

Cannabis Engagement in Riga, Latvia: Voices from Impacted Communities

Lisbon Addictions 2022



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Qualitative Cannabis Research

- ▶ Most research on drug engagers has come from 10 mostly high income countries (Khalili et al., 2018)
- ▶ Australia, Germany, France, UK and US are the global leaders in cannabis knowledge production (Khalili et al., 2018)
- ▶ The funding bodies from there favour research that aims to prove harm of cannabis (Dolphin & Newhart, 2019)
- ▶ Result: culturally static and unrealistic accounts of cannabis experience

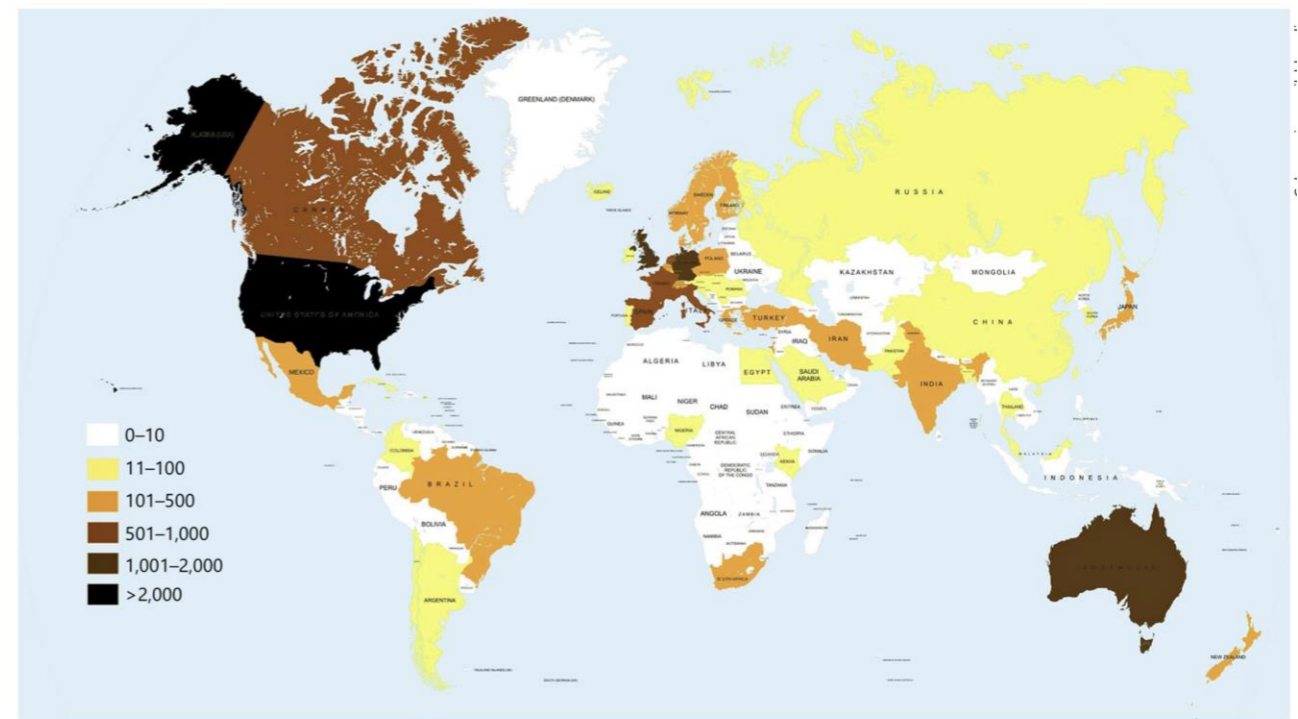


Fig. 3. Number of papers published on cannabis during 1995–2014.

Semi-Structured Interviews

27 (1.53min average) semi-structured interviews in Riga/online via



Sampling in 2 waves:

1. Convenience and snow-ball sampling
2. Self-selection via social media

27 participants (aged 19-53, 10F/17M):

- Users; grower; brokers/helpers; commercial dealers (Coomber & Moyle, 2016).

Analysis used Listening Technique (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008)



The West in Post-Soviet European Latvia

...the first time I heard about (cannabis) was obviously from music, from movies of like people using it at the beginning

(Willow, 26)

...for a young person - especially if you're from Latvia... if you're a 16 year old teenager, you have all this hip-hop culture, you think it'd be so cool to one day meet Snoop Dogg, right?... We follow all that USA culture, you're curious about what its actually like... and you have some friends who've bought some weed... a group of teenagers, they get drunk and roll a joint and are all happy. They put on some Wiz Khalkha or Snoop Dogg and simply sit, look at each other and laugh

(Alex, 27)



Post-Soviet explanations for cannabis stigma

Society overall thinks that cannabis is a drug. It's the Iron Curtain to blame. It placed us in a frame as... those that have grown up in freedom... My mum sees cannabis as a drug, but she doesn't read anything about it... I've asked her to read about cannabis, but it's a lost cause. The older generation didn't have a possibility to find out about things that they were interested in.

(Drew, 22)



Explaining drug stigmatising society

People who don't smoke cannabis... think, 'Oh yeah the law is correct because they are all druggies.'... its like that story: grandma is sitting on a bench by her flat-building outside and a hatless man passes her, so she concludes, 'wow, drug addict.'

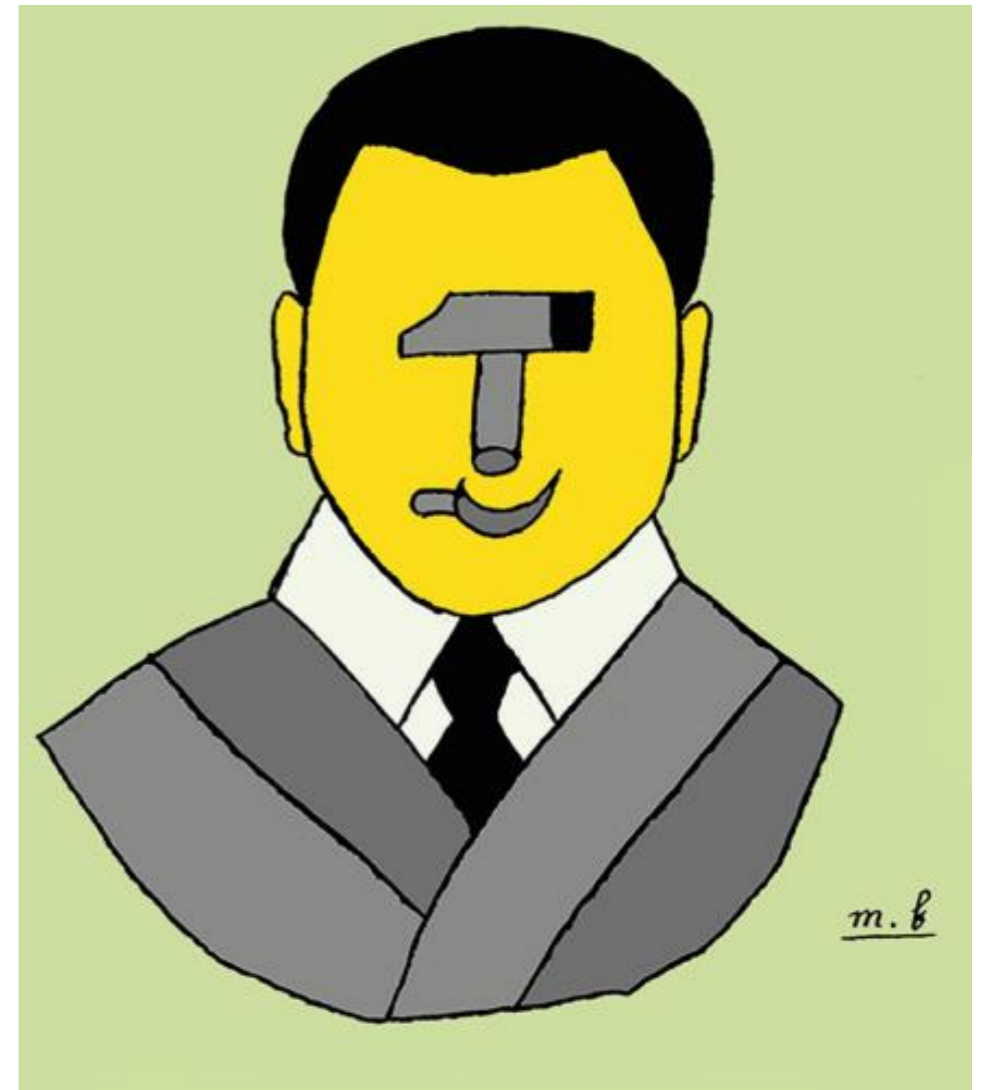
(Claire, 22)



Explaining drug stigmatising policymakers

They don't know anything. In truth none of them have ever really gotten into [cannabis questions]. That is my impression about all these cannabis experts in Latvia. First of all, they've never read any literature. I always read... Latvian criticism usually is not based in science. They use zero science. Yet there is tons of science about cannabis. And when Apinis [former president of the Latvian medical doctor's union] talks from his... dogma ... he's from his own reality which he has built in his brain that is not connected to the physical world.

(Lewis, 38)



Historical Context, Stigma & Homo Sovieticus in Latvia

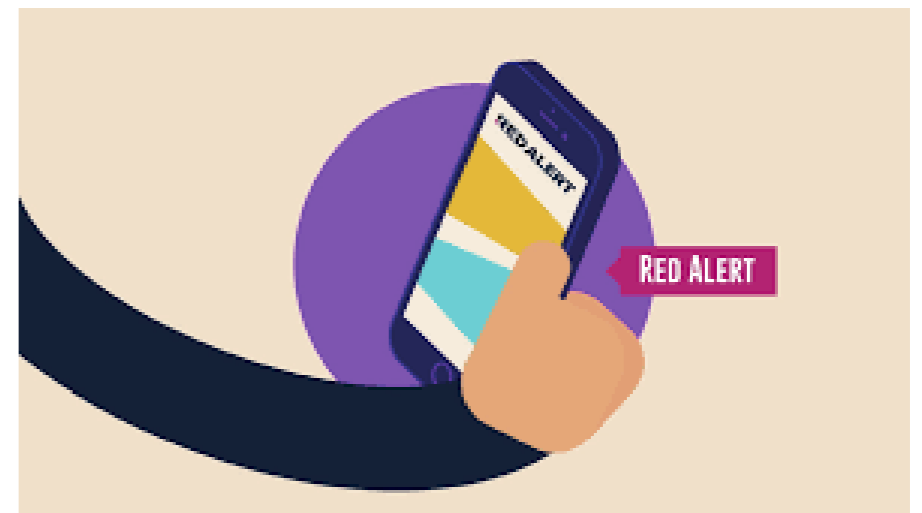
Homo Sovieticus

- ▶ In USSR was *the ideal man*
- ▶ Now is *positioned as a victim who experienced 'decades of humiliation, harassment, persecution, injustice... betrayal... [and] a lack of reliable, factual information' which had 'reduced [its] ability to test reality'* (Bebre, 2022: 2; Gulens, 1995, 282)



Reconstruction of non-users

- ▶ Exaggerated claims of drugs reconstruct claim-makers as uneducated, extremist & unhelpful (Bebre, 2022)
- ▶ In this case, claim-makers become *Homo Sovieticus* that has little access and input into user lives
- ▶ Prevention/Harm reduction messaging/support cannot reach users if users perceive claim-makers as the *Homo Sovieticus*
 - ▶ Users turn to alternative information source, like the online world, which contents are less testable yet seemingly more reliable (Bebre, 2021)



More on this:

The screenshot shows the Taylor & Francis Online interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Home', 'All Journals', 'Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy', 'List of Issues', 'Volume 29, Issue 4', and 'Cannabis users and Homo Sovieticus. Stigma, culture, and delegitimization in Riga, Latvia'. Below this is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Enter keywords, authors, DOI, ORCID etc'. The main content area features a journal cover for 'Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy' and a title 'Cannabis users and *Homo Sovieticus*. Stigma, culture, and delegitimization in Riga, Latvia' by Kristiana Bebre. The article is marked as 'Editor's choice'. On the left side, there are statistics: 430 Views, 1 CrossRef citation to date, and 5 Altmetric mentions. At the bottom of the article information, there are links for 'Download citation', the DOI 'https://doi.org/10.1080/09687637.2022.2042487', and a 'Check for updates' button.

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Editor's choice

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ESSD Book Chapter Outline Call

Normalisation re-visited: Drugs in Europe in the 21st Century

Theme: Normalisation revisited

Deadline: 04/12/2022

Editors: James Morgan, Thomas Sögaard & Alfred Uhl

Contact: essd.research@UGent.be

The 'normalisation thesis' has become a much-used framing device in drug research since its development in the 1990s, particularly in relation to recreational drug use. But the term is often used uncritically or without definition. In this book we will look to interrogate the concept of normalisation as it applies to drug use, drug policy and drug research in Europe in the 21st Century.

We are interested in chapters on empirical studies, theory and critical reflections related to one or more of the following topics (or other areas related to normalisation):

- **Normalisation of drug use:** Defining and conceptualising 'normalisation'; Changing patterns and understandings of normalised drug use; Normalisation of 'soft' vs. 'hard' / 'recreational' vs. 'problematic' drug use; Normal(ised) drug use and normal(ised) drug users; relationships between normalisation, marginalisation and stigma; representations of drug use in media and popular culture; drug use as everyday practice; accommodation of drug use into everyday life.
- **Normalisation and drug dealing:** Social supply as the flip-side of normalised use; blurring the boundaries between use and supply; normalisation and drug markets (lower, middle and upper levels); normalisation of drug production.
- **Normalisation and drug policy:** Policy reactions to normalisation; normalisation as a component of drug policy; drug policy as an indicator of normalisation; de-normalisation as a component of drug policy; normalisation and policy goals: drug prevention vs. harm-reduction.
- **Normalisation and drug research:** Methodological challenges and opportunities; drug researchers and their drug use; participatory research; action research.
- **Normalisation and its flipside:** Potential re-stigmatisation of drug use and users; revitalisation of stereotypifications, shaming and morality in representations, policy approaches, and self-perceptions among drug users.

Qualitative and cross-national studies are particularly welcome. All chapters should include a European dimension.

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