



## Newsletter July 2020

### The social phenomenon of “illegal drug abuse” in Croatia

The social phenomenon of “illegal drug abuse” with modern characteristics appears in Croatia in the mid-sixties of the 20th century. Young people in Croatia were introduced to the subcultural trends of Western Europe mostly through tourism. The late sixties marked the appearance of small scenes of very unusual (at least for this area) young people with a hippie lifestyle and style of behavior, which included the consumption of cannabis and hallucinogens in several cities throughout Croatia. To respond to the threatening trends of drug abuse in the world, the most knowledgeable person and one of the leading experts on the problem of addiction in this area and later the president of the World Organization of Social Psychiatry, professor Vladimir Hudolin (then head of the Clinic for Psychiatry, Neurology, Alcoholism, and Other Addictions at the Clinical Hospital “Sestre Milosrdnice” in Zagreb, Vinogradska 29) launched an initiative to organize and open a special department for the treatment of drug addicts (Sakoman,). Hudolin noted that this category of addicts differs significantly from alcoholics and that it is necessary to change the approach and treatment, according to their characteristics and needs. As a result, the Department for Drug Addiction was opened and renovated on the renovated floor of the building of today’s Psychiatric Clinic „Sestre Milosrdnice“.

In the 1970s, opiates (heroin) became part of the hippie population. Although difficult to access in Croatia at that time, many opiate addicts managed to satisfy their addictive needs by procuring opium from other countries (Macedonia), collecting opium by illegally cutting green poppy pods in other people’s gardens or making opium tea from dried

discards of the poppy cocoon. Furthermore, the control of storage and dispensing of morphine, codeine, and other analgesics at that time in pharmacies was weak which resulted in opiate users receiving an additional source of opiates (Sakoman, 2016).

In the early eighties, professor Hudolin appointed Dr. Sakoman as head of the Department of Drug Addiction. Dr. Sakoman began developing a program for the treatment of addicts in the prison system in 1981, while simultaneously launching of the “Register of Treated Addicts” (1978) and reorganizing of the work of the Department. With the spread of cannabis consumption, a real epidemic of “glue sniffing” broke out among younger teenagers in those years, and it was stopped after two years of intensive education in schools. At the end of the eighties, methadone was widely used in therapy at the Belgrade Institute for Addiction Diseases, and there were dozens of addicts (mostly from Split, Croatia) who obtained this opiate. The monthly dose of heptanone tablets in the original packaging was given in advance, and the medication intake was not supervised by a professional. Thus, in addition to the street heroin problem, this opioid was increasingly entering drug



circulation. In the development of a global strategy to combat HIV spread, which became one of the major concerns at the time, addicts came into focus as the main spreaders of HIV. Thus, the systematic education of addicts was organized in the Republic of Croatia to protect users against HIV. Not only that, but addicts were also given access to sterile **needles** and **syringes** for injecting drugs, as well as leaflets explicitly describing how injecting drug users can protect themselves from dangerous infections and viral diseases (Sakoman, 2016).

At the beginning of the 1990s, which were tragic in the Republic of Croatia due to the war, favourable conditions arose for the growth of organized crime, with most profit coming through weapons trade and illegal drugs. As the country's tight resources were focused on the country's defense, and an established Commission for the Suppression of Drug Abuse of the Ministry of Health, headed by Dr. Sakoman (1990), was tasked with devising a strategy and organizing a system to combat addiction triggered by war, post-war and transitional period. Given that opiate addicts were most challenging, led by the experience of previous hospital and outpatient "drug-free" treatment with very poor results, the Commission organizes a system to provide addicts with easily available methadone replacement therapy in 1991.

In an attempt to decentralize access to treatment, professional teams of specialists were trained to diagnose addiction and indicate the use of methadone in several most endangered cities.

At the same time, the Commission worked closely with family physicians to ensure the administration

of methadone in their practices, following the recommendations of the expert teams of the newly established Centres. At that time, in addition to the non-governmental organization "Help" from Split, Red Cross joins the initiative for the development of

harm-reduction programs and strategies. In 1990, Bernardica Juretić founded the non-governmental organization Humanitarian Organization "Zajednica Susret", within which the first Croatian therapeutic community was opened in Cista Velika (near Split). Today, there are several associations focused on the prevention and treatment of people with addiction, as well as 8 different rehabilitation programs in therapeutic communities.

Due to the rapid increase in heroin addiction prevalence, the public put pressure on the political system to intensify measures to combat addiction. Thus, in 1995 a special inter-ministerial commission was formed within the Government with the task of drafting a "National Strategy for Combating Drug Abuse". The president of that body, and at the same time the advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, Dr. Sakoman drafted a proposal for a "Strategy" which was adopted by the Croatian Parliament in 1996, along with the Government. Based on the "Strategy", an "Implementation Program" was developed with the tasks of a dozen ministries whose resources were responsible for ensuring the implementation of numerous planned activities (from repressive measures, school prevention programs to prison addiction treatment programs) throughout the country (Sakoman, 2016).

Fundamental "National Strategy" (1996) called for the adoption of "Law on the Suppression of Drug Abuse". With much difficulty, the Croatian Parliament finally adopted the proposed Law in 2001 (and has since been amended several times). The Law clearly defines the problem (drug abuse), the purpose of the Law, a description of all terms important for its understanding, regulation of control over the production and marketing of drugs and precursors (with a list of controlled drugs, psychotropic substances, and precursors which Ministry of Health has to update regularly). A description of the tasks of each state body in drafting and implementing the "Action Plan" based on the "National Strategy" is included. Special emphasis is on the systems responsible for implementing measures for prevention, detection, and treatment of addicts (and drug users),





coordination of implementation, financing, and description of the envisioned penalties for violation of the provisions of the “Law”. The Law also calls for providing opiate addicts with opioid substitution therapy (Sakoman, 2016).

Due to the circumstances that befell Croatia, the development of the treatment system began in 1991. That was way before the adoption of the “National Strategy” (1996), which described in detail the tasks of the fundamental state network of Centres for outpatient treatment of addicts.

However, it was not until 2003 that the penultimate amendment to the Health Care Law resolved the issue of the institutional framework of Centres. The legislator entrusted this work to the county institutes for public health. The Croatian Institute of Public Health (HZJZ) has taken on the role of coordinating the work of the network of Centres (Sakoman, 2016).

The basis of the public health system of all counties of the Republic of Croatia, which coordinates the implementation of all activities of the part of the “Action Plan” related to reducing drug demand, is the network of county Centres for Prevention and Outpatient Treatment of Addicts (21 centres).

Based on the latest amendment to the Health Care Act (2010), these centres have become an integral part of the services for mental health, prevention, and outpatient treatment of drug addicts of county public health institutes (Sakoman, 2016).

In 2002, the Government Office for the Suppression of Drug Abuse was established in Croatia with the task of ensuring harmonization and coordination of the implementation of measures to combat drug abuse as well as the establishment of an effective

system for implementing drug abuse policy and an integrated national drug information system.

The office was merged with the Croatian Institute of Public Health in 2019 and no longer operates independently but under the authority of the Ministry of Health.

In 2007, the Office prepared a Resocialization Project intended for drug addicts who have completed a program of treatment, rehabilitation, and addiction treatment in a therapeutic community, penal system, health care institution and outpatient treatment, and who maintain abstinence for a long time and adhere to the prescribed method of treatment. The project was adopted by the Republic of Croatia adopted The addiction treatment system in the Republic of Croatia is based on a network of inpatient and outpatient treatment (outpatient treatment, therapeutic communities, and homes for addicts). The treatment is approached in a multidisciplinary manner with the aim of the most successful treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration of treated addicts into the social community. Each person is approached individually in accordance with their bio-psycho-social needs and characteristics.

#### IZVORI:

Sakoman, S. (2016): Analiza javnozdravstvenog sustava u HR te Međunarodna iskustva: Analiza javnozdravstvenog sustava u liječenju ovisnosti o drogama u Republici Hrvatskoj. U: Roviš, D., ur., Izazovi izgradnje cjelovitog pristupa prevenciji ovisnosti te liječenju, resocijalizaciji i socijalnoj reintegraciji ovisnika u Republici Hrvatskoj – Analiza stanja i potreba te iskustava Primorsko-goranske županije. Rijeka: Medicinski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci, Nastavni zavod za javno zdravstvo Primorsko-goranske županije. 71-85.

Ured za suzbijanje zloporabe droga  
<https://drogeiovisnosti.gov.hr/>

#### Ela Megla

Born in 1993 and in 2017. Graduated from the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences (University of Zagreb) and a Master of Social Pedagogy. Since 2017 work's in Humanitarian organization “Community Meeting” with people with addiction problems and with their families. In addition, also works on various projects related to the problem of addiction (mostly prevention and resocialization).

## Europe Aid Projects With Iran

After many years an application for a big European project under Euro Tc participation was confirmed by the European Commission. In fact not one project, but two, both Europe Aid projects in cooperation with Iran under the General title: ***Strengthening service provision for drug use prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and care for injecting users in Iran.***

Main Applicant for the first project guaranteeing 20% of the total budget, which is nearly 1000 000 Euros is the Rebirth Charity organisation where long fruitful connections in networking and a near relation to their director Abbas Deylamizade exist. Rebirth is running numerous treatment programs in Iran.

The title of the successfully admitted project is:

***Strengthening social support for homeless drug users in the Islamic Republic of Iran***

Our part in the project is to share our best practice on the topic in Europe, deliver workshops, plan and execute an ongoing evaluation as well as providing supervision.

Due to the Covid 19 complications it is not yet totally clear how our tasks will be delivered.

In the meantime the kick off meeting took place virtually. So the project started and so far it is planned that all work from our side will be carried out virtually as there is no perspective about travel options from or to Iran in the nearer future.

We are looking for members who are willing to contribute and are willing to join our project team having experience in evaluation, workshops on treatment strategies and supervision.

There is a quite big budget for all this tasks, so this a also a good option for additional income for your organisation and or the persons involved.

We want to warmly invite you to participate!

For further information contact our project manager Iris Neuretter.

If you are interested we will provide you with the whole successful application/strategy/budget of the project.

There is also the second Project confirmed – led by the Iranian ADNA – Asian Drug Demand Reduction Association.

This project did not start and we will send you further info when available to us.

Please feel free to also indicate your interest in participating in this project!!

## Iris Neuretter is our new office manager

Since the end of operating grants the Euro TC office depends on mainly voluntary work.

This is why we suffer from changing efficiency and flow of communication.

The board is therefore happy to announce Iris Neuretter as our new office manager.

Iris is motivated for international experience, her great skills are already used very valuable through her involvement in our Iran project, where she works as technical assistant and is part of our project managing. She is strongly involved in our revitalization process and will function as your contact partner for all practical issues concerning our operations

Iris is born in 1993, she lives in Vienna.

After graduating from school with a musical and piano focus, her interests developed strongly towards human experiences and behaviours and she started her studies at the Sigmund Freud Private University in Vienna.

In 2018 she obtained her academic degree (BSc.) The bachelor thesis titled as follows: “Coworking: The perception of community, solidarity, and personal training in Viennese coworking spaces – a survey”. Subsequently, she continued her studies at the SFU with the Master course on social psychology in combination with the clinical psychology approach. In this context, her particular interest is directed to social norms and constructions, as well as their effects and consequences. Corresponding influences are the critical theory, critical psychology, as well as psychoanalytic approaches. Since 2019 Iris Neuretter is also teaching the Bachelor seminar “Paradigm History of Psychology. Psychology – science, its history and its cultural meaning”.



Her access to the treatment of mental illnesses, prevention, health-conscious lifestyles is a holistic one with psychological and psychosocial aspects. Specializing in her social-psychological and clinical master's degree, she deepened her interest in psychosocial problems and holistic perspectives. During her internship at Euro TC member „Therapiesalon im Wald“, she was able to incorporate this knowledge and learn to combine theory with practice.

Due to the enthusiasm for the work, especially in the field of psychological diagnostics and the fruitful cooperation with the „Therapiesalon im Wald“ team, a still persistent collaboration developed after the finished internship.

As a committed and interested person the cooperation with the international network Euro-TC expanded step by step.

We are very happy to have Iris on board.

You can contact her for all issues concerning our Euro TC network through: [info@euro-tc.org](mailto:info@euro-tc.org)

## Seven EuroTC members are carrying out an Erasmus+ project

The consumption of new psychoactive substances (NPS), also known as “new drugs”, is an increasing challenge for addiction support. This applies both to the individual health damage potential, from cardiovascular arrest to psychoses to long-term brain damage enough, as well as the verifiability of consumption. Common rapid drug tests often fail to detect these new substances, which is why they are widely known as “legal highs”.

In the project “Handle it! – Strategies for dealing with new psychoactive substances in Europe”, an international exchange of specialists takes place between seven addiction aid organizations from Austria, Hungary, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Germany.

The aim is to make new knowledge, ideas and strategies in dealing with the psychoactive substances accessible to a larger community, which then passes on their opinions, experiences and feedback, in order to enable a better understanding of the topic.

The project was developed in the therapy association Ludwigmühle, which also took over the project management.

“Handle it!” Includes the therapy association Ludwigmühle and the other EuroTC members IREFREA · Instituto Europeu de Investigação de Factores de Risco de Criança e Adolescentes (Portugal); Comunità di Venezia Società Cooperativa Sociale (Italy); Megálló Csoport Alapítvány (Hungary); Humanitarna organizacija “Zajednica Susret” (Croatia); Therapy salon in the forest (Austria) and the bwl – Baden Württemberg State Association for Prevention and Rehabilitation gGmbH (Germany).

