

THE IMPACT OF INNOVATION IN THE DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ABUSE

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Abstract:

The last decades have been characterized by an incremental increase in the illegal drug abuse, resulting in the development of one of the most important threats towards humanity. Based on analyses and research with the theme of the drug phenomenon which have been conducted over the past years, one could point out both the complex and dynamic character and its expansion in the entire world. Today the global approach represents the unique means of efficiently tackling the issue, which can be noticed by analyzing the international context and by knowing the drug abuse evolution and expansion inner causes.

The paper aims to analyze the impact of the introduction of new technologies on reducing drug

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1. Introduction

The unprecedented level of drug abuse undoubtedly represents one of the major threats aiming at the safety of people, their health and integrity. Every day millions of people use and abuse drugs worldwide.

Due to the complexity of such a disease, resulted in first of all from its bio-psycho-social dimension, the drug abuse has reached the top of the concerns of government and nongovernmental organizations which fight for the defense of human rights, for justice and for the promotion of health. The UN, the Interpol and the Europol place the drug black market on the second level at an international scale, after weapons development.

The drug black market financially represents one of the most developed underground markets. In spite of its black market character, its recent expansion has made it become more and more attractive including for the governments of countries which face a raised level of drug abuse. Thus, incomes obtained from activities that are typical for the drug trafficking and

abuse have been introduced in the budget estimations of certain European states.

In 2014, world estimations regarding incomes obtained as a result of the drug trafficking and abuse were placed at the level of about 320 billion dollars, which represents over half of the total sum of estimated incomes of world organized crime. From this estimation, one can understand the increased interest of different government factors concerning the economic control over such a phenomenon. Thus, a relevant example is represented by Italy, which through the voice of its prime minister, mister Matteo Renzi, has announced that starting by next year even the incomes derived from prostitution and drug abuse will be part of the calculation of the gross national product. The Italian government has chosen this solution by using the new statistical rules of the European Union which, among other aspects, demand that the estimations of incomes concerning prostitution and drug abuse be part of the national incomes. As a result, at least from a statistic point of view, Italy will be able to get over the period of recession.

These political and economic approaches of the drug abuse have also been introduced as a result of the increase in the number of drug consumers and as a consequence of the enrichment of the drug distribution market.

Though having an illegal character and being assimilated to the black markets, the drug market partially undergoes the same processes as a legal economic market. Both innovation and the new communication and informatics technologies created worldwide have become factors which have changed during the last years the structure of the drug trafficking and abuse. Obvious radical changes have been made both in the field of consumer profiling/typology and in the area of the drug production, transportation and selling processes.

2. New approaches to innovation in the field of drugs

Tackling innovation in the field of drugs refers first of all to the product innovation. It can be perceived both as a conception process, the creation of new substances to be launched on the market and as a process of change, as a process of enhancing the classic psychoactive substances. Undoubtedly, innovation in the field of drugs presupposes the innovation of process, both the development of new substances and the modification/enhancement of the existing ones, new technological techniques being created in time afterwards.

A suggestive example would be represented by the recent appearance of a new category of psychoactive substances, called spice drugs in most countries, part of the hallucinogens family and which have rapidly managed to change the classic patterns of the drug abuse and to become the

most consumed category of drugs, secondly after cannabis. Produced in illegal labs out of mixes of plants and different chemical substances (especially synthetic cannabinoids) spices have shown to the world that the drug abuse phenomenon is one of permanent evolution, adapting to the needs of the new generation in the context of globalization and technological progress.

These new technologies, having Internet at its core, have led to the development of an open market for the new drugs. More and more, the drug sale market has moved from the street to the Internet networks, which better guarantee the anonymity and which also provide a higher diversity of the offer.

Internet has become an increasingly important actor in providing the diversity of the means of selling drugs, also generating particular obstacles to stopping the offers of new and old drugs. The possible control is especially hindered by the fact that the producers, the suppliers, the dealers, the Internet site hosting services and the payment processing services could be located in different countries. The permanent spread usage of the anonymous networks, the so called darknets, involving the sales of drugs to users and consumers is also added to these difficulties.

Such sites access technology is more frequently incorporated in the consumers' software, opening these markets to a larger number of people. Moreover, the free sale of legal drugs on the Internet seems to have determined an increase in their availability to dealers and consumers. In 2013, based on the monitoring performed by EMCDDA (The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction) 651 sites which sell legal drugs to European citizens were identified.

An important aspect is the fact that a series of newly discovered drugs from the drug market appear to be addressed to legal usage as medicine. Sometimes, these are sold as medicine, while in other cases they are sold as illegal drugs, as heroine, or as legal drugs, chemical substances used for research and even as food supplements.

Beyond the commercial character of involving the Internet on the drug market, one could also notice the social role, meaning the significant contribution of the Internet in the dissemination of new means of abuse and in the promotion of new substances, the virtual environment being a true resource of know-how. By means of the Internet, the amount of information has surpassed any border so that even the distribution of the novelties in the drug abuse area has become a very easy enterprise. It is common knowledge that at a European level, most people, mainly the young ones acknowledge as their choice of the main source of information the Internet sites, the same thing occurring in the domain of addictions. The main risk of this aspect would be the absence of certification for the chosen information, the virtual

world being accessible to everybody, including to those pursuing publishing purposes. Sites which promote more or less the alcohol abuse using as arguments the so called scientific research are often identified, but until being denied by the competent authorities, their purpose of disseminating information in favour of alcohol abuse will have been achieved.

The individual efforts of every country to counterattack the huge wave of new substances and means of production and selling have not been enough, an obvious need of international cooperation and unity when deciding the fighting measures against such a phenomenon is noticeable. The attempt to control the illegal activities concerning the regime of the psychoactive substances on the Internet proves to be extremely difficult taking into account the technical (communication) opportunities provided by the Internet.

A relevant example for the impact that the Internet had on the drug sales was represented by the site Silk Road.com, which was organized as an on-line illegal drug sales black market. Based on services providing anonymity for the users, the owners of this site were facilitating the selling of drugs throughout the world, especially in the USA. An interesting aspect springs from the fact that transactions performed on this site took the form of the Bitcoin system, representing a system of decentralized electronic payment and a digital coin created by Satoshi Nakamoto in 2009. The name Bitcoin also refers both to the program with open source for using such coins and to the peer-to-peer web that they create. Bitcoin is not based on trust in a central emitter. Bitcoin uses a database distributed over knots of a peer-to-peer network in order to catalogue the transactions and uses cryptography to provide security basic functions such as ensuring that the bitcoins cannot be spent but for the owner and only once. In February 2014 there were 12 million bitcoins. At present prices, the cumulative value of the emitted Bitcoins (indicator equivalent to the market capitalization) surpasses 7 billion USD. What is interesting is the fact that in only two and a half years, Silkroad.com facilitated transactions of 9.5 million bitcoins (approximately 1.2 billion dollars), while its owners managed to raise a profit of 600.000 bitcoins (80 million USD).

Fortunately, due to very difficult legal efforts caused by the total anonymity which certain software programs can guarantee, F.B.I managed to shut down the site, to arrest the individual suspected to be the creator and the administrator, Ross William Ulbricht on bases of three crimes: illegal drug trafficking, being an accessory to money laundering and an accessory to computer crime.

The development of technology had a special impact in the production, acquisition, transportation and commercialization of illegal drugs. Using the new computer technologies and devices, producers manage

to bring substances with modified psycho-active effects on the market, not obeying the law control. One could offer the example of the category of new synthetic substances, produced especially in China, but also in the Baltic countries, whose appearance has led to legislative changes in most European countries. Unfortunately, the very rapid rhythm of modifying the structure of the substances makes the authorities' efforts be late.

The last generation technology is being more and more frequently used by the drug dealers in the process of transportation. The most common means of transporting the substances is by road traffic, so that the dealers could use GPS latest generation devices or coded mobile phones ensuring the protection of the illegal cargoes. Due to software programs used, these devices become almost impossible to detect/intercept by the authorities.

Innovation represents an element with a special impact on the drug trafficking and abuse evolution. Beyond the increase of the economic impact of the drug trafficking and abuse as a result of the variety of substances launched on the market, one can point out the major impact of the development of information technology and communication on the social perception concerning the drug abuse. Practically, by means of computer technologies a true globalization of drug abuse has been made possible, especially in Europe. The institutional reaction must be adapted to the new tendencies and challenges, surpassing the national borders being the first step. Without cooperation between international institutions and organizations which promote and defend the human rights, the efforts to reduce the expansion of drugs seem to be destined to failure.

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