompt audiences to think about psychedelic substances as criminal accessories rather than medicine; despite the fact that psychedelics have a rich history as therapeutical substances in psychiatry and medicine (see Nichols, 1999):

After the discovery of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), in the 1940s psychedelics were studied for a broad range of medical and psychiatric purposes for decades. Following the 1971 treaty of the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances that explicitly prohibits LSD for example, a collapse and a subsequent hiatus in psychedelic research took place.

The late lapse of the absolute prohibition however, have redounded the emergence of various organizations, whose mission is to revisit psychedelic research, undertaking preclinical studies with substances such as LSD, psilocybin, ayahuasca , ibogaine, and methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA).

The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), the Heffter Research Institute, and the Beckley Foundation have published clinical studies (eg. Heifets and Malenka, 2016; Danforth et al., 2016) with an emphasis on anxiety disorders and addictions. By undertaking methodologically sound studies (Camm and Saleiveva, 2012), contemporary researchers could legitimately argue for the benefits of the supervised use of psychedelics and its' transformative power to improve psychotherapy.

Nonetheless, the visible, mainstream, public discourses still assume that psychedelic drugs contribute (if at all) to society through, the often also-presented-in-criminal-context, „rave culture” (Millmann and Beader, 1994), despite these substances never being intended for recreational purposes (Dyck, 2005) as MDMA was synthesized by Anton Köllisch in 1912 in order to ease excessive bleeding, and Albert Hoffman was working on a central nervous system stimulant, when he discovered LSD.

This discrepancy between the promises of medical implications and the negative media coverage has not yet sparked an academic interest in examining the psychedelic stigma with the tool of cultivation theory. This paper aims to fill this gap, focusing on four Central European countries, and the reciprocal relationship between science and mass media in the Visegrad Group.

As the media both mirrors and molds society (Schoenbach and Becker, 1995 p. 234) it creates and shapes public opinion that acts as “an institution of society” and influences how the state and the elites act (ibid p.235). Moreover, it has been argued that media is the primary source of information and for understanding science and innovation (Morgan et al., 2012; Brossard and Nisbet, 2007). Thus, this paper asserts that this heuristic role, as a consequence to the criminal stigma in the case of psychedelics, is the root cause of the prevailing institutional, financial and reputational challenges for psychedelic science (eg. Sewell, 2006).

While increased interest and coverage of psychedelic scientific advances could have been observed in the past two years, with mainstream media (eg. The Guardian, The New York Times, Rolling Stone, Forbes) picking up on the therapeutical and medical benefits of such substances, mainly in the United States (eg. Boseley, 2016; Jarnow, 2016; Burns, 2015), there are still notorious distortions when it comes to psychedelics, especially outside of wealthy occidental countries. This paper argues that the so called “psychedelic renaissance” has not reached Central Europe en masse, despite an indisputable need for a modernized approach to mental health and treatment for problematic drug use in the region (based on Mental Health OECD reports and EMCDDA data – see list of references). The paper hypothesizes that the participants of the study will have a hostile attitude towards psychedelics and that this predisposition is aided by the cultivation effect of television, ie. those who watch more TV will have a stronger, more negative opinion about these consciousness-altering substances.

The Visegrad Four

The study focuses on the developing Central European region, specifically the Visegrad Four (also known as the Visegrad Group, V4 and Visegrad Countries). The Visegrad Alliance is the cultural and political coalition of four countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Boasting the 12th largest economy in the World, this union is more than just a joint effort of the Central European region: having been part of a single civilization for centuries, according to the official statement of the Visegrad Group (www.visegrad.hu), the four countries also share common cultural and spiritual roots.

Indeed, the V4's respective histories have been intertwined throughout the years, including numerous territories being ruled by the Habsburg Empire and its successors at various times from the 1500s to World War I. During the Cold War, the V4 were „satellite states” of the Soviet Union, but the communist republics have ceased after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Visegrad Group was established on 15 February 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The member count grew to four in 1993, when the Czech Republic and Slovakia peacefully parted ways, and in 2004, all four countries have joined the European Union on the same day, as a fruit of a joint pursuit.

Despite the shared historical and cultural background, when it comes to drugs, the V4 seem to approach the issue somewhat differently. Apparent differences in both policy and culture can be seen, as an example, in high level international political statements, such as this year's (2017) United Nation's Commission on Narcotic Drugs, where the Czech Republic's delegate emphasized the importance of harm reduction and the crucial role of civil society in providing such services appropriately; Hungary on the other hand, where harm reduction services are systematically disenabled (Sarosi, 2014), propagated a “community-based approach, focusing on a drug-free lifestyle.”

In their statements, Poland pledged its full support for the EU's joint statement. The EU's drug strategy set out to tackle the 'world drug problem' by reducing the harms caused by it, "rather than on fighting drugs as the embodiment of [...] evil" (Krawczyk, 2017).

To understand how these different approaches have developed in a group of cultural-sibling countries, one ought to look at the initial formulation of drug control in each member state. Before the end of the Soviet regime, drug use was practically nonexistent, or at least far from being on top of the political agenda in the socialist countries. Sovereign political models, institutions and policies on drug related activities have been only formed relative recently with the adaption of the widespread prohibitionist Western models (Cohen, 1993).

Eastern European countries have had a lot of experience with suppressive policies during the Soviet reign, and a rise in the use of drugs after the democratic transformation has been a major concern in the region (for example, in Poland, home-made opiates and Hungary, legal hypnotics and sedatives among under-privileged groups became prevalent)(Cohen, 1993).

At the same time, not only were the young democracies heavily reliant on economic assistance from 'the West' to tackle newly arising problems, they were unambiguously pressured by the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP, the predecessor of UNODC) to strengthen the "links of cooperation in the field of drug control" (Cohen, 1993), ie. to comply with the United Nations drug control conventions . The uniform regulations have been embraced by the new republics without much objection (Although, in Czechoslovakia, the Prague Center for Drug Addiction openly criticized conventional drug policies as early as 1997. (Zabransky, 2004)). In adapting these policies, the V4 essentially joined the US's War on Drugs, declared by Nixon in 1971. Hungary even had a close relationship with the US's Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and developed their own DADA, mirroring the infamous DARE program (a law-enforcement provided youth education, based on pseudoscientific anti-drug propaganda).

The first time media (the only, official) started talking about drugs were, after the instigation of *glasnost* in 1985, when a public campaign was started against alcohol and drug consumption, targeted mostly against consumers - any drug user was denounced as a criminal, capable of acting violently in case he/she needs money to buy drugs (Cohen, 1993). This criminalizing model stayed prevalent in the former Eastern Bloc until today, and drug consumption is still mostly seen as an offence and thus renders it as a problem for law enforcement and judiciary (Szasz, 2001). In today's everyday language, addiction doesn't refer to an illness but rather a disdained deviancy, where the user is a rule-breaker, rather than a patient and accordingly, the toolset to solve the problem is on the criminal spectrum (Detrovics and Balázs, 2004).

Today, the most conspicuous difference among the Visegrad countries is about the categorization of substances. While even possession is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment of 2 years in Hungary and three years in Slovakia and Poland, the Czech Republic have not only drawn a difference between Cannabis (which is fully legal within regulated environment) and other substances, possession for personal purposes is only an administrative offence, and a decision whether it reaches the threshold for industrial quantity made on a case by case basis. The debate on medical use for Cannabis is pretty much absent from the political debate in Hungary and Slovakia. In Poland, while as conservative as possible, a medical Cannabis bill has been passed during the time of writing. Furthermore, while in all countries exist procedures for mitigating circumstances and instances of exchanging treatment for a prison sentence, there are several cases of sentence suspension and alternative penalties mandated for Czech offenders (EMCDDA 2015).

In assessing the approach that these four countries take to battle drug problems, despite boasting the most liberal regulations, the Czech Republic has the lowest rate of problematic issues (EMCDDA 2015).

The Czech Republic is not only vocal about the importance of harm reduction, their efforts are confirmed by the fact that nearly 80% of problematic drug users (PDU henceforth) were under treatment and only 0,00036% of the population were reported to pass away as a consequence of an overdose, while, as a contrast, only ca. 21% of PDU were taken care of in Poland, and the number of overdose deaths reached 0,00059% of the population (2012 and 2014 EMCDDA data), which was only topped by Hungary's 0,00064% in 2013. Slovakia's statistics in terms of safety and drug use is in the middle in both aspects with ca. 36% of PDU in treatment in 2014, and 0,00048% of all deaths were attributed to drug overdose in 2012.

In general, the approach of the Eastern European states can be somewhat likened to those in Central Asia (Krawczyk, 2017) with strict policies, that are heading toward less repressive measures and focus on health, while on the civil scene, a battle for funding seems to be more competitive in the V4 than in the Western part of Europe.

With a unique historical position, the interrelations of media, public opinion and policy makes the Visegrad Countries an interesting case to study cultivation effects. Therefore, this project surveys prevailing television consumption habits, the general public's attitude towards psychedelic substances, and the moderating effect of the different cultural and legal contexts. The results could offer an insight into the power of television in the former Eastern Bloc as, despite some local research into the stigma of drug use, the differences in approaches and their effect on forming attitudes have not yet been studied.

The central question the paper poses is the following:

How does the cumulative impact of television consumption affect the attitude towards psychedelics in the Visegrad countries?

As a result of continual mentions of illicit drugs in a moral-judgement context, this paper hypothesizes that people internalize the images they encounter, and

H1: TV exposure influences public attitude towards psychedelics negatively.

Consequent to the previously outlined differences across the four member states, both in regards of cultural and legal environment, the paper also hypothesizes that

H2: The cultivation effect differs by country in the Visegrad Group.

H3a: The cultivation effect of H1 is moderated by the cultural context of each country's drug scene, respectively.

H3b: The cultivation effect of H1 is moderated by the legal environment of each country's drug scene, respectively.

The study expects to find TV consumption effects to be stronger in countries where the legal system is more restrictive and the cultural environment is less adept at dealing with the possible risks associated with the recreational use of psychedelics. In an environment, where the juristic system echoes the messages of mass media and the psy-culture is less proficient on harm reduction, negative portrayal is expected to seem more realistic.

Methodology

Sample

Considering research costs, access to subjects, the scope of the research and the nature of the project, electronic surveys are the most applicable method for the proposed goals. Web based questionnaires provide the ability to conduct large-scale data, efficient distribution and quick response cycles while automatically verifying and storing responses (Andrews et al., 2003). Online surveys are also proved to be less intrusive than personal interviews (Wright, 2005), and thus, suffer less from social desirability effects. A non-probability snowball sampling method is applied with an aim for a heterogeneous pool. The outcome of online data collection resulted in 720 valid cases. Consequentially, the sample could be described as rather diverse pool with participants ranging from 15 to 80 of age where the mean age is ca. 21, with a steady distribution of gender as 54,6% of the participants were male with a standard deviation of 0,506. While most of the participants, 45.8% said they live in a capital city ($SD=1,365$, $M=2,21$) the level of education was very varied. ($SD=1,526$, $M=3,64$).

Measures

Media variable. The media variable, assessing the extent of media consumption was measured on four separate scales that asked the participants to choose from four options that best describe how much time they spend (1) actively watching TV on an average weekday, (2) on an average weekend day, (3) how much they estimate the TV is on in the background on a weekday and on (4) weekends, ie. their passive consumption of television.

A new variable of the above scales was then calculated in order to express the sum TV consumption with as Cronbach's alpha of 0,893.

An important factor to consider when probing media consumption is the emergence of on

demand TV online. Since the researchers have come across several reports on the internet's slow cannibalization of the TV audience (eg. Nielsen, 2010), this paper finds it important for the participants to report on their consumption of programs produced for television but transmitted through other channels as well. Participants therefore were repeatedly reminded to consider their answers keeping in mind the material, regardless of the device on which they consume.

Attitude. The dependent variable, attitude towards psychedelics, was measured across four scales that assessed the respondents' (1) perception of the danger of psychedelics, (2) approach to recreational drug use, (3) attitude towards medical applications of psychedelic substances, and (4) stances on their regulation.

Every scale had five category responses, where all the statements were worded negative or reverse coded retrospectively, so that the higher scores on each of the scales indicate a more hostile attitude towards psychedelics. A new variable, a composite scale of the above scales, was then calculated in order to express a general attitude towards psychedelics with a good reliability index (Cronbach's $\alpha=0,943$).

The attitude towards recreational use was measured across 9 items, of which 6 items loaded on the same factor with a Cronbach's α of 0,915, indicating a highly consistent scale. On ominous five items, respondents indicated on a five point scale how much they would be bothered (1) by someone in their environment under the influence of psychedelics, (2) by someone offering them psychedelics, (3) by someone in their environment under the influence of cannabis, (4) by someone in their environment under the influence of *some* narcotics, (5) if they avoid events/places where they know people might be consuming psychedelics, and (6) whether they would contact the police (or in case of a minor, parents) if someone would offer them psychedelics.

Perception of danger of psychedelics was measured on a 9 item scale, where 3 loaded on one component with a Cronbach's alpha of 0,797. The three items measured, somewhat blatantly, the respondents' evaluation of Cannabis, psychedelics and non-hallucinogenic drugs, in regards to how dangerous they think the use of them are.

The attitude towards medical use of psychedelics was measured on a scale of 6 items, two of which asked whether the respondent thinks taking psychedelics in an appropriate environment can be beneficial to (1) mental and (2) physical health - these loaded on the same factor with a Cronbach's alpha of 0,901. Due to a glitch in the Czech translation, the second variable regarding physical health had to be deleted when computing the sum attitude scale.

Participants' opinion on current drug policies, focusing on regulation, was measured on a four-item scale, where all loaded on one component with a Cronbach's alpha of 0,752. Here, participants could indicate the extent to which they agree with the following statements: (1) law enforcement should be stricter when it comes to psychedelics, (2) the only way to tackle the drug problem is through legislation and law enforcement, (3) regular consumers of psychedelics are criminals, and (4) drug addiction is only the person's fault.

Given the sensitivity and uniqueness of the topic, after the media consumption habits section in the survey, a short definition was included in the questionnaire that explained what psychedelics were, referencing their long history of use, legal status and a single sentence indicating their potential benefits as medicine and use in psychotherapy. (Exact wording included in Appendix.) Two control questions followed the definition page, asking participants (1) if they have read anything new on the previous page with an opportunity to expand on what exactly have they learned, and (2) whether they have themselves have taken psychedelic substances, with an option to elaborate on the experience.

Informedness. The state or quality of being informed on the scientific use of psychedelics is expressed in the study under the umbrella term of ‘informedness’ that was measured on a five-item, self-assessing scale. On the informedness scale, participants could indicate to what extent they think they are up to date on the topic of (1) drug policy, (2) informed about psychedelic research, (3) psychotherapeutical advances, (4) whether they have heard of any psychedelic research and (5) whether they thought psychedelic research should be banned.

This variable was measured individually and not grouped into the composite attitude scale as the intention of this measurement would not fit logically into the composite one, and items 1 through 4 made up a fairly reliable scale independently, with 0,751 for Cronbach’s’ alpha.

Circumstances. To factor how each participant’s is likely to be predisposed in regards to psychedelics, a new variable was calculated, adding up the legal and cultural environments’ measures (calculated on a case-by-case basis according to the demographics section in the survey), plus previous personal experience. This variable thus expresses the way in which the effects of one’s personal experience, the cultural and legal surroundings accumulate.

Moderators. In order to test whether the (Ma) cultural or (Mb) legal environment of a country plays a significant role in forming public opinion, the researchers conducted a series of interviews with journalists and policy advocates in each country (full transcripts in Appendix). The interviews consisted of five clusters, where interviewees painted a picture of the culture of psychedelics in their experience, and assessed (1) the state of psychedelic science and the public’s awareness of ominous studies, (2) available harm reduction measures, (3) the recreational scene, and (4) the prevailing image of psychedelics in the media – supported by some empirical evidence. Each nation was evaluated by the researcher on consistent, five-point scales reflecting the above values. A new variable was then calculated, that determined how facilitating the cultural environment was for the formation of hostile attitudes, where 1 is very hostile and 5 is a psychedelic-friendly cultural predicament.

The category to determine the legal context was based on secondary data: publications recommended by the interviewees and publicly available data by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Addiction. Here, the countries were evaluated on a five-point scale that expresses the harshness of drug policies and the values were then assigned to each data row, based on the participant's nationality. The evaluation is included in the Appendix.

The moderating variables were calculated individually for each line of data, based on what the participant indicated as their nationality. The values were, therefore, respecting the fact that some might have felt more comfortable completing the survey in a different language than what their nationality is.

Control variables. A number of control variables are applied in order to ensure that media effects are properly measured. Demographic variables such as gender, age, residence, level of education are employed in the analysis. In addition, respondents' familiarity and personal experience with the authorities and psychedelic substances respectively, as media sources will be more meaningful when direct experience is lacking (Schnauber and Meltzer, 2005).

Analytic strategy

Present study employs multiple linear regressions, using SPSS in order to test whether or not media consumption predicts the attitude towards psychedelics (H1) and differences of the cultivation effect by country (H2). For the test of H3, a mediation analysis is conducted, using the process macro (Hayes, 2016) where the independent variable is media consumption, the dependent is attitude towards psychedelics and the moderating factor is informedness. For testing the moderating effects of (H4a) cultural context and (H4b) legal environment, a different model of the process macro is applied.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and the results of a bivariate analysis to test the relationship of the listed variables with attitude. The analysis includes the Informedness variable, that measure the participant's knowledge regarding psychedelics, in order to aid the interpretation of further results.

Table 1. Bivariate Analysis

	N	Mean	SD	Attitude	Informedness
TV consumption	720	8.05	4.045	.434**	-.276**
.Experience	720	1.27	.446	-.162**	.114**
Gender	718	1.56	.506	.301*	-.161**
Education	718	3.64	1.526	.059	-.036
Residence	716	2.21	1.365	.093*	-.019
Nationality	707	2.39	.991	-.393**	.302**

Note: P* < .05; **P < .01

All numbers are Pearson Product Moment correlations

The results indicate that respondents watch approximately 8 hours of television per week on average. Table 1 also shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, for example, a slight majority of the participants were male and an average respondent is 21 years old, while ca. 27% of the respondents reported to have tried a psychedelic substance before. The results of correlation analysis are also included in the table, indicating that television viewing is significantly related to attitude towards psychedelics and informedness about psychedelic science, ie. heavy viewers are more likely to have a negative attitude and be poorly informed. The bivariate analysis shows that neither education, nor residence are significantly related to attitude or informedness, whereas gender is a significant indicator for both.

The results show that men are more likely to form a negative opinion, and that those who recount a previous personal encounter with the substances are more likely to have a positive attitude towards them, and be more informed about their scientific use. Furthermore, nationality seems to be a significant predictor both for forming attitudes and being informed on psychedelic science.

Figure 1. shows how participants from different cultural and legal environments scored on the attitude scale.

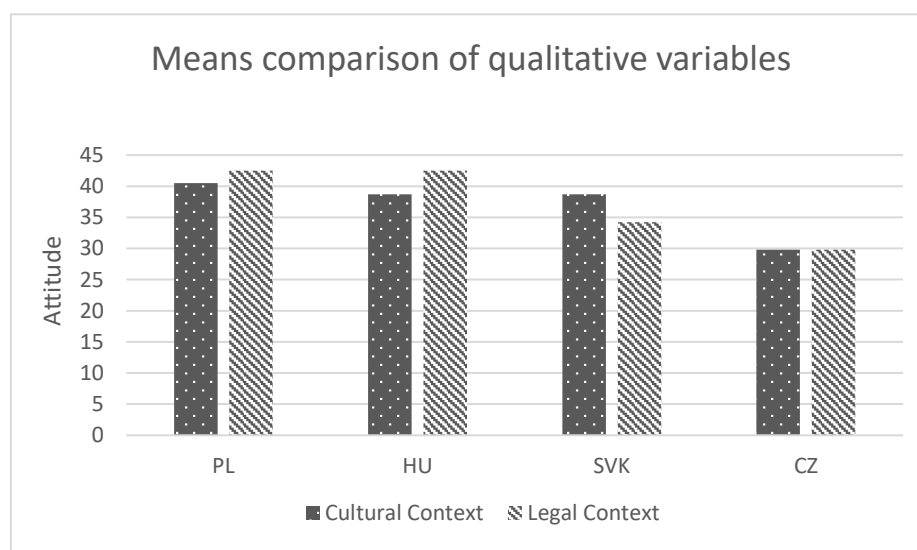


Figure 1.

Comparing means was used as a tool to determine whether the cultural or legal predicament of each country had any bearing on forming attitudes; the above figure shows where these conditions are more favorable in a country, the attitudes toward psychedelics tend to be more favorable as well. Moreover, the level of informedness about psychedelic research can be expected to be higher in countries where these predicaments are less hostile.

As there could be a number of factors that mitigate or enhance the above relationships, the study further addresses these relationships by developing separate models to test the hypotheses individually.

The analytic strategy to test the first hypotheses was to conduct a linear regression. Whether and how people's attitude varies, depending on their media consumption habits, while controlling for demographics and personal experience, is demonstrated in the first model as follows.

Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression Report

Model	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable(s)	r^2	β	F	p
1.	Attitude	TV consumption	.188	.434	1, 713	.000
2.	Attitude	TV consumption, age, gender, education, nationality, residence, experience	.330	.309	7, 695	.000
3.	Informedness	TV consumption	.076	-.276	1, 714	.000
4.	Informedness	TV consumption, age, gender, education, nationality, residence, experience	.137	-.197	7, 695	.000

In the first model, the effect of TV consumption on attitude without control variables is examined, which explains ca. 19% of the variance. The second model includes control variables of previous personal experience with psychedelic substances, gender, education level, residence and nationality. Although the power of influence is less, the second model explains considerably more, 33% of the variance with high significance, where all the control variables showed a significant predicting effect, except for level of education.

As a part of this analysis, the correlation between the amount of TV watched and the level of informedness was also tested with similar results; the fourth model that included the control variables explains ca. 14% of the variance, which is higher than the third model, while both are highly significant. This indicates that those who watch more TV are less likely to be up to date on the advances in science regarding psychedelics.

Based on these linear regression models, it can be argued that, in general, those who watch more TV, are more likely to be less informed and have a negative attitude towards the substances in question. The first hypothesis is therefore accepted.

For testing the second hypothesis, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to test whether TV consumption and nationality have a significant effect on attitudes, where the countries were assigned values from one to five, based on their average score for cultural and legal environments (for the detailed outcome, see Appendix). The results show that a model with these two independent variables explains 28% of the variance and remains highly significant. Therefore, the second hypothesis can be accepted and it can be concluded that for a unit of change in the ranking of countries in direction towards a hospitable context, a -0,298 unit of change could be observed in the attitude scale towards a less negative prejudice.

Upon testing the second hypothesis, multiple linear regressions per country were run to examine the differences of the cultivation effect in each country as well.

It has been proven that the effect of TV consumption of the study's participants has a significant effect on their attitudes towards psychedelics, and the model, including demographic control variables, remains significant when broken down to each country's respective data. As Table 3 presents, however, some variables have different influencing powers and significance levels in different countries.

Table 3. Breakdown of Cultivation effect by country

	Hungary	Czech Republic	Poland	Slovakia
TV consumption	.040	.228**	.050	.261**
Age	.298**	.091*	.070	.109
Gender	.199**	.146**	.108	.101
Education	-.124	-.014	.023	-.094
Residence	.025**	-.025	.117	.043
Experience	-.298**	.552**	-.565**	-.509**
r²	.290	.535	.412	.469
N	170	259	93	185

Note: The table presents standardized beta coefficients and indicates significance where $P^* < 0,05$, $P^{**} < 0,01$

While the sole influence of TV consumption was significant in all countries individually, models that included the control variables show a significant effect for TV consumption only in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This is rather an interesting finding, as according to the 2014 survey of Eurobarometer, the citizens Hungary and Poland were admittedly more reliant on mass media to inform themselves about the risks of drug use. These results might be explained by the different composition of participants in the four countries (due to non-probability sampling) as previous personal experience with the substances has had a significant and rather strong effect on the formulation of attitudes everywhere; with the exception of Poland, people are more likely to form a negative opinion on psychedelics when they have not tried them before personally. Also, in Hungary and the Czech Republic, age and gender are both positively significant predictors, ie. males and younger people tend to have more favorable opinions in these two countries. This can be explained with the esteemed state of psychedelic scientists in pre-prohibition times that is now being re-discovered by junior academics that make up the new generation of psychedelic researchers that are both really

only documented in these two countries among the V4. Despite some of the interviewees mentioning an apparent information gap between residents of capital cities and rural cities, the results of the survey only show a significant relationship between residence and attitude in Hungary.

In order to test the third hypotheses, the process macro by Hayes (2016) was applied and the first model, classical moderation analysis, was run to test whether the cultural (H3a) or the legal context (H3b) of the country moderated the cultivation effect. The analysis resulted in no significant results, therefore both parts of the third hypotheses have to be rejected. A rather strong and significant effect was detected however, upon applying the data to other models.

First, running a classical mediation, as presented in Figure 1., showed a significant indirect effect of TV on attitude through informedness, where the standardized indirect effect was $a*b = 0.352$, BCa CI [0.248, 0.475], and the mediator accounts for ca. 25% of the total effect. The significance of this indirect effect was tested using bootstrapping procedures where the unstandardized indirect effect was 0.111. Thus, the indirect effect of TV consumption on attitude, and the mediating power of informedness is statistically significant.

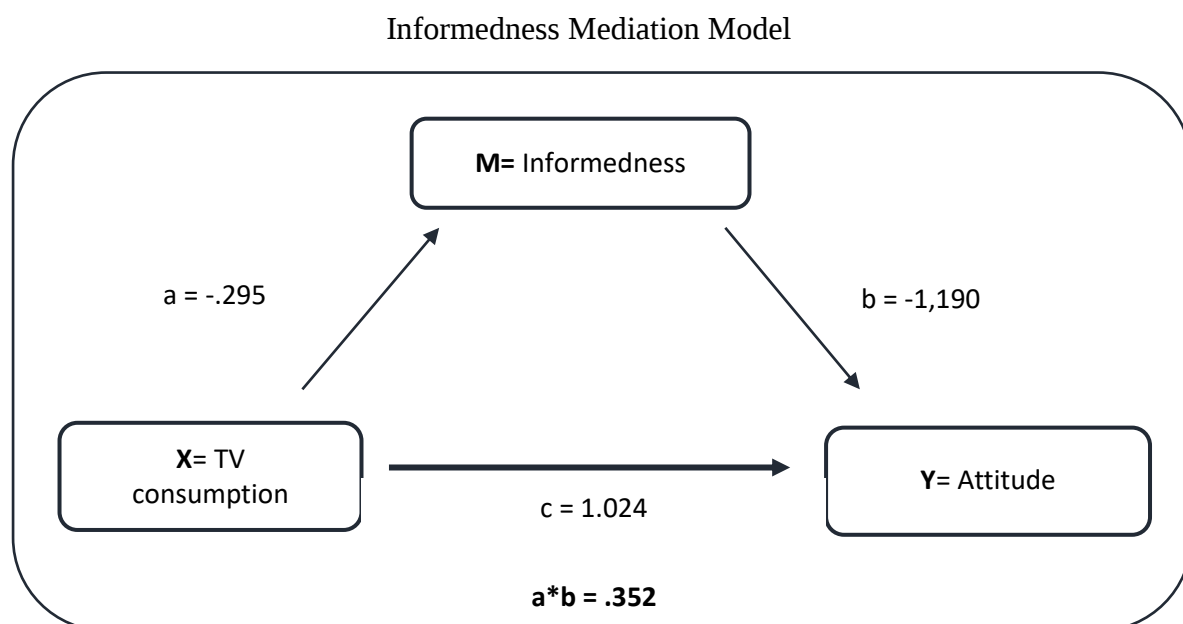


Figure 1.

An other notable finding emerged upon merging the two moderators with the previous experience indicator into a new variable that is categorized as ‘circumstances’. The results of the moderation analysis including this new variable is presented in Figure 2.

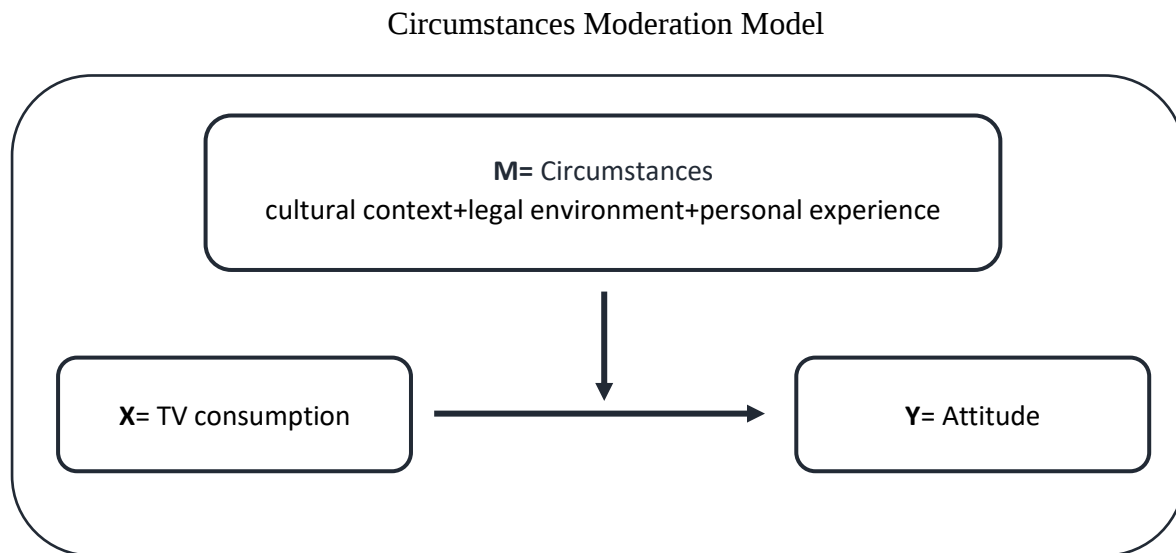


Figure 2.

To test that circumstances are a function of attitudes, and more specifically this moderates the relationship between TV consumption and attitudes, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. In the first step, two variables were included: TV consumption and circumstances. These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in attitudes, $R^2 = .289$, $F(2, 702) = 142.47$, $p < .001$. Next, the interaction between TV consumption and circumstances was added to the regression model, which accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in attitude, $\Delta R^2 = .295$, $\Delta F(3, 701) = 96.865$, $p < .001$, $b = .173$, $t = 2.326$, $p < .05$.

Examination of the interaction plot (Figure 3.) showed an enhancing effect as TV consumption and circumstances increased. As a result, it can be contended that participants who watch more TV with a low score on the circumstance scale have the most hostile attitudes.

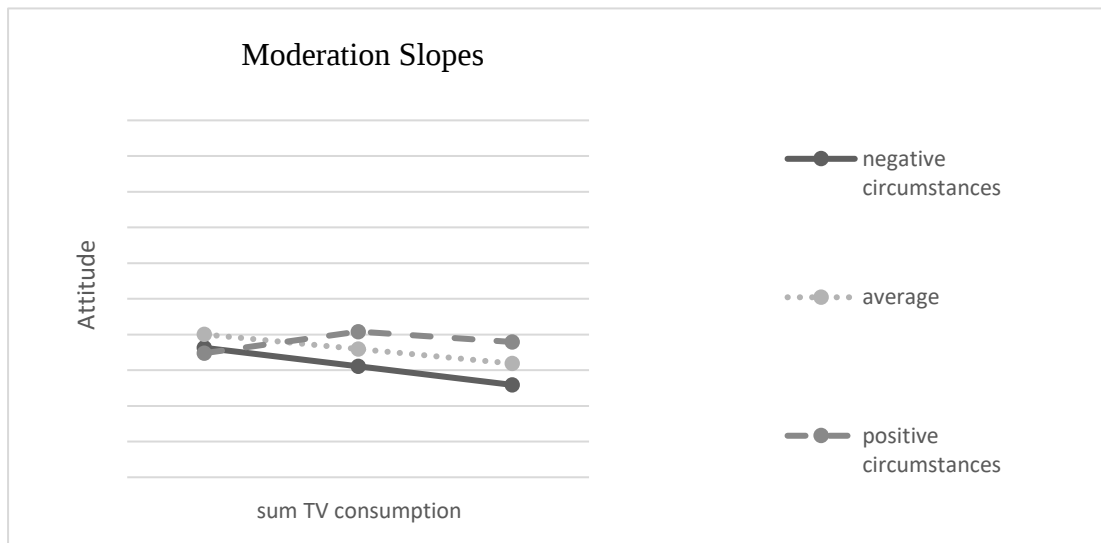


Figure 3.

The third and final significant model identified in the analysis shows the cultural environment's moderating effect on the relationship between TV consumption and attitude that is mediated by level of informedness (Figure 4.).

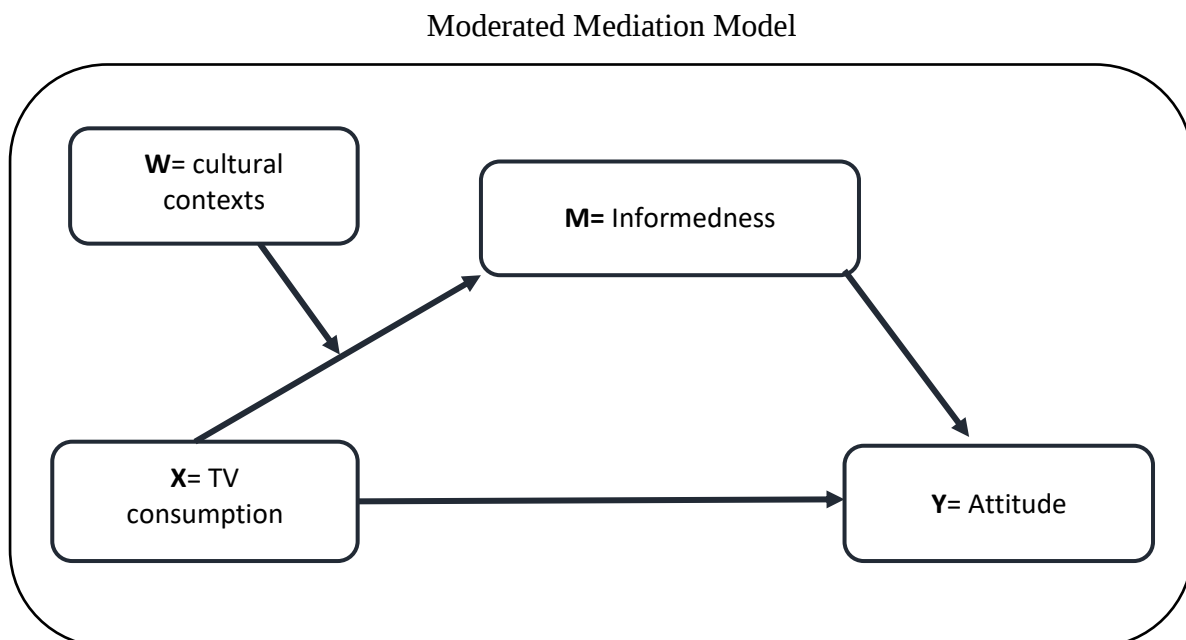


Figure 4.

As figure 4 illustrates, the magnitude of both direct and indirect effects of TV consumption on attitude significantly decreases when considering the moderating effect of the cultural context, while controlling for previous experience. The value of the coefficients for the conditional effect of TV consumption on predicting attitude were $b = 0.2514$, $t = 1.651$, and with $p = .099$, the effect is significant. Based on the assessment of the interaction plot (Figure 4.), it can be concluded that the cultivation effect of TV on attitude towards psychedelics is significantly mediated by informedness, while the effect of TV consumption on informedness is influenced by the cultural environment of the country - ie. those who watch more TV are less likely to be well informed on the scientific advances regarding psychedelics, and consequentially, are more likely to form negative attitudes, but this effect decreases in impact in countries, where the cultural environment is more condoning and facilitating to less prohibitionist approaches to drugs and drug use.

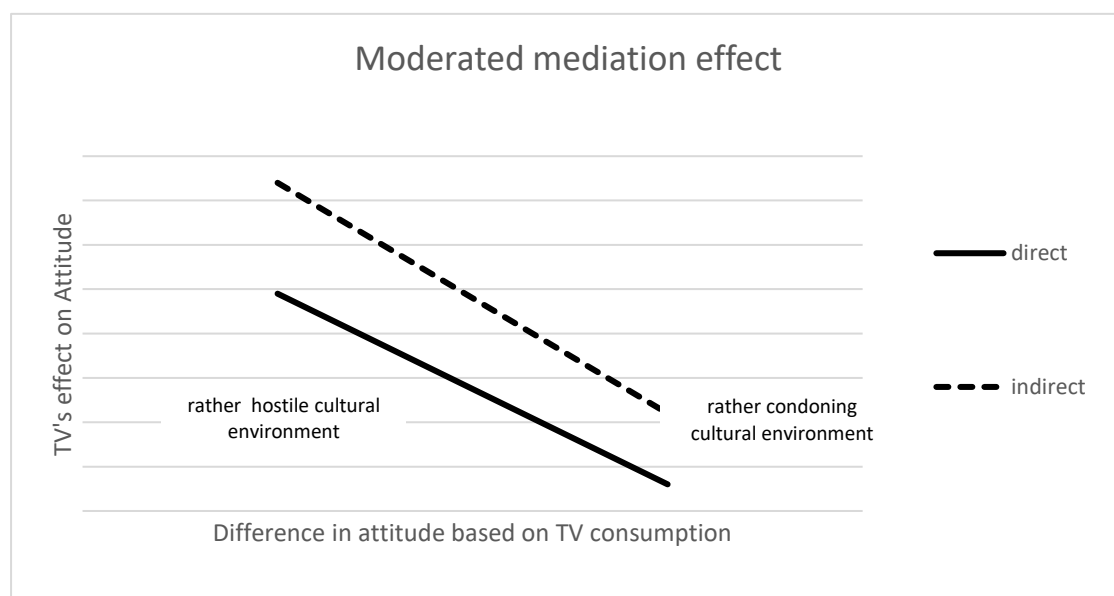


Figure 4.

Conclusion

This research project argues that the mediatized image of psychedelics affects the public in a way that results in shallow actual knowledge about psychedelics, while promoting a negative opinion towards them. The overly homogenized understanding of drugs has been shown over history (Coomber and South, 2004), and it has been gaining importance as a societal problem in the face of increasing deterioration of mental health globally (eg. WHO LC-PD, 2003 and 2014), for which psychedelics are proving to be more and more of an effective cure (see Tupper et al., 2005). In applying cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1976), and leaning on findings by previous researchers of drugs and media (eg. Szasz, 2001; Belackova et al., 2011), present paper hypothesized that the more TV one is exposed to, (H1) the more negative one's attitude will be towards psychedelics, and (H2) that this attitude will, while remaining significant, show to differ across the countries of the Visegrad Alliance.

Relying on quantitative research methods, the aforementioned hypotheses were supported, and it can be argued that television does indeed present a distorted image of psychedelics that endorses a hostile general attitude. This finding is parallel to what is a frequent topic among psychedelic researchers (eg. Nutt et al., 2006) and one that poses important institutional, financial and reputational challenges on psychedelic science. Moreover, this moralist conceptualization has been suggested to negatively impact societies (Coomber and South, 2004; Tupper and Labate, 2012), and the media enforced one-dimensional understanding of the “drug problem” produces an equally simplistic approach regarding how the problem should be solved.

The study was also hypothesizing that the differences in cultivation effect are moderated by (H3a) legal and (H3b) cultural contexts. These hypotheses, however, were not supported by the data, unless combined with personal experience. This finding reinforces that of Schnauber

and Meltzer (2005) whereby the cultivation effect is especially prevalent when the level of personal experience is low. A similar correlation can be theoretized based on further notable findings as mediation and moderated mediation analyses point to the important role informedness plays in the cadence of the cultivation effect.

It is important to note that while looking into mass media coverage of controversial societal issues is an important step towards understanding perceptions and the shaping of public opinion (Forsyth, 2001; Körner and Treloar, 2004), television is not the sole influencer of public opinion or conveyer of mass media. Nevertheless, according to the two levels of cultivation theory, it is reasonable for this study to contend that mass media fuels negative bias, while neglects to report on scientific advances regarding psychedelics, resulting in a negative attitude towards ominous substances by those who watch more television.

Therefore, the results of this project provide insight into how the prevailing narrative in regards to drugs, and particularly psychedelics, affects public opinion that, potentially, serve as justification for prohibitionist drug policies that fuel violence, pose health risks (Wolfe, 2013), violate basic human rights and hold back science. (Sarosi, 2012).

The interrelations of media, public opinion and policy have been studied immensely in communication science (eg. McCombs, 1997; Kruger and Wall, 2001) and the (re-)emergence of psychedelics, as powerful assets in the medical toolkit, justify the need for a new wave of psychedelic research in social sciences just as well as medical disciplines; there is a wide range of angles and approaches that would help further comprehend the current stigma surrounding psychedelics and eventually be of assistance in restructuring historical, institutional, moral innervations and reduce associated risks.

The vision of this study is to foster an inclusive, honest dialogue, where current, real and relevant risks can be addressed with an approach (and corresponding toolset) that is more compliant to contemporary circumstances and the actual need of the affected population.

The analysis identified some unanticipated issues that are possible subjects for future research. Such topic could be the prevalence of set and setting (coined by Zinberg, 1985) as an entirely new information in regards to the effects of psychedelics. The majority of respondents have listed the concept as something never heard of, yet “set and setting” are crucial elements of understanding and categorizing psychedelic effects.

Furthermore, while message system analysis traditionally precedes cultivation studies, since its results have identified such phenomena, this paper can serve as a basis for a bigger-scale research and an aid to interpreting qualitative results.

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Appendix A

Table A 1. Drug induced deaths

Drug-induced mortality rate among adults aged 15–64*	
Czech Republic	5.2 deaths per million
Hungary	3.4 deaths per million
Poland	8.5 deaths per million
Slovakia	3.1 deaths per million

*European average = 19.2 deaths per million

source: EMCDDA.europa.eu

Table A 2.1. and A 2.2. Overdose deaths

Total number of overdose deaths							Population (2010)
Country	% of population	2015	% of population	2014	% of population	2013	
Czech Republic	0,00042%	44	0,00033%	35	no data	no data	10 506 813
Hungary	0,00025%	25	0,00023%	23	0,00031%	31	10 014 324
Poland				no data	0,00064%	247	38 167 329
Slovakia	0,00050%	27	0,00024%	13	0,00050%	27	5 424 925

Total number of overdose deaths							Population (2015)
Country	% of population	2012	% of population	2011	% of population	2010	
Czech Republic	0,00036%	38	0,00027%	28	0,00052%	55	10 543 186
Hungary	0,00024%	24	0,00014%	14	0,00017%	17	9 855 023
Poland	0,00059%	227	0,00075%	285	0,00068%	261	38 611 794
Slovakia	0,00048%	26	0,00029%	16	0,00037%	20	5 426 258

* Population data source: "Definition of Regions". World Population Prospects, the 2015 Revision. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population

* Death toll source: General Mortality Register - European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA.europa.eu)

Table A 3. Problematic drug use rates**Overall Problematic Drug Use (PDU) ^A**

Country	Population (2015)	Year	Mean age of problematic users (2014)	Estimated number of problematic users	PDU percent of total populaion	New patients (2014)	EMCDDA estimation of total number of clients in treatment (2014)	Percent of PDU
Czech Republic	10543186	2014	29	47 700	0,45%	4 743	37 888	79,43%
Hungary	9855023					3 120	4 688	
Poland	38611794	2009	26	79 500	0,21%	3 456	16 592	20,87%
Slovakia	5426258	2008	29	10 519	0,19%	1 158	3 833	36,44%

source: emcdda.europa.eu

^AUp to 2012 the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) defined problem drug use as injecting drug use or long duration/regular use of opiates, cocaine and/or amphetamines. However, in 2012 a new definition of 'high-risk drug use' was adopted. The new definition includes 'problem drug use', but is broader (mainly in its inclusion of high-risk use of more substances)

Table A 4. Rates of drug related offences of the law

Number of offences 2015		of which psychedelics	of which only possession	relative to population
Czech Republic	5549	5356	856	0,008%
Hungary	6617	3452	4985	0,051%
Poland	30638	0	27133	0,070%
Slovakia*	969	468	416	0,008%
* OFFENDERS				

source: emcdda.europa.eu

Appendix B/1

Cultural Context (H3a)

SCALES

Science

- 1= psychedelics are absent from academia / state actively obstructs research
- 2= few, mostly underground studies / state doesn't support research
- 3= moderately public, privately funded studies / state allows research
- 4= published, state funded projects / moderate state support for research
- 5= highly publicized, financially barrier-free research / state supports research

Safety / Available harm reduction

- 1= complete lack of education; addiction is deviancy, a crime; state actively obstructs harm reduction
- 2= fear based education, promoting abstinence, harm reduction is undertaken via civils
- 3= miscellaneous information distribution; state aids harm reduction via civil society
- 4= evidence based education; state allocates funds + infrastructure for harm reduction
- 5= evidence based peer education, promoting safety, state is actively involved in harm reduction

Recreational scene

- 1= nonexistent: violent, disproportional persecutions, harassment
- 2= underground: occasional raids, users targeted
- 3= in-between: informal agreements with law enforcement
- 4= relatively free: users not targeted
- 5= absolutely stigma free

Mediatized image

- 1= demonizing
- 2= hostile
- 3= indifferent
- 4= acceptant
- 5= positive general vibe

SUM SCALE

1= hostile predicament towards psychedelics

2= condemnatory cultural context

3= rather indifferent towards psychedelics

4= condoning cultural context

5= psychedelic-friendly predicament

COUNTRY SCORES

PL=2

HU=3

SVK=3

CZ=4

Appendix B/2

Legal Context (H3b)

SCALE

1= very strict policies; full-on drug war (eg. Philippines)

2= **strict policies**

3= **impassive approach**

4= **somewhat liberal policies**

5= liberal policies; drugs decriminalized (eg. Portugal)

SUMMARY

Czech (4)

- Drug use is not a criminal offence
- Possession of small quantities for personal use is an administrative offence (fine)
- Distinction between cannabis and other drugs
- Parliament defines threshold quantities with which to determine whether an offence was administrative or criminal
- A range of alternatives to imprisonment is available to the court (e.g. suspended sentences, community service and probation with treatment)
- use of cannabis for therapeutic purposes has been allowed since 1 April 2013
- Cultivation and supply of medicinal cannabis is possible through a licensing procedure since March 2014.
- In 2010 the total drug-related public expenditures represented 0.06 % of GDP of which ca. 75 % were for supply reduction activities and the remaining for demand reduction (patient healthcare and medication received the largest shares)

Hungary (2)

- Consumption and possession is a criminal offence, punishable by up to two years in prison (and 5–10 and 5–15 years if involving larger quantities)
- Supply is punishable if involving a small amount: 1–5 years
5–20 years or life if involving certain circumstances or large quantities
- The court may take the perpetrator's addiction into consideration when imposing the punishment: option to suspend prosecution in the case of treatment for a small quantity but cannot be repeated within 2 years.
- No specific budget attached to the drug strategy – data from 2007: 0.04 % of GDP
law enforcement: 75.3 %, prevention and research: 10.5 %, treatment: 10.4 % and harm reduction: 3.8 %.

Poland (2)

- Any drug possession is a criminal offence and is penalized with up to three years' imprisonment. (In minor cases the offender can ordered to serve a sentence involving limitation of liberty or deprivation of liberty for up to one year.)
- Prosecutors have the right to oblige a sentenced drug user to undergo treatment. (limited to first time offenders with no criminal record.)
- Trafficking of drugs is penalized by a fine AND imprisonment of between six months and eight years.
- No information on budget or overall demand reduction initiatives (in 2013, in the course of monitoring the implementation of the National Anti-Drug Strategy, communal governments were asked to report spendings - based on these data collection exercises, an incomplete estimate points to drug-related expenditure of 0.01 % of GDP)
- *A bill regulating medical cannabis has been passed at the time of writing but no data is available about its application and if and how it changes practical matters.*

Slovakia (3)

- Possession for personal use is a criminal offence, punishable by up to up to 3 years imprisonment
+ up to five years may be imposed for personal possession of an amount corresponding to a maximum of 10 times the 'usual single dose'
- The court may suspend execution of a sentence not longer than 3 years for minor supply offences, if the offender is addicted and the treatment appears to have a chance of success.
- New penalties:
Home imprisonment and community service
Conditional waiver for penalties shorter than 2 years (if prior behavior and other circumstances assure that the purpose of a penalty will be fulfilled without the offender staying in prison)
- Possession of any amount above 10 doses must be charged under drug trafficking, supply or production with a penalty of 3–10 years' imprisonment (can increase up to 25 years under specific conditions)
- The age limit of criminal liability is now set at 14.
- Drug policy documents in Slovakia have no associated budgets and there is no review of executed expenditure.
- In 2006 total drug-related public expenditure ⁽²⁾ represented 0.05 % of gross domestic product (GDP), with 63.3 % for public order and safety, 14.8 % for treatment, 7.6 % for prevention, 1.8 % for coordination, 1.3 % for education, 0.9 % for harm reduction and 10.3 % for other areas

Appendix B/3

Expert Interview 1 – Poland

Interviewer: Orsi Feher

Interviewee: Dawid Krawczyk, political journalist

Interview over Skype on 8th of June, 2017

[Greetings and technicalities]

INTERVIEWER: Thank you for agreeing to give an interview – so, I would like you to start by telling me about how you got into your line of work and what you are doing exactly?

Dawid Krawczyk: [...jokes...] I work in the field of a drug journalism. I got started by writing about politics and labor issues. I used to work as a journalist for about three years, writing about international issues, travelling around. In our magazine, we have a specific segment devoted to drugs and policy now. It is a unique thing in Polish media, no other outlet does such work in Poland. I was [always interested] in the topic, I covered many different issues before, eg. social justice, racism, international politics, international law – these are issues that partially cover [drug policy]. I wrote about them, so it was almost a natural thing to arrive to this field. More recently, I started to [be interested in] what is happening internationally with drug laws, so at one point this year I was even covering high level political stuff like the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at the UN, but I am also still covering [local political issues]. I like to write about psychedelic [therapy] or injection sites and other harm reduction issues too.

So, you said there aren't many other media covering such issues in Poland?

There are different types of coverage of drugs, but none of them are really well researched. Just yesterday I took part in a [panel] interview that happens every year before the holidays, called „the use of drugs”. It is on TV. It's a good topic for them to scare some parents with before the holiday. My [stance] on the show was more against legal highs... and of course they didn't know the difference between decriminalization and legalization for example, so I talked about that as well.

And, always, the discussion is [confusing?] A problem in polish media coverage is that, for example a big topic is substitution therapy: The idea of methadone that you get from polish media is that they present it in a medicine that is wonderful to treat addiction, and at the same time, they call it liquid heroin, so it's very [difficult] to get relevant information from mainstream media that are important and [useful].

If we focus on psychedelics specifically, what kind of information would people be able to get from media? Is media even a relevant source to learn about these substances? What do you think?

I don't think so [that it is relevant]. They certainly play a role in stirring moral panic. Years ago when this polish war on legal highs started, it was a huge topic in the media...

Hold on - When you talk about legal highs, is it synthetic cannabinoids or the non-listed herbs, eg. iboga or kratom?

I am talking about synthetics... substitutes for the conventional drugs, like stimulants or for pot. These are the most popular local legal highs and the polish media likes to cover them. [...] If you would type „drug issues” into any search box of polish media, this is the only topic that you probably will find. This is what they like to present, scary stories of people going crazy on synthetics.

Yeah, there always seem to be ridiculous stories circulating on extreme highs...

[talking abot <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4566974/High-teenager-chopped-penis-off.html>].

Haha, yeah [...] we are not that extreme in Poland, but it's getting there in different tabloids.

From what you are saying, it seems that the prevailing narrative in the media serves to scare people when it comes to drugs. Is there any differentiation between the types of drugs though? Do people know the differences between opiates and psychedelics for example, or is all just >drugs<?

Certainly, cannabis has a different status in the narrative. There is a quite reasonable public discussion around the medical use of [the idea of] medical marijuana. There was an [initiative] in the parliament about medical use, but [...] it failed during the legislation process – now, the people who [initiated it] are working on it and getting it further.

So, the debate around medical cannabis is a bit more rational and a lot calmer [...].

You won't read much about opiates. Most of the people out there think that the heroin problem is a story of the past... You know, when opium addiction was visible. Probably, statistically, it is also true that more people were dependent those days, but now it's not true that there are no opium dependent people living in Poland, but you won't see them on the streets or find the topic in the media.

About psychedelics – there is not much of a debate.

There are not really known cases of addiction.

There are some articles about mephedrone, because it was popular when it was legal... there are mutations around still today [...].

There was some coverage of chemsex a while ago, it was a big piece that basically plagiarized the entire story of the 2015 film, Chemsex.

So no, there is not much talk about psychedelics, except for stimulants and medical cannabis.

How about Psychedelic Science? Can the Western-European trend of pioneering psychedelic research be seen anywhere in Poland? Do people know about the research of psychedelics in therapy or any medical use?

Great question – and the case about this so called “psychedelic renaissance” is that it's not happening on Poland. I did research that, I have reached out to psychiatrists, scientists [due to my work] to see if they know about anything of the sort going on here and mostly, they didn't even really have an idea of psychedelic research [in general]. There is nothing going on in the field in Poland for 30 years, because of the approach to psychoactive substances by the polish scientific community. The only [person who talks about it] published a book “The Encyclopedia of Psychedelics” (by Kamil Sipowicz – author's note). It is a really huge book and he [said] that the only example [of research] within the country was during the communist

times, when some regime-scientists tried to extract LSD from human feces. So, the state of the science... contemporary research... well, nothing is going on.

What about public figures? Is there anyone on the horizon, talking about anything other than the dangers of drugs?

There is one MD (prof. Marek Bachański), who treated patients with medical cannabis, he did it semi-legally. Let's say it was murky ground, but he is an advocate for medical cannabis. There was also a well-known neuroscientist (prof. Jerzy Vetulani), who passed away last month. He was known for his research and speaking up about decriminalizing all substances, and at the end of his life, I think he was talking about legalizing psychoactive substances. And from the legal point of view, there is a professor of criminal law (prof. Monika Płatek) – she is a pretty well-known figure as she comments on a lot of different topics in the media and she is also pretty vocal about her support for decriminalizing drugs. She is taking part in public debates, but [drugs] is not her [main profile]. Neither of these people are focusing solely on [drugs], it's not like there is a movement. They are public figures and happen to advocate for drug policies. [...] Which is good, in a way, because if they have knowledge, experience, achievements and respect from different fields, it is not easy to discredit them [...]

We can say that then, the media coverage of drug science is far from ideal – do you think people know about harm reduction, what it means or how to tackle problems?

I don't really believe that a regular person knows such terms [...] [Our magazine] writes about such issues regularly, but there were some articles about harm reduction in mainstream newspapers at various times, so there might be people who are aware, but those are the minority for sure.

Okay, so ordinary people don't know much about harm reduction. What about young people, who go to festivals, are present at the scene of recreational drug use – how much do you think they are aware or how much information is even available for them?

There are “party workers” in Poland, in Warsaw specifically – that is one thing [for information or help]. They have their tents, tests, condoms, etc. If they happen to be present at a party, then yes...a lot [is available]. These “party workers” are doing a great job!

Who are they? Is it a civil initiative? Are they helped by the government in any way?

As far as I know, they work on a voluntary basis. There are of ways for them to get funding – a lot of good work is done by the Social Initiative for Drug Policy that was started by students. Now they are very into testing and are trying to build this database of ecstasy pills and new psychoactive substances (NPS). They are really checking what is sold online and the actual structure of the substances before creating a list. But no, it is not funded by the government.

Are there any government funded harm reduction programs, not just re psychedelics but across the spectrum?

Yeah, the opioid substitution services...

Yes, I have read about that on Political Critique, but it seems to be very impersonal (people report to be basically thrown out of the facilities after they took their portion).

Yeah, it is true. The quality of these services is seriously low. It is not something that you could compare to, for example, Danish models. A lot of people are very critical of it, but they are there... it could be worse... Are there any safe injection rooms in Poland? No, there aren't. There were some cooperation between activists and drug users to establish such, but they are not operating. They were self-organized, grassroots initiative that were not too successful.

[...] Say you are a PUD and you need help, should you be worried about consequences of admitting to use? eg. school credit, law enforcement or just the stigma?

Yeah, you could be... all drug possessions are criminalized, so... yes. There is this exception that the prosecutors can halt the process, which they actually do quite often... BUT you have to know about it. You have to know your rights, you have to know how to deal with the police and what to say to be considered for this kind of treatment. And if you are just a regular PDU, there is a huge chance that you are not aware of the legal determinants of your situation... So, if you know this stuff, if you are educated, if you have a social means and [status], you can probably get away with possession, but it is very easy to get into trouble too. Police doesn't have the best reputation with handling users.... they will try to get every last piece of information out of you about your drugs, they will probably blackmail you or just convince you in, let's say, legally doubtful ways... So, there are a few things to worry about when it comes to drugs and encountering law enforcement...

So... about the attitude of law enforcement. There is this discussion going on, that events and festival organizers are hesitant to provide space for harm reduction services to avoid unwanted attention from the police...

Ahhh, yeah... There is this certain resistance to harm reduction at festival, because [the organizers] feel it is like a general [attitude of] parents, that drugs are taboo... and establishing a harm reduction point would just be like announcing that "drugs are present at our festival". And basically, it demands a lot of courage to confront this taboo. So organizers prefer to keep their events less safe as a result...

It is a very simple thing I think, you have a generation that is not used to such festivals or even talking about drug consumption, and most often they are the ones paying for the ticket ... But SOME festivals exist that are pioneering the harm reduction approach and welcoming them in their premises... but even then, they prefer to be not so public about it. We run an article last year [talking about drug checking] and mentioned one of these pioneer festivals as a good example, but the organizers called us the next day, asking for their names to be removed... So even those, who are in favor of the approach, still are very much afraid of the consequences of the stigma.

Yeah, I wasn't expecting anything else to be honest. Let's shift the conversation to the expansion of the drug market after the fall of the iron curtain. How did history, the communism affect the culture?

When we talk about the 90's, the first drug that comes to mind here is amphetamine. That was basically the symbol of the era - a token of the past. We are the biggest producer and exporter of amphetamine in Europe - and I think it was a consequence of a national identity problem somehow. This post-colonial sense of not having an identity, motivated people to become

amphetamine producers. It was a huge part of the techno culture that was THE thing in the mid 90's, so they could [be proud of making good Polish amphetamine.]

About psychedelics – I don't think there was a huge hippie culture in Poland... I was very young then, but I definitely can't recall any trace of it in mainstream culture or media. There weren't any established personas. Surely, people were experimenting with mushrooms and all this psychoactives [that you can find in nature]. I recall a magazine writing about different personal experiences, but it was a very niche thing. It was never even part of the mainstream of the alternative. [...] There are some crazy stories popping there head up in mainstream news every now and then, like the crazy Daily Mail guy... you can hear of people going insane on LSD and running around naked...but that is about all the coverage.

Recording cut off 37 minutes into the interview – the conversation went on for an other ca. 15 minutes about psychedelics not being available in the country during the Soviet period and about the recreational culture of drug-use, which is limited to a certain subculture in a "traditional psychedelic" EDM scene in a relatively sensible and safe setting.

Expert Interview 2 – CZECH REPUBLIC

Interviewer: Orsi Feher

Interviewee: Eva Cesarova, YouthRise policy advocate, head of Czech Psychedelic Society

Interview over Skype on 23rd of June, 2017

[Greetings]

Interviewer: As a start, I would like to hear about how you got into your line of work and a little update on what you are up to recently.

Eva Césárová: Well, my work is not directly with psychedelics. Years ago, my friend got an internship to study Ayahuasca in Peru. Before that, we would hang out and do drugs together, kind of mindlessly. Once she came back, she told me she doesn't want to do any of that any more. She decided to start the psychedelic society in the Czech. It was meant to be a project to spread information about psychedelics and one time she managed to bring together psychologists and psychiatrists to debate. She invited me as well... I was studying media and she thought my views could be useful for them in the discussion. So I jumped into it, without having a real personal experience with psychedelics in a mindful way. I mean I was working, I was studying at a time so my drug use was not really distracting my life, but it was a different approach. Then [I became involved] and our events became really big, the Czech Psychedelic Society grew to 3000 members and two years later [...] I helped YouthRise to organize a talk about Ibogaine in the Czech, through which I got offered my job.

So, I am still very much interested in all drugs, psychedelics especially, but all of them I think about as medicine and I am studying addictology now.

Sounds about right.

We are well connected - it is an interesting position, a lot of people are interested in our approaches to harm reduction.

V4 – drug markets similarity

How do you think this affected our region? Are our countries in a unique position in the continent? How is the Czech different?

In Czech we have a distinct position, we were the last ones to schedule LSD in 1975 and we always have been kind of different. The research on psychedelics was always a big thing in the Czech, there were so many centers doing this [in the 70s]. Milan Hausner or Stanislav Grof are [exceptional names in the field until today]. The book, “LSD, the highway to mental health” was the book that changed my point of view on LSD and it is a very important scientific publication, because the subjects were diagnosed with terminal states of psychosis [sic] so they could be medicated until their end of their life... They were given really high doses of LSD through long session and they were able to dig up certain stuff that they were repressing through their entire life that actually caused their psychotic states. [...] Then, Stan Grof saw that LSD was getting scheduled in other countries [...], recreational use was not so spread in the Czech however, he expected it to happen here soon. So he travelled to south Africa to find other methods to reach altered states of consciousness, because that is what he found was the very healing and fundamental to health. That is where he gathered the knowledge for Holotropic Breathwork. They were working on it at the end of the sixties... But the thing is with Stan Grof, half of the country [thinks of him as] beloved and the other as shame, that his research is not valid. He even received this embarrassing title, “the lost stone”...it is for someone who is bullshitting [sic] and he was awarded this by the Club of Sceptics.

In the recreational scene, I think that definitely they were present, but not much... With Grof [as pioneer] it was more about therapy. He was teaching psychologists to implement his findings and [follow-up on his researches.]

How was the legal environment then? Was he underground or totally legit?

It was before it was scheduled.

So how do you see that this legal context of psychedelics evolved after that?

Well, we are just following the UN [policies]. I really believe we were trying to hold it for as long as possible because of the results from the 70s really worked. I mean, they had patients, here, that had no chance, no hope before that... but keeping it would have been going against the UN.

Do you think that scheduling has an effect on supply and demand in the Czech? Besides the halt of studies...

I think that the biggest change was the revolution. I don't think scheduling didn't change much here, we had communism, so then you could go to jail even for having long hair... that really wasn't [on the agenda]. I've never asked my grandparents, but I know my parents smoked weed and they had the long hair [the hippie look] but they don't know much about other drugs, I don't think they would be interested in them anyway.

So it wasn't really available to anyone...

There were subcultures, but underground subcultures. I think you could find traces of psychedelic history from that period but you would have to dig really deep.

What about later, in the 90's? Were there a late view of hippies, did anything change?

Yeah, we had this movie, Piko. It would be an interesting source for you.

We had pervitin (metamphetamine). We had a lot of people hooked on pervitin. After the revolution, there was this big boom. Not only because the borders were easier to cross but also because the environment completely changed. Before, it looked like the regime will have their own [concentration camps], the communists could get rid of anyone, but after that [it was an éles change] things seemed to become very easy going [in contrast]. And it was after that, that harm reduction services became widely available... so that kinda helped the situation with pervitin and heroin as well. But there is not much to be known about psychedelics. We have had mushrooms, growing in the wild for a long time and people have been using them, but I don't have much of an overview of that, because it just seemed to be a normal thing, you can find them in forests freely.

So, harm reduction started to have its own culture after the revolution. Does the government also take actual step towards safety?

Harm Reduction is about safety. The current anti-drug coordinator started those services... he used himself when he was younger and he is a therapist. He knew what is going on in other countries and how to tackle the spread of HIV, HepC and so on... so he really fought for establishing harm reduction services in the Czech Republic really early on. Therefore, he has been known to speak up and help the situation.

Is he working through civil society?

He is a politician.

So government is actually helping?

I have the feeling they don't really know or care about what is going on. As long as Jindřich Vobořil is doing a good enough job, the government doesn't really interfere.

[There are some actions against medical cannabis] despite that they have been legal for years. Still, some patients can't access the medicine, because the whole process is being complicated. The setup of the legalization of medical cannabis is ridiculous at some points (licensing for example – AN).

It is very interesting, because the public face of the Czech medical cannabis is very kind. It sounds like all you need to grow is a license.

Yes... but who decides who can get those licenses?

I understand what you mean...

That's how it usually works... [...] but on the other hand, a lot of this bureaucracy gives us a certain amount of space...

So, how is academia looking today? Considering this rich culture and Stan Grof's hírnév... do Czech people know about psychedelic science? Not for recreation, but as medicine...

Hm... There is a huge psilocybin research about to be going on, it was even on the news yesterday [...] Also, it seems that some of the MDMA for PTSD research (<http://www.maps.org/research/mdma>) will be carried out here, in Prague. I think a lot of it [comes from] the Psychedelic Society, people write articles and talk about it, we get it in the media. Just yesterday, I've met a girl who was [overexcited] about how much is going on in the Czech, just think about it, we have 6000 members of the Society and on average, we have 50 new [member requests] per week. But on the other hand, I live in my bubble, it seems to me that everybody around is aware of it and use psychedelics in a conscious way, because I am working with this... I can talk to people who [are surprised about all the research happening in the country]. But yeah... we had the Beyond Psychedelics conference, the Transpersonal Conference is happening this year.

[...] I am really thinking about the approach I should take with all of it in the future, because my start with it was not the "proper" way. But I don't ever want to lie about it; there are a lot of ways of using all drugs and that is exactly the point, that I can see the difference... and take advantage of the spiritual context with intention and in a proper setting. I actually think that the spiritual buffer lays a big role in addiction.

[...]

So what do you think is the public image is of psychedelics and the people using psychedelics?

In the Czech? hm... things are getting better. I think people are much more willing to speak about it or admit [use]. At the same time, media is somehow pushing to accept it, but it's just boulevard. It is kind of silly. There were sensationalistic headlines, like "Doctor cures depression, you will never guess how. It's a drug!" [laughs].

So media is paying attention, but they have no idea about the whole deal.

Yeah, they definitely don't know much about the history. They talk about it as some new thing. Still, it makes people a lot more open to it. We get more and more messages at the Society from people who just want to learn more, about micro dosing for example. And then, for example I worked on the production of a movie, and there was this very typical Czech soap opera actress who surprised me so much talking about it openly and so casually [especially considering her status]. So... times are changing.

Do you think people differentiate between drugs? I know in the law, there is a differentiation, but how about in the head of ordinary people?

Yes, I think so. Every single media [outlet] has written SOMETHING about psychedelics or some research and also, the main TV channel has run material about the psilocybin research so people know it's not just a drug. And then there is the pervitin problem...

In my generation, I am confident at least 30-40% has tried these drugs, or... actually... more....

So I guess the media plays a big role... How does national TV cover the topic?

It was on the main commercial channel, it was in a cultural magazine. Quite detailed coverage. On the other channel, it was on various programs a little bit here and there.

[...] Are younger people informed about safe use?

No, this is actually the biggest problem. We don't have a setup on how to educate ... every school has their special person that supposed to be a quasi "drug advisor", but usually it's just a teacher whow studied special education, so they don't really have a clue about drugs. The approach is usually just say know. My experiences with them were less than pleasant. So no, in that sense we are not doing very well. There has been some attempts, but there is also the scientologists who are [interfering] with the in-school... Some schools are very against that but then the only other choice they have is those people that I said...

I see it as a huge need. Schools should talk about consciousness, mindfulness, etc. too. and the physiological, biological, spiritual consequences of taking these substances. So that kids are equipped with all the information and they can make a decision themselves what they want to do to their bodies and how. My friend was telling me that in Amsterdam, they are already doing something similar and he was able to discuss drugs with his 11 years old nephew and they knew so much and were asking relevant questions. It was obvious that an open, honest discussion can solve a problem.

[...]

Thank you so much for agreeing to this, I think we went through all my questions – is there anything you would like to add?

One more thing I forgot to tell you re the media: What we are doing is when there is coverage of psychedelics in the media and we notice something not correct, we release a public announcement and list sources as to why it wasn't accurate.

That is really cool [...]

[Thanks & Bye]

Expert Interview 3 – SLOVAKIA

Interviewer: Orsi Feher

Interviewee: Martin Pazitny (Pažitný)

Interview via telephone call on two occasions in August, 2017.

[RECORDING FROM 3/8/2017]

Thank you for doing this again. Please introduce yourself again for the record and talk a little about how you got to your line of work.

I am Martin, I have a Bachelors in Political Science, my thesis was about harm reduction and European law... about how the Slovak Republic adapted a harm reduction approach as we entered the EU. Then I studied addictology at the Charles University in Prague, which I finished in 2016 and my Master Thesis was about monitoring webshops that sell New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) .. this was also a big part of a project that I was working on. My professional field is itrend(?) project, a European project on which 5 countries are working together that monitors NPS markets and I developed a software that tracking

webshops with NPS and after that I continued data monitoring on my own and continuing developing softwares that the EU can use for gathering data.

I was interested in psychedelics since high school but more from a human rights perspective. I didn't understand how someone can get into jail just for possessing weed...or whatever substance while not doing any harm to anyone. Then I got somehow more interested in psychedelics and my first conference was the Ibogaine conference without any personal experience and I did an interview with Rick Doblin that got me studying more and more about the topic. I was still interested in helping people not get into jail...mostly it was harm reduction, my interest was still human rights. Then it slowly reached beyond... I got interested in mental health, but not just from the [classical point of view] but how healthy people can use psychedelics, if they use it right. Then as I got really into this, I was involved with the Czech Psychedelic Society and now I am a founder of the Slovak Psychedelic Society, which we started officially this year.

It is going pretty good. There are no other initiatives like this in the country, but we had our first scientific conference earlier this year, in the beginning of June. It was at a mental health hospital, which is a big thing, because they recognized us as professionals - We had the credits [for continuing education for medical/health professionals]. So, we are trusted in the scientific scene. It was completely sold out, there were about 3-4 articles published in good newspapers. So we are now [expanding], there are more and more professionals interested. It was the first event like this in Slovakia.

Historical perspective – What is your impression of the period when the borders opened up after the fall of communism and drug markets opened up. So what was the scene like around that era?

There was definitely a drug market in Czechoslovakia before 90', but for the general public it was mostly mixing pills and alcohol that was prevalent – mostly painkillers to enhance the drinking. Then, there were small groups of drug users, where someone was cooking pervitin or growing weed. They were only distributing to a closed group though, there was not really an open market. People were not offering them freely. If somebody tells you there was no drug problem, it is not true [...] it was just not visible. And after the borders opened, it is true, we were on the smuggling route for the western countries for heroin and [eventually] we also became their target [for buying]. Because there was no education for young people, even professionals didn't know how to deal with the heroin problem successfully, so it was a big problem, especially in the bigger cities – we are talking about the generation that are now in the forties. Overdose cases were [outstanding]. What is maybe a good thing from this time, is that there were harm reduction services working. During this time, there were around 6 [centers] and today there are only two. The rest was shut down.

When it comes to psychedelics, it is a bit different to the Czech... culturally, it became a bit popular at the end of 90's, beginning of the new century when there were psytrance parties every weekend. Even in smaller villages, there were people coming together in nature and dancing. That's when people were using LSD a lot, for example. It was only a few years, this cultural phase. Now, this scene slowly started to turn to pervitin and the music changed a lot... the psytrance parties became a lot smaller, the EDM scene transformed more towards pervitin. With MDMA... people are TRYing to use MDMA, but from what I know [...], when young people refer to ecstasy, they are not looking for the MDMA feeling, not really

openness, they are looking for energy to keep them up. So ecstasy for them is probably more about metamphetamine. Which is dangerous... even though we are no pill testing in Slovakia, we know that “ecstasy” used to include really low amount of MDMA and it really changed around 2014... now there is too much MDMA, it is too strong for them. It is dangerous because they are used to eating 3-4 to get the high [they were looking for] and now even 1 pill can be too much for someone.

So if we talk about the evolution of the culture, it doesn't seem to be going into better directions. You mentioned that there are less harm reduction centers today than 10 years ago.

Yes, because the heroin problem was very public. It was on the streets, it was in every newspaper [...] And when people are dying, children of people in position were dying, you have to do something about it... It is still a problem, but heroin is not the first choice drug anymore. It is funny, it was very easy to buy heroin, there were stories of heroin-jars in bars [...] It is not so much prevalent as pervitin.

In the government, there are some Christian parties, who don't like to see money put into harm reduction. [They see it as taking care of junkies.*] They like to punish people so that people are scared and they think then people are not going to use. So they scare the dealers, they scare the users and they see it as good to scare the people who consider trying. So there are only 2 harm reductions services, yes...and they are both on the Western part of Slovakia, there is nothing anywhere else... People are still using, the problem is still real, but nobody really knows anything about them, there are no studies, no information on [illnesses and PDUs]. There is no systematical monitoring.

So, as you say the legal context is more about punishing than protecting... when it comes to harm reduction and education, it looks like it is more a task for civil society. Do the government aids them? Financially or infrastructural what does it look like in Slovakia?

Yeah, prevention and education are really bad. There is no systematical support for [these services].

I am not even talking about harm reduction, just prevention... there is this crazy initiative, called “take a ball”. What they mean is, take a ball, a football or a basketball, instead of drugs. This is how they see it, kids should just play with some ball and after it, they will be fine, and they will not do drugs. Then there is this “drug free world” initiative from the Scientologists and [...] they go into schools and spread harmful information.

The few real harm reduction groups try to do some real education, but they don't have enough money to reach more than a few schools around them.

Then there is the police. I also don't think they are a [reliable] source or that it should be the role of the police to go into schools and talk about drugs. But this is what happens in Slovakia a lot. My brother had this experience 3-4 times, that they are going into his high school and cause trauma for kids, when they walk in with dogs that sniff around student by student...ant they are just sitting there, shitting their pants... what they usually find is just some sandwich... that's really crazy!

Would you say that [law enforcement] actively targets users though?

Hmm... luckily, not really. If they see a few alternative looking, [suspicious] guys just walking in the night, they will probably be stopped and the police will try to [get them to] give them their drugs. And it works, because people are scared! They give anything they have just to get away, this happens often, but there are not really [big raids] or I haven't heard of [parties shut down], which is good.

The other important thing you mentioned is that there is no actual knowledge or research about the users. So can you tell me a bit about the scientific/academic scene?

I think this is the biggest problem here. Science is missing. Not just because I try to work in science [and it's a lot of obstacles], but it is really hard to have an argument about this topic... not just with police or politicians, if you don't know your facts and numbers, it is difficult to have a strong statement. Sometimes these studies come out, but there is no systematic monitoring of the problem. What I love about this topic is that you can study it from so many perspectives, that's the probably biggest reason I started studying them, the many [aspects], but in Slovakia there are barely any studies. For the EMCDDA, the state has to supply some data, but they are just collecting the data, but nothing too serious, you never know enough... it mostly just meeting the EU [requirements] with nothing behind it. In the Czech, where I studied addictology, the researchers who were teaching us were publishing articles in Czech and English and they know a lot, they use scientific methods and there is enough power in that against harmful changes or for better policy. This is what is missing in Slovakia... and it is the same for psychedelics.

Is there no interest? Is it difficult to get funded or is the topic too difficult?

Yeah, there is the huge stigma remaining from the Nixon era... that it is for hippies. There is no really tradition for this. Because if you studied psychedelics [back when they were legal], you gave up your life, there were these "crazy hippie scientists" and then later there were these strong, proud individuals who [pioneered] scientific research like Rick Doblin, Amanda Fieldling or Jiri Horacek in the Czech Republic, who chose this direction because they really believe and [pushed through] hard times and made it easier for people to get involved, they opened the road. In Slovakia, this was missing. We had , who was a well known psychotherapist and psychiatrist, but he emigrated to Switzerland when the Russian army came. He is well known in the German speaking world and he did very important work during that crazy time. Now we are trying to bring him back ... to be recognized by Slovak citizens and for people who want to be involved in the work. He is a great scientist, great psychotherapist, but we are missing this [persona] who can bring the people together. You don't need to do [high level research] fMRI ... you don't need to be a neuroscientist. There are a lot of different kind of researches to be published... Nothing like this is happening and we are about to change this. This is the only way to change the [public understanding] to get the science recognized.

Now the people who are getting in touch with us [the Psychedelic Society] have [professional] backgrounds, some of them are published scientists. This is how countries should operate where psychedelic science is missing, connect and co-operate with interested scientists, reach into academia and start to publish in smaller papers and work towards bigger thing...

That's how public perception can change.

[...] We can talk about the right of patients, the right of humans to alter consciousness, all of them are important topics, but none of them have the power to change the perception in post-communist countries. I don't think this is a concept that can be played here, because there is no tradition of this... people are not so much familiar with it, they don't really get the concept of human rights. In conservative countries, it actually can scare people, it is something so foreign, it is associated with gays and drugs... it is not a part of the everyday life.

Good point... So then what about the perception of psychedelics? If you say, psychedelic science...

It is just probably nothing. Blank.

That is a good thing from some perspective. We can bring something into that blank. That is probably the only good thing about the absence of the topic in public debate.

[...fearmongering...]*

The role of Psychedelic Societies or anyone who is involved in drug policy, we have to be in touch with open minded journalists and help them, put some effort into [distributing] real information. There are a lot of mistakes [unintentionally] because this is not their everyday topic, but we can fact-check them and [help them report] correctly...most of them are really grateful because they will publish a valid article. And that is my hope, that when there are more articles like that, you can show it even to your grandparents [in response to] crazy, sensationalistic articles.

[RECORDING FROM 1/8/2017]... 44:25

[lack of research/lack of interest in psychedelic science] most people only know what they read in tabloids [clickbaits, sensationalistic headlines]. [Actual scientific reporting] That is what I would like to see! ...people getting access to actual information, so that if somebody confronts them with this popular bullshit, they can argue with it, because they have read something [scientific].

I totally agree. So what is the current situation like in Slovakia, in terms of media? In most countries, it is all about fear and „keeping kids safe“. Are there any outstanding TV narratives that are typical of psychedelics?

In these post-factual times we are living, as I like to call, everybody can publish anything, it is difficult to assess... It depends on what kind of media you are looking at. There are some well-established media [outlets] both on the liberal and conservative spectrum. What is good, is that conservatives [...] are not really writing about this topic as it is not part of the public debate. I guess this is the only good thing about this topic missing from the public debate, that conservative people who don't really have knowledge on the topic, or don't pay attention. So people with a more traditional view, who are into punishing [PDU] just are not involved in the drug [...] science.

On the liberal spectrum, people are starting to write about it more openly and more and more on the opinion that calls for regulation [instead of prohibition] and we can do something with that. There are some articles now, for example, about what is going on in Colorado, in the US, about changing regulations in Uruguay, and also there was this debate between four people about what we should do about this trend... Because there is a proposition of a new law in

Slovakia, and there were some articles [around the topic] about our conference and interviews with our speakers. That is the thing, you need to have that brand, those kind of people, who are bright and interested in the topic and work in the media and emphasize the important parts of the topic.

I agree [about the brand people] but in my experience, those people can be subjected to bad press too [examples from Hungary].

Nothing like this so far in Slovakia. I think it is partly because it is not a „hot topic”, there is no clash [of opinions]. That is what I am saying, when the public debate is missing, you don’t have these opposing sides [...] Maybe this will happen in the future and has been in the past, but right now it is really not there. If there is coverage, it is more about the new attitudes or like „caught with Marijuana”... but these are not really articles, just [attention grabbing]. There is one more thing that I think will describe the situation in Slovakia [about the polarized attitudes]: they had dogs come into schools and go around children to search for drugs. And the police posted a picture on Facebook, saying “we are doing prevention”. And then it was followed by a really big shitstorm, people were writing how wrong it is and stuff like “you are spending money on scaring our children” and etc. I was really surprised that there were these strong responses... there were of course people who were in favor, and said that we need to keep our schools clean and etcetc., but there was a big opposition to this action that even became TV news. That kind of set up some boundaries... they are still probably doing it but at least they are not showing it as something to be proud of. I never thought this could happen in Slovakia that people feel so strongly about this.

This brings up a very important question. What do you think, how much does an average person know about psychedelics? I don’t just mean the scientific aspect, but do they even what it is, know how it is a different category of drugs?

[very definite] NO. I don’t think they know what psychedelics are and even if they did, they would not answer you [if you ask a random person on the street]. Young people and people in Bratislava may be a bit more [knowledgable].

Would it make a difference if you ask more concrete? Like, not psychedelics, but say LSD?

Could be... like that, it is more associated to crazy people and people who end up in mental hospital or hippies...

I thought so... So where do you think that comes from? Because it is everywhere [in our region]...

[Suggesting propaganda]

I think it is still from the Nixon era. When you look at articles that speak about “hard drugs”, the “dangerous drugs”, the Schedule I group, there is always heroin and LSD... the worst of worst are always these two examples *The only thing they have in common is that they are scheduled together, but they are similar in people’s minds...

What about a person that is involved in the EDM scene, does a random raver know what options they have to stay safe, about harm reduction – are they even familiar with this concept?

Unfortunately, not really.

Okay, you need to separate Slovakia and Bratislava. It is a bit better in the capital, because there is this harm reduction services that work at parties. They are not a [full spectrum harm reduction services], they don't provide a safe space for example...it is not like PsyCare in the Czech, but they do provide [leaflets] information about what is happening to [drug users], and they offer [...] condoms. I think only a few people are aware of it... but mostly there is a lack of information, lack of safety... it is just kind of wild.

[Entertainment media vs psychedelics]?

Hm... [...] what is crazy that politicians use this "he is on drugs"/"he must be high" kind of [banter] among themselves as [an insult]. It has been happening in the last years and it is absolutely crazy...

In TV shows... not really. We don't really have those well-respected people as in the Czech Republic or who are publicly known, who admit to smoking marijuana [recreationally]. This is a big difference between Slovakia and the Czech Republic as well: these "drug coming outs" don't really happen in Slovakia. If people are using, they do it in their privacy, there is nothing in the public eye about this... you don't really find any known person admitting they use weed or MDMA – I think it describes the whole situation [attitudes] in the country. It is similar to homosexuality... there are no public coming outs in Slovakia, or even if there is someone known for it, they are not pushing the subject.

If there is ANY mention of drugs on TV, it is usually associated with trouble... if you see someone smoking weed, they will end up in a much worse situation. Because they have some other troubles and [personal problems/mental problems] smoking weed is something that happens to people like this.

There are much more shows in the Czech that associate weed with fun/funny things...as a specific part of the culture... at least it is not associated with it leading to heroin or something like that. In Slovakia if you see weed-smoking, it is usually connected to the hippie culture or you see someone with dreadlocks, it is not really built into the culture... and with psychedelics, not even that. I don't think they were ever on any TV show.

Expert Interview 3 – HUNGARY

Interviewer: Orsi

Interviewee 1: Peter Sarosi - policy advocate, journalist

In-person interview on 7/8/2017

[Intro, ice breaker]

My name is Peter Sarosi and I work for the Rights Reporter Foundation that is an NGO, created 2 years ago by my colleague Istvan Gabor Takacs and me. I previously wrked for the Civil Liberties Union that is the leadong NGO

I started out as a historian, I [graduated from] the Central European University with an MA in medieval studeis. I was studiing the history of religions, especially the history of the christian church. Soon, I realized that I don't want to start an academic career but I was interested int

he history of the international drug control system, because I found a lot of similarities between the Christian church and prohibition – they are both based on dogmatic thinking. If you go to Commission on Narcotic Drugs at the UN, you will find that most people are reciting the conventions as sacred texts... the whole hierarchy of the drug control system resembles churches' [structure] and I found out that by banning some substances that were not so popular [in our part of the world] and regulating those that were popular, like alcohol and tobacco, was not based on scientific argument, it was a clearly politically, a racially biased decision and current drug policies are not based on health and human rights [...] so I became interested in changing the situation. So I went to the US to study and attended my first DPA (Drug Policy Alliance) conference [...] and I got inspired to start a career in this field. So I joined the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union in 2004 and I became the head of the drug policy program. My predecessor was the first ever [professional] to work with this topic in Hungary – we decided to start this website, Drogiporter (Drugreporter) and since 2007 we are making movies with my colleague, István Gábor Takács [...] I left HCLU because we were working more on the international scene, we make videos if international issues or local issues in [various countries]. We are not the traditional legal watchdog NGO anymore [...] I am also a member now of an expert group at the European Commission which is called the Civil Society Forum on Drugs, so we are advising the Commission on drug policy issues [...] I am also the co-chair of Eurasian Harm Reduction Network [...].

So, let's talk about our region in a historical aspect then... [fall of the iron curtain, drug markets opening] What are your impressions of that time, the sub-cultures around drugs preceding that period and its evolution towards the millennia?

[...] We know that the drug phenomenon in Hungary was quite marginal in the previous political system. Only those had access to substances such as marijuana or psychedelics, who had access to travel to western countries, for example artists, novelists... In the 80's most of the drug using community was segmented, marginal, mostly young people connected to some kind of sub-cultures, like punk or alternative music... these cultures were [center around] revolting against the system. There is an [iconic] book about that period, *Repülök a gyógyszerral* (I am flying with drugs) by dr. József Rácz – he is one of the greatest experts on drug issues in Hungary and Sándor Bajzáth, who is a recovered PDU and was part of that scene that time... Most people were using drugs that were smuggled out of the pharmaceutical industry, or smuggled from [the west], but after the borders were opened, almost immediately, drugs came through and this was quite a shock to the Hungarian society. When the new generation started using drugs [...], that was completely [a new thing] to the older generations. There was and is this huge generational gap. That is the first thing you should understand when we are talking about drug policy of the region. For example in Western Europe or in the US, already in the 60s, baby boomers had an experience with drugs, they either have smoked marijuana, they knew of hippies [...] but in Hungary, or Czech Republic... or any of the V4, these were quite new. It also created a phenomenon that we call a moral panic [...] The main thing about the moral panic is that it creates a disproportion of coverage on a certain societal [topic] that is considered deviant by the majority of society. The coverage is sensationalistic and they are overemphasizing the criminal and damaging effects

of drugs. That was very prevalent of the media then and [public opinion] about drugs and drug-use. Now, many young people watch and laughing about for example early episodes of this [iconic, cultic, cultural pearl] Hungarian soapopera called *Szomszédok* (Neighbours) and laugh about [depictions of weed smoking] and “weed overdose”. So, that was the typical hungarien mentality towards drugs... they are lethal, damaging, you will end up in the prison or cemetery. It created fear, especially in the older generation, and created pressure to restrict the response to drug use [...] this has happened in the 1920 about cocaine in the media as well [...]

In the 90’ first, mostly cannabis came, then psychedelics and then, soon a new injecting heroin user scene emerged.

Was heroin not prevalent before?

Mh... more like morphine, that was smuggled from the pharmaceutical industry. Heroin became only a mass phenomenon after the political change. The situation was so severe in the early 90’s that the first syringe programme was created in 1994... that time all these programs were often times harassed by police, they were not legal; society and the media saw it as something that can be resolved by repression. People had some false hopes that they can create a drug free society and by persecuting even users, they can send a message that deterred people. Of course this model of prohibition doesn’t work, we know it from history and it also didn’t work in Hungary... It doesn’t work in reducing drug use, but it works in increasing political power [...] This moral panic is always used by politicians to gain popularity. [...] That happened with FIDESZ (the current ruling party); they built an election campaign on fearmongering around drugs and in 1998 when they came into power, they restricted the criminal code.

Does this prohibitionist model affect the approaches to harm reduction today? How are we keeping people safe?

Luckily, during this first FIDESZ government, [...] a state senator (Ákos Popolánszky) was appointed, who was a rather progressive man of that time who introduced the first national drug strategy that legalized harm reduction services. So during this period of 2009-2013 [...] the drug coordination system was built in Hungary. The first grants to support HR were provided by the government, the first programs to support party goers on the EDM scene. So in the early 2000 we lived a more progressive era, harm reduction centers were open – HR is operated by NGOS in Hungary – there was a quite good and flourishing relationship between the government and NGOs; for example, NGOs were invited to participate in the government’s drug council and it was the NGOs who voted for their representatives – I was one of them [...] I don’t claim it was a golden age, because the drug laws in Hungary were always more restrictive than in most part of Europe, and if you look at the social attitudes in Hungary, we are much more socially conservative than for example in the Czech Republic. It really matters a lot, because in countries where there is a more liberal [air] and a group of politicians who become decision makers, and have the opportunity to move forward the drug control system, you can see that the [general attitude is more progressive]. I also mean the

attitudes of professionals themselves, because many of them are against the concept of HR... or they accept it as a practical tool, but their concept is more abstinence oriented and don't really support drug users organizing, which would be very important.

Where does this [predisposition] come from though?

It has nothing to do with drugs, but more with society and history and culture. We have the same socially conservative attitude towards many things, like homelessness or sex workers, etc. Usually there is a huge hostility against minority groups. When we had the socialist liberal government and they made some, very limited reforms, it faced opposition from society and from most politicians. In the 2000s we believed we were on a good track, that as we join the EU, we will become one of those developed nations who have developed HR system and it seemed like only a question of time until we have safe injection rooms, we will decriminalize drugs, we had campaigns with the Hemp Seed Association... we were going to the police reporting ourselves, we were raising awareness. We created the media monitor program, we were correcting falsely published information, we were trying to train journalists [...] Nobody expected that after 2010 the opposite will happen; we got a conservative government that reversed many social policies [...] The socialist government was afraid to make bigger reforms and the second FIDESZ government were not afraid, they were just against the spirit of [scientifically prepared javaslat] and they [went in the different direction] restricting the criminal code, rejecting the progressive drug strategy, they said it was too "harm reductionist" and created a new one in 2013, that claims to create a drug free Hungary. Despite all civil society efforts, they cut not only the budget for harm reduction but also for prevention programs. They kind of demoralized civil society [in the process] - The civil scenes is a lot more fermented nowadays.

So what does harm reduction look like today? What does the government do to tackle the "drug problem"?

There were efforts by the government to create a "school drug coordinator system". So they appoint one of the teachers, who is not a professional but is trained on the basic principles. After 2010 this was abandoned. There was also the school social worker system [...] that was replaced by the "bűnügyi referens" (Criminal Referent), kind of a school-police system that lets policemen into school [justified by the] spreading violence. This system is flourishing today, most of the prevention was done by policemen, teaching kids how to say no to "deviant acts", which we know [from evidence] to be actually counterproductive. All of this happened at the same time when NPS came to Hungary and this new wave just came as a shock to the public health and school system as the budgets were cut and law enforcement was more important to the government than [a humanistic approach]. [Since there is no budget allocated to the National Drug Strategy] most NGOs work in a very difficult environment, they depend on government grants that are sometimes not even launched at all... lot of NGOs and HR programs closed down. Not only because of the lack of support, but also harassment and attacks by [official bodies]. [...] There is not really a political leadership [on the drug policy front]. [...] We don't even have those institutions anymore that were creating data on [infections, demand, PDU, etc.] The drug coordination system was scaled down [extremely].

You mentioned a lack of leadership in politics, what about on the scientific side? I am thinking in particular about the “psychedelic renaissance” and whether it has reached Hungary and to what extent?

Unfortunately, there is no such thing in Hungary. Although, in the 50's and 60's many psychiatrists were really interested in this and there were some experiments with [...]LSD for example [...] at the National Psychiatric Institution in Budapest. Those early experiments were discontinued after the substances were banned, but there are still some psychologists interested in the subjects but there is no possibility of human experiments...

Is it restricted legally or...?

Actually, neither the international conventions nor local law would make it impossible. One of the goals of the conventions is providing access to these substances for scientific and medical purposes but in reality, it is a very long and bureaucratic process with a lot of traps that is a time consuming and [expensive] process. Many scientists are afraid of being stigmatized or even ridiculed... Only a few researchers are working in the field, for example Csaba Szummer. It's a small group of researchers, mostly neuroscientists who work with cannabinoids, mostly trying to develop synthetic cannabis based medicines. So they are not really interested in the psychedelic realm, just developing dietary medications. There is Tamás Katona and Tamás Freund, who are internationally known researcher who work on cannabinoid based medications – they actually support medical cannabis now, but that is a whole other issue. But about [psychedelic] substances, there are zero researches... only a few from the social science view, questionnaire based studies about the psychological effects. So the medical use of psychedelics is a completely uncharted territory. The professional community knows some about the [trend] but we don't have anything [similar to what is going on in the Czech]. Two years ago there was an [attempt to establish a] Hungarian chapter of MAPS but as far as I know, it is not operational right now. Levente Móró phd is the engine the Hungarian Psychedelic Community, but there is no formal scientific community. He was one of the founders of death.hu, that is [a useful forum to connect and educate people]. I was contacted through Drugreporter by people who study or work with psychedelics abroad; so... really, it is in its infancy. There is no real scientific research going on.

So as I understand it, there is a general knowledge about it, but nothing really going anywhere.

Yeah and the main reason is the media I would say. The perception [of psychedelics] is very negative.

[...]

There is two kinds of stigma attached to researching psychedelics. The first is in general, the hostile attitude towards recreational drug use and drug users. People perceive these drugs as much more dangerous as they are while underestimating the dangers of alcohol or tobacco. They think people can go mad and commit terrible crimes under the influence of these drugs or cause traffic accidents... which is not true, though most accidents are [caused by] alcohol.

This is a very strong attitude in the population – most people believe that pálinka for example, which is the strongest form of alcohol, is more dangerous than marijuana. [...] When we made a survey, 70-80% of people said cannabis is more dangerous than alcohol and it is an opinion that is very hard to change. The second stigma is attached to psychiatric drugs, like antidepressants, that is increasing. There is some truth to it, you know, there is something like “pharma-greed” [...] People are afraid that [psychedelic science] is coming from that industry and it is a threat, that it can be abused... I have met this kind of prejudice among professionals, who say “oh we already have Xanax abuse for example, we don’t want any more of these”. They don’t understand that psychedelics can’t be used daily [...] it’s just a lack of knowledge, which of course can be changed but it takes time... So a lot of education needs to be done to show that psychedelics are not just a next generation of those overprescribes, addictive medications, that they can actually treat addiction.

Then, the legal environment is not very favorable either. For example Salvia Divinorum and Ibogaine are listed as NPS...

Wha-?

It is very strange. They don’t really know these substances, but ban them anyway. We know that Ibogaine for example is not a new substance at all, and it has no addiction potential – it was one of the big arguments against it; that it is addictive, which it can actually treat. Of course there are accidents [caused by Ibogaine], but because the environment is not controlled. When we tried to access the risk evaluation for [these legislations] and they wouldn’t show us, so we went to court and lost the case... So we still don’t know what the arguments were for the ban. [...]

So they are considered as abusive substances.

You mentioned many times that people see these messages in the media that reinforces the stigma. So, what is the general narrative then? What are the contexts in which I would meet psychedelics in the Hungarian media?

There is no real differentiation between drugs... There is no difference in the law either... And, you know, the law often manifests in the consciousness of society [...] Most people don’t know you can’t get addicted to LSD or become a mushroom-junkie. [laugh] The same attitude to psychedelics is true as to opiates. I very rarely see [coverage] of psychedelics specifically. Now especially there is less interest than in the 90’s and probably the reason is that the users are very marginal in the society... a lot fewer young people use them than cannabis for example. If you consider MDMA a psychedelic, then we have some [coverage] and when there are news of accidents from parties or festivals, it definitely appears [on TV] that they are dangerous and lethal ... From time to time, we have to explain that MDMA itself is not a toxic substance, but certain circumstances do make it dangerous. So with some knowledge, risks can be easily reduced, but this hostile attitude to HR, that is can promote use or enable people, leads... journalists don’t really understand the concept of HR either, so when we are talking about HR on the party scene, they believe we take psychologists to parties and [...] persuade people not to take drugs. They don’t know that it is mostly peers,

helping peers and educating each other about [...] mitigating risks... the [message of it] never got through.

Is it different among the people who are part of the recreational scene?

Of course. Those who use the substances know that the media depiction of the drugs and the scene is completely unrealistic. They are the ones who are the victims of police raids, which is a [prevalent] thing in Hungary – police raids [locales, events] from time to time or surround festivals and do stop&searches. This is also because of the public pressure. .. Dealers are called “traffickers of death” who are [corrupting] our youth and we have to defend them by sending the police. Those who have personal experiences [...] know that is completely false, the stigma is so strong, very few people came out... there was this one actor last week who said he smokes marijuana and doesn’t think it is a big deal... Ferenc...??

Hujber?

Yes. He was very brave. There are some people who are forced to come out, because they got arrested or [some public drama] and they immediately declare regret and that they will warn children to not [make their mistakes]. So there is this ritualistic purification following “incidents”. It is very similar to the gay scene [earlier].

[...]

There is this disproportionate moral panic... most of those users who appear [on TV] are PDU. You know, there is no news in someone smoking a joint in the evening and then going to sleep, but if they have an accident, are hospitalized, etc. it is news. It is much different from coverage of alcohol, where you have reports on national television; the pálinka festival and wine festival coverage shows people consuming in a cultured way, people see this patterns of civilized and moderated drinking patterns but with drugs, it is always the excessive and problematic use patterns...and [the audience] believes it. So the majority of drug users, who have no problems [with their use] are not visible to the wider society. I think change will not happen until many [normal] people come out as drug users. [...]

Usually, in the media when they ask someone, those experts also meet with the most problematic users, I am talking about Gábor Zacher (famous toxicologist, public persona) and so their experiences are very limited and don’t meet the great majority of drug users and they make conclusion of that limited sample of drug users.

Is it casually mentioned in any entertainment content? Are there any characters on series or films that depict users?

I don’t own a TV, so I am not [entirely up to date] but once I had to watch 2 episodes Éjjel Nappal Budapest (Budapest Tag und Nacht - reality TV) because of a legal case we had; the channel needed our legal advice: There was a girl who lost control of i-don’t-know-what-kind-of drug and there was a moral of the story to children that drugs are dangerous and even that was banned by the media authority that it was a “too open” discussion of drugs ... [even though] it was a very [conservative] moralistic narrative. So, really it is a taboo. And I

mentioned Szomszédok... there are similar [culturally important] shows where people [actually turn to] for knowledge and the depiction is the same, moralistic, dangerous.

This media culture is so global [nowadays] that younger people access all kinds of [content] where characters consume [drugs] without a problem, so I assume for the younger generation it is way less bad [...]

[Thanks&Bye]

Interviewer: Orsi Fehér

Interviewee 2: Levente Móró, PsyHelp Coordinator, Doctor of Cognitive Psychology

In-person interview on 5/9/2017

[Intro, ice breaker]

I am [presenting next week] my PhD in the topic of altered states of consciousness and one of my main interest of research is psychedelic drugs and the other is NPS I got into the scene more than 15 years ago, I've been the editor of Daath, the Hungarian online psychedelic community. Related to that, I got involved in psychedelic harm reduction at parties and festivals worldwide [...] I am also involved in drug policy in Hungary, I was helping to [found] MOKE (Hungarian Medical Cannabis Association) I am generally the drug expert in forensic meetings along with people from governmental agencies and I also [work with] the Civil Liberties Union and the Rights Reporter Foundation.

[historical angle]

The drug-use scene has changed a lot after the change of regime, but if we talk about psychedelics in particular, it has always been a marginal [phenomena]. During the socialist [era] it was only people with good connections, like children of diplomats or other people who have the privilege to go abroad, who obtained any kind of psychedelics. There was not a hippie era in Hungary [...] because this cultural influence was kept out by the [iron curtain]. There were some individuals who got inspired by these movements of course, but later, after the change of regime, it has been said many times that Hungary changed from a transit country to a destination country of drug use, but psychedelic substances like LSD or psilocybin...there was not really a boom as far as we know. Slowly, subcultures [around them] started to form. [It has a lot to do with] the EDM scene, the goa/psytrance scene, that formed in the late 90's, mostly as underground, illegal parties at the time. Related to that, when borders opened and people could travel abroad and foreigners started to come to Hungary, for festivals [...] psychedelic drugs established a subculture in Hungary. It is typical that if you look at drug confiscation statistics, LSD for example is only seized during the summer months, it is very festival related, and there are no seizures of LSD from October to May. That just shows how much these drugs are related to the psytrance scene in Hungary. The other phenomena is drugs on the internet, that is my other research area as well [...] So, Daath was a collection of texts from the internet [translated to Hungarian] and later, in 2001 [...] it was systematized and the forum was opened, that offered a possibility for people who

are interested in psychedelics to discuss the topic] now it has over 10.000 members, even after registration was made harder by a [compulsory entry test]. There is a whole generation of psychedelic people who grew up reading Daath. Then, there is the possibility to send in [personal reports of experiences] that proved to be very helpful, because [...] these are not the topics that you can share with any friends or family members. People [outside of the subculture] might be afraid about what it is or worry that it has to do with addiction ...or whatever, you will end up in a mental hospital or they call the police on you. So this sharing aspect was a very important part. Sharing is helping to integrate the experience, it is really essential when we are looking at the whole experience - the after-phase is essential. I don't think that outside of that, psychedelics are a popular [or known] in Hungary. It remains within the psy scene.

The 'boom' with drugs that happened in Hungary was about NPS around 2010. There have been some changes in the scene [due to the introduction of synthetic drugs] but it is even more marginal. The original psytrance scene has pretty good connection to the [classical] stuff and most people don't experiment with synthetics.

You mentioned a lot of important aspects that I would like to touch on. So, [...] there is the danger contestation of psychedelics in public opinion and their illegality, but there were a few years between the change of regime and the signing of the conventions. How do you see the evolution of the legal frame?

I guess pretty much all of them were put under control by the '71 convention and there hasn't been any added "bonus". I don't think it's the legal status that [influences the stigma] but more like the dangerous propaganda, for example "you will go mad if you take them". Most people don't even have interest in that I think. There is interest in stimulants because everybody wants to feel better, more energized, etc. but the demand for stupefies, like alcohol [and mixed with sedatives] is also very common. Psychedelic [experiences] are quite the opposite. For those who don't have the background within the subculture, a trip is not something they would want to have, for one, it is too long and then they will be [messed up] by the [stimuli], the visuals might not be enjoyable. They really make you confront yourself and [your flaws] they might bring up painful memories – it IS like psychotherapy and [most people] don't like to force this... 8-10 hours of psychotherapy is not what most people have in mind for recreation... this is I think the main reason most people frown upon the substances.

Do most people have the equal amount of information about psychedelics and other kinds of drugs, stimulants for example, that you mentioned then?

If you do a google search, apart from Daath [that is used by authorities as well], there is pretty much no information in Hungarian language. There have been some [short lived] projects to distribute information, but [...] no.

This is the problem with other drugs, there is no website that gives you decent, reliable, scientific information... no one really cares. It is really sad actually, the government doesn't care. In other countries (west – ed.) it is a bit better I guess... they don't consider information dangerous [as in it will cause more people to use drugs].

What about ordinary people? Would a random person off the street know what a psychedelic even is?

Yeah, I guess they would associate it to LSD and from that they associate to going crazy... that you will stare in the sun, imagine you are an orange and peel yourself [laughs]... or that you think you can fly and jump out of a window!

I heard the orange story in at least 3 different languages.

Yes, it's been around decades. Even though the yellow media doesn't have scary stories [particular to psychedelics]. They have scary stories about drugs and they always assume if there is an extreme murder that it is associated with drugs which mostly turn out to be bullshit... it usually turns out that these were due to really bad social circumstances or psychiatric disorders and not psychoactives. Basically, even they can't make [legit] scare-stories about psychedelics, and for most people it is the only thing they read.

By yellow press you mean...

Like Blikk or Bors... boulevard, tabloids... what they say about drugs is what people believe. Since there aren't many information about [psychedelics], most people believe in the old myths and [propaganda stories] which are obviously not true.

Yeah there are very limited studies about media coverage of psychedelics, but the one extensive by Demetrovics says it is mostly in a criminal context or about recreation and not much scientific...

Yeah, yeah... I will send you two links [...] about older studies.

Alright, I wonder about entertainment media. If we take 2 steps back from psychedelics, if some teenager turned on the TV, what would their impression be of the drug scene?

On TV or in movies, it is very rare to see realistic depiction of drug use. There is this movie, Dealer by Fliegauf Bence – a full feature movie... so this was one instance of Hungarian mass distribution of media detailing the topic... apart from that I don't really recall. Books have been written, Albert Hofmann's LSD, my problem child was printed in Hungarian in the first half of the 2000s or Stanislaw Grof's LSD psychotherapy and now, Csaba Szummer [a Hungarian scientist] wrote 2 books about psychedelics. Demetrovics is writing on party drug use... but these are more on the side of professional literature.

Yes, we can transition into the academic scene of psychedelics. Could you talk about the state of psychedelic science in Hungary? How it has been fluctuating and what influences the fluctuation?

Hungary has a long history of psychedelic studies. Even in the early 50's there were DET studies at the National Mental Health Institute and Stephan Szára was a big name, he synthesized DMT for the first time, but he immigrated to the US. So they used DET and DMT on schizophrenic patients [...] with LSD, they experimented [...] in the late 50's. They used these substances on healthy volunteers, including later famous writers and artists... interesting

stories, but not much publications about that. We tried to recover the archives of the National Mental Health Institute [...] but it is very difficult administratively. Later, as in other parts of the world, were nonexistent. The big name in psychedelic science at the moment is Ede Frecska who is a psychiatrist but he also has a psychology doctorate degree and he worked in the US for 15 years with veterans...then when he returned to Hungary, he put a lot of effort into bringing up the Hungarian psychedelic research scene. In the meantime, there is András Feldmár, who is an other instance of when you [achieve success abroad, you can come back to Hungary and then they will take you seriously]. He made a big impact with his lectures in Debrecen and his book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness* had 3 reprints – kind of a best seller in the topic. He touched the topic of LSD therapy which he did in the 70's in Canada, it is dubious if it was legal [...] From then on, people who are more open than the majority could have been [engaged]. You shouldn't to believe everything he states but he [succeeded in] popularizing the topic. The whole Feldmár Institute is based on him and people in our circles have been influenced by him. He got involved In the MDMA programme in Canada as well, so actually he is doing a good service for [...] at least the popularization of psychedelic therapy [...]. Now, since Ede returned and Csaba [got active again] Károli University [is pioneering] and a [Hungarian chapter of MAPS has been founded].

We organized a conference in 2011 and since then, it has been Ede Frecska, Csaba Szummer, Petra Bokor [...] and me, we are the core of the Hungarian MAPS. After this first conference, we [understood] the importance of telling the public about [scientific advances] so we've been on radio shows, some non-scientific magazines, given lectures at the Medical University. There is some DMT research, but it's neuroimmunology, it [doesn't involve humans]. We are still trying but there are administrator hurdles [at every step]. We are trying to negotiate with officials but it doesn't seem that anyone has the courage to undersign any kind of permission because they don't want to take any risks [...] they are not helpful. This has been the situation for many years. So, at Károli, there have been several psychology students writing theses about psychedelics, so there have been some pretty nice academic work on the topic. Some international publications have also been made, Attila Szabó and Csaba Horváth, a philosopher study phenomenology. Ayahuasca research is also on with Petra and Ede, published in international medical journals... so it is to the medical professional audience.

On that last thought. How about getting a wider audience to know about the medical benefits[...]?

Because the international media is bombarded by the topic as MAPS research is very high profile, there have been stories about MDMA being [on the road to approval], there is some coverage of that. Ayahuasca is also an [interesting topic], you could meet it in like Marie Claire magazine... and then Cannabidiol is something you can meet in mainstream media. In online media, there is a pretty good coverage of scientific breakthroughs... they are translations of original pieces.

My main subject is television, what do you think about the filtration of all of that to TV?

Ooooh it is like zero! Hungarian television is owned by the government, very centralized, very censored. There is no way to get in! I've been interviewed for a police magazine on TV a few times, and TV2 news but it is the equivalent of the yellow press. Even though at the time, the reporter seemed genuinely interested and getting the story, when it got to the final form, there was a stupid title and an image of a syringe... There is always the same propaganda symbols and pulling the same strings on people's minds. It is the same with drug policy too. I guess there are more independent channels like HBO, that cover it better, but in the mass media, like Hungarian royal TV... no chance. But who watches TV anyway?

A lot of people!

Yeah... [laugh]

So if we had to summarize the image of psychedelics in mass media?

It is little known, the old BS is still around, but to the newer generations, we are getting through

Alright, as a final note, let's talk about harm reduction.

It is the problem child of policy! [There is no budget to the National Drug Strategy. Harm reduction is virtually a cuss-word, equivalent to enabling].

[Thanks&Bye]