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# IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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EXTENDED VERSION

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# AYAHUASCA

## IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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*This book is dedicated  
to my wife Lucie*

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In Brno 23. 11. 2018

## ABSTRACT

Ayahuasca is a preparation used in “traditional Amazonian medicine”. This book focuses on its utilization in the Czech Republic and the possibilities of using it for therapeutic purposes in local conditions. The book contains a classification of rituals and the characteristics of their organizers and participants. An on-line questionnaire survey was conducted among ayahuasca users from November 1, 2015, to December 31, 2016. The research sample consists of 46 respondents (23 women and 23 men) that once took part in some rituals.

Similarly, semi-structured interviews with an average length of 50 minutes recorded with informants. Grounded theory method was applied to analyse the interviews conducted. The results confirm that rituals are adapted according to the needs of the users. The respondents use ayahuasca not only because of healing, but also for spiritual and religious reasons, curiosity/experiment and personality development. In local conditions, the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca lies primarily in the treatment of lifestyle diseases.

### **Key words**

traditional medicine of the Amazon, ayahuasca, therapeutic potential

## RESUMEN

Ayahuasca es una preparación utilizada en la “medicina tradicional amazónica”. Este libro se centra en su utilización en República Checa y posible uso terapéutico en las condiciones locales. La publicación contiene una clasificación de los rituales y las características de los organizadores y participantes. La investigación de campo entre los usuarios responde a una encuesta online y se llevó a cabo entre el 1 de noviembre del 2015 hasta el 31 de diciembre del 2016. La muestra abarca a 46 personas (23 mujeres y 23 hombres) que alguna vez ya habían formado parte de algún tipo de ritual. Las entrevistas que se realizaron, de carácter semi-estructurado, fueron grabadas y tuvieron una duración aproximada de 50 minutos. Posteriormente, se analizaron empleando el método de la Teoría fundamentada. Los resultados de esta investigación confirman que los rituales se adaptan a las necesidades de los participantes. Ellos usan ayahuasca no solamente para el tratamiento, sino también por las razones que se deben a lo espiritual y religioso, o a lo mejor invitados por la curiosidad/experimento y con el fin del desarrollo personal. En las condiciones locales, el potencial terapéutico de ayahuasca se basa principalmente en el tratamiento de las enfermedades relacionadas con el estilo de vida.

### **Palabras clave**

medicina tradicional amazónica, ayahuasca, potencial terapéutico

## ABSTRAKT

Ayahuasca je přípravek používaný v „tradiční amazonské medicíně“. Tato kniha je zaměřena na její užívání v České republice a možnosti jejího terapeutického využití v místních podmínkách. Publikace obsahuje klasifikaci rituálů a charakteristiky jejich pořadatelů a účastníků. Terénní výzkum mezi uživateli ayahuascy byl v návaznosti na on-line dotazníkové šetření realizován od 1. 11. 2015 do 31. 12. 2016. Výzkumný vzorek tvoří 46 osob (23 žen a 23 mužů), které se minimálně jednou zúčastnily nějakého typu rituálu. S těmito osobami byly nahrány semi-strukturované rozhovory o průměrné délce 50 min., které byly následně analyzovány metodou zakotvené teorie. Výsledky výzkumu potvrzují, že rituály se uzpůsobují potřebám uživatelů. Ti ayahuascu užívají nejen kvůli léčení, ale také ze spirituálních a náboženských důvodů, ze zvědavosti/experimentu a kvůli osobnostnímu rozvoji. Terapeutický potenciál ayahuascy v místních podmínkách spočívá zejména v léčbě civilizačních chorob.

### **Klíčová slova**

tradiční amazonská medicína, ayahuasca, terapeutický potenciál



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

5-HT	5-Hydroxytryptamine
ADF	Ayahuasca Defense Fund
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
APA	American Psychological Association
CDK	Centre for the Study of Democracy and Culture (CZ) <i>Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury</i>
CONFEN	Federal Council for Narcotics (BR) <i>Consejo Federal de Estupefacientes</i>
DMT	N,N-Dimethyltryptamine
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EEG	Electroencephalography
IACHR	Inter-American Court of Human Rights
ICEERS	International Centre for Ethnobotanical Education, Research and Services
IFRETT	House that Sings, French Institute of Research and Experimentation on Traditional Therapies <i>La Maison qui chante, l'Institut français de recherche et d'expérimentation sur les thérapies traditionnelles</i>
IMAO	Monoamine oxidase inhibitor
INCB	International Narcotics Control Board
LSD	Lysergic acid diethylamide
MAPS	Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies
MDMA	3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine
NDE	Near-Death Experience
NRM	New religious movement
NUDZ	National Institute of Mental Health (CZ) <i>Národní ústav duševního zdraví</i>
OCD	Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder
PDA	Plantaforma para la Defensa de la Ayahuasca
POP	Process-Oriented Psychology
SSRI	Specific Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor
THH	tetrahydroharmine
UNADFI	The National Federation of Associations Defending Families and Individual (FR) <i>l'Union nationale des associations de défense des familles et de l'individu</i>

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This book deals with the use of ayahuasca in the Czech Republic. The book focuses on the possibilities of its therapeutic use in local conditions. We assume that a shift in the purpose and way ayahuasca is administered in contrast with traditional habits caused by the needs of inhabitants.

In 2015, we found out that ayahuasca had been significantly used in the Czech Republic for over ten years when we encountered with that for the first time. The number of organizers that perform rituals, during which this preparation is administered, can hardly be equal to the countries of its origin. However, the use of ayahuasca in local conditions has been given serious attention in recent years. Thus, the sociocultural phenomenon of the ritual is worthy of attention.

We have consistently been researching ayahuasca since 2007. First, we dealt with its use in the drug addiction treatment. We examined its utilization in the Peruvian center Takiwasi where it is administered together with “traditional medicine of the Amazon” (Horák, 2013).

Subsequently, based on various scales, we compared the retention and motivation of inpatients in Takiwasi with other therapeutic communities in Nicaragua and the Czech Republic (Horák et al., 2014; Horák, 2015a).

Since July 2015, we have been researching how and why ayahuasca is used in the Czech Republic. First, we conducted an online questionnaire survey, which helped us to get in touch with 42 volunteers willing to attend an anonymous interview. The results of the survey demonstrated that therapeutic methods applied in Peru and the Czech Republic do not differ fundamentally. We also managed to identify the motivation of ayahuasca users, which oscillates from curiosity, spiritual and religious reasons to healing (Horák, 2015b; Horák et al., 2015). This is related to three ways that ayahuasca is used. For instance, it is used for recreational, religious and traditional purposes.

In November 2015, we did a year-long fieldwork among ayahuasca users in the Czech Republic and recorded semi-structured interviews. In the absence of previous contacts secured through an online questionnaire, it would be impossible to meet the informants. Ayahuasca users form a specific subculture. This is primarily because certain substances contained in the preparation are regulated by law (see chapter 5).

The aim of this work is to give answers to two questions: 1. Why do Czechs tend to use ayahuasca? 2. If they are using this preparation, what is it good for?

The answer to the first question is almost obvious. Czechs in this behavior do not differ from the population of the neighboring countries and not only from them, but also from many other states, notably Peruvians and Japanese. However, we were not satisfied with such a response, and during the semi-structured interviews, we asked 46 other persons for their opinions on the matter. Their testimony forms the basis of this book.

To the second research question, it is not possible to give an exact answer. The therapeutic potential is ascribed to ayahuasca by users, but this must be verified in clinical studies.

The phenomena discussed on the following pages are so new in our society. They can not be said to occur regularly, form a traditional part of our culture and prove

demonstrable efficiency. In our opinion, that is why we should pay attention to them. They are the ideal material for basic research.

The use of ayahuasca also deserves attention. We can see how new psychoactive substances penetrate the Czech (and European) market, and how the legislation deals with it.

Currently, our society is in the era of “postmodern” (Sheldrake, 2003; Wright, 2008) or “postmaterial” (Němečková, 2016), craving for new ways of responding to current issues.

One of the most important from them is the question about the cause of an illness that is in our opinion fundamentally linked with the individual concept of spirituality. Spirituality is one of the key factors influencing whether we cure. For this reason, it is also one of the central topics of this book.

## 2 CHARACTERISTICS OF “TRADITIONAL MEDICINE OF THE AMAZON”

*“El espíritu de la liana sobre el camino del corazón  
El ayahuasca, planta maestra, enseña la visión. Abre la conciencia al fluido de la energía  
cósmica y transforma las formulas de los fenómenos naturales. El sonido, el espacio  
y el tiempo se conectan entre sí y juegan en la mente con la lógica y las leyes naturales.  
Detrás de la barrera de la alucinación se revela la esencia del ser.”<sup>1</sup>*

Otto Placht

We put “traditional medicine of the Amazon” in quotes because—as in the case of several other phenomena, as discussed in this book—it is a controversial concept.

“Traditional medicine of the Amazon” represents a medical system based on the use of specific therapeutic methods and various natural products, that basically take three forms: 1. traditional a) indigenous (if practiced by healers from an ethnic group living in the Amazon, e.g. Aguaruna, Shipibo-Konibo, etc.) or b) mestizo (characteristic with religious syncretism); 2. neoshamanic (where rituals are facilitated by non-native organizers, e.g. from the USA or some European countries); 3. religious (i.e. the ceremonies of originally Brazilian syncretic churches, e.g. Santo, Uñiao de Vegetal or Porta do Sol). The rituals in indigenous, mestizo and European style were characterized by Luna (2011).

The indigenous variety of “traditional medicine of the Amazon” is artfully described by the bestseller, Narby (2006), who studied it among the Asháninka.

The scientific interest in this medicine was initiated by Luna (1999). In his classic book, he presented in detail the Amazon cosmology thanks to illustrations of the painter and mestizo shaman Pablo Amaringo, whom we had an opportunity to visit in 2007 in his school of painting Usko-ayar situated in Pucallpa. In his later works, Luna explained in details the principles of mestizo healing practices, such as *vegetalismo* (Luna, 1986). The core texts related to this topic include publications by a renowned American anthropologist Dobkin de Rios (1972; 2008).

However, artists were early interested in ayahuasca, a key element of “traditional medicine of the Amazon”. Since the 1950s, beatniks began to search for it (Burroughs, Ginsberg, 1963; 2013). In 1971, they were followed by the McKenna brothers, who explored the Colombian jungle for a forgotten plant, hallucinogen oo-koo-hé containing N,N-Dimethyltryptamine, abbrev. DMT (McKenna, McKenna, 2000).

At this point, it should be emphasized that “traditional medicine of the Amazon” and “ayahuasca” are not the same, although in common language users often confuse it. The term “traditional medicine of the Amazon” refers to the controversial concept that ambivalence lies in the fact that some ethnic groups in the Amazon do not use this type of medicine for more than 50 years (Brabec de Mori, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> ***“The spirit of vine about the path of heart***

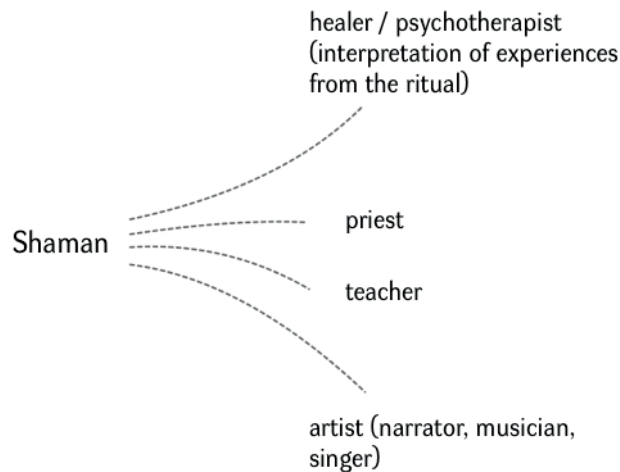
*Ayahuasca, a master plant, shows a vision. Opens the consciousness to the flow of cosmic energy and shapes natural phenomena. Sound, space and time link with each other and play around with the logics of our thinking and the laws of nature. Beyond hallucinations exposes the essence of being”* (translation: authors).

In this context, the question arises as to what the term “traditional” means and how old the “tradition” should be explained (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983, 1–14; Dawson, 2017). On the other hand, archaeological findings show that the indigenous people of the Amazon drink ayahuasca as medicine, which has been frequently used for about 2000 years (see subchapter 3.2).

It is also necessary to distinguish between “traditional medicine of the Amazon” (in certain regions referred to shamanism or healing, Spa. *curanderismo*) and the so-called neoshamanism. These two systems are interwoven and cannot be separated. Nevertheless, they are fundamentally different in some aspects (Adlam, Holyoak, 2005; Caiceda, 2007).

Shamanism is considered as an archaic religious phenomenon (Eliade 1997; Narby, Huxley, 2004). Vojtíšek (2007) defines shamanism as a religious practice seen in various tribal societies, and characterizes with animistic spirituality.<sup>2</sup>

Also, shamanism is described “as a set of practices and concepts of the cosmos, spirituality and human needs” (DuBois, 2011, 13). Shamanism has its social dimension and is associated with a particular worldview (Spa. *cosmovisión*), which presupposes the existence of a spirit in each being. Figure 1 shows various roles of the shamans earlier described (Horák, 2010a, 102–103).



**Fig. 1** Roles of a shaman (source: own processing)

Neoshamanism or contemporary shamanism represents a set of eclectic spiritual beliefs and practices (Lužný, 1995; Linquist, 1997; Bowie, 2008). Its revival is related to the New Age movement (Hanegraaff, 1996; Sutcliffe, Gilhus, 2013). Neoshamanism can be considered as the revitalization of the ancient cult of Mother Earth (Deméter, Pachamama). Neoshamanic spirituality is based on working with the elements, such as aether, fire, water, air and earth. In some cases, it is mixed with elements of eastern

<sup>2</sup> Willerslev (2013) is more explicit about animism. Shepard (2004) provides general characteristics of the Central and South American shamanism.

cultures. In other, there is too much emphasis put on the authenticity of tradition, but fundamentalist think it is an occult ritual.

The three basic characteristics of neoshamanic practice that differentiate it from the traditional shamanism include: 1. emphasis on conscious choice (neoshamans are described as open-minded and curious persons that become to practice shamanism through reading and traveling, not through self-healing and their ancestors); 2. specific cosmology (e.g. standing on the combination of Buddhist and animistic beliefs); and 3. the individualistic orientation, i.e. helping others is not the main aim of their practice (DuBois, 2011).

The last characteristic of neoshamanism is the most problematic one. Those that practice it might not only fail, but could be (inadvertently or unknowingly) harmful, as it is probably the most difficult to unearth. Neoshamans often do not harm only themselves, their own families and friends, but ultimately the society – their undisguised followers and uninformed users of alleged “medicaments”, as well as the inhabitants of indigenous communities they pretend to represent.

Neoshamanism is often accused of devaluation or unauthorized appropriation of foreign traditions. Currently, the use of tradition by non-indigenous inhabitants poses a major problem (Brown, 2004). Some neoshamans buy ayahuasca and other psychoactive preparations from the indigenous people, imitate “magic” operations, pronounce prayers learned by heart. They make the ceremonial music with ancient musical instruments or play popular “healing songs” from the Internet. They also specialize in all types of issues, only to amaze their followers and find markets for their products.

On the other hand, if the work is done for the tradition, the positive aspect of “traditional medicine of the Amazon” cannot be denied. It gives people around the world access to the treatment in a traditional style and helps to maintain the continuity of indigenous spirituality of some ethnic groups (e.g. Aguaruna).

To ensure that the tradition is not taken for granted and there is no violation of intellectual property rights, the organizer should be adopted when they have received an authorization from the ancestors.

In the first half of the 20th century, ayahuasca drinking was adopted by Christians in Brazil. The number of people who have experienced it increased after the syncretic churches were established (Metzner, 2006). The book by de Alverga (2007) is among the classic works on syncretic churches. Feeney and Labate (2014) discussed the globalization of syncretic churches based on the transnational perspective. Frenopoulo (2011) analyzed the mechanisms that led to the transformation of ayahuasca in a sacrament.

The most popular syncretic churches, that have their origins in the Brazilian state of Acre and during the last decade have spread all over the world, are Santo Daime and União do Vegetal. During the fieldwork, we found out that the first mentioned religious organization operates in the Czech Republic. Balzer (2005) documented the practice of Santo Daime in Germany, Blainey (2013) in Belgium, and Watt (2014) in Ireland.

Previously the ceremonies of another originally Brazilian church called Porta do Sol were also held in the Czech Republic. However, we discovered that the practice has already disappeared (see subchapter 11.1.1).



### 3 CHARACTERISTICS OF AYAHUASCA

#### 3.1 Psychopharmacological characteristics

As stated in chapter 2, “traditional medicine of the Amazon” is usually considered a synonym for ayahuasca. For instance, it is considered as a decoction from the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* and leaves of the shrub *Psychotria viridis*.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these two basic ingredients, water is used in the preparation of ayahuasca. Ayahuasca is also prepared from various plants that contain the same chemical substances. There are different ingredients added to the mixture, which adds value to the effects of the finished product (Ott, 1994; Rättsch, 1998). This can be useful on the one hand, on the other, it is risky for users.<sup>4</sup>

The vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* contains beta-carboline alkaloids: harmine, harmaline<sup>5</sup> and tetrahydroharmine (abbrev. THH). Ott (1996, 223–231) describes in detail the history of its discovery. Harmine and THH are monoamine oxidase inhibitors (abbrev. IMAO) and have antidepressant effects (Sanches et al., 2016).

According to Dakic et al. (2016), harmine increases the number of neural progenitor cells, i.e. cells that give rise to neurons. Research suggests that in human neural progenitor cells exposed harmine exhibited up to 70% increase in proliferation. The creation of new neural cells includes inhibition of DYRK1A, a gene that is over-activated in patients with Down syndrome and Alzheimer’s disease. Harmine might potentially play a role in neurogenesis and be therapeutically useful in humans with cognitive deficits.

Since the 1970s, harmaline has been subjected to rigorous scientific research, because its structure is very similar to the 10-methoxy-harmaline produced by the pineal gland of mammals. It can be concluded that the efficacy of harmaline is probably similar to metabolite involved in the control of conscious states (Shulgin, 1976).

In the leaves of *Psychotria viridis*, there is DMT, a substance endogenously present in human urine and cerebrospinal fluid (Strassman 2001, 63). Based on this finding, we can speculate that there is a link between the activity of DMT and appearance of spiritual experiences as they occur after the administration of the substance.

The pharmacological efficacy of ayahuasca is determined by the synergy between the two types of substances. Beta-carboline alkaloids inhibit an enzyme of monoamine oxidase (abbrev. MAO) in the digestive tract and prevent oxidative deamination of DMT. Otherwise, the effects of DMT cannot be achieved when administered orally. The effect is induced after the substance arrives through the bloodstream into the brain. How were the indigenous people of the Amazon able to discover the right liana

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the etymology common with gender inflection in genus see Horák (2013).

<sup>4</sup> In this book, we focus on ayahuasca prepared in the basic way. However, in the Czech Republic it is possible to take part in rituals where a similar preparation containing beta-carboline alkaloids and DMT, but made from other ingredients (e.g. *Peganum harmala* for beta-carboline alkaloids contained in the vine, *Diplopteris cabrerana* or *Acacia* sp. for DMT) is administered. This preparation is used to be designated by the same or another local name (see subchapter 12.3).

<sup>5</sup> Schenberg et al. (2015) have revealed the relationship between the level of harmaline and vomiting. Also, practitioners of “traditional medicine of the Amazon” consider vomiting as an important part of the ayahuasca experience.

that allows otherwise orally inactive DMT begin to operate among thousands of plant species is still a mystery (McKenna et al., 1986).

Regarding the possible therapeutic use of ayahuasca, it is interesting that THH inhibits serotonin reuptake (5-Hydroxytryptamine, abbrev. 5-HT). This causes an increase in the level of dopamine mediators (noradrenaline and serotonin) in the central nervous system. DMT acts on proteins-transporting 5-HT. It is known as a 5-HT<sub>1A</sub>, 5-HT<sub>1B</sub>, 5-HT<sub>1D</sub> and 5-HT<sub>2</sub> agonist (Keiser et al., 2009). In the case of long-term ayahuasca users, an increase in synaptic connections for serotonin transmission was found (Callaway, 1994; Beltrán Gallego, 2007).

### 3.2 Sociocultural Characteristics

Ayahuasca forms a pivotal part of the cosmology of some indigenous ethnic groups of the Amazon (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1972). Native people use it traditionally for a variety of purposes. For instance, they use it during the initiation of healers, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, establishing the contact with the spirit world, divination and telepathy, or to ensure the social cohesion (Dobkin de Rios, Rumrill, 2008).

Although Ayahuasca is usually considered as a key element of the “traditional medicine of the Amazon”, it is not the only plant-based medicine from the Amazon used in the Czech Republic. There is also a variety of tonic, antiparasitic and antiseptic substances available on the Internet. Besides ayahuasca, our informants also orally, nasally or ocularly administer tobacco. Such an application has also been documented among indigenous ethnic groups living in the tropical rain forests of the Amazon. However, its original meaning is more magical-religious than medical (Wilbert, 1994).

Considering the history of ayahuasca use, probably the oldest archaeological evidence of this habit is usually quoted. It is a decorated stone bowl from the Pastaza province in the Ecuadorian Amazon. It is currently preserved in the anthropological museum of Universidad Central del Ecuador in Quito. As stated in chapter 2, this finding is estimated to be over 2000 years old (Naranjo, 1983).

The first written evidence about the use of decoction from the liana was done by the Ecuadorian geographer Manuel Villavicencio, in his book, *Geografía de la República del Ecuador*, published in 1858. The following is the popular publications *Notes of a botanist on the Amazon & Andes* was written by the famous British botanist Richard Spruce. Spruce met ayahuasca in 1851 among the members of the Brazilian indigenous ethnic Tukano and included liánu the genus Malpighiaceae family. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the works of other ethnographers and researchers were published, e.g. Crévaux, Koch-Grünberg or Rivet (Kilham, 2014; Metzner, 2014).

According to the context in which it is used, ayahuasca is considered as a cure or a sacrament (Moro, Noreika, 2011). It cannot be considered a drug in the true sense of the word (Fericgla, 2004). As Gable (2007) demonstrates, it is not possible to create a physical dependence in the sense of increasing tolerance (i.e. the need to increase the dose to achieve the same effects) and craving. Lanaro et al. (2015) confirm that there is neither overdose possible. After ingestion of ayahuasca, serotonergic stimulation of vaginal tract occurs, which causes vomiting and diarrhea (see subchapter 11.3.1).

As is well known, ayahuasca has strong emetic effects. However, we learned from informants that there are those who do not vomit or experience nausea after using

it for a long period. Notwithstanding, emetic effects cannot be wholly excluded (see subchapter 11.3).

In our opinion, it is also not possible to talk about craving because ayahuasca has a disgusting taste. Nevertheless, it is questionable to what extent one can participate in the ayahuasca ritual (see chapter 7). Studies did not confirm the occurrence of neuropsychological deficits in long-term ayahuasca users (Ribeiro Barbosa et al., 2012; Bouso et al., 2013; Ribeiro Barbosa et al., 2016; dos Santos et al., 2016a).

In the context of a Euro-American society, ayahuasca cannot be considered as a medicament. To declare any product a medicament, it must be subjected to clinical trials. Although they are consistently performed, in case of ayahuasca the amount of scientific evidence has not been able to outweigh adversity of dominant (bio-)medical and legislative system.

To use ayahuasca as a sacrament is common among the indigenous people of the Amazon, who see it as a sacred plant (Spa. *planta sagrada*), as well as among the members of syncretic churches. Nevertheless, the concept is also problematic. From the Roman Catholic Church, such a practice is considered a heresy. The Vatican does not officially accept syncretic churches. The Pope Francis (2015, 109–110) argues that it is necessary to take care of the indigenous communities and their traditions, but the question remains how far this declaration will go.

Based on the context in which it is used, ayahuasca is seen either as a hallucinogen, psychedelic substance or entheogen. The first, classic denomination is an expression of phenomenological distrust of visual phenomena, which are perceived by users in the altered state of consciousness after ayahuasca ingestion.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, this expression also reflects ethnocentrism of Euro-American civilization, which still tends to see the indigenous societies as primitive and illiterate. Thus, the societies live in delusion stemming from ignorance (Brabec de Mori, 2016). Therefore, we do not use it in this book. We consider it pejorative.<sup>7</sup>

The term psychedelic (i.e. from Greek soul revealing), which is again gaining popularity with the restoration of research on psychoactive substances, is linked to the counterculture of the 1960s, hippies, and New Age. At that time, the possibility of using of psychedelic substances in psychiatry was intensively considered, as they also can mimic psychosis (Grof, 1994; dos Santos et al., 2017).

The last-mentioned term etheogen – originally created by researchers, who dedicated themselves to the study of psilocybe mushrooms – is in our opinion the most suitable (Wasson et al., 1986). The term entheogenic refers to a psychoactive substance and preparation that allows a connection with God. For this reason, it can be considered “a sacrament” (Steindl-Rast, 2001; Blainey, 2014).<sup>8</sup> Spiritual motivation is relatively frequent in case of ayahuasca users (see chapter 7).

Currently, the use of ayahuasca in the therapeutic and sacral context prevails (Ballón, 1999; Labate et al., 2009; Mercante, 2010). Ayahuasca is used as a therapeutic tool—as

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the classification of hallucinatory states see Móró (2010).

<sup>7</sup> However, in the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (abbrev. DSM) is stated that “*in certain cultural contexts, hallucinations may be normal part of religious experience*” (APA, 2013, 88).

<sup>8</sup> Bossis (2014) dealt with the use of psilocybine in connection with the mystical experience and focused on its potential use in palliative care.

it is common in the Peruvian Center Takiwasi (Horák, 2013)—or it is used as a spiritual practice, performed as a part religious ceremony.<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 2 *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine (source: Rajnoha, 2017)

### 3.3 Ayahuasca as a Therapeutic Tool

Ayahuasca is a technology for working with the sacred in its pure essence. Shamans control this technology in such a manner that it does not control them. The knowledge of this technology allows them to have direct contact with sacred in its diverse manifestations. Such manifestations have a (communicable and in some instances also shared) meaning. The meaning can be interpreted by the symbols through which the manifestations of the sacred show. In addition to the direct experience of sacred, shamans also have available an ample material for work. If they open the space for discussion about the meaning of symbols that ayahuasca users saw during the ritual in their visions, it can have a psychotherapeutic effect (Palma et al., 2016).

However, not every shaman is a psychotherapist.<sup>10</sup> Currently, the work of psychotherapist requires some formal training, which among other things leads to the therapist's view of the problems of their client through the prism of the therapeutic approach they studied. As a result, the shaman usually only contacts the sacred, conducts the ritual by singing and oversees the safety of participants.

If they manage them, the shamans perform some methods to treat patients. This is done both by singing some healing songs (*icaro* in Quechua), by blowing tobacco (*Nicotiana* sp.), cleansing the body with rattles or fanning with fragrant essences. In general, such work could be called music therapy and aromatherapy. However,

<sup>9</sup> We distinguish between the ritual, ceremony and ceremonial, although these terms are commonly confused between ayahuasca users. The ritual is a set of tasks that have a settled form and are carried out repeatedly in defined (ritual) space (Valeri, 2014). Religious ceremony is related to the activities of (syncretic) churches. The term ceremonial as a denomination for a festive event is not used in our work, as it seems to us inadequate in the medical context.

<sup>10</sup> Interpretation of visions produced by “the traditional medicine of the Amazon” is rather a domain of neoshamans. Indigenous or mestizo shamans do not pay attention to their interpretation.

the style of work differs between these approaches, because shaman operates in the altered state of consciousness, in this case, caused by the ingestion of psychoactive preparations (Znamenski, 2007). The available data we have collected during fieldwork confirm that ayahuasca rituals can be safe.

Ayahuasca may be considered a safe therapeutic tool when it is administered during a traditionally managed ritual supervised by an experienced organizer who oversees its preparation and use.<sup>11</sup> During the integration of personal experience, the quality of aftercare they provide is of inherent importance (see chapter 11.1).

Failure to comply with the rules of the ritual can cause undesirable effects or fatal consequences. The so-called diet or a set of specific dietary prescriptions accompanied by sexual abstinence plays a crucial role in the organization of ayahuasca ritual (Horák 2013, 60–63). When using ayahuasca, it is not recommended to take drugs (see chapter 11. 8). Possible problems may arise from the risky personality of participants in the rituals and their lack of awareness (Kavenská, Simonová, 2015).

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<sup>11</sup> No context (i.e. setting) is 100% safe. According to Zinberg (1984), the experience of altered state of consciousness is always influenced by the mentality of individuals (i.e. *mindset*, abbrev. *set*).

## 4 GLOBALIZATION OF AYAHUASCA

Currently, ayahuasca has become a global phenomenon. Labate and Jungaberle (2011) and Labate et al. (2017) summarized the knowledge on this issue in their monographs. Ayahuasca rituals are performed not only in the Czech Republic and neighboring countries, but also in South Africa, Spain, Estonia or Australia (Balzer, 2005; Sobiecki, 2013; López-Pavillard, 2015; Kaasik, 2016; Gearin, 2016).

The expansion of ayahuasca beyond the South American continent occurred mainly with the diffusion of Brazilian syncretic churches Santo Daime and Uñiao to Vegetal that use it as a host (Labate, Feeney, 2012). These churches have their roots in the culture of Brazilian mestizos (Por. *caboclos*). During the so-called rubber boom (1880–1914), they crossed the borders of neighboring Peru and Bolivia. They gathered knowledge on the use of plants, and then in an environment of remote forest communities where the orthodox Christian church was not too strong; they formed their interpretation of ayahuasca (Luna, 1986).

For the greater part of the 20th century, these religious organizations have not overwhelmed other evangelical cults in which Brazil is flooded. However, the possession and use of ayahuasca were legalized there thanks to the syncretic churches in 1992, and their international reputation thus increased.<sup>12</sup> However, this situation was preceded by some major events.

Uñiao to Vegetal objected to the 1985 Act, which ingredients for the processing of ayahuasca were illegal. Therefore, the Federal Council for Narcotics (*Consejo Federal de Estupefacientes*, abbrev. CONFEN) established a special commission to deal with the issue of its ritual use. After the fieldwork in Céu do Mapia, it was confirmed a positive report that the local religious community is characterized by a high degree of social organization, coherence and solidarity (Labate, Sena Araújo, 2002).



Fig. 3 View of the Amazon (source: Rajnoha, 2017)

<sup>12</sup> Nowadays, they are also present in Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Canada, England, France, Japan, Italy, Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland (Tupper, 2008; 2009). Based on our findings from the fieldwork, Santo Daime church operates in the Czech Republic (see subchapter 11.1).

In addition, members of the syncretic churches participated in the first research on whether ayahuasca cause a neuropsychological deficit in long-term users (Grob, 2006; Ribeiro Barbosa et al., 2016) and whether it is safe to administer it to pregnant women, children and adolescents (Dobkin De Rios et al., 2005; Labate, 2011).

Ayahuasca utilization is also widespread in Peru. Since 2008, it was declared in the country as an intangible cultural heritage of the nation by the Act No. 28296. The legal action has been taken in response to the development of the so-called exotic, religious (Foutiou, 2010; 2014), drug (Dobkin de Rios, 1994) or otherwise called ayahuasca tourism (Mantere, 2013; Quevedo Pereyra de Pribyl, 2013; Kavenská, Simonová, 2015). The product is provided to various types of tourists for a fee (sometimes by untrustworthy persons).

The Internet has enabled the ayahuasca users to connect regardless of geographical distances. It also allowed an international trade with ayahuasca, which makes it available worldwide. Currently, it is produced, distributed and consumed around the world just as other preparations from a wide range of “traditional medicine of the Amazon”. Anyone with free Internet access can order it by post. However, if they do not comply with national drug laws, there is a risk of being penalized.

## 5 LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE AYAHUASCA USE

“Bringing money into spirituality is always tricky.”

William Barnard

As stated in subchapter 3.1, the basic version of ayahuasca contains at least two herbal ingredients (most commonly crushed vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* and leaves of the shrub *Psychotria viridis*). However, these may be replaced by different substitutes. This chapter shows a comprehensive analysis of the problems related to the possession of the controlled substances in the Czech Republic, in particular, and the world, in general.

Drug law in the Czech Republic is governed by The Act on Addictive Substances and on Amendments to Certain Other Acts (167/1998). Production and trafficking of DMT is banned in the EU under the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances. DMT is included in the Green List of the International Narcotics Control Board (abbrev. INCB) under the IDS code PD 004. Beta-carbolines (harmala alkaloids) are not regulated by the European legislation (Erowid, 2015a; 2015b). Therefore, and certainly, not only for traditional but also for legal reasons, we can see ayahuasca prepared without DMT and called *purgahuasca* (Horák, 2013).<sup>13</sup>

DMT is considered illegal in the Czech Republic according to the Government Regulation No. 463/2013 on schedules of addictive substances, as amended by Government Regulations No. 243/2015 Coll. and No. 46/2017 Coll. This regulation established a list of narcotic and psychotropic substances as well as substances which, because of the extent of their abuse or because they directly or indirectly endanger the health, were necessarily subject to control.

According to the opinion of the Supreme Court dated 3/13 2014, sp. ref. Tpjn 301/2013, published under number 15/2014 of the Collection of Judicial Decisions and Opinions, Criminal Part, it is illegal to possess more than 0.60 g of DMT in powder or crystal and 0.5 l of ayahuasca if it contains DMT. Ayahuasca containing less than 0.150 g of DMT was not covered by this prohibition (but may be treated differently in relation to its composition).

Until August 22, 2013, Government Decree No. 467/2009 Coll. it also stated that more than 0.5 l of ayahuasca is “larger than small quantity” and therefore possession of more than 0.5 l of ayahuasca was considered an offence according to the Section 39 (2) a) of Act No. 167/1998 Coll.

Beyond mere possession, and distribution of ayahuasca (with the presence of DMT), is considered a crime under Sections 283–287 of the Penal Code.<sup>14</sup> Until January 5,

<sup>13</sup> If ayahuasca does not contain DMT, then its possession may not be considered an offense – as stated by the Supreme Court/Criminal Division in a letter on December 7, 2017 (sp. ref. Ntn 227/2017). In the Takiwasi center, purgahuasca is used for therapeutic purposes (Horák, 2013). Weisberger (2013) documented this practice among the Secoya.

<sup>14</sup> In the Czech Republic, drug distribution is a criminal offense punished by 1–5 years of imprisonment. According to Penal code, art. 283 (1–5), the punishment range extends from 2–10, 8–12, or 10–18 years of imprisonment in case of aggravating circumstances, e.g. involvement of minors, larger / significant / large scale of act / benefit, injury or death, or involvement of (international) criminal organizations. For more details on legislation related to the use of ayahuasca in the EU member states see Horák et al. (2017).



2012, the possession or cultivation of plants containing DMT was prohibited by Offences Act, § 30/1 j, k under penalty of up to 15.000 CZK. On January 5, 2012 plants containing DMT (as well as mescaline-containing plants) were removed from the list in response to arguments from the professional public that such plants do not grow for psychoactive and recreational purposes.

As regards plant material handling, INCB (2010, 46) explicitly mentions plants and herbal preparations (such as ayahuasca, iboga, peyotl, psilocybe mushrooms, etc.) which are not subject to control under the 1971 Convention in the point 285 of its Annual Report. The only controlled plants are cannabis, poppy and coca. Ayahuasca does not appear on any list of internationally controlled substances. In legal terminology, the “substance” differs from “preparation” which leads to contradictory interpretations (Tupper, Labate, 2012; Sánchez, Bouso, 2015).

France is the only country in the EU where DMT is forbidden not because of its effects, but because of the activities of House that Sings, French Institute of Research and Experimentation on Traditional Therapies (*La Maison qui chante, l'Institut français de recherche et d'expérimentation sur les thérapies traditionnelles*, abbrev. IFRETT) based in Nantes. This center, which represents the Peruvian Takiwasi Center in France, was labeled a sect by the The National Federation of Associations Defending Families and Individual (*l'Union nationale des associations de défense des familles et du l'individu*, abbrev. UNADFI). Such a designation is wrong in our view because their openness characterizes both centers. Their members could be hypothetically described as members of a cult (Cambell, 1972) or representatives of a new religious movement (abbrev. NRM), but their aspirations are primarily therapeutic, not spiritual (Vojtíšek, 2007).

As we indicated in chapter 5, in Brazil, New Mexico and the Netherlands, the use of ayahuasca is recognized as a religious act thanks to the activity of syncretic churches that have achieved legalization due to the respect for religious freedoms (Dawson, 2013). In other countries (including the Czech Republic), the ayahuasca use is not legal in a religious context, and so these institutions are operating in the so-called “grey area”.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Ayahuasca Defense Fund (abbrev. ADF), created by the International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research and Services (abbrrev. ICEERS), a sharp increase in the number of arrests has been observed worldwide since 1999. This is either because of the detection of containers with ayahuasca during their transport across the border, or because the police revealed a postal item with ingredients and subsequently detained the perpetrator during its collection. However, cases of ayahuasca users brought to justice for alleged drug trafficking do not usually end with imprisonment (ADF, 2016a).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> They are referred to as hidden (underground or secret) churches because they cannot publicly perform their ceremonies as may be persecuted. Secret activity is then externally presented as a non-religious and private (Kautzer, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> For example, such case was documented in Lithuania (Ellens, Roberts, 2015). In the Czech Republic, there is no evidence of criminal prosecution for ayahuasca trafficking or performing of ayahuasca rituals. In addition to the aforementioned ADF, legal protection for users of ayahuasca is also intensively addressed by the Spanish non-profit organization *Plantaforma para la Defensa de la Ayahuasca* (abbrev. PDA).

It should be noted that it is necessary to distinguish between “drug traffickers” and “micro-traffickers”. The first term refers to people involved in the industrial production and distribution of illegal psychoactive substances. The second term includes individuals who repeatedly commit a crime of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychoactive substances in small quantities. In this case, it is the offense of illegal business. Similar crimes are characterized by having a common offender acting on their own, independently of others (Ávila Martínéz, 2011).

Rather than micro-enterprise (Spa. *microtráfico*) some authors prefer to talk about retail with illegal psychoactive substances (Spa. *narcomenudeo*). In this way, it is better to point out their chain of distribution, leading to prohibition and control that goes hand in hand with the secularization of some cultural practices and social life in urban areas (Zamudio Angles, 2008; 2013).

In any case, the decision of a court does not depend on the recommendation of INCB. National and international courts are not obliged to adhere to it. Such a recommendation is usually referred to as “commentary”. In the hierarchy of international law, judicial decisions take precedent over commentaries.

For example, in 2014 the European Court of Human Rights (abbrev. ECHR) concluded in the case of the Dutch member of the ayahuasca church CEFLURIS, Alida Maria Fränklin-Beentjes, that ayahuasca is a DMT-containing product and hence the 1971 Convention applies to it (ECHR, 2014). In contrast to other EU member states, beta-carboline alkaloids are illegal in France (Legifrance, 2005).

In any case, international conventions have precedent over national laws. The 1988 UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances supplemented certain measures that affect the legal status of plants containing psychotropic substances. According to Art. 14.2 of this treaty, states should take appropriate measures to prevent illicit cultivation of such plants and to eradicate if this is not contrary to respect for fundamental human rights, traditional licit uses, where there is historical evidence of such use, as well as the protection of the environment (UN, 1988, 14; ADE, 2016b). Nevertheless, the requirement for “historical evidence” to prove the tradition of using plants contained in the ayahuasca preparation can hardly be achieved within the EU member states.



**Fig. 4** Administration of ayahuasca (source: Rajnoha, 2017)

Persons affected by local laws, e.g. in circumstances where the law restricts their religious freedom, may refer to international tribunals such as the ECHR or the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (abbrev. IACHR).

Regarding the legal status of ayahuasca, there is no consensus among judges and law enforcement agencies on whether it should be outlawed due to DMT content or not. It is up to the national governments to make the final decision within their jurisdiction and control the plants used in the preparation of ayahuasca, and eventually the product itself (ADF, 2016c).

In any case, it should be clear that declaring some product illegal because the products contain a banned substance is reductive and does not reflect the sociocultural complexity of its ritual use. Indeed, thanks to the ritual, its use can be not only safe but also suitable for the treatment of various diseases in the era of civilization (Frecska et al., 2016). However, considerations about potential therapeutic use and human rights should always go hand in hand with the requirement while having public security at heart.

## 6 LOCALIZATION OF AYAHUASCA IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

During the last ten years, there have been several interesting research projects implemented on ayahuasca in the Czech Republic. There were published results of pilot studies aimed at its use in addiction treatment, in psychotherapy and personality development, which show a positive effect in these areas (Kavenská, 2008; Kavenská, 2013; Horák, 2013; Kavenská, 2014). The results of other research in biomedicine and social sciences confirm this fact (Giove, 2002; Lewis, 2008; Mercante, 2013; Bogenschutz, Johnson, 2016; Nunes et al., 2016; Tófoli, de Araújo, 2016; Talin, Sanabria, 2017).

Furthermore, original papers focused on the shamanic tourism (Kavenská, Simonová, 2014) and the motivation of Czech participants in ayahuasca rituals held in Europe have been published (Kavenská, Vosáhlová, 2013). Recently, we have published the first scientific paper on glocalization of ayahuasca and its possible therapeutic use in local conditions (Horák et al., 2015). Also, data on the subculture of Czech users of “traditional medicine of the Amazon” has been published (Horák, Vosáhlová, 2016). Partial research on Brazilian syncretic churches based on finding from informants in the Czech Republic has not yet been published.

In the last ten years, a number of interesting final theses on this topic have been defended in the Czech Republic: bachelor’s (Lukášová, 2011; Tomková, 2011; Kubíčková, 2014; Vozáryová, 2015; Ava, 2015; Drlíková, 2016; Wrožynová, 2017); master’s (Horák, 2006; Kubeček, 2011; Petružálková, 2013; Simonová, 2014; Tichá, 2015; Vosáhlová, 2015; Vodičková, 2017); and dissertations (Horák, 2010b; Kavenská, 2012).

In addition to several important domestic and international book titles (Luna, 1986; Kuchař, 2001; Narby, 2006; Velíšek, 2008), ayahuasca has become popular among Czechs mainly due to the mass media. On the Internet, there are some discussion forums and groups of drug experimenters, sites of organizers of exotic tours to the Amazon, websites of spiritual leaders and seekers, etc. in the Czech language. Czech TV has also broadcast several remarkable documents about this issue in the past few years. For instance, *Otto Placht – malíř džungle*, *Sít noci nebo Brána smrti* [Otto Placht – The Jungle Painter], *Sít noci* [Network of Night] or *Brána smrti: Z housenky motýlem* [Gate of Death: From Caterpillar to Butterfly].

Since ayahuasca is not legal in the Czech Republic, it is mainly used by individuals that maintain confidential, informal relationships and social networks on the Internet.

The Czech subculture is not homogeneous. Smolík (2010, 32) shows the subculture of skinheads, football hooligans, metalheads and other individuals. Souček et al. (2011) focused on the visual style of Czech subculture.

Users of the “traditional medicine of the Amazon” have their perception of social reality and specific problems. It is typical for them to use various psychoactive preparations, which they consider to be a medicine and sacrament. The use of ayahuasca occurs in the so-called temporary autonomous zones, i.e. in environments that people experience their situation as unacceptable or unsatisfactory to meet each other. Therefore, they have reasons to defy social norms, mechanisms and institutions that maintain discipline and control in society (Bey, 1991).

As shown in figure 5, based on the survey in which 70 respondents participated, ayahuasca is used in all regions of the Czech Republic, notably, Prague (the capital city of the Czech Republic), the Central Bohemian and Pardubice. This is also confirmed by our informants who participated in the ayahuasca rituals in most of the Czech regions, except Karlovy Vary and Ústí nad Labem (see subchapter 11.2.1).

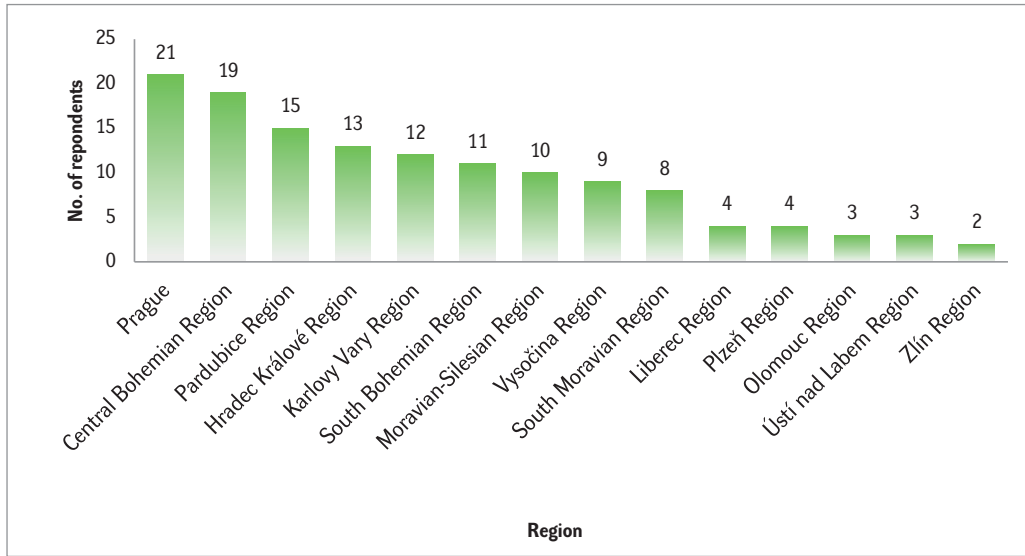


Fig. 5 Ayahuasca rituals organized in Czech regions (source: Horák et al., 2015)

## 7 MOTIVATION OF AYAHUASCA USERS

The aim of this publication is not to characterize ayahuasca users from a legal point of view, or to classify them as criminals. On the contrary, we try to look at their actions from a neutral perspective, regardless of the socioeconomic and political aspect of the subject.

The motivation of users to participate in the ayahuasca rituals was the primary reason for the online questionnaire that we performed during a preliminary part of this research. The results reveal that the respondents have participated in the ayahuasca rituals for four reasons: 1. for healing, 2. for spiritual and religious reasons, 3. for curiosity/experiment, 4. for personality development. The number of respondents who stated that they used it for entertainment and recreation was statistically insignificant (Horák et al., 2015).<sup>17</sup>

The need to use ayahuasca may be based not only on the spiritual, but also profane reasons (Eliade, 2006). Profane motivation justifies such reasons as chronic pain, leukemia, Parkinson's disease, cancer (Schenberg, 2013), asthma, depression (Anderson, 2012; dos Santos et al., 2016b; 2016c) or alcohol addiction (see subchapter 11.5).

Schmid et al. (2010) confirm that ayahuasca can improve coping strategies against disease and increase life satisfaction. Further research has shown the positive effect of experience with ayahuasca on the psychological and social level, which can lead to the repetitive use of this brew. Changes observed by participants in ayahuasca rituals include increased self-confidence, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, feeling of inner peace and enjoyment of life, greater assertiveness and independence (Winkelman, 2005; Barbossa et al., 2005; Kjellgren et al., 2009).

On the one hand, spiritual motivation represents a response to the dissatisfaction of spiritual needs in the environment of institutionalized churches. As a result, some ayahuasca users tend to "traditional" rituals, whether of indigenous or mestizo performance, because such religiosity allows a direct experience of God's existence (Fericgla, 2004, 14). Similarly, users that are close to the environment of institutionalized churches tend to syncretic churches that consider ayahuasca a sacrament (Labate et al., 2009).

As explained above, the context in which ayahuasca is used is also derived from the motivation of its users. Differences in ritual performance in "traditional", neoshamanic, and church style are diametrical. Before dealing with the various styles in more details (see chapter 12), it should be noted that the profanation of ayahuasca for recreational and experimental purposes may lead to unfortunate consequences.

As for experimental use of ayahuasca, the consequences of its use may be fatal in the case of self-medication (without the supervision of an experienced practitioner). Administration of ayahuasca is tied to a strict diet that excludes a variety of common foods. Violating the diet may well enhance its emetic effects and create unpredictable adverse effects.

It may be speculated that if ayahuasca were administered in microdoses, it could help to alleviate depression, some types of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (abbrev. ADHD) or obsessive-compulsive disorder (abbrev. OCD). However, such an

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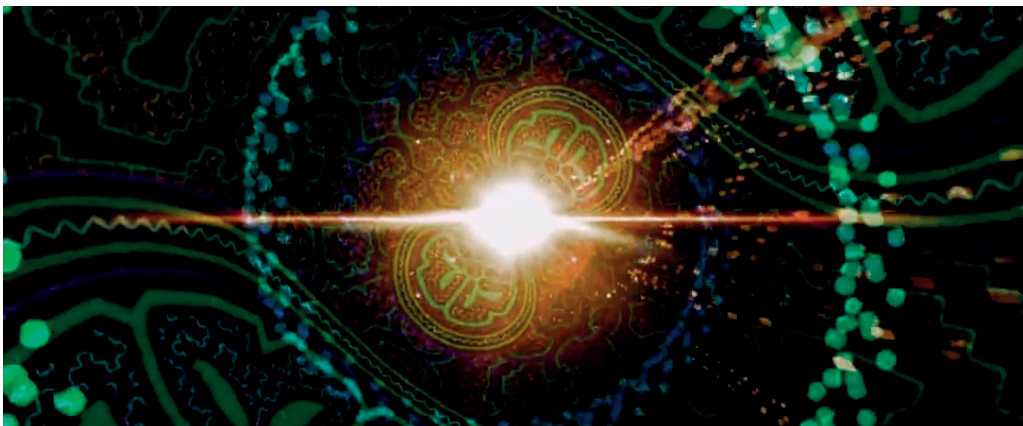
<sup>17</sup> These results coincide with research conducted independently by Kavenská and Simonová (2014).

application is still unsubstantiated by any serious research, serious risks associated with unpredictable changes in human behavior.

The mere curiosity as a motive for the use of ayahuasca is not enough in our opinion. Taking it in a “try and see” manner is risky. Apart from the possibility of adverse effects and the socio-pathological phenomena that may occur during the ceremony due to the absence of pre-screening, the main obstacle to such behavior is that most of the organizers do not provide any aftercare.<sup>18</sup>

This does not mean that the participants could not contact an organizer in case of emergency and ask for help. It is risky because the victim may not get assistance in a difficult situation or emergency. The aftercare is just not part of a standard service, although the integration forms an essential part of the therapeutic process. After approaching sensitive topics in an altered state of consciousness, it can happen relatively easily as the person will not be able to cope with them. One can remain alone, or they will be forced to seek help from an “expert” in order to integrate the experience. However, in complicated cases, even this may not be enough.

Recreational reasons (Lat. *recreatio* in the sense of refreshment, restoration, recovery) may seem acceptable from an ethical point of view, since—according to our informants—the use of ayahuasca contributes to the restoration of psychological balance and strengthen the relationship of man to nature and the sacred (see subchapter 11.4). On the other hand, the increased interest of the public in participation in rituals can lead to the development of so-called ayahuasca tourism (see chapter 4) or to an inadequate appropriation of native culture (Foutiou, 2016).



**Fig. 6** Ayahuasca vision (source: Rajnoha, 2017)

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<sup>18</sup> In the absence of pre-screening, organizers usually provide an informed consent, which the participants fill in in advance. Thus, they declare that they have not forgotten any of the restrictions, i.e. the unauthorized use of antidepressants from the category of specific serotonin reuptake inhibitors (abbrev. SSRI). However, given the illegal status of ayahuasca, the administration of informed consent is rather comical. As far as the supervision of the possible occurrence of socio-pathological phenomena during the ritual is concerned, it is the responsibility of the organizer. Reports on sexual harassment or physical assault are not uncommon in the media. Sometimes, there is also a suicidal behavior on the part of the participants after its completion.



Fig. 7 Ayahuasca in flower (source: Horák, 2009)



Fig. 8 Preparation of ayahuasca from *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis* (source: Rajnoha, 2017)

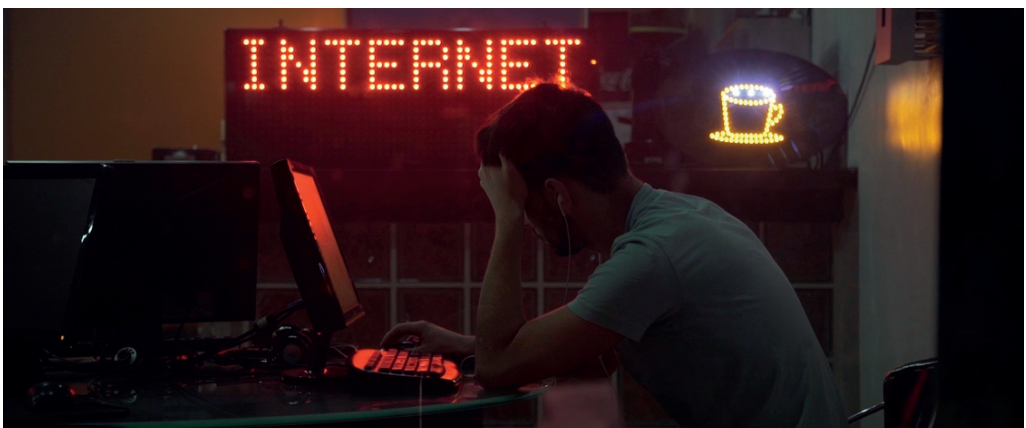


Fig. 9 The use of social media may be seen as the main factor contributing to the globalization of ayahuasca (source: Ibid.)





**Fig. 10** Romanticization, sentimentalization, and idealization of the Amazon is common among ayahuasca users (source: Rajnoha, 2017)



**Fig. 11** National Institute of Mental Health (NUDZ), renowned for supporting research on ayahuasca. It is situated in Klecany – Czech Republic (source: Ibid.)



**Fig. 12** Electroencephalography (EEG), i.e. electrophysical monitoring method to record electrical activity of the brain, used by researchers from NUDZ (source: Ibid.)



**Fig. 13** As ayahuasca may provoke radical shifts in self-perception, skilled facilitator is necessary after the ingestion (source: Rajnoha, 2017)



**Fig. 14** Participation in the ayahuasca ritual should be avoided especially by people using SSRI antidepressants (source: Ibid.)



**Fig. 15** Drinking of ayahuasca may be a result of the long search (source: Ibid.)



**Fig. 16** Primary forest is characterized by high biodiversity (source: Rajnoha, 2017)



**Fig. 17** Trees in the Ecuadorian Amazon (source: Ibid.)



**Fig. 18** Romanticization of the Amazon is usually false in contrast with ongoing deforestation (source: Ibid.)



**Fig. 19** Clearing the tropical known for its decadent cocktail list (source: Rajnoha, 2017)



**Fig. 20** In developing countries, garbage is not handled properly. Trash is often discarded in public forest sites (source: Ibid.)



**Fig. 21** Jeremy Narby, a project manager in charge of the Peruvian Amazon forest in Nouvelle Planète, an international foundation for development cooperation (source: Ibid.)

## 8 ANTHROPOLOGIST AS AN OUTSIDER?

*“After centuries of colonial domination backed up by ethnocentric theorizing about ‘religion’, Western scholarship should learn to shut its big mouth and start listening!”*  
(Hanegraaff 2016, 590)

This chapter represents a modest contribution to the decolonization of the methodology of social and cultural anthropology, which is primarily based on fieldwork and participant observation. Different types of questionnaires, scales, and interviews are used on a secondary basis. Anthropologists write field diaries, and if needed they analyze the content in the same way as in the case of any other archival material (e.g. letters, photo documentation, audio or video recordings).

The application of anthropological methods carries several ethical dilemmas. Not always do anthropologists have direct experience with the phenomena they are researching. Their work is mainly to analyze and interpret data collected through secondary methods. Although such an approach may be necessary in some cases, it can hardly be used in the research of phenomena such as (religious) rituals. As Shannon (2008, 70) asked, *“how could one write about music if he had never heard it?”*

Asad (1993) wondered whether it is legitimate to use the term “religion” regardless of cultural differences. The Eurocentric construct of “religion” is used by “Western” scientists to interpret the category of “sacred” also among people who do not come from this environment. Still, he rejects it as “external” approaches taken by a functionalist (Malinowski, 1939) or interpretative schemes (Geertz, 2000) and suggests that anthropologists should be trained to understand religion “from the inside” like its followers, participants in rituals and spiritual practices.<sup>19</sup>

Even the supporters of religion often defy external categorization and emphasize its subjective dimension. However, this attitude is naturally the subject of criticism we sympathize with. It assumes that the meaning of religion can be explained by the analysis of symbols, language, and ceremonial practices.

Bunzl (2005) believes that humans spend too much time deconstructing keywords and too little time analyzing how they work in the real world. To meet this requirement, we try not only to describe, but above all to interpret the (i.e. redescribe) informants’ opinions in this book.

As for the terms used, we refer to religion as any confession that is based on institutionalized spirituality.<sup>20</sup> We also distinguish “spirituality” from “religion”. For spirituality, we consider a “reified group of ideas”.<sup>21</sup>

Reification represents a methodological error; institutionalization is a social process. Reification (concretization or objectification) occurs when the “indicator” of

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<sup>19</sup> In this context, Nongbri (2013) points out that non-European ethnic groups have no expression for “religion”, and claims that the use of this ethical category involves the “rape” of an emic vocabulary of the people pushed out of the “modern West”.

<sup>20</sup> Němečková (2016) writes very aptly about the so-called “non-institutionalized spirituality”. Based on her concept, we analyze data relating to issues of faith (see subchapter 11.4.1).

<sup>21</sup> This definition is a paraphrase of the concept created by Hanegraaff (2016, 584). However, he distinguishes not only between “religion” and “spirituality” (in singular and plural), but he also works with the category of “sacred”. Arguably, such a concept is not completely transferable into the Czech language (cf. Hanegraaff, 1999).

a phenomenon is treated as if it were a phenomenon itself. Institutionalization takes place when a practice or set of practices are accepted and expected in a culture. In this context, for the “belief” or “image” we consider a cognitive artifact that relates to the worldview. The image of reality under certain historical contexts is conceptualized as “a phenomenon” in this book.

## 9 METHODS

*“Structure determines function.”*

Ada E. Yonath

In this chapter, we deal in detail with the description of the methods used in the processing of this book. The research framework is presented in table 1.

**Tab. 1** Research framework (source: own processing)

Strategic research questions	Why do the inhabitants of the Czech Republic participate in ayahuasca rituals? What health problems can be treated by ayahuasca according to local users?
Partial research questions	What types of ayahuasca rituals are performed in the Czech Republic? What are the local specifics of work with ayahuasca?
Nature of collected data	narratives
Subject of research	opinions of users of “the traditional Amazonian medicine” in the Czech Republic
Research sample	46 informants
Research strategy	the emic approach, qualitative endogenous
Research techniques	semi-structured interview, qualitative content analysis, participant observation
Research method	Grounded Theory
Research paradigm	Critical theory (Guba, Lincoln, 1994)

As indicated in chapter 1, from July 14 to August 31, 2015, we conducted a pilot online anonymous questionnaire survey through e-mail, Facebook, and Google+ 1452 subjects that may have participate in ayahuasca ritual. The selection of respondents was deliberate, performed by self-sampling and snowball methods (Bernard, 2006).

Thanks to the questionnaire, at which we asked whether the respondents would be willing to participate in further research and would provide their contact details. We were able to get in touch with 45 volunteers who were willing to participate in a confidential personal interview.

Based on the semi-structured interviews with the volunteers, we then began mapping the network of people who attend the ayahuasca rituals (Horák et al., 2015).

The disproportion between the number of individuals addressed and the number of volunteers was to a large extent influenced by the fact that DMT and ayahuasca are illegal in the Czech Republic (see chapter 5).

Fieldwork, during which we recorded interviews with ayahuasca users in the Czech Republic and conducted participated observation of rituals, was realized from November 11, 2015, to December 31, 2016. During this time, we managed to do a total of 46 interviews (Baker, Edwards, 2012). Based on the diary records from the fieldwork, we also reconstructed 3 ayahuasca rituals (see chapter 12).

As for audio recordings, their average length is 50 minutes (standard deviation: 20:50). In total, there were 2358:22 minutes (i.e.: 39:30 hours) of audio recordings collected.

To ensure the reliability and validity of data, we used the triangulation method. Triangulation was based on the inclusion of 7 researchers representing different scientific disciplines (i.e. anthropology, psychology, religious studies, and international relations) into the collection and processing of data. Additionally, data collection took place at different times and in different locations. All participants provided informed consent. The Grant Board of Internal Grant Agency, Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies, Mendel University in Brno, has approved the protocol.

As already mentioned, all interviews were conducted with volunteers. They have participated in the interview either on the basis of a previous questionnaire survey or through participants already involved in the research sample. The self-selection of interviewees was thus carried out (Miovský, 2006).

The research sample consists of 23 women and 23 men who previously attended some ayahuasca rituals. The informants were selected regardless of gender. The average age of informants was 34.5 years (standard deviation: 11.8). The youngest was 22 years old, the oldest 70. Their family status shows that 58.6% of informants were single, 23.9% were married and 17.5% were divorced. 41.3% of the informants had completed secondary education, 54.3% were university graduates, and 4.4% graduated from a higher vocational school. 91.3% of the informants were Czechs. Also, citizens of Polish, Dutch and Slovak were included in the research sample. However, their number is not statistically significant.

The informants were mayors, painters, psychologists, students, architects, administrators, women on maternity leave, academics, therapists, neurologists, professional soldiers, IT specialists, graphic designers, economists, musicians, farmers, psychotherapists, technicians and retirees.

The detailed characteristics of the research sample are shown in table 2. The names of all subjects included in the research were changed to maintain anonymity.

**Tab. 2** Characteristics of the research sample (source: own processing)

ID	Gender	Marital status	Age	Nationality	Education	Occupation
G01	male	married	36	Czech	university	mayor
G02	female	single	26	Czech	university	painter
G03	female	single	24	Czech	university	psychologist
G04	female	single	22	Czech	university	student
G05	male	married	35	Czech	university	academic
G06	male	single	27	Czech	university	architect



<b>ID</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
G07	female	single	38	Czech	high school	administrator
G08	male	married	35	Czech	university	geodet
G09	female	married	34	Czech	high school	maternity leave
G10	female	single	35	Czech	high school	designer
G11	male	married	32	Czech	university	entrepreneur
G12	female	married	25	Czech	high school	postman, maternity leave
G13	female	single	38	Czech	university	architect
G14	male	single	44	Czech	university	restorer
G15	female	single	28	Czech	university	student
G16	female	single	23	Slovak	university	student
G17	male	single	23	Czech	high school	student
G18	male	married	68	Dutch	high school	therapist, organizer
G19	female	divorced	50	Czech	university	neurologist, therapist
G20	male	single	25	Czech	high school	professional soldier
G21	male	single	27	Czech	high school	marketing
G22	female	single	44	Czech	university	IT specialist
G23	male	single	23	Czech	high school	student
G24	male	single	32	Czech	high school	entrepreneur
G25	male	single	37	Czech	higher vocational school	graphic designer
G26	male	single	39	Czech	higher vocational school	economist
G27	female	single	23	Czech	high school	student
G28	male	divorced	40	Czech	high school	businessman

ID	Gender	Marital status	Age	Nationality	Education	Occupation
G29	male	single	37	Czech	high school	IT specialist
G30	female	divorced	50	Czech	university	musician
G31	female	single	40	Czech	university	financial advisor
G32	male	married	37	Czech	high school	farmer
G33	female	divorced	49	Czech	high school	wellness worker
G34	male	divorced	34	Czech	university	psychotherapist, economist
G35	female	single	34	Czech	university	editor, journalist
G36	female	single	33	Czech	university	translator
G37	male	single	31	Polish	university	IT specialist
G38	female	married	56	Czech	university	ENT physician
G39	male	married	51	Czech	high school	screenwriter, organizer
G40	male	married	33	Czech	university	self-employed
G41	female	divorced	63	Czech	university	garden architect
G42	male	svobodný	27	Czech	high school	technician, therapist
G43	female	divorced	70	Czech	university	pensioner, adult educator
G44	female	divorced	54	Czech	university	graphic designer, student
G45	male	single	34	Polish	high school	organizer
G46	female	single	27	Czech	university	student

The interviews with informants were analyzed using the Grounded Theory (Strauss, Corbin, 2002). Firstly, each audio file was transcribed and encoded on Google Sheets. The coding consists of assigning a specific code (i.e. analytical category) to the basic units of analysis defined by the length of one paragraph was carried out in all transcripts. An assignment of codes was based on semantic similarity between the units of analysis. The extent of narratives did not have any influence on the outcomes of the analysis.

The coding was done in 3 steps. In the first step, 46 transcripts with a total range of 1044 standard pages (standard deviation: 9) were divided into 3 parts, and so-called *open coding* was implemented. In this way, the *coding frame* was created and constantly specified (Schreier, 2012). Similar results were confirmed by other researchers in the team that analyzed their data separately.

Then, all codes from open coding were copied to a separate sheet and the coordinates of the narrative to which they refer were added. Coordinates, composed of the informant identifier and the default cell axis (e.g. G01A13), are used to trace the narrative.

The number of identical codes expresses how much the code is *grounded* in the narratives of informants. The number of codes coupled with the parent code indicates its *density*, i.e. how much it is interconnected with others.

Ready codes can also be merged thematically by parent code into so-called *code families* (Glaser, 1978). The code families that are characterized by semantic relation between codes can be arranged causally and displayed in diagrams (Elo, Kyngäs, 2007). As a result, the so-called *paradigm model* of the grounded theory is created. For this purpose, both Microsoft Excel and MindNode, a mobile application for mind mapping, was used.

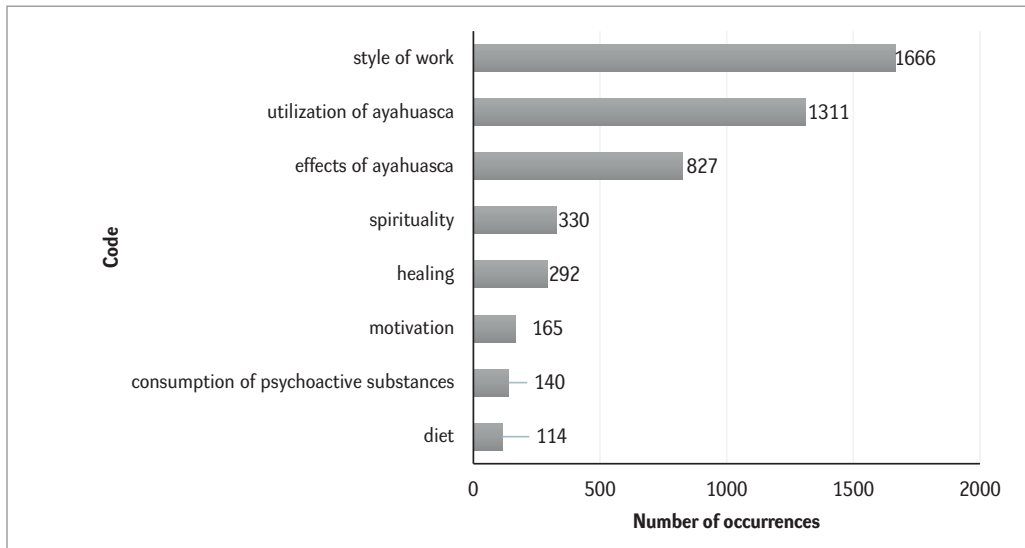
In the second step, the so-called *axial coding* was performed. The codes were implicitly arranged according to the list created by Strauss and Corbin (2002) and categorized as causal conditions, intervening conditions, phenomena, context, actions/interactions or consequences. Axial coding helps to interpret the narratives because it makes the causal relations between codes transparent.

When open and axial coding of all transcripts were done, we proceeded to the third step, i.e. so-called *selective coding*. In this step, the codes from open coding were categorized according to their groundness and density and those that were predominant have been selected.

As far as the relevance of the codes is concerned, at least 50 occurrences were considered statistically significant. Nevertheless, the selection was done up to the level of 10 repetitive occurrences. Finally, causal relationships among the code families were discovered, and the results were interpreted (see chapter 11).

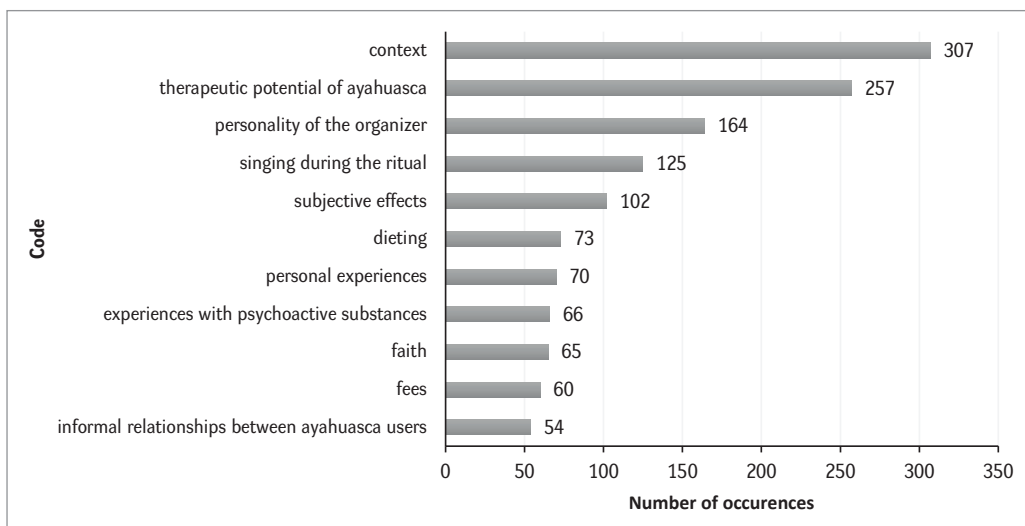
## 10 RESULTS

During the open coding, 4845 codes were created. As shown in figure 22, there are 8 code families that are most embedded in the narratives.



**Fig. 22** List of code families most embedded in narratives of the informants (source: own processing)

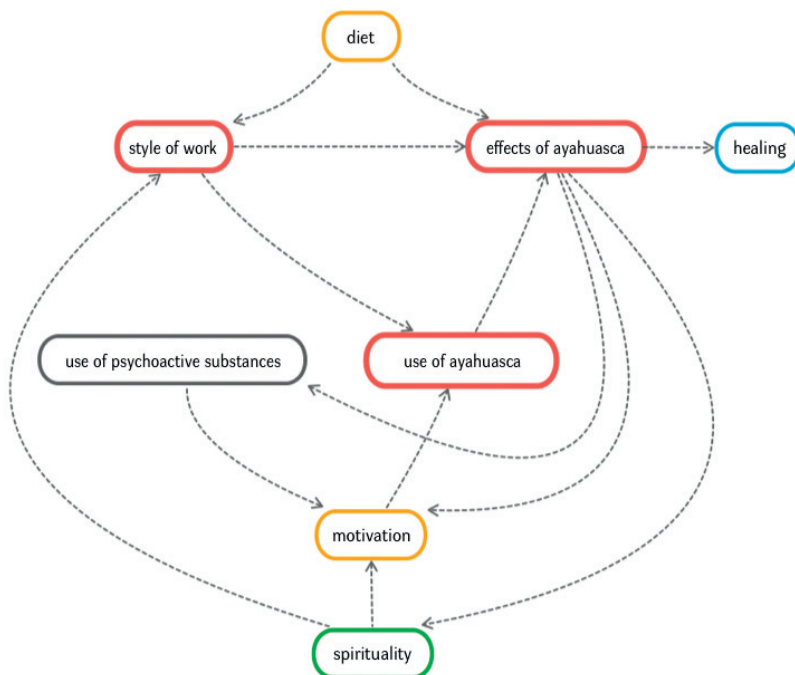
Figure 23 shows code families with the highest density. In this case, 11 were selected.



**Fig. 23** List of code families with the highest density (source: own processing)

## 11 INTERPRETATION OF INTERVIEWS WITH AYAHUASCA USERS

As we stated in chapter 9, a paradigm model of the grounded theory is created. The findings reveal causal relationships between the most recognized code families. It can be displayed in the following way (see figure 24).



**Fig. 24** Paradigmatic model of grounded theory (source: own processing)

The three most frequented code families—style of work, use of ayahuasca and effects of ayahuasca—are highlighted in red. The diet affects both the organizer’s style and the effects of ayahuasca. Use of ayahuasca is the central category in narratives of our informants.

As noted in chapter 7, participants in rituals may have different motivations for the use of ayahuasca. Their past influences the motivation of users, often intertwined with experiences of using different psychoactive substances, and spirituality. The spirituality of ayahuasca users is discussed in detail in subchapter 11.4.

The spirituality of organizers is naturally reflected in the style of their work and the way the rituals are performed. The style of work further determines the effects of ayahuasca.

The effects of ayahuasca, in turn, affect the motivation of users, because they often decide to participate in the ritual repeatedly. They also influence their decisions for the further use of psychoactive substances as reflected in their spirituality.

The effects of the preparation are related to the possibilities of its use in the treatment, eventually with its therapeutic potential. This is dealt with in subchapter 11.5.1.

## 11.1 Style of Work

Information included in this subchapter was published earlier (Horák, 2018). Regarding the style of work, organizers of ayahuasca rituals that take place in the Czech Republic, independently use the techniques that are typical in the Amazon. Smudging, ophthalmic or nasal tobacco application, healing by the leaf-bundle rattle (Quechua *shacapa/surupanga*), laying on of hands or perfume application (e.g. *Agua de florida*) is common. A specific technique represents the cleansing with liquor, which is also used to rinse the mouth. At the end of the ritual, personal experiences from the altered states of consciousness are usually shared, thus facilitating users to integrate them into their everyday life.

It is clear that working style has an impact on the context in which ayahuasca ritual is conducted, albeit to varying degrees (see subchapter 11.2.1). Many of our informants had experience with the Quechua tradition. One of them said:

*“I like the Quechua. That means it is in the dark. It is overnight, you know. It is probably at all the ceremonies that people are not talking there, though... that they do not talk there all the time. (...) It is exclusively with a shaman. There is always a cleansing of space before and after... A medicine wheel is performed before it starts. This is also important.”* (G31A141)

In narratives, fragmentary references to Shuar, Santo Daime, and specifically Daime traditions were identified, as mentioned here:

*“There is still one person who is doing it one on one. That is what I forgot. Moreover, I am seeing him now. (...) He puts you on a massage chair and does something like Reiki. You drink, and he plays music... Also, it is... it is interesting because he opens you this way. I enjoyed it a lot. It takes 2 hours only. He makes that like this... And he is from another church. It is the Daime Church. Not Santo Daime, but Daime, which directly follows the founder”* (G43A1809–1829).<sup>22</sup>

### 11.1.1 Personality of the Organizer

As we mentioned in the chapter 9, all the subjects referred to in this work are anonymized.

According to informants, ayahuasca has been used in the Czech Republic since 2001. The first rituals were performed in the Pardubice region by José Alvarez, Peruvian mestizo healer and painter. José is famous among the users because he cured one of his epileptic clients.

José came to the Czech Republic thanks to the invitation of one of our informants' husband, an ENT doctor, who had previously participated in his rituals in Croatia. She said: *“It was in 2001, when the Twins fell down... That is why I remember the Twins because we were driving... José was in the car that we drove to the cottage, right? He just came from Croatia, but we organized... my husband organized a healing for a friend, his classmate, who has not got Parkinson, but multiple sclerosis, sclerosis he has... (...) We paid him a week in Croatia, but it was canceled, yeah ... So, we did it quickly and*

<sup>22</sup> There is no unity in the nomenclature of syncretic churches. Santo Daime was studied by Dawson (2013).

*invited him to our friend's cottage to do the ritual there. He just cured our son... (from epilepsy, authors' comment). I do not know if he treated him there. He only diagnosed him and then it was held somewhere close to Svitavy... It was already organized... There were about 54 people, and it was huge... It was for those who did not get to... (Croatia, authors' comment)."* (G38A309–313)

José still occasionally visits the Czech Republic. Some of the local patients also travel to his newly-established healing center in Iquitos, northeastern Peru.

In 2007, it was possible to take part in a ritual led by another Peruvian healer of mestizo origin, Daniel Quispe. He organized them with his girlfriend in the South Bohemian Region. According to the latest information, Daniel discontinued in this practice since he returned to Peru after several years in Spain. This information was confirmed by a graphic designer and student who arranged the first Daniel's rituals in the Czech Republic, and herself also performed them alone. It is illustrated below:

*"I was involved in more ceremonies here. (...) In 2002, we brought here... brought a person with whom... The first person I had drunk with medicine in Peru and he stayed for two months at our cottage and there... There were ceremonies for friends and us. And in fact, it happened again several times later. Without limits of resources, without... without any... With the ceremonial leadership, we were capable of. I would probably describe it like this"* (G44A17).

Formally, the rituals organized by Daniel were very similar to the work of Ecuadorian healer, Luis Zambrano, with whom it was also possible to establish a contact. Both performed overnight rituals, followed by the sharing of experiences with the healer that interpret visions (see subchapter 12.1). The only difference was that Daniel did not perform so-called personal cleansing when the organizer works with each participant separately during the ritual and applies above-mentioned traditional healing techniques.

Luis has been performing rituals in the Hradec Králové Region since 2012. He has also organized a couple of work stays in the Ecuadorian Amazon with jungle trips, rituals and seminars in the indigenous community he comes from.<sup>23</sup> According to the informants, he has a student in the Czech Republic, Jiří Horák, who uses similar techniques, but organizes rituals for few participants (on average 5). Previously, they also differed in the work ethic. While the clients of the Ecuadorian healer pay some amount of money for participating in the ritual, the Czech healer did his work for a gift decided by a patient's discretion.<sup>24</sup> Jiří has had a separate practice since 2014. Also, there were clients that Milan Burian interviewed. Milan is a Czech citizen, who performs rituals in dance halls in Prague and the Pardubice region.<sup>25</sup> Also, he organizes expeditions to Peru. In this case, the informants stated that rituals are

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<sup>23</sup> Because of the language barrier, the informant with ID G26 mediated the public relations of this organizer.

<sup>24</sup> Such a practice is not unusual among the healers both in the Czech Republic and abroad. For example, Gomez García (1996, 212) found it in Malaga, Spain. From a utilitarian point of view, this practice serves primarily to increase the healer's prestige. *"The degree of sociocultural integration of the healer is not based on any charge but on the social status he has acquired based on recognition from his clients. Everything depends on the prestige that he received for his therapeutic successes. It can bring him legendary glory or cast him into oblivion."* (Gómez García, 1996)

<sup>25</sup> Milan's rituals in the Pardubice Region facilitates the informant with ID G41.

significantly shorter compared to other organizers (i.e. approximately till midnight), and then—probably still under the effects of ayahuasca—the participants get back to their homes.<sup>26</sup>

Another organizer working in the Czech Republic is a Dutch neoshaman, Arnold Uhlenbeck. Arnold bases his practice in the so-called process-oriented psychology (abbrev. POP) and experience he gained in Santo Daime.<sup>27</sup> Arnold occasionally organizes rituals in the Hradec Králové Region, where he usually books a private cottage for this purpose.

Arnold's rituals are facilitated by a neurologist and therapist, who has begun to pursue alternative, complementary medicine and family constellations after burnout. She told us during a personal meeting:

*"I have already reduced my doctor's office to just one day a week... I'm no longer nervous about it... I burnt out, I am done now. I had an office which I operate as a doctor [at home]. It means in a day, I attend between 30 and 40 people who are not motivated at all. They are... Everyone comes and wants pills. They just stare at you. So, I said to myself that I do not want to do that anymore... This kind of medicine laborer. So now I am... I've just stopped doing that at the end of the year. It was not because of financial reasons. I was doing well... I had plenty of patients, and insurance companies were paying, but I decided that I do not want to do that anymore. Moreover, as I stopped that, I started to open those constellations seminars determined for the work with health... So, ayahuasca is... The work with ayahuasca is basically about the same thing that is done in constellations. It just goes deeper."* (G19A231)

Another important group among our informants represent the participants of rituals guided by Jan Novák, a screenwriter and a former member of the Brazilian syncretic church Porta do Sol (MacRae 2004, Vieira Monteiro2012). Jan lives in the Moravian-Silesian Region and has been organizing rituals since 2010. In the style of his work, Christian elements can be recognized.<sup>28</sup> This is illustrated by the following narrative, where the ritual of Rebirth that he does at Easter time and simulates childbirth is described:

*"This stuff I do over the day. Because it is sunny, I seal the windows with crepe paper. The crepe... in the color of lila, in red. (...) I put it on the light bulbs... I give that kind of touch. I put women and men apart, head to head. (...) First, I release the music to tune them to alpha [waves] and then I play on the atabaque drum and give a signal to start slowly as lizards... without using their legs or hands, just... crawl their way against each other. Given that there are many people, they must push through. This is a process that takes 40 minutes, an hour, right? This way... they get to the other side. Well, and thus they experience what they experience. Some of them, who were born legs down, are suddenly the opposite. Some of them, who got stuck... It happens and there are many things that they realize during that moment, you know. Well, and then... then when it is over, I play the music to get them back, right, and we continue..."* (G39A1823–1855). The reconstruction of another ritual guided by Jan Novák is presented in detail in subchapter 12.2.

<sup>26</sup> Arguably, this practice is risky as possible incidents are likely to occur without subsequent supervision of clients in the altered state of consciousness. In addition, such behavior may have a negative impact on the integration of experience as such (see subchapter 11.3.1).

<sup>27</sup> In the research sample comes with ID G18.

<sup>28</sup> In the research sample, he has ID G39.



In the Moravian-Silesian Region, there has also been another organizer of Polish origin, Mateusz Kowalski. He became one of our key informants after finding out that besides the implementation of originally composed workshops he dedicates himself to giving public lectures.<sup>29</sup> Mateusz left his homeland after having problems with the law and Roman-Catholic Church because of organizing the ayahuasca rituals. In the Czech Republic, he has performed the ritual since 2012.

Finally, one of the people interviewed organizes his rituals in one the South-Bohemian centers of personal development, participated in the rituals of Santiago Hernández, a Mexican organizer adopted in the Lakota tradition, currently lives in Slovakia.<sup>30</sup>

A sweat lodge usually precedes Santiago's rituals, who sometimes serves during the ayahuasca and peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*).<sup>31</sup> One of the events organized by this organizer is reconstructed and presented in subchapter 12.3 in this book.

### 11.1.2 Singing during the Ritual

In most cases, the organizers (sometimes also with the participants) sing spontaneously the so-called *íkaros*, or healing songs, not only in native Amazonian languages, but also in Spanish, English, Russian, Ukrainian or Czech. The singing of *íkaros* based on the idea that the intonation, vibration of the song in whose words a certain intention is compressed, can affect an individual's state of mind (consciousness).<sup>32</sup>

An informant told us: *“Some íkaros did not have words at all, they were just syllables arranged one behind each other or tones. Possibly the song was sung. Sorry, whistled I wanted to say, or blown. These are three ways to do that work. He just like that (he is blowing gently, authors' comment) or whistles... However, from my experience, the louder the speech, the better the healer's ability to cope with the altered state of consciousness. Because one sometimes feels so bad that you are glad to sit. Even to sing something, I cannot imagine it”* (G05A126).

As it has been mentioned above, the organizers often sing out rhythmic sounds using rattles while singing. Thus, keeping the attention of participants. Sometimes they also play various musical instruments (e.g. guitar or drums). Occasionally, some music groups are performed during the rituals. In some places, there are also songbooks used (e.g. containing hymns in Portuguese, as it is common in ceremonies performed by syncretic churches).

A neurologist and therapist, who facilitates rituals, said: *“Everyone gets that [songbook] and they (the organizer, authors' comment) mention the number they sing and start playing... Moreover, those who are here have already known the songs. And I know them, so I sing with him, yeah... We sing as if it is two-part singing when it is*

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<sup>29</sup> In the research sample, he has ID G45.

<sup>30</sup> These rituals are facilitated by an informant who in the research sample has ID G43.

<sup>31</sup> For the use of peyote for therapeutic purposes see Calabrese (2014).

<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to observe the tension between the etymologically related Spanish expression *encanto* (English word for “charm”) and the English verb *to chant*. The English and Spanish terms for “being enchanted” (Spa. *encantado*) have the root in the Latin word *incantāre*, equivalent to *en-* + *cantar* (Bustos 2008, Callicot2013).

*possible, and when anyone that can sing comes, we sing like three-part. Also, I have sung in the church since my childhood, so I sing, you know...*" (G19A471).

Some organizers make their work easier by playing the recorded music during the ritual.<sup>33</sup>

## 11.2 Use of Ayahuasca

As we stated in the chapter 10, one of the key code families identified in the narratives is the use of ayahuasca. In this subchapter, we look into it in details. We focus on the context of ayahuasca use, personal experience of users, fees for participating in the ritual and informal relations between users.

### 11.2.1 Context

Ayahuasca rituals in the Czech Republic are held throughout the year, with a different frequency for each organizer (from 2 events per month to 3–4 events per year). As mentioned in chapter 6, rituals can be attended in all regions in the country. Our informants participated in the regions as follows: Prague, South Bohemian, South Moravian, Hradec Kralové, Liberec, Moravian-Silesian, Olomouc, Pardubice, Plzeň, Central Bohemian, and Zlín. They choose the organizers based on their preferences and move freely between them.

Some also have experience with participation in the rituals in other countries, such as Slovakia, Poland, Germany, Croatia, Netherlands, Norway, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru.

The informants confirmed that the ritual is usually performed at night (i.e. vigils). It takes place in the dark due to an intensification of the introspective effects of ayahuasca. However, the context of the rituals varies from every organizer. The evidence is presented in following narrative:

*"Everyone seems to have it differently. (...) The ceremony depends on who is doing it, as everything of course. So, the act of when you drink it is always almost the same, but what goes on during the whole night is different. Some people always turn the light like Peruvians. It is always completely dark. The windows are covered, so that you can concentrate solely on yourself and your feelings. (...) You hear others only when they move or make some sounds, but you hardly see them. While in turn, someone does that in another way. Those that are from Peru do it to trigger some soft light, illuminated, plus singing or playing some songs from stereo (...) and the music that is usually without words (...). It does not disturb that much... as some drums or something like that. However, in both cases they are singing"* (G17A187).

When the ritual takes place at night, it is probably due to security reasons. However, if it is performed during the day, it may be both for better control of the organizer over its course and for keeping the rhythm of sleep. In both cases, the comfort of the participants is paramount.

For similar reasons, and also to avoid public disturbances, rituals usually take place indoors (on a cottage, in a gym, hotel hall, yurt or tipi). With reference to the style of Jan Novák, one of the informants explained that:

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<sup>33</sup> Tito La Rosa is among the popular artists.

*“For me, when I started to go there, I could go anywhere I wanted. When I was there for the last time, they insisted that... the circle would be held and that nobody would go out. No one would go to the first floor during the ritual, and so on. So, more attention was paid to it. I think it is good, because when they started to run on the slopes in the summer and lied somewhere there in the grass, it was energetically disorganized” (G28A137).*

The Polish organizer Mateusz Kowalski, who usually performs the rituals during the day, explained his reasons for such a practice as follows: *“I like when people can do what they feel. When they find their rhythm with daime, with ayahuasca. It is not about being a leader and doing it as I say, but about finding your own rhythm. Some people just pass it sitting in the place, where you are. Some of them like admiring the beauty of nature in silence. Some people also like going to the house to talk for few minutes” (G45A834).*

Another informant, Mateusz’s long-time friend, added: *“It is during the day because the guy I visited (Mateusz, authors’ comment) was also learning, traveling and discovering other cultures and traditions. He took something from each of them, and they naturally influenced him. It seems he took it from some Santo Daime, from some tradition of Santo Daime...” (G17A167).* This fact was finally confirmed by the organizer.

*“We start at 11am and finish at 7 pm. So, it takes all... [day],”* he said (G45A634). At the same time, he pointed out that he does not only conduct weekend events, but also occasionally organizes ten-day workshops, during which—in addition to the use of ayahuasca in any amount—massage and meditation sessions are also done. However, this context is exceptional in the Czech Republic.

As the informants confirmed, most organizers dedicate themselves to performing rituals during the weekend, with two consecutive night sessions that usually take place. It is up to the participants to decide how many sessions to attend.

The reason for such a style of work may seem very prosaic. The Dutch therapist, Arnold Uhlenbeck, explained it to us during the interview as follows: *“With us, it is always for two nights (...) because if you drink only one night, it can occur that nothing will happen. (...) With new people, when you drink two nights in a row, you get a better idea of what ayahuasca can do” (G18A219–227).* Nevertheless, from the organizer’s perspective, the motivation for such behavior may also be economical (see subchapter 11.2.3).

Ayahuasca rituals are usually organized in a rural setting. Notwithstanding, there are exceptions, such as Milan Burian (see subchapter 11.1.1) who works in the downtown (of capital city). Only in Milan’s case, the vigil ends in the middle of the night. The other organizers remain in the place until the morning.

There are usually 15 participants in a ritual. Except for one case, all informants told us that there were no minors involved.<sup>34</sup>

## 11.2.2 Personal Experiences

Based on the analysis of the informants’ narratives, we have learned that they have experience with different types of alternative, complementary medicine, astrology,

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<sup>34</sup> Previous studies have shown no difference in neuropsychological indicators among adolescent users and the control group (Doering-Silveira et al., 2005). In any case, the issue of ayahuasca use among adolescents still represents a poorly explored topic.

Aztec, Chichimecan and Quechuan shamanism, sweat lodge and Sun Dance, with H'opono-pono, T'ai chi ch'üan, meditation (e.g. tantric or Osho) and yoga (e.g. with hatha yoga or vipassana), autosuggestion, holotropic breathing, family constellations, gestalt therapy, dark therapy, dance therapy, craniosacral therapy, the RUŠ method, macrobiotics, reiki and shambhala.

Some ayahuasca users tend to psytrance music scene (St John, 2012; 2015; 2017) and have used different types of psychoactive substances in the past (see subchapter 11.7), psilocybe mushrooms (*Psilocybe* sp.), fly agaric (*Amanita* sp.), angel's trumpets (*Datura* sp.), iboga (*Tabernanthe iboga*), San Pedro (*Echinopsis pachanoi*), kambo (*Phyllomedusa bicolor*), ska pastora (*Salvia divinorum*) or cannabis (*Cannabis* sp.).

A twenty-three-year college student of Slovak nationality, responded to our question about her experience: *“Well, for example, it was marijuana [that I used to smoke]. It is very common in the Czech Republic. In Slovakia, it is definitely not. I think it started in Brno. It is perceived there, in a very, very liberal way”* (G16A237).

### 11.2.3 Fees

The informants confirmed that all the organizers are currently charging a fee for attending the ritual. On average, it is 2,100 CZK (including accommodation). In the case of participation in the weekend event involving two successive rituals, the average price is slightly higher, i.e. 5,200 CZK. Naturally, the fund-raised has an impact on the quality of the organizer's work.

As organizers of ayahuasca rituals are at risk of legal punishment, the fees do not seem to us unreasonable. *“I do not think it is exaggerated,”* a twenty-year-old architect said. *“It's possible that there will not be so many people as it would if it was a voluntary contribution, I suppose. But I don't think it is wrong. (...) I don't have a problem with it. Also, as we talked about the legal risk, so yeah ... I would not do it for free too”* (G06A228–230).

The organizers argued that, the organization of ayahuasca rituals is usually a source of livelihood, or they put the funds raised into the construction and maintenance of their centers. Considering what has been discussed in subchapter 11.2.1, it is understandable that the organizers charge a fee for participating in the rituals.<sup>35</sup>

In the case of Ecuadorian, Luis Zambrano, who according to our informants invests finance in buying tropical rainforest threatened with mining, we think the collection of fees for participation in rituals can be considered as an anti-colonialist strategy (Moeller, 2010). One informant, among others Luis's good acquaintance, said:

*“Why should I criticize that they do that for a living (...) when they have quite a few advantageous (...) options to make it? And the Western world is extracting oil, gold there... When you compare it in this relation, why cannot you just take 2 thousand for the ceremony when they basically belong to you. It is absolutely all right, yeah”* (G13A925–929).

The informants stressed that the fee influences their decisions in participating in the ayahuasca ritual (see subchapter 11.6).

<sup>35</sup> In this context, alarming is the style of work done by Ayahuasca International, a Spanish-based trading company. Due to the violation of intellectual property rights, it is in a long-standing legal dispute with Colombian ethnic group Cofán (Jütte, 2016). For the broader economic context of ayahuasca use, see Tupper (2017).

As for specific approaches, Milan Burian makes a separate diagnosis during which the patient does not take ayahuasca. It costs 300 CZK. One informant, a garden architect by profession who participates in Milan's ceremonies with her daughter, told us:

*“Milan made a diagnosis, then there was ayahuasca and it was already possible to see that he was tired of the diagnosis. So now... now he decided to do a diagnosis separately and then just proceed with the ritual... that ayahuasca. Also, I like it more... it's fine. (...) Anyone who asked for it, went to that diagnosis. He actually checked the chakras, told us, how we were doing energetically, and then, when we decided to travel with him to Peru, he also gave us herbs. We already got them so that we could balance our energy”* (G41A81–85).

Mateusz Kowalski organizes ten-day workshops, which ayahuasca is drunk daily during the day for 19,000 CZK (including food and accommodation).



**Fig. 25** Application of tobacco in the eye (source: Rajnoha, 2017)

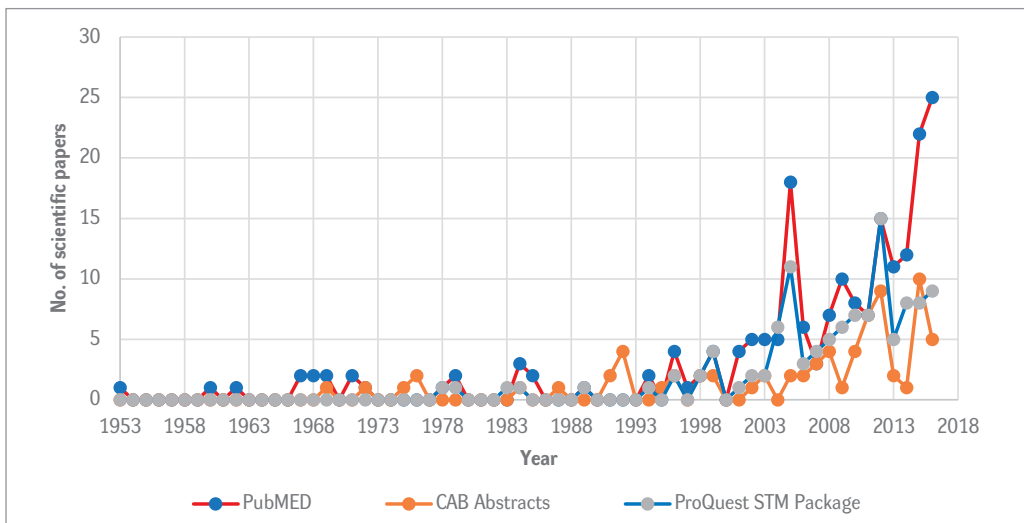
### 11.2.4 Informal Relationships between Ayahuasca Users

Recently, an increase in public interest in ayahuasca has been observed (see figure 26).



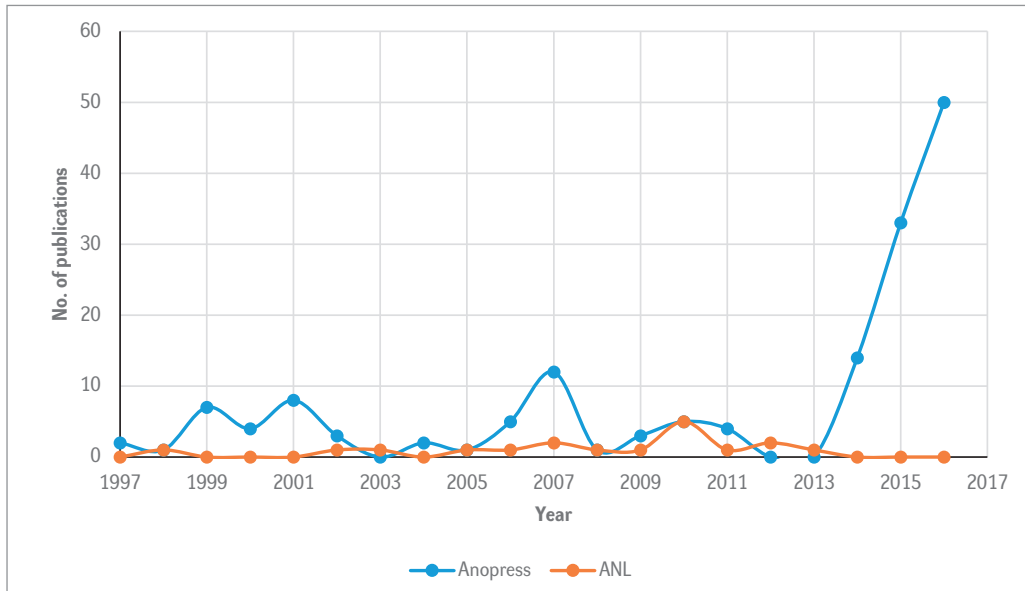
**Fig. 26** Occurrence of the term “ayahuasca” in the Spanish corpus of books (source: own processing in GoogleBooks Ngram Viewer)

Empirical studies on ayahuasca have sharply increased since 2005 (see figure 27).



**Fig. 27** Number of scientific publications containing the term “ayahuasca” (source: own processing in PubMed, CAB Abstracts, ProQuest STM Package)

Similarly, information about ayahuasca has been spreading in the Czech media since 2014 (see Figure 12).



**Fig. 28** Number of publications searched by keyword “ayahuasca”  
(source: own processing in Anopress IT and ANL)

It also spreads in public lectures of organizers, at music festivals or gatherings of the Rainbow Family (Souček et al., 2011). One informant confirmed that:

*“I have been in the community for quite some time, I think since 2001 or 2002... In the community of people who visit festivals of psychedelic, psytrance or electronic music and so on. Also, around those festivals, there is a bunch of people who... know that, they work on themselves”* (G36A209).

Another informant told us:

*“I learned that long ago from my friends, from my friends at Rainbow [gathering]. They were the ones who told me that something like this exists for the first time. It was, I do not know... 4 years back. 3 years back. So that time, you know...”* (G23A35).

As earlier mentioned in chapter 6, most participants have been to the ritual from the recommendation of friends and associates. *“Personal experience of someone who can give you the recommendation always plays a big role,”* said to us one informant (G44A313).

Another informant added: *“It is organized through acquaintances, because as it is not legal, they do not have websites. So, those that have already drunk it would tell others, but the people are still cautious...”* (G31A383).

Similarly, one informant said:

*“I have a friend that is a healer, and she actually took me there. She was always saying: ‘I can not now, I am going to aya [ceremony].’ So, I asked: ‘Please, what is it?’ So, she introduced me to it. Well, and she said: ‘Come and try it, OK?’ So, I did it. (...) I was a little worried because I thought: ‘You have got to take a bucket to vomit and just like that...’ However, I have to say that I took it well, and like it, OK? Also, the community of people that are around ayahuasca”* (G41A43).

One informant, occupational therapist, added:

*“I learned about it from a friend that came to me for therapy. She... She was on a lot of rituals and anything that could do help her, but she was still afraid. Well, her problem was not solved at the end of the therapy. Consequently, she went somewhere for help. Well, she never went into that fear. Well, then nothing will help you. If no one takes you to that fear that you are afraid of, you know. Some are afraid of violet and pink colors” (G42A301).*

All communication between users is private. Facilitator of rituals organized by Arnold Uhlenbeck told us:

*“Now that I’m organizing here is pretty much on verbal recommendation basically. When those guys got it in here, they had some people around them, you know. I learned about it through one guy and I was the one that invited his acquaintances and they approach theirs and this way it works, yes...” (G19A171).*

Although ayahuasca users meet in private and secret groups on social networks and forums, personal contact is preferred. It demonstrates the following narrative:

*“There is such tendency... More so, it means that people get very close to each other before and after aya. They still stay in the same place. They sit and smoke there till night. (...) Also, the atmosphere there is amazing, relaxed, you know. So, then there is such a tendency (to meet, authors’ note)” (G29A219).*

The informant mentioned above answered to our question whether she met other participants outside the ayahuasca rituals in the following way:

*“Yes, actually ... because a lot of similar activities with the same focus were created thanks to it... For example, we sing ceremonial songs together, we go for trips, we organize some kind of meetings where we try the techniques that ayahuasca showed us, and practice. (...) Yeah, it’s really a community, you know. The people who drink ayahuasca” (G31A125–129).*

She added a little further:

*“We are like a group of friends, so I do not even go to the sessions where there are people who I don’t know... We will bring together a small group, and since the shaman’s wife is actually my friend, those sessions are more unofficial” (G31A307).*

There can be several communities of ayahuasca users identified in the Czech Republic. However, relations between their members are not always so tight and lasting. Anyway, if they are, we think it has a positive impact on the integration of their experiences. More so if the rituals are shared with family members.

Some organizers send people in their directories invitations to planned events. After signing in, new candidates typically receive email instructions. In addition to information on the time and place of the ritual, they also contain a list of foods that must be left out of the menu (see subchapter 11.8).

However, there is not always enough information from the facilitators who send an invitation to the ritual.<sup>36</sup> This is illustrated by the following narrative of a university student who decided to participate in the ritual to get rid of the trauma of rape:

*“I was totally confused because Marie called me one day at the beginning of July sometimes around 8 pm., if I was interested and I had to make a quick decision because there was a limited number of places, and I thought it was... like something that I’m looking for, so I agreed.*

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<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the lack of awareness of participants may imply problems when using ayahuasca (see subchapter 3.3)



*Moreover, I think she was telling me in the interview that it was good to follow the diet a month before and a month after. So, I roughly said when the term is.*

*I say: 'You know, I've been waiting for some email or information.' Nothing came.*

*Then there were a few of confused emails as a group e-mail from Marie where there was a terrible amount of information in one paragraph without proper commas, dots. So, I didn't really know where it belonged. Then another email came from someone else correcting the information.*

*So, I didn't answer immediately because I was at work and I do not like to (...) deal with personal things there. At that time, it was weird there and I was afraid someone could denounce me or something like that, so I did not even want to solve such a topic in the workplace.*

*I came (...) home and there had already had an email saying: 'You didn't respond in time, so you have 2 days.' It was a bit... You know" (G46A535–539).*

### 11.3 Effects of Ayahuasca

In a wide range of codes attributed to the “effects of ayahuasca”, one of the three most frequent code families that emerged from the analysis of interviews with our informants, the majority is related to the description of subjective effects.<sup>37</sup>

In informants' narratives, we can see interesting statements in this context, e.g. that ayahuasca works independently of the socio-cultural environment, shows people better aspect of their personality and the problems they are suffering from or it causes changes in the self-concept.

Interestingly, according to the informants it also improves perception of one's own body and in self-reflection, it amplifies empathy and activates self-healing processes. Informants also confirm that they cause typical physiological reactions such as diarrhea and vomiting. Some of them described us their visions, which may have a therapeutic effect (for details see subchapter 11.5.1).

#### 11.3.1 Subjective Effects

A wide range of subjective effects that users attribute ayahuasca can be categorized according to intensity, duration, quality and symptoms. As for the intensity, users describe the effects of ayahuasca predominantly fast regarding its onset, strong, and quite difficult to manage. However, others stress that the effects of ayahuasca can be controlled and influenced by free will.

Regarding the duration, the effects of preparation vary from one individual to another. Nevertheless, several users agree that they are long term and it is possible to feel the effect even after the ritual.

A forty-four-year-old IT specialist who participated in the rituals of Milan Burian described her experience as follows:

*"I was a bit afraid because it was till late night in Prague and I thought, as I had the experience that I felt sick of it... I was not even able to stand on my feet, I was crawling*

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<sup>37</sup> The research of subjective effects after ingestion of ayahuasca has previously been dealt with by Riba et al. (2001) and Ribeiro Barbosa et al. (2005).

*on all four... So, I wanted to stay in a hotel somewhere close when I came back and I am able to get there... And finally, it was actually like that I had not felt anything before I arrived at the hotel...*" (G22A77).

Depending on the quality, the effects can simply be divided into positive and negative. For example, it may seem negative that after the ingestion of ayahuasca, a person may experience the worst fear in life like some of our informants. However, experience with ayahuasca does not necessarily have to be a *bad trip*. The informants narrate that the positive effects of ayahuasca include inducing physiological cleansing, influencing motivation, facilitating upbringing and learning (Tupper, 2003). Furthermore, it can also trigger an ecstatic experience and cause more intense perception of nature and a sense of belonging.<sup>38</sup> As stated in subchapter 11.8.1, the argument made by an informant that the use of ayahuasca in pregnancy does not have a negative health impact can be considered controversial.

As for the different symptoms, ayahuasca ingestion may lead to nausea, headache, diarrhea, vomiting, and distorted perception of time. The effects of ayahuasca do not always involve visions. According to some informants, ayahuasca produces images, visual hallucinations, unconscious contents, (ambivalent) emotions, and sometimes even dreams that can be remembered easily, as users attach particular importance to them. This is illustrated by the following narrative:

*"It was like an insight into very deep layers of memory, and I just had one vivid dream that was not lucid in the sense that I could influence it, but it was more valuable, right? (...) Because it was one of the moments I see as if it was yesterday... It was also one of the few dreams I remember just because... I didn't fall asleep, ok? Really... All those three sessions I felt as if the liana... as if it entered every cell, and especially the third one, I felt like I burned it normally, yeah. (...) I feel that what comes out of the people during vomiting and by the bottom, came out of me with the help of tears and something like... internally I... I really had a feeling for an hour that I melt like a lead or some metal... as if I had to melt from inside. I felt like a furnace..."* (G25A227).

When ayahuasca is administered during the day, its influence on introspection lowers according to the informants. This may be due to an increase in visual effects of the preparation in daylight. A 31-year-old Polish IT specialist stated that:

*"During the day when it is beautiful outside, one can go out and just spend time on the grass in private, but I think it has less effect on the introspection. The introspection is not so strong, because the darkness makes you lie there in the bed or on the mattress and focus on yourself. The light seems to be disturbing. More... there are more sensations, so the introspection is just weaker..."* (G37A271).

When informants talk about the effects of ayahuasca in connection with its therapeutic potential, they report that the preparation influences self-conception. In our opinion, this is clear from the following narrative:

*"Also, in those visions, I saw myself sitting from the back, and I realized... at that moment, that I would really like to embrace everyone and love them, but that I am very strict about myself and that I am not doing it"* (G21A325).

<sup>38</sup> However, as brilliantly wrote Smith (2000, 27), "ecstasy is not fun." In this context, Richards (2014, 22) refers to "the condensed agony and personal suffering experienced by many persons as they struggle through their psychodynamic forms of resistance towards the Divine and as they view their past failings in life in the light of experiences of unconditional love."

Ayahuasca experiences may also be affirmative in nature. It can create awareness and acceptance of reality, such as in the case of sexual identity (Cavnar, 2014).

In any case, the effect of the preparation is rather a result of the different synergistic circumstances in which it is used, than just the influence of chemicals that are contained therein. The efficacy of ayahuasca is tied to a subsequent change in patterns of behavior, *“because if one reverts to the same as usual, so... they can just drink it every Friday and well... nothing changes, huh? Yeah, so this is such an... indicator of what you can change... but then you must do it yourself, because no substance will do it for you”* (G14A630–638).

According to the informants, the incidence of ayahuasca effects is not dependent on the socio-cultural environment, although it can be perceived more intensely in the original conditions of tropical rain forest. In any case, it does not mean that the *set* and *setting* does not influence the way the effects are manifested (see subchapter 3.3) and that the effects are not affected by diet (see subchapter 11.8). This is evidenced by the following narrative of one informant:

*“Yeah, like that ... it’s just how it works. So, there is no (...) geolocation limitation of the effect of that transmitter. I don’t think so. It works, but as to what extent it would be better in that place, I don’t know. There are people who just go there (to South America, authors’ note) to those ceremonies... to be there for two or three weeks, but I think it is partly more (...) about their ego that wants to experience it just in the right environment...”* (G17A345).

The effects of ayahuasca are also affected by the awareness and readiness of a user. In this context, one informant says:

*“When I drank it for the first time, and I didn’t know anything about ayahuasca... I didn’t read anything... just a little right before that it could cause death... so I was scared and went to the hydrocolon in advance...”* (G38A351).

The effects of ayahuasca are individual and, according to some informants, to some extent not transferable. This can have a negative impact on the integration of experience and the deterioration of interpersonal relationships, as demonstrated by the following narrative:

*“Well, actually, as I started to use it, I was really excited, and I told my aunt about it. I thought she was the only person who could understand it, and she was really scared of me. She started to think I was on drugs and that I was completely crazy, and I have changed and so on. But it took a while, and now it’s coming back a little bit... it has a negative impact on our relationship, but it was not just this. That was the whole thing that happened...”* (G15A1409).

Such a situation can only be temporary and may be based on an increased need for social isolation, which may contribute to addressing the most pressing problems.

## 11.4 Spirituality

The spirituality of informants can be characterized as non-religious because their narratives prove that they are resistance to institutionalized churches and distrust of dogmas. Appropriately, this is illustrated by the following narrative of twenty-five-year-old postwoman at the time of our interview on maternity leave:

*“I believe somehow on my own that there is something upon me which protects me, that I have my guardian angel who care for me, and that is probably all. A wedding in the church we had, but as we would go to church or not, so that no” (G12A41).*

Some informants reported they believe in themselves, in God, in the cosmic intelligence, in higher energy, or in nature. Others understand the world as it is revived by spiritual power. Some informants may be characterized by apocalyptic thinking.<sup>39</sup> In some informants, animistic beliefs are intermingled with Catholic. Others tend to (Zen) Buddhism, Judaism, or Sufism. For instance, one of the informants narrated that:

*“Well, it can’t be pigeonholed, of course. It isn’t possible to say that I’m a Catholic or a Buddhist or ... or a Jew, but I’m closest to Buddhism... I’m closest to Buddhism. I believe in the cosmic intelligence, that there is an order of all that is happening, that everything has its reason, that everything is as it should be for some reasons. I believe that in the present second and present moment we create the next seconds and minutes by our thoughts, as they will look, so I believe in the law of action and reaction. I believe in karma, I believe there is good and evil in people” (G28A39).*

Some informants believe that it is possible to communicate with plants at the emotional level. They believe in the supernatural energy and multidimensionality of human life. A detailed characteristic of the beliefs of those with whom we had the opportunity to record an interview is included in the next chapter.

### 11.4.1 Faith

*“I’m a believer, but I don’t belong to any religion. If it’s possible to say so, yeah. Well, and aya[huaasca] brought me that faith,”* one informant explained and mentioned the transformational potential of ayahuasca (G19A33).<sup>40</sup>

*“The whole process is about a return to faith from my point of view,”* she further narrates that. *“I understand it from that. (...) My dad was an atheist, and my mother was an evangelist, but I never believed her, so I had a very divergent views about religion. I later had many contacts with the Catholic Church when I was singing and playing music there. I had believers around and I was in touch with that (religion, authors’ note), but they didn’t convince me at all. On the contrary, there was... a stronger resistance in me. However, it is quite logical in countries like ours” (G19A45–53).*

Another informant thinks about religion in the similar way. A thirty-two-year-old entrepreneur described himself as a fan of the infamous, but very popular Petr Chobot, who is currently organizing expeditions to the Amazon, just like some of our informants. He told us about his conviction:

*“Personally, I regard each religion as a certain instrument of power. Notwithsatnding, what I identify with is that Jeshua... like Jesus ... existed. Just the stories we actually notice that are intermingling in different religions, I see quite broken on that side... so they could use it for themselves. Also, if we would look at it from the other side... looking into the depth of Christianity ... I certainly do not identify with the fact that there is*

<sup>39</sup> A remarkable contribution to apocalyptic thinking among ayahuasca users was published by Nemu (2016).

<sup>40</sup> As reported by Ellens (2014), other psychoactive substances and preparations also have this potential.

*a Holy Trinity, right? I don't even agree that Christ is a Christian... Moreover, you have perhaps heard of Christ in the Amazon..." (G24A97).*

Similarly, thirty-three-year-old wellness worker told us: *"Although no one led me to that, so I came to it alone in a different way... whether it was Buddhism or Christianity, it was mixed. I kept looking for something mine. (...) Actually, everything is the same, so I ended up in essence, and that is nature. (...) During the ayahuasca ritual, it was completely explained to me. It was like a lesson and I have no reason to doubt anything, because I know that everything is one whole, actually, and it is nature... It is all unity here" (G33A35–39).*

Another narrative of incidentally same old informant in our opinion aptly illustrates what the institutionalized spirituality is based on:

*"The world works in much more complex way than we think, and I certainly don't believe in any religious ideology, but there is something that goes beyond us or what we are part of" (G40A29).*

Some informants view the use of ayahuasca can be a way of finding their spirituality. Whereas others believe that its transformational potential can be a hidden threat because it can be misused. The 43-year-old psychotherapist described it as follows:

*"The fact that such experiences are very authentic, does not even mean they are true. If someone just because they see their death and their past lives or other universes believe they exist, then it certainly poses danger. (...) For me, as a skeptic, anybody trying to convince someone that it really is like that, to believe in it, seems dangerous. Also, it is possible here (...) because the experience is very convincing... So, I think a good shaman or the one who leads the ritual is essentially not convincing anyone or does not foist any conclusions and if so... if those rituals would lead someone that would try to convince others what... what the experience means, so it could be a tool of very effective manipulation. (...) Well, I think that even a decent sect could be established on that" (G34A381).*

According to some of our informants, faith is relative. This is illustrated by the narrative of the Polish organizer Mateusz Kowalski, who answered our question about his religious conviction: *"Hm... Well, it depends on whom I'm talking to. When it is someone that is strong, very rigid and strict ... who has a firm conviction on these things, and it would be hard for me to connect with this person... when we have different beliefs and he has a firm mind... a solid .... strong conviction... which he or she does not change, so I do not hold this belief, because it doesn't matter to me. It is just a belief. (...) So, I believe this way. When I talk to people, I believe every conviction they have and at the same time I do not believe them. (...) For me, it is more about the connection with people than about belief" (G45A143–163).*

One of the informants, who uses ayahuasca together with her husband and two sons has notable ideas. She narrated that: *"I started thinking differently in 1986, when my dad died, yeah... And suddenly I started thinking about other things, you know? Before, I mocked how someone could believe in God, right? I was simply materialist and due to the sudden death of the father, yeah... I started thinking [differently]. (...) I was baptized, but I don't like Catholics, Christians, a lot. However, I believe in something... rather the Indian way. (...) Red road. It is just like that I believe... that I pray every day to cardinal directions, to the world's directions, the Creator and the Mother Earth" (G38A79–91).<sup>41</sup>*

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<sup>41</sup> The term "Red Road" is used by New Age sympathizers and hippies to denote their own interpretation of the spirituality of First Nations. Critics accuse them of appropriating foreign culture and its misinterpretation (McGaa, 2009).

At the beginning of ayahuasca rituals, some organizers opened the so-called healing circle.<sup>42</sup> Its sense was explained to us by one financial adviser in the following narrative:

*“The healing circle is actually a method to connect with existence through what is here, it means four elements ... It’s the earth, fire, water and air here in this reality... And each of them represents something... Earth represents... matter, human body, planet Earth. Fire represents light, power, clarity, vision... Water represents emotions, feelings, and air represents the detached view and indeed the ability to reason. These four directions are represented in us, not only in everything that exists but also in the human body. So, when one opens the healing circle, all of their aspects open to learning. (...) Then, the gate of earth opens as well, which represents our ancestors and the past, and the gate of the universe that symbolizes other parallel realities... Moreover, one may ask about who made it possible for all these elements to be present, to protect them... And the last, is heart as the heart of the universe. Our heart, that there is the approval of our heart with this process because it changes you. So, one voluntarily enters this process where all these beings are involved and opens to be changed if it’s necessary...” (G31A145).*

A twenty-three-year-old student explained to us the spiritual reasons of absence during a diet that is recommended in connection with participation in the ritual, as it is following affects the effects of ayahuasca. He narrated that: *“In order to assimilate all this... the experience you... [had], it’s recommended to adhere to that ... for example, celibacy, because during sexual intercourse, the energies of the two people are essentially transformed. However, the energy is basically the life energy, so you are losing the energy in that... during the intercourse, you are taking the energy of ayahuasca that works. It’s the same with alcohol. If you don’t respect the diet before, then you will suffer during the ceremony. You won’t suffer that much after that but you will basically stop what you have achieved during the ceremony... It won’t continue.... (...) It seems to be important what happens later... during the subsequent period and if you respect the diet” (G17A289).*

Most of the informants—in addition to being convinced of past lives and the influence of ancestors on human deeds—also believe in rebirth. As narrated by a thirty-four-year-old journalist, eclecticism and fatalism is also typical:

*“Lately, what gives me a sense is what Ivanka Adamcová says. She says that everything is programmed in our soul before one is born and that we have little will to change something. There are a lot of points to go through, and we learn how to do that from life experiences and that it is important not to deny what is going on, but to accept it, and thus it may change somehow. (...) Moreover, I think there is something like a power, which is like God, love or universe. I don’t know how to say that. (...) It really seems to me that in life there are points that I just have to meet, whether I want to or do not, and that even if I get somewhere else (...) by my will, through the different people, it will push me in that place where I’m supposed to be. (...) So, I believe in reincarnation, the fact that we actually plan our future, and such a major idea is that everything is good. Like this way” (G35A47).*

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<sup>42</sup> This method is traditional among some native North American ethnic groups such as Ojibwe or Lakota (Horák, 2014).

As confirmed by the narrative of the facilitator of rituals organized by Santiago Hernández, who participated in the Santo Daime ceremonies in Brazil, psychoactive substances can influence the form of beliefs. She told us:

*“We went to Rio Branco, and everything took another turn. I was so at the bottom that I have spent whole day... I read some... book of a Sufi mystic and I prayed the whole day. (...) And then it came... They call it miracao, experience. (...) It’s like a miracle. Suddenly, the images in that church revived and I felt the unspeakable welfare and that the best hypothesis I had about life is (...) right. We’re actually coming back here somehow. However, other experiences came to my mind. Those, when once I ... It was with mushrooms for change. Suddenly, there was no... When I woke up from such an initial confusion... Suddenly, there was no Jana at all, but only in one’s consciousness” (G43A179–203).*

Similarly, one of the informants, an IT specialist who has had experience with psychoactive substances narrated that:

*“I believe the universe is an organism that has a fractal or recurrent structure and at every level of the structure, I see repetitive patterns, designs... Also, it is just intelligence and we are cells in that organism trying to find our path... In my opinion, this path leads us to accept that we are cells and not as separate units in that system” (G37A35).*

The world view of some of our informants could be characterized as holistic. It demonstrates the narrative of Jan Novák, who organizes the ayahuasca rituals with his wife of Brazilian descent: *“I, thanks to Márcia, who works with the body (as a physiotherapist, authors’ note) and has been working with ayahuasca for 12 years, just as I did... I don’t distinguish between spirituality, matter, mind, spirits. For me, it’s one unit, about which I have to care” (G39A325).*

## 11.5 Healing

Regarding “healing” sometimes informants say that it is “work”.<sup>43</sup> They want to express the effort that must be made to overcome the repugnant taste of ayahuasca and unpleasant somatic effects. At the same time, they say that healing is “a process”, a long-term issue that is not only about the rapid removal of symptoms, but about finding causes of illness and awareness of problems. One single, twenty-six-year-old painter, told us, for example:

*“This way I have discovered many problems that I inherited from my family... As for high blood pressure when I had to use pills when I was 18. However, simply by the process of healing, by drinking medicine, I have discovered that it is the energy that is taken from generation to generation, [transmitted] to the feminine gender. Of course, it was behind what I learned... [that] it comes from my great-grandmother. However, it’s getting better and better. It manifested itself particularly in the fact that I didn’t manage nervousness” (G02A77).*

A doctoral student told us: *“[Ayahuasca] heals itself. Nevertheless, it’s also about self-acceptance. How one accepts it matters” (G15A1495).*

The informants are convinced that many diseases are psychosomatic. For example, a twenty-three-year-old student stressed that:

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<sup>43</sup> In Spanish-speaking countries, the term “trabajo” is commonly used as a figurative designation for ayahuasca ceremonies.

*“I noticed that among people who shared with me. They had complexes (...) and it helped the most of them... or they were able to clarify many things this way. Also, if we take it like that, yeah... though it may be somehow spiritual that they realize something, the mind is of course inherently connected with physiology...” (G23A273).*

According to informants, psychosomatic diseases are caused by internal programming of human beings. For instance, repeating the same maladaptive patterns of behavior that cause health issues (e.g. suppressing sadness, addiction).

The thirty-five-year-old surveyor, who used ayahuasca for relational problems and had gone through both psychotherapy and dark therapy in the past, commented on that in his narrative as follows:

*“I think I have poorly learned some patterns. Well, it is just like doing nothing until my mother says... And I had that with my wife too. She told me to do something, but I didn’t until she would repeat it up to eighteen times. Then, she would say that she didn’t want to be like my mother. She clearly saw all patterns of behaviours as if she were my mother” (G08A439).*

A Dutch therapist, Arnold Uhlenbeck, explains the efficacy of ayahuasca as follows: *“[Ayahuasca] heals a lot on the level of emotional body and mind structures. Also, physically, because physical problems sometimes come from traumas” (G18A653).*

A Polish organizer, Mateusz Kowalski explained that: *“[Ayahuasca] can change steady habits of the mind, deep unconscious programs, and ultimately there is a chance for someone to change their behavior” (G45A1054).*

The facilitator of rituals led by Milan Burian has added a remarkable comment:

*“All diseases arise from the way we think about ourselves and about the world, how we understand ourselves. If we realize that we are part of the existence or not... and that is what ayahuasca can do. That we are part of that existence, that we are obviously its integral part. The more people understand that they are totally integral, necessary, the more will be healthier. So, I think that is why it cures” (G31A355).*

A twenty-seven-year-old therapist, who participated in Jan Novák’s rituals, said in the same context: *“The therapeutic potential has what ... what’s going on thanks to it. She (ayahuasca, authors’ note) contains a variety of substances and so on, but in practice what she does with you [is] that she really... gets you into alpha waves. Well, and you will experience it... your life without your mind, without your own limitations. Someone is just afraid to go to kindergarten, and that fear stays inside of him. Also, through that fear he filters his reality. Moreover, he is just afraid to go to the café. There are people who would be afraid of going out. (...) Ayahuasca is like power. (...) She has her consciousness and vibration. Every plant has its own consciousness. Vibration, harmony and... but she will tune you into her frequency” (G42A193–425).*

In general, informants are convinced that ayahuasca helps people to look at reality from a different perspective and to understand their multilayeredness, to deviate from the stereotype and to be self- focused. Furthermore, in solving relational problems, detoxification and, last but not least, regeneration of the organism. It improves immunity, experiences emotions, body perception, attention, self-esteem, organization of life and contributes to the development of talent. Also, it increases empathy, concentration, self-awareness, awareness of inner freedom, and can lead to finding a sense of life. As mentioned above, it makes changes in self-concept. It also



eliminates negative thoughts, prejudices, reproaches, arrogance, aggression, egoism and fear.

Notable is the potential use of ayahuasca in the palliative care of patients who suffer from an incurable disease at an advanced or terminal stage (Ellens, 2009; González et al., 2017). It can provide the user with an opportunity to have a near-death experience (abbrev. NDE) and thus alleviate their concern (Liestner, 2013). Our oldest informant described such an experience with a typical sense of humor. She spoke of it as follows:

*“So, I’ve been through the funeral... I was fine, right? I was looking at my funeral and suddenly... I thought I was leaving the phone and it suddenly rang. Eva Svobodová was just calling me, and that shaman then told me: ‘Oh yeah. Those people don’t let you even die’” (G43A2088–2093).*

Informants ascribe ayahuasca efficacy in the treatment of chronic pain as it facilitates coping, in respiratory disorders, asthma, allergies, atopic dermatitis, functional diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, Lyme borreliosis, adenoids infections, mental disorders (e.g. depression, paranoia, anxiety), addiction, multiple sclerosis, and cancer. The informants argued that it also allows integrating the experience of an altered state of consciousness induced by psychoactive substances. The therapeutic potential of ayahuasca is discussed in more detail in the following subchapter.

### 11.5.1 Therapeutic Potential of Ayahuasca

*“My life is divided into before and after ayahuasca” (G37A31).*

Ayahuasca users have very diverse ideas about its therapeutic potential. As stated in subchapter 11.3, ayahuasca acts independently of socio-cultural environment. However, this does not mean that it would be applied to therapeutic purpose in all contexts that it is used. It implies that, unlike the effects, the therapeutic potential is dependent on the context.

Furthermore, it can not be claimed that the intensity of the effects would be directly proportional to the therapeutic effect attributed to ayahuasca by the user. This confirms the following narrative:

*“Yeah, I definitely felt that... his energy (healers’, authors’ note) I felt it, but it didn’t work in my case the same as in others, or as it usually works, as you’re consciously influenced by aya[huasca]. It wasn’t like that... It was much weaker for me than for other participants I talked to. (...) It’s probably a good thing that... it was weaker. (...) What I wanted to change has changed. (...) Even though I felt bad at the beginning, then... then now I don’t think it was a bad thing, or it would be inferior because it helped me” (G23A229).*

According to some informants, ayahuasca is a panacea. For instance, it has a universal or broad-spectrum therapeutic potential). It illustrates the following narrative:

*“So, usually the first ceremony is about diagnosing the problem... And then it continues with healing based on occasional drinking of ayahuasca, and ingestion of some plant remedy following the diet... So, I think it has a potential to heal anything in this context” (G44A917–925).*

One professional soldier answered to our question on what type of disease could be treated by ayahuasca: *“As for depressions, it’s 100% sure. That is perfect. Also, all these different mental blocks and – how shall I say – a negative view of life. So, of course, mental and physical [challenges]. I think in this case it will also be efficient. For example, my back stopped hurting at a ceremony. I have unblocked it. Also, I suffer from such pain often. So, I think it has a universal healing potential”* (G20A235).

In the same vein, a forty-four-year-old restorer of paintings and polychrome sculptures narrated that:

*“People solve everything this way. (...) Or not everything, but some inner problems, right. (...) Let there be some detachment from someone, from something or some disease or [their] relationships. (...) Basically, it’s therapeutic”* (G14A616–620).

A 32-year-old entrepreneur suffering from problematic alcohol use said: *“It’s more about working on yourself, okay? I found out that I had some pain because it was like my stuff... I had unresolved things, you know? Ayahuasca helped me a lot in this sense because I started... as if I got into myself and I experienced some negative fears, the worries I have had in my life, right? From childhood to the addiction, the nerves of exams at college, and such things, to mention but a few. So, it scanned me completely”* (G11A54).

A twenty-one-year university student said:

*“Well, it’s important to me from that point of view. I do not know yet what path I want to choose in my life. Even though I’m pretty sure now, but it could still help me in that... show me how to continue. What [to do] exactly, if I say that like this... exactly, I would say clearly, what my mission is”* (G04A126).

In another place, she added:

*“I would like to go again. I feel like the healing process that has begun isn’t over yet. I still need to solve many issues, and I believe that ayahuasca can help me in different ways”* (G04A98).

A first-year university student told us:

*“I take it as a way to heal and to know oneself and your (...) instincts, because she (ayahuasca, authors’s note) is like a mentor, but at the same time I’m essentially becoming independent only”* (G17A151).

A thirty-eight-year-old architect sees the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca as follows: *“Maybe the vine helps to dissolve delusions... because people are pretty stuck in different beliefs. (...) The more delusions, the more they vomit”* (G13A823–827).

According to ayahuasca users, it can be used especially in the treatment of various mental disorders. It confirms the narrative of a postwoman on the maternity leave. She told us: *“It has changed my view of myself and on the whole. I began to perceive it differently. Importantly, I began to perceive myself differently. (...) And so I calmed down though, I’d say. (...) I was pretty aggressive, and I’m starting to realize it a lot. I just think about it... I just think more about it... and I’m trying not to behave like that and think about why... why the kids are screaming or why they are like that and... and so, yes”* (G12A323–369).

As promising seems the application of ayahuasca in case of eating disorders, e.g. anorexia nervosa (Soler et al., 2016). Its use can lead to a change in eating habits. One informant says in this context:

*“I think schizophrenia could be treated in this way. Any instability or such states, some kind of hysteria, choleric [mood] or explosiveness, definitely aggression, you*

*know... Even bulimia and all those... (eating disorders, authors' note). I think most of the problems could be solved that way, or at least it would help you, because if you help the psychic component, then it works alone...*" (G23A289–293).

As already mentioned, in chapter 6, ayahuasca is useful in the treatment of drug addiction, as it relieves cravings. An informant confirmed that: *"Since then, roughly after the fourth ayahuasca, the craving sensation disappeared. I had strong cravings for alcohol, sometimes for methamphetamine and weed, and I do not feel it anymore"* (G11A38).

*"There was nothing to get me out of it. I've tried everything. Fighting sports, football, girls... Absolutely everything. Always for a moment. As for this herb, I perceive long-term growth, the joy of life, completely different. (...) I neither feel addicted nor have cravings. I know about myself that I'm addicted, but that addiction no longer affects my private life, yeah. Hand tremors, fears of people, all of this has passed away, yeah. I've had quite a lot of paranoia, depressions, yeah. So ayahuasca completely changed me, it changed my mind. I'm pretty much stress-free today. I'm doing a lot better in my work, in my private life, so the therapeutic usability is enormous, in my life or my case it was great"* (G11A87–G11A150).

The previously mentioned surveyor describes a similar experience. He narrated: *"I've been smoking for some time before, then not, and so different. In the summer, I smoked so easily as with beer and packed [tobacco]. Cigarettes, I did get cigarettes taste, but tobacco. It's just because of those ceremonies and diets, I've found out that I can be without it. So, that is how I ... stopped smoking. I've found out that I can do it without coffee, and I haven't been drinking it anymore since then"* (G08A512).

Another informant who suffered from a similar type of problem recalled in his narrative the synergistic effect that diet has when using ayahuasca. He mentioned: *"The need to keep the diet, together with those processes of vomiting and cleansing, helped me get rid of smoking addiction. I didn't smoke cigarettes, but water pipes quite often"* (G26A175).

As the following narrative demonstrates, the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca is independent of motivation. A forty-five-year-old graphic artist, who is a former facilitator of Daniel Quispe's rituals, told us:

*"Although [people] are looking for various things, I think that the healing will always be there, whether on a psychic or physical level"* (G44A909).

However, another narrative confirms that the motivation of an individual to treatment is directly proportional to the therapeutic effect of ayahuasca:

*"In order for the healing effect to occur, then the dependence must be unwanted by the client or patient in this case. There must be a very strong internal conflict, which the (...) patient solves as he's just addicted to something that he doesn't want to, and it's bothering him and he's fighting it. Then... then I believe the healing effect can be enormous"* (G34A375).

Similarly thinks a 40-year-old businessman when he says in his narrative:

*"Of course, the effect of ayahuasca is greater than the trouble you face. The greater the problems this man has, the more see the shift. If there is someone who is relatively alright, and nothing is bothering him, so it is practically only recreational as to try something, then of course that effect won't be so impressive. But if there is a man who is at the end of his rope and who doesn't know where [to go], and virtually can't... can't*

*go lower, he can't get into a worse situation, so the effect is enormous, that is a bungee effect, right? It will ... it will... it will shoot you completely, completely into another world view. It is going to change you, you'll know, you'll start living according to it and it's going to be incomparable"* (G28A231).

The positive effect of using ayahuasca is described by a thirty-four-year-old informant, the married mother of two children who suffered from heroin addiction in the past:

*"Actually, I have learned that the moment you decide to go to ayahuasca... as if you are ordering there... at that moment you are connected to the vine's energy and it is starting to work... that before you are going there, you feel... you feel the changes. Sometimes it is as useless temper, sometimes it's like a total tuning. But the most beautiful is actually the feeling you have during the first month after the ceremony. When in fact you are absolutely connected to yourself, to nature, to the universe, to everything. Simply balanced. Happy, satisfied. Everything is how it should be. And this, this feeling I need. I wanted it again. I absolutely didn't have necessity... to solve something there. It was rather that I wanted to recover a peace of mind"* (G09A52).

Although ayahuasca users may have the need to participate repeatedly in rituals, it is impossible to talk about addiction in case of this preparation (Fábregas et al., 2010). Before describing the benefits of ayahuasca, a thirty-three-year-old economist added the following:

*"It's not always comfortable and talking about some addiction is totally misleading because who would drink it if you don't feel well, yeah. So, for me the benefit is... I distinguish and see several benefits at different levels. I would say mostly at a physical level. I stopped identifying so much with my body, right? Previously it was: 'Jesus, my tooth is hurting me, I've a cold...,' and I was sick of it and everything was wrong. And now, of course, it's unpleasant, that is clear, but just as I've gone through these unpleasant conditions, I'm not sticking with it that much... Well, it's just OK. I'm sick, and what?"* (G26A343).

A long-time friend of the above cited informant, with whom we were also able to speak, added: *"I believe this is the fast way of knowing oneself. That's why we are here. We should all find what we really are. And to remove all these hypocrisies and masks, because terribly many people are wearing a lot of masks"* (G10A245).

One psychotherapist has added the following information on this topic: *"It must... it must help in training that inner attention at all. Whether I would be something like meditation or just learning to work with your emotions or to change your moods. (...) If anyone wants to learn such a thing, then this will surely help"* (G34A377).

In this connection, Arnold Uhlenbeck expressed himself as follows: *"Sometimes people say: OK, I've had one year's therapy. A weekend with ayahuasca is enough for me to feel the same effect"* (G18A1045).

In chapter 7, we have stated that the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca lies in the treatment of depression. As previously mentioned, restorer stated, *"if aren't really hitting the wall... the ground and don't vomit all night long in spasm, then it mostly (...) show you a better side of you, right?"* (G14A293).

Similarly, another informant, who is currently working in marketing stressed that: *"If you aren't able to solve something by yourself, then this is really a powerful support. It is possible to work with intentions, so that the energy can be directed in some way. (...)*

*From my own experience I know that ayahuasca would definitely help people who may be struggling with stress, depression or maybe feel... some vanity in their lives, and so... I think ayahuasca can help people or guide them in some ways. It shows them that life is actually fine” (G21A587–603).*

A postgraduate student adds: *“She shows you... you’re seeing you from above, what you are doing in your everyday life” (G15A135).*

The therapeutic potential of ayahuasca may be based on memory recall. A twenty-two-year-old architect who participated in the rituals of Luis Zambrano told us:

*“In the second phase, the healer mentioned that in advance, there may be some images from the past. They can be. And that was what I experienced. They were drawn in the slightest detail. Only by looking at the past, it was like if I’ve just found some problems in myself” (G06A282).*

Arnold Uhlenbeck, inspired by the thoughts of Carl Gustav Jung and Stanislav Grof, is convinced that ayahuasca helps solve transgenerational problems and heal the circle of life (Shalit, 2017). He explained to us the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca:

*“Ayahuasca heals memories. We have memories. (...) But we have memories at different levels. The first level includes those memories you will remember when you return back to the age when you were 4, 5 years old. This is true for most people. (...) For example, for some people who have had sex trauma since they were 7 or 8 years old, or they don’t remember it because their memories disappeared. Also, it is also true in case of painful memories that we tend to... (illustratively sweeps the crumbs under the table cloth, authors’ note). (...) Then when you drink ayahuasca... [they will appear]. And I say: ‘Look!’ So ayahuasca primarily heals memories. Memories at this level. But these memories go back to 4 years ... Sometimes to 3. But for the period before three years of age, we don’t have memories. This is true for most people. However, the memories are there! We have memories like newborns, like children. (...) Then there is another level of memories that extend to the moment of conception. Every memory you have, starting at conception and ending with the present is stored [in your memory]. When you drink [ayahuasca], the gates of unconsciousness open and the memories from this level penetrate consciousness. However, memories [from the collective unconscious] also enter there” (G18A1061–1119).*

In the context of the treatment of functional diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, the following narrative of an informant who at the time of our interview passed through approximately 15 ayahuasca rituals seems interesting:

*“From my experience... I will talk about myself, because I can’t talk about anyone else, yeah... It helped me with psychological problems, breathing difficulties, I’ve grown young again. Yeah, my physiologic reserves are much larger. Yeah, and my mind and mainly the intestines, I had a terrible belly and stomach aches, you know. I had heartburn, increased acidity of an organism and things like that, and since then I have it no more since then” (G11A154).*

Another informant ascribes the efficacy of ayahuasca in the treatment of lymphadenitis. He told us: *“I think it’s one of the tools that can help in the healing and therapy of any illness. I would say every disease is born in the energetic body and then its manifestation in the physical body is only as a result of weakening the energetic body somewhere either in chakras or, of course, in meridians and other such lanes... I myself had problems with the lymph glands in legs essentially due to some block and in one night I was able to remove it...” (G24A439).*

As for the potential treatment of asthma by ayahuasca, Arnold Uhlenbeck explained to us its cause as follows: *“When you cure the trauma, physical problems will disappear. For example, asthma is usually associated with the moment of your first breath. (...) So, when you cure your birth trauma, asthma can disappear”* (G18A657–661)

As we have already mentioned in subchapter 3.1, harmine contained in ayahuasca increases the number of nerve progenitor cells, i.e. cells that enable neurons to form. The following narrative is an allusion to this recent discovery:

*“[Ayahuasca] is looking for new ways in the brain, yeah. She regenerates everything. (...) As new connections. When there is some... that can’t be recovered. She doesn’t have supernatural abilities, so she finds some alternative to make it work”* (G38A531).

## 11.6 Motivation

There are no individuals among our informants who would abuse the psychoactive ayahuasca. Their approach is not purely instrumental. On the contrary, like South American natives, they consider it sacred. They personify it as a teacher or guide with an independent will and intelligence that needs to be treated with respect, and they ask it for advice (Kriegová, 1970).

Apart from exceptions, there are no people who would tend to self-medication in order to overcome mental discomfort (see subchapter 11.7.1). Our informants generally use ayahuasca under a professional supervision, mostly for curiosity / experiment, personal development and self-knowledge, or healing.

A 24-year-old psychologist explained her reasons for using ayahuasca:

*“Um, I was just curious. Curious what it could give me. Also, it was a pressure being with the people I met at the ceremony. They were... How to describe it? Incredibly calm, balanced, and they were extremely nice. I liked it. At that time, I didn’t feel like a quiet man. (...) I’m a highly emotional person. Such as... I don’t know how to describe it. It was such a wild river. So, I longed for the tranquility I saw in them... the harmony I saw there”* (G03A93).

The 36-year-old mayor said: *“It’s like... I’ve always been interested in ayahuasca because after previous experiences with psychedelic substances that have changed my life fundamentally (...) it seemed to be at the top of all this, of course. (...) But also generally. (...) If one collects information, there are so many interesting things! (...) However, when I went to the first session, the most important reason was the cleansing at that moment. However, not even physical, but rather mental cleansing and dealing with some difficult fates. Also, especially, I wanted to... It was as if I would consciously want to be hit, to make that purge to be cleansed from my wrong deeds”* (G01A15).

Regarding the motivation, one farmer told us: *“I haven’t seen that there would be some junkies for new experiences, absolutely not... It’s even impossible to do that for this reason (...) Who would want to (...) vomit because of the experience, right? When they want to be in a good mood, so they rather take something else, some chemical drug... I haven’t experienced any ecstasy or anything like that... As people describe it, it may be fun if you drink all night. What about sitting with a bucket, turning your stomach upside down and staying in the toilet? Yeah, for me it has always been about cleansing. (...) I just sat on the toilet and it flew out of me up and down, right? So, it’s definitely not something that one would like to experience just for the fun of it”* (G32A75).

## 11.7 Use of Psychoactive Substances

Some of the interviewees have experience with psychoactive substances (e.g. MDMA, LSD, DMT, ketamine or heroin). These are individuals who tended to use different substances in the past for entertainment. Currently, they can be, however, considered “responsible users” similarly as other informants. As alrier stated in chapter 7, it is because their motivation is different. In the next chapter, we focus on their personal experience closer.

### 11.7.1 Experiences with Psychoactive Substances

In our opinion, the below-mentioned narrative of Mateusz Kowalski appropriately illustrates the importance that users attribute to ayahuasca. Mateusz described his experiences with psychoactive substances concerning his profession as follows:

*“My problems began when I started going to school. I dislike going to school suddenly. (...) It was terribly brutal and cruel. They were bullying me horribly; they were beating me a lot. (...) I couldn’t find my place at school, so when I was around 12, 13, my mother took me to a psychologist or a psychiatrist. (...) She thought maybe I was a little autistic. (...) Maybe she didn’t, but the teachers... a little bit. (...) I was very sensitive... and I thought there was something wrong with me. Because when I went to the doctor and no school children would treat me nicely, I thought something was probably wrong with me. So, I started taking pills. It started very early when I was 17. When I was 17, I started with cannabis, then with amphetamines. I quickly became addicted to those two. (...) It was very addictive for me. Nevertheless, it helped me because it made me insensitive. I was able to behave aggressively. I was not a victim anymore, but a tyrant. (...) I felt better, but then ... then I had to pay very much for it. I stopped taking it as soon as it began to ruin my body and I had that... that... something like psychosis... I was paranoid. I felt like people were chasing me. I hallucinated and (...) then I became depressed. I was really depressed. I was at the very bottom. I interrupted school. I couldn’t complete my diploma thesis in such a state of mind. I was not able to leave the house. I lost contact with my family, friends. I went out only once in 2 weeks... once every 2 weeks just for food. I was terribly depressed. (...) I was at the bottom and I tried... I contemplated committing suicide. (...) Then I had an episode... I suffered terribly, and once I was lying in the bath and thought about drowning. However, I did not do it. When I woke up the next day, I had no thoughts for three months. (...) After three months, it disappeared. Then my mind returned. I went to the Vipassana retreat. It was 10 days of Vipassana. I received many answers there, because I searched everywhere. In Hare Krishna, in one religion after another, everywhere... And Buddhism gave me many answers. (...) And then, when I finished the ten-day Vipassana retreat, my brother had some ethnobotanicals at home. He got a sample of ayahuasca somehow. I saw it and I began to be a little bit interested. I found that it could help me clean up from chemicals. In the end, I was using amphetamines and tramadol. (...) I started drinking it (ayahuasca, authors’ note). I drank it two years in a row. I drank it for 8 months every day. First of all, only [Banisteriopsis] caapi, then caapi with chacruna (Psychotria viridis, authors’ note) and caapi with jurema (Mimosa tenuiflora, authors’ note). Then another 12 months. (...) This part of my life is a bit like a dream... I had visions. I heard my voice as if my subconscious spoke through it... As if some part of my personality was talking to me*

*and explained how to make it. How to make ayahuasca. I was very determined because I was terribly depressed and I saw the light in the tunnel. I felt a little better. After the Vipassana, I got above the level of my misery. Then, I saw that light, so I felt a desperate need (...), the desire to get out of it. I didn't want to be depressed and sad anymore. I was very determined to look for peace and happiness” (G45A203–352).*

## 11.8 Diet

According to our informants, it is necessary to keep a diet that does not contain tyramine-rich foods (e.g. ripening cheese, yogurt, salami, yeast, soy products, bananas, figs, grapes, beans, red wine, and beer) at least 3 days before and after the use of MAOIs such as harmine and THH (see subchapter 3.1).

Instead of listing all the dishes that are bound by restrictions, it is advisable to consume only boiled rice without salt, mash (buckwheat, spelt or oat), eggs, water and herbal teas. On the other hand, the use of alcohol, other psychoactive substances and medications are excluded.

As already mentioned in chapter 7, people using SSRI antidepressants should avoid participating in the ayahuasca ceremony (Fantegrossi et al., 2008; Katzung et al., 2015).

Restrictions also apply to pregnant women. One of the informants used ayahuasca during her pregnancy. She described the situation as follows:

*“I just wanted to mention something that I haven't told you before... I would say that it almost saved my life. (...) I found myself in a complicated situation twice. Perhaps, potentially life-threatening, and without the interference of that... healer or just the plants, I thought I wouldn't cope with that at all, it was complicated. (...) Once it was an interpersonally complicated working situation. I was in some way driven into a corner and I didn't know how to get out of it. And the other... the other was when I was expecting a baby, that just wasn't okay. However, I didn't know, just that pregnancy was very demanding. Then it was born dead at the end. It was because of some genetic causes. It turned out gradually. In fact, this experience, as I did a lot of ceremonies during pregnancy..., allowed me to get out of it incredibly. (...) I got into a very strange mode, maybe a bit jungle or not evaluating... For example, I felt sure that either I'd live or the baby, but it was not possible together. However, I accepted the situation in good faith... as an animal” (G13A980–1012).*

As confirmed by Labate (2011), the issue of using ayahuasca during pregnancy is highly controversial. So far, there are no clinical trials to confirm / reverse its risks. dos Santos (2013) argues that the matter can not be taken lightly. Precautionary measures should be taken. Fetal chromosomal changes may occur if ignored. In pregnancy, severe vomiting can be also risky, or the mother can be negatively affected by terrifying experiences during the ritual.

According to our informants, to avoid the possible occurrence of side effects, the diet may also make sense as it serves to detoxify the organism. Besides, it is an expression of humility towards ayahuasca and can act as a limiting factor for its frequent use. It also contributes to the training of willpower, or it forces people to stay focused and clarify their intentions before participating in the ritual. Some ayahuasca users also ascribe a therapeutic effect to the diet, as it helps to relieve allergies, atopic eczema and improves fitness.



### 11.8.1 Dieting

A 23-year-old student told us about the diet:

*“I kept a recommended diet that was sent to us through a mail. (...) Some variety of food, notable spices, meat, dairy products, legumes, sugar, confectionery, and cocoa have been excluded because the food could influence the effect of the plant” (G27A71–75).*

The thirty-eight-year-old administrator of clinical trials in a pharmaceutical company answered to our question if she respected the diet prescribed by e-mail in the following way: *“Yeah, yeah, exactly. I think it was even stricter because I understood that I can’t even use salt at all, to use sugar. (...) Well, so I didn’t have some salt or anything like that. I was just eating more buckwheat. Potatoes and vegetables, I’ve always eaten, so this way. I didn’t eat any mash, you know. So, I didn’t even prepare it. Not even the agave syrup [I didn’t use], nothing. I was eating fruits and vegetables. (...) Well, it was fine. My body was fine because it was cleaned up nicely” (G07A265–267).*

The fifty-year-old musician said:

*“Well, it’s recommended for three weeks, a month... Of course, such is common (...) healthy diet, right? (...) A week before I left out alcohol completely. Coffee, and that stuff... Three days before even more strictly. That means no black tea anymore. I think even the green one no longer. Just herbal at the utmost. I don’t know... buckwheat porridge, just something like that. It is already very strict there and you don’t eat at all, right? Because it is unnecessary to let ayahuasca clean everything. She needs to get deeper, right? So that is it. Of course, the same thing follows... So, after three days of the very strict hunger-strike... Then a week of no coffee, alcohol, nothing stimulating, including sex, right? Then a month, let us keep a healthy diet. Well then, it’s a smaller problem than before, you know... Because you started it. (...) You have no cravings for coffee, nothing that would be toxic to the body. Anything that can be somehow toxic you don’t even remember, and it last for several months. (...) I’ve lived with that for half a year (...), because it starts to work later... One thing is the experience and the second is what it does to someone, you know. Also, you begin to realize many things, to understand them... You notice things you wouldn’t have noticed before, yeah... And now something is going to happen, and it starts to open. It takes several months. It’s incredible...” (G30A43).*

## 12 RECONSTRUCTIONS OF RITUALS

Ayahuasca rituals are highly diverse, and its form depends on the sociocultural origin of the organizers. For greater clarity, three rituals that took place in the Czech Republic are interpreted in this chapter. The analysis is based on the knowledge obtained from the fieldwork and the contributions of the informants.

### 12.1 Reconstruction of the “Traditional” Ritual Organized in the Hradec Králové Region

Preparation for the traditional ritual led by Luis Zambrano begins five days in advance. It takes the form of various dietary recommendations. It is forbidden to consume too salty, sweet, spicy and fat meals. Part of the diet is also sexual abstinence.

The participants are supposed to come to the place of ritual at about 6 pm. Upon arrival, they are accommodated, and all necessary information is given on how the ritual is organized and how ayahuasca works. Then they are given space to relax and tune in.

After sunset, all participants sit in the ritual room and create a circle. The organizer of the ritual (shaman, healer) comes in and starts sharing the product. The participants always mention their names, and tell the organizer what they expect from the ritual and how they feel. Immediately after sharing, tobacco infusion is applied either in their eyes or nose. Then there is a ritual opening of the space done by smudging and invocation of the individual elements (fire, earth, water and air), as well as auxiliary spirits.

When space is ready, ayahuasca is drunk. The participants come to the organizer one after the other. The organizer pours a cup of ayahuasca to them, utters a prayer over it and give it to them. It is up to each participant to decide how much they want to drink it. After the last participant finishes, the last small candle that burns in the room is extinguished, and the rest of the ritual takes place in the dark. It is allowed to sing, play musical instruments, or otherwise make sounds.

In the course of the night, a healer’s helper and takes them to so-called individual cleansing. This is a healing procedure that implies the energy cleansing of the body. During the cleansing, the healer sings *ikaros*, smudges participants with tobacco or sprays them with aromatic essences. He also passes over their bodies with the leaf-bundle rattle. After the cleansing of the last participant, the healer closes the ritual circle and leaves the room.

The morning after the ritual, sharing takes place between four and five people. First, the organizer of the ritual hears what each participant has experienced, then speaks for himself.

### 12.2 Reconstruction of the Neoshamanic Ritual Organized in the Moravian-Silesian Region

Every three weeks at the weekend, there are rituals organized at the cottage of Jan Novák situated in the Beskydy Mountains. The ritual, which lasts 1–2 days, is usually attended by about 50 people. If we compare the current situation with 2009, when there used to be up to 15 people, the number of participants is approximately tripled.

Previously, it was sung in Portuguese during the rituals, and now it is in Czech. In other respects, their course is still the same.

Rituals are open to new entrants. If someone is new, the organizer will always mention it to others in advance via e-mail. A newcomer tells the organizer in anticipation all about their health status. They also come to the venue earlier, as the organizer always sit in a circle with them and give them general information on the course of the ritual and experiences. Other participants usually come to a place around 5 pm. The ritual begins between 7 am and 8 pm. However, the time of its beginning is not specified. The beginning always comes naturally from the situation after all participants dress up in bright clothes and sit in the ritual room.

Nobody goes outside during the ritual. Anyone that wants to go out during the ritual can come out in front of the cottage. They usually sit in a circle on the ground. However, it happens that a few hours after drinking ayahuasca, people stand or dance. Everyone does what they like or need.

At the beginning of the ritual, before the first cup, the organizer or someone assigned to go around and one participant after another is being smudged from all sides by *palo santo* (*Bursera graveolens*).

During the first 30 to 60 minutes, the participants are one by one coming to take ayahuasca from organizer's hands, which is euphemistically called "tea". It is served in a quantity of liqueur glass, i.e. about 0.05 l. During the ritual (after about 3 hours), it is spilled for the second time in half (or smaller) amount than the first time, about 0.025 l. Naturally, no one has an obligation to drink it twice.

Songbooks with ritual songs are given to participants in advance. The ritual is performed in the shadow, so it is still possible to read the songbooks. They begin to sing and play musical instruments (drums, guitars, jingle bells, etc.). The ritual is regularly carried out in a group which takes care of the musical accompaniment. The organizer also plays music (mostly on a drum, but also on a guitar and a typical Brazilian percussion instrument *caxixi*). He is part of a musical accompaniment, he even composed some Czech songs. Organizer's wife, who also participates in the ritual and occasionally guides them, plays music too. Besides, she usually helps and makes sure everyone is all right. The ritual, which may take up to 7 hours, is not affected by time and none of the participants focus on it. They play music and sing until late in the morning.

The ritual is coming to an end when the organizer invites participants to come for *rapé*, i.e. fine-ground tobacco mixed with herbs from the tropical rain forest that is blown through thin tube into both nostrils. After all those who were interested in taking *rapé* meet again on the ground, they start with sharing experiences. However, this activity is voluntary like the rest of things done during the weekend.

At the end of the ritual, all participants hug and thank each other for its successful completion. In the kitchen, there is a soup and plenty of fruit prepared. The sharing continues according to individual needs. Those who do not want to stay, they live close and feel to drive, are leaving. Some people remain in the ritual room, they play and sing... The rest is going to sleep. Others stay in the kitchen and they talk.

After lunch, it is usually possible to take *rapé* again. Even though there is no program the next day, some remain until the evening. They walk into the woods, plant trees, help with cottage work etc.

### 12.3 Reconstruction of a Neoshamanic Ritual Organized in the South Bohemian Region

Information included in this subchapter has already been published (Horák, 2018). As stated in subchapter 11.1.1, this ritual was performed by the “bioenergetic healer” Santiago Hernández in one of the South Bohemian centers for personality development. The ritual was preceded by the sweat lodge for all registered participants. It was prepared on Saturday morning. After the introductory meeting, everyone went out to prepare wood for the bonfire and built a tent on the wooden construction (see figure 29).



Fig. 29 Wooden construction of sweat lodge (source: own processing)

The purge began in the sweat lodge around 3 pm when they were warming up stones in the fire. Four times, they were all closed in the dark in a secluded hut, where they sang and prayed in four directions connected with the elements (see figure 30). The organizer of the ritual sprinkled red-hot stones with water and put aromatic plants on them. The temperature in the tent culminated to the tolerable limit, and the steam rising from the boulders burned all the people with lust; however, it was a frosty day in December.

Some authors do not mistakenly take the shape of a sweat lodge as the mother’s womb, where the participants of the ritual return to consolidate their contact with the Mother Earth and rejoice in overcoming their limits with the reality of inevitable death.

The ritual causes catharsis, a sense of relief and cleansing in all aspects (Sládek, 2017). For example, one of the participants has suffered for a long time since his mother’s death of back pain, and he could not get rid of the pain. He declared that during the sweat lodge ritual, “*it rumbled sharply*” in his back, and the pain completely disappeared.



**Fig. 30** Sweat lodge (source: own processing)

The relief comes only after a terrible expectation of a breath of fresh air that gets into the tent during breaks set between phases. Throughout the ritual, the healer interconnected the participants by singing together with someone, that observed it from outside.

After the sweat lodge, all the people acted as a harmonious community and gradually set off to rest in the main hall, followed by a common dinner, served with vegetable soup, chickpeas and lettuce. Whoever wants can offer grated cheese. All 11 people were tired after the previous ritual, and they ate food except for one person, who did not go to the sweat lodge. They had dinner, and then, rest based on the healer's instructions. The program continued until 10 pm.

At about half past ten in the evening, everyone gathered in the ritual room. Participants prepared their sitting space and evenly spread along the walls of the room, the center which was dominated by an altar with 5 burning candles and knitted jaguar heads. These statutes, as it later turned out, had greater significance and meaning than it first appeared. Before the ritual, the organizer stated that if a healing process was too demanding for some of the participants, focusing on the light of the altar, the jaguar heads could help to overcome the difficult moments. This was later confirmed by some informants.

At the head of the room, a fire burns in the fireplace, where the participants planted wood and hot coals before the beginning of the ritual. The organizer lightened the cedar twigs in the bowl, rounded off the participants and fanned them with the eagle pen. Then he asked all of them to come to him one after another and served "medicine". Most of them came to drink ayahuasca, which the healer has in front of him on the floor in two glass jugs. However, it turned out to be so-called *rucacha*, a combination of Syrian roe (*Paeganum harmala*) and acacia (*Acacia* sp.).

Three participants instead of ayahuasca choose peyote, i.e. a powder from the grounded cactus *Lophophora williamsii*. It can also be used fresh, but the organizer

has it already prepared in this form from previous rituals. Based on our findings, Santiago Hernández is the only person who organizes such rituals in the Czech Republic, where ayahuasca and peyote are used at the same time. It was later clear; it does not cause any problems in the ritual performance.

As soon as everyone returns to their places, the healer would ask his helper to round off the participants with *palo santo* (*Bursera graveolens*), and they would be cleansed with its smoke. As soon as he settles down, they sing together *ikaros* in the rhythm of the shamanic drum and various rattles. No one leaves the ritual room without the permission of the organizer.

During the ritual, if the effect of the preparations recedes, the healer offers a second dose. Some even claimed it earlier, because they did not feel anything.

In first-time users that are 3 this time, there can be noticed an intense physiological effect. One of them makes Asian dance style creations in the air by her hands and sometimes laughs with the clear sensation of happiness. One participant suffers from a strong tremor and lies on the floor in a crouching position. In some moments, he screams. According to his testimony, during the ritual, he transformed into a leopard that its statue admired and touched before. His physical, as well as vocal manifestations proved it. At the beginning of the next day, the healer expressed in that sense that such situations are not uncommon.

The other participants sat or laid in quiet, mostly with their eyes closed. Their faces were calm, brightened. Although they were in an altered state of consciousness, they responded naturally to address, able to communicate fluently and stand up. The whole ritual took place in a relative peace. Everyone was absorbed into their inner being and the persons present did not communicate with each other. If it happens in exceptional cases, the organizer will immediately commend them. It is customary that, if the participants are in the pair, they are split up in order not to be next to each other.

The decrease in effects characterizes the second half of an eight-hour long ritual. Almost everyone was lying down although none of them was sleeping. The healer neither requires anyone to stay sitting nor sing anymore. On the contrary, he plays *ikaros* of popular Peruvian neoshaman, Herbert Quinteros, ceremonial songs of the Diné and Mohawk. The songs by the Iroquois singer, Joanne Shenandoah, and other performers from his stereo, explaining how he helps himself this way in an individual guided ritual.

The healer's resonant voice sounds again in the morning, when the songs enclosing the ritual that motivating the participants are performed. Symbolically, the ritual ends at about 9 am after the cook with her helpers prepare breakfast. It is sanctified in a similar way as an altar by cedar smoke (*Thuja occidentalis*) and sweet grass (*Hierochloa odorata*).

At the end of the ritual, all participants show respect to Kayumari, sacred deer carved in wooden statuette decorated with brightly colored cotton beads. Finally, they thank all the elements through the calumet, the sacred pipe, from which they breathe for four times to express self-acceptance, and exhale as a sign of return. The number also symbolizes the number of elements. The fifth, last breath and exhalation of smoke serve to make the spirit of everyone present.

Just as it was at the beginning, all participants join in a circle at the end of the ritual. They show respect and thank to each other by saying "*In Lakesh*" (I am You)

and “*A Laken*” (You are Me). This is one of the core spiritual wisdom transmitted by ayahuasca. Everything in the universe forms a unity and a whole.

A sharing of experiences follows. Commentaries made by the healer accompanies it. A rest continues until lunch, after which participants move one after another to their homes.

## 13 CONCLUSIONS

This book presents current knowledge on the use of ayahuasca in the Czech Republic. Besides the theoretical passages, the book also contains characteristics of participants, organizers and facilitators of rituals, prescriptions for the use of ayahuasca, and the typology of rituals held in our territory.

In this study, data were collected from 46 respondents that at least once participated at the ayahuasca ritual in the Czech Republic. The rituals were guided by one of the 9 organizers mentioned in subchapter 11.1.1.

For the conceptual reasons, the organizers were divided into three basic categories: 1. “traditional” indigenous and mestizo healers, 2. neoshamans, and 3. members of the syncretic churches. This typology reflects not only the different socio-cultural origins of each one and the different style of work, but also reflects the motivation of participants in rituals and their individual needs.

The motivation of participants varies from curiosity and desire for self-awareness and personal development, through the healing of various diseases to the realization of spiritual and religious needs. These needs may be satisfied by ayahuasca depending on in what context it is administered.

Arguably, organizing the ayahuasca ritual is perceived as a type of service that is tailored to the needs of users. As a result, their number may increase. However, the organizers’ goal is not only to satisfy as many clients as possible, but also to maximize their earnings in a given environment.

The informants declare that ayahuasca is used in the Czech Republic in a (non-clinical) therapeutic or spiritual context. In a general sense, syncretism is typical for the spirituality of users. As for the society we live in, it is pluralistic. It is characterized by various beliefs that are sometimes not entirely compatible at first sight. Of course, not all our informants keep their spirituality united. Probably none of them is a member of any syncretic church we wrote about in chapter 2.

Ayahuasca is popular because it has promising therapeutic potential in the treatment of addiction and other lifestyle diseases. This is confirmed by several authors (Thomas et al., 2013; Loizaga-Velder, Verres, 2014; Coe, McKenna, 2016; Frecska et al., 2016; Harris, 2017; Tafur, 2017).

In addition, our informants attribute its efficacy e.g. in functional diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, skin problems, depression, parasitic infections, allergies, and asthma (see subchapter 11.5). They also use it to detoxify organism and enhance immunity (dos Santos, 2014).

Studies focusing on the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca have already been conducted (Andritzky, 1989; Labate, Cavnar, 2013; dos Santos et al., 2016b; 2016c; Soler et al., 2016; Horák et al., 2018). However, their results need to be supported by further research.

The utilization of ayahuasca has its risks that cannot be ignored. On the organizer’s side, the risks can be caused by a lack of pre-screening of users, who may experience contraindications due to a breach of prescriptions (i.e. abstinence of psychoactive substances and sex, prohibition of pork and spicy food consumption). On the user’s side, the risks can be caused by low awareness of the effects of ayahuasca and poor quality of after-care that has an impact on the integration of experience.



Although scientific studies do not confirm its negative impact on health, caution should be considered when administering this preparation to pregnant women, children and adolescents (see chapter 4).

Ayahuasca has become a subject of tourist interest in the last decades, and rituals are sometimes performed by people not only with a bad reputation but also without any preparation. Some of them have appropriated the culture of indigenous ethnic groups of the Amazon. The biggest risk for this reason is that ayahuasca will be removed from ritual and ceremonial space because of glocalization and could be viewed as a drug used in psychotherapy only. A plant that is traditionally considered sacred would become a product provided at exclusive private clinics and centers of personal development. Sacred medicine would transform into the subject of commerce, used in the spirit of economic opportunism without limitation of resources and charged for high fees. In the eyes of users, participating in the ayahuasca ritual would turn into an exotic holiday.

## 14 LIMITS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Of course, this work has its limits. First, the groundness of codes is not evidence of real incidence of phenomena, it only expresses the quantity of related narratives in transcription of the interviews. Furthermore, axial codes proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2002) represent only a specific form of a phenomenon whose meaning is subjective and, therefore, relative in nature.

Research reported here is based on the testimonies of our informants, but they cannot be generalized to the whole Czech population. The total number of ayahuasca users in the Czech Republic is not known,

because the DMT containing preparation is illegal in the country. After all, the aim of this research is not to find out how many ayahuasca users in the Czech Republic, but to gain information about them and explain why they participate in rituals and what health problems they are treating this way. The extent to which this intention has been achieved is up to the reader.

In chapter 12, there is a reconstruction of some ceremony performed by any syncretic church operating in the country is missing. We have not been able to do the participant observation in these religious organizations.

Regarding the issue of the ayahuasca use in the Czech Republic, the question remains whether this is not the so-called *invented tradition*, an artificial construct that penetrated Europe in the second half of the 20th century with the expansion of Brazilian syncretistic churches that mix Christianity with animism.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) connect invented traditions with the aim of justifying the interests of newly emerging social groups that present themselves as ancient. They seek to anchor the tradition in a specific context, which would help them to legitimize it. The invented traditions resonate in public, as there is a great demand for them. People uprooted from traditional lifestyle welcome the opportunity to identify themselves with newly emerging social groups. Organizing “traditional” rituals and celebrating ceremonies seems to be a natural response to secularization, individualism and multiculturalism in current globalized society.

## 15 SUMMARY

This book presents a piece of up-to-date information on the utilization of ayahuasca in the Czech Republic. In addition to the theoretical chapters, the book contains characteristics of the participants, organizers and facilitators of ceremonies, prescriptions for the use of ayahuasca and types of rituals held in the country.

Data for this research was collected from 46 informants, who at least once participated in the ayahuasca ritual that has been conducted by one of the 9 organizers available to perform this activity in the Czech Republic.

For conceptual reasons, the organizers were divided into three main categories: 1. “traditional” indigenous and mestizo healers, 2. neoshamans, 3. and members of the syncretistic churches. This typology reflects not only the different sociocultural origins of the participants, but also their motivation for rituals and individual needs.

The motivation of participants oscillates from curiosity and desire for self-awareness and personal development, through the healing of various diseases to the realization of spiritual and religious needs. These needs may be fulfilled by participating in the ayahuasca ritual depending on what context it is provided.

Arguably, ayahuasca ritual can be perceived as a type of service that is adapted to the needs of users. As a result, the number could be increased. However, the goal of the organizers is not only to satisfy as many clients as possible for whom the modified global product is more accessible, but also to maximize their earnings.

The informants confirm that ayahuasca is used in the Czech Republic in (a non-clinical) therapeutic and spiritual context. Generally, the spirituality of users is characterized by syncretism. We argue that, in the society we live in, there is a plurality of beliefs (that sometimes are not entirely compatible at first sight) typical in this case. Of course, not all of my informants keep their spirituality united. Probably none of them is a member of any syncretic church.

As for its therapeutic potential, ayahuasca can be applied to the treatment of addiction and other lifestyle diseases. The informants attribute its efficacy to functional diseases of gastrointestinal tract, skin problems, depression, parasitic infections, allergies and asthma. In addition, they use it to detoxify their organism and strengthen immunity. Studies on the therapeutic potential of ayahuasca have been received tremendous attention in recent years. Notwithstanding, further research and results are needed to shed more light on this burning subject.

The utilization of ayahuasca has its risks that can not be ignored. On the organizer’s side, the risks can be caused by a lack of pre-screening of users, who may experience contraindications due to the breach of prescriptions (i.e. abstinence of psychoactive substances and sex, prohibition of pork and spicy food consumption). On the user’s side, the risks can be caused by low awareness of the effects of ayahuasca and poor quality of after-care that has an impact on the integration of experience. Although scientific studies do not confirm its negative impact on health, caution should be taken when administering this it to pregnant women, children and adolescents.

Ayahuasca has become a subject of tourist interest in the last decades, and rituals are sometimes performed by people not only with a bad reputation but also without any preparation. Some of them use the culture of the indigenous

ethnic groups of the Amazon inappropriately. The biggest risk for this reason is that ayahuasca will be removed from ritual and ceremonial space because of glocalization and could be viewed as a drug used in psychotherapy only. A plant that is traditionally considered sacred would become a product provided at exclusive private clinics and centers of personal development. Sacred medicine would transform into the subject of commerce, used in the spirit of economic opportunism without limitation of resources and charged for high fees. In the eyes of users, participating in the ayahuasca ceremony would turn into an exotic holiday.

## 16 SUMARIO

En este libro se presentan las informaciones actuales sobre la utilización de la ayahuasca en República Checa. Además de los capítulos teóricos, el libro también contiene las características de los participantes, organizadores y facilitadores de rituales, prescripciones para el uso de la ayahuasca y la tipología de las ceremonias celebradas en el país.

Para este libro, recolecté datos sobre 46 personas, que por lo menos una vez participaron en un ritual con la ayahuasca en República Checa realizado por uno de los 9 organizadores disponibles en este país para llevar a cabo este tipo de actividad.

Según el estilo de trabajo, he dividido a los organizadores por razones conceptuales en tres categorías principales: 1. curanderos “tradicionales” indígenas y mestizos, 2. neochamanes y 3. miembros de las iglesias sincréticas. Esta tipología refleja no sólo los diferentes orígenes socioculturales de cada uno de ellos, sino también la motivación de los participantes en sus rituales y sus necesidades individuales.

La motivación de los participantes oscila entre la curiosidad, el deseo de autoconocimiento y desarrollo de la personalidad, a través de la curación de diversas enfermedades hasta la realización de necesidades espirituales y religiosas. Estas necesidades pueden ser satisfechas por ayahuasca, dependiendo del contexto en el que se provee.

Según mi opinión, el ritual con la “medicina tradicional amazónica” puede ser percibido como un tipo de servicio que se adapta a las necesidades de los usuarios. Como resultado, se puede extender el número de ellos. Sin embargo, el objetivo no es sólo satisfacer al mayor número posible de clientes para quienes el producto global modificado es más accesible, sino al mismo tiempo también maximizar los beneficios del proveedor.

Mis informantes confirman que la ayahuasca se utiliza en República Checa en un contexto terapéutico (no clínico) o espiritual. En general, la espiritualidad de los usuarios se caracteriza por el sincretismo. En mi opinión, igual como en la sociedad en que vivimos, hay una pluralidad de creencias (que a veces a primera vista no son totalmente compatibles) típica en este caso. Por supuesto, no todos mis informantes mantienen su espiritualidad de la misma manera. Probablemente ninguno de ellos es miembro de alguna iglesia sincrética.

En cuanto a su potencial terapéutico, ayahuasca puede aplicarse en el tratamiento de la adicción y otras enfermedades del estilo de vida. Mis informantes atribuyen su eficacia también sobre enfermedades funcionales del tracto gastrointestinal, problemas de la piel, depresión, infecciones parasitarias, alergias y asma. Además, la utilizan para desintoxicar el organismo y fortalecer el sistema inmunitario.

A pesar de que ya se han sido realizados diversos estudios sobre el potencial terapéutico de la ayahuasca, aún estos resultados deberían ser apoyados por investigaciones adicionales.

La utilización de la ayahuasca puede conllevar una serie de riesgos que no pueden ser ignorados. Estos riesgos pueden ser causados por parte del organizador como del usuario. Por parte del organizador pueden ser causados por una falta de preselección de los usuarios, que pueden experimentar contraindicaciones por el incumplimiento de las prescripciones (abstinencia de sustancias psicoactivas y sexo, prohibición

del consumo de carne de cerdo y de alimentos picantes). Por parte del usuario, puede que el poco conocimiento de los efectos de la ayahuasca y la mala calidad del seguimiento después del ritual, puedan tener un impacto en la integración de la experiencia. Aunque estudios científicos aún no confirman el impacto negativo de este sobre la salud, debe tenerse precaución al momento de administrarse en mujeres embarazadas, niños y adolescentes.

La ayahuasca se ha convertido en un tema de interés turístico en las últimas décadas. Por ello muchos de los rituales a veces son realizados por personas de mala reputación o sin ninguna preparación. Algunos de ellos se apropian de la cultura de los grupos étnicos indígenas del Amazonas. El mayor riesgo que ello conlleva es que la ayahuasca será eliminada del espacio ritual y ceremonial como resultado de la globalización y podría quizás ser vista como una droga usada sólo en psicoterapia. Una planta que tradicionalmente se considera sagrada se convertiría en un producto proporcionado en clínicas privadas exclusivas y centros de desarrollo personal. La medicina sagrada se transformaría en sujeto de comercio, utilizado en el espíritu del oportunismo económico sin limitación de recursos y cobrado con altos honorarios. Desde el punto de vista de los usuarios, su participación en el ritual de ayahuasca se convertiría sólo en una fiesta exótica.

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This book is focused on “the traditional medicine of the Amazon”, globalizing and localizing trends in its use, and possibilities of its therapeutic application in the Czech Republic. In local conditions, the potential of this medical system lies primarily in the treatment of lifestyle diseases.

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