Dear friend,

We are a group of researchers who – in the context of the European project *NAHRPP- New Approaches in Harm Reduction Policies and Practices* – are carrying out research on controlled use and self regulation strategies of people who use cannabis (*Cannabis self regulation model in a harm reduction perspective*).

The research takes place in three countries, Belgium, Spain and Italy, coordinated by Forum Droghe (IT), ICEERS- International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research and Service (E) and Institute for Social Drug Research, Ghent University (B).

At the international level and in Europe, sociological research has been studying the controlled use of drugs since the 1970's (Becker, Zinberg, Cohen, De Corte and many others). The premise, based on evidence, is that, as with alcohol use, problematic illegal drug use affects a minority of users, while controlled and self-regulated use applies to the majority. A large part of research on drug use is epidemiological and even when the research is sociological, adopting a qualitative approach, it is focused on users who are in treatment and recruited through the services system. This implies that research is focused on problematic patterns of use. This is the predominant methodology, with the results being a pathological vision of drug use, while the predominant, controlled or moderate patterns of use remains in the shade.

In the scientific community of drug policy researchers, there is a strong consensus that the *war on drugs* in general, and the repressive approach of cannabis use and cultivation in particular, have failed. A more effective and humane cannabis policy is highly needed. As you probably know, several countries and states have taken the first steps to decriminalize possession and/or personal cultivation of cannabis, and some have even gone as far as to regulate the recreational cannabis market. In other countries, the debate on how an alternative cannabis policy might look like has been revived. There are also many "bottom up" experiences, such as Cannabis Social Clubs or similar kinds of associations, which have experimented and are experimenting new models of production and supply, often linked to a shared culture of self-regulation, harm and risks reduction and prevention.

In this innovative and dynamic context, this research aims at making a scientific contribution to the current debate and to the knowledge of a phenomenon that is nowadays represented – and also seen by decision makers – in a distorted, non realistic and uninformed way. This is how stereotyped vision and alarmist responses grow. Based on mistaken beliefs and unsupported by evidence is the idea that every kind of drug use is intended to evolve into addiction or problematic use.

By studying the self-regulation and controlled use strategies adopted by cannabis users it will be possible to understand what the more significant factors are that facilitate or, on the contrary, obstruct a controlled use which is both desirable and sustainable by users themselves and one which would reduce risks and harm, and support self regulation. The research further aims to make a crucial contribution towards developing effective policies which support and not counteract the personal and social strategies of self-regulation. It could also impact on interventions and operational approaches of harm reduction and risks limitation based on "natural" models of controlled use.

This research project includes people over 18 with at least 10 years experience of cannabis use, who are members of Social Cannabis Clubs and those who don't have this kind of experience. It is based on individual interviews through which the person interviewed describes and reflects on her/his trajectory of cannabis use, its phases and trends, reasons and expectations of use, contexts and rules, personal strategies of controlled use and of regaining control.

The interview lasts approximately one hour and is conducted by a researcher of our team with complete respect for privacy and according to anonymity norms .

We are at your disposal for any further information.

Thank you for your collaboration!

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