

Abstract

Ayahuasca is a beverage containing the compound DMT, which makes it a powerful psychedelic. This drink has traditionally been used by Amazonian peoples in shamanic rituals or religious services. Because of its therapeutic potential, it is also used in the world to treat addictions, but the organisation of ayahuasca rituals in the Czech Republic is a criminal offence. Nevertheless, the rituals have become widespread in our country and are a relatively available experience. This thesis has three main objectives: to describe the form and course of these rituals in the Czech Republic, to obtain a complex evaluation of participant's satisfaction with the rituals, and finally to evaluate these rituals in terms of harm reduction methods and the more recent corollary concept of benefit maximization of psychedelic experience. In the practical part, qualitative research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 10 participants of the rituals. The main results consist of detailed descriptions of the rituals – most are led by an indigenous shaman, but there are also Czech neoshamans who follow indigenous practices. The format is mostly group, but there were also three individual rituals that were more therapeutically oriented. Participants evaluate the work of the shaman and the organizers as the most important, ensuring their sense of safety and trust. They also positively evaluate the provision of psychological preparation and the possibility of subsequent integration and contact, but they are generally rather uncritical of rituals, probably due to their illegality. Majority of the respondents describe benefits of the experience for their well-being, although there have also been negative impacts. The organisers generally follow harm reduction principles and their violation was rather rare, i. e. failure to search for contraindications or to establish a sense of security. The greatest scope for maximizing benefits appeared to be in the area of psychological preparation and especially long-term integration, which is usually omitted. The support in these areas could be professionally provided for those interested, however, the classification of these activities as the crime of spreading drug addiction poses a risk. Even so, it would be appropriate to continue to monitor ayahuasca rituals and find ways to reduce their risks and maximize their benefits.

Key words: ayahuasca, psychedelic experience, shamanic ritual