

# “Without Limits of Resources”: Glocal Trends in Ayahuasca Utilization

„Bez omezení zdrojů“: Glokální trendy v užívání ayahuascy

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## ABSTRACT:

*This paper focuses on glocal trends in ayahuasca utilization with reference to the Czech Republic. Specifically, current tendencies in glocalization of this traditional Amazonian medicine are described. Field work was carried out in the Czech Republic from November 1, 2015 to December 4, 2016. The paper contains classification of local rituals, characteristics of the organizers and their working styles. The research sample consists of 46 persons (23 women and 23 men) who at least once took part in some type of the ayahuasca ritual. Semi-structured interviews with an average length of 50 minutes were recorded with informants. These interviews were subsequently analyzed using the Grounded theory method. The results confirm that rituals are adapted according to the needs of the ayahuasca users. These users participate in the rituals not only because of healing, but also for curiosity/experiment, personality development and spiritual and religious reasons. Finally, some risks related to ayahuasca utilization in local conditions are discussed.*

## RESUMEN:

*Este artículo se centra en las tendencias glocal en la utilización de ayahuasca. En primer lugar, contiene descripción de las corrientes tendencias en la glocalización de medicina tradicional amazónica. En segundo lugar, los resultados del trabajo de campo están incluidos. Este se realizó en la República Checa desde el 1 de noviembre de 2015 hasta el 4 de diciembre de 2016. El artículo contiene la clasificación de los rituales locales, las características de los organizadores y su estilo de trabajo. La muestra de investigación consta de 46 personas (23 mujeres y 23 hombres) que por lo menos una vez participaron en algún tipo del ritual con ayahuasca. Grabamos entrevistas semiestructuradas con una duración promedio de 50 min. con los informantes. Estas entrevistas fueron posteriormente analizadas por el método de la Teoría fundamentada. Los resultados confirman que los rituales se adaptan a las necesidades de los usuarios de ayahuasca. Estos participan en ellos no sólo por la curación, sino también por curiosidad/experimento, desarrollo de la personalidad y razones espirituales y religiosas. Por último, los riesgos relacionados con la utilización de ayahuasca en las condiciones locales están discutidos.*

## KEYWORDS:

glocalization, ayahuasca, traditional Amazonian medicine

## PALABRAS CLAVE:

glocalización, ayahuasca, medicina tradicional amazónica

## INTRODUCTION

Ayahuasca, a decoction from the liana *Banisteriopsis caapi* and leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* shrub (or some of their substitutes), is a global phenomenon. The rituals can be found not only in the territories of the Amazon countries but also in South Africa, Spain, Estonia, Australia, Germany and the Czech Republic (Balzer 2005, Sobiecki 2013, López-Pavillard 2015, Kaasik 2016, Gearin 2016, Horák 2016).

The issues pertaining to ayahuasca globalization have been extensively discussed by some researchers (Labate, Jungaberle 2011, Labate et al. 2017). They stress that the expansion of ayahuasca outside of the South American continent occurred especially in connection with the spread of the Brazilian syncretic churches of Santo Daime and União to Vegetal, whose members use it as a sacrament. In the liturgy of these churches hybridize the influence of orthodox Christianity and animism typical for members of the Amazonian indigenous ethnic groups (Luna 2002, Labate, Feeney 2012).

For the substantial part of the 20th century, these religious organizations did not predominate other evangelical

cults widespread in Brazil. However, in 1992, the possession and consumption of ayahuasca was legalized there thanks to the syncretic churches, and thus their popularity increased internationally. They are currently in Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Canada, England, France, Japan, Italy, Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland (Tupper 2008, 2009). Results from the field work confirm that Santo Daime Church operates also in the Czech Republic.

Some major events preceded the globalization of ayahuasca. The União do Vegetal church raised objections to the Brazilian law from 1985, according to which the ayahuasca ingredients were illegal. *The Consejo Federal de Estupefacientes* (CONFEN) therefore established a special commission to investigate how it is used ritually. After the field work in Céu do Mapiá, a positive report was published declaring that the local religious community is characterized by a high degree of social organization, solidarity, cohesion and willingness to cooperate (Labate, Sena Araújo 2002).

The members of the syncretic churches participated in the first research to determine whether or not ayahuasca

causes 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). No neuropsychological deficit was confirmed by the researchers.

Except Brazil, ayahuasca use is also extended in Peru. According to the Act No. 28296, the ayahuasca ritual has been proclaimed as an intangible cultural heritage of the Peruvian nation since 2008. This lawful action was taken in response to the development of the so-called

“exotic”, “pilgrimage” (Foutiou 2010, 2014), “drug” (Dobkin de Rios 1994) or otherwise called “ayahuasca tourism” (Mantere 2013, Quevedo Pereyra de Pribyl 2013, Kavenská, Simonová 2015), where the product is provided to various types of tourists for a fee (sometimes by untrustworthy practitioners).

The Internet has enabled the community of ayahuasca users to stay in contact regardless of geographical distances. Recently, an increase in public interest in ayahuasca has been observed, as evidenced by an increasing number of references about it (see Figure 1 and 2).

Information on ayahuasca has also been spreading in the Czech media, where it is possible to observe a significant increase in publications on the issue since 2014 (see Figure 3).

The Internet has also enabled an international trade in ayahuasca, making it available globally in the same way as other preparations from a wide range of “traditional Amazonian medicine”. Currently, the product is produced, distributed and consumed all over the world. Anyone with free Internet access can order it by post. However, if it does not comply with national drug laws, there is a risk of being penalized.



Fig. 1: Occurrence of the term “ayahuasca” in the Spanish corpus of books. © Own processing in GoogleBooks Ngram Viewer.

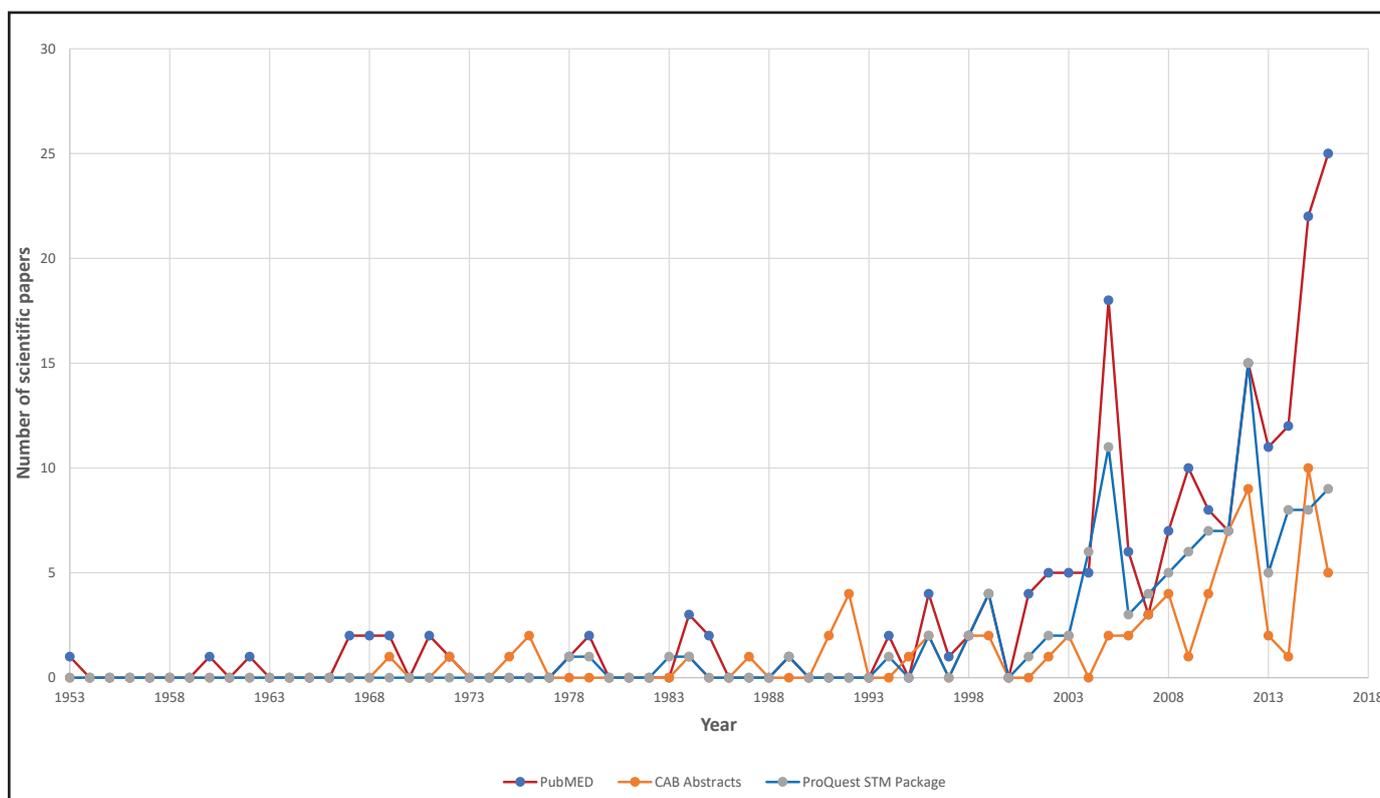


Fig. 2: Number of scientific publications containing the term “ayahuasca”. © Own processing in PubMed, CAB Abstracts, ProQuest STM Package.

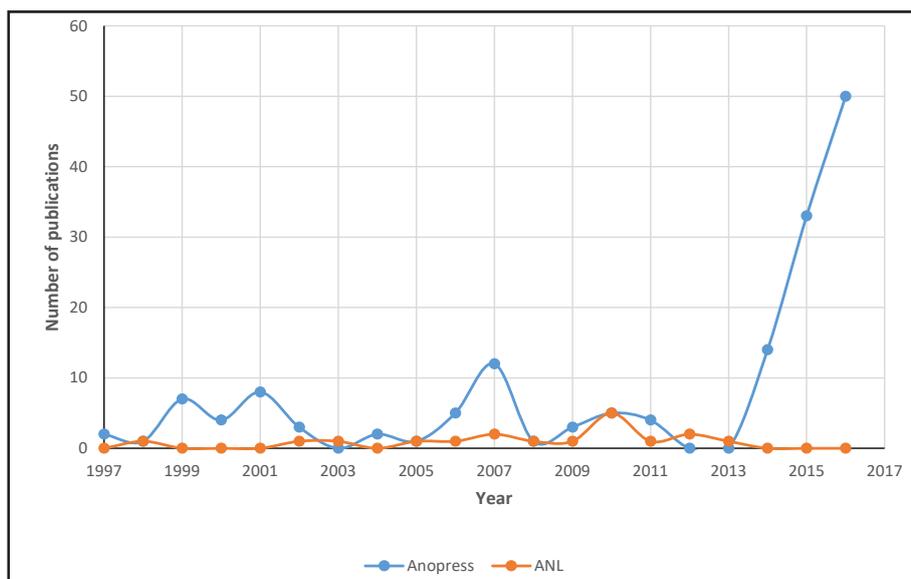


Fig. 3: Number of publications searched by keyword "ayahuasca". © Own processing in Anopress IT and ANL.

### LOCALIZATION OF AYAHUASCA IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Ayahuasca is used in the Czech Republic in three different contexts: 1. traditional (where the rituals are conducted either by members of Amazonian ethnic groups or mestizos); 2. neo-shamanic (rituals performed by non-native organizers and devotees of this spirituality, e.g. the US or EU citizens); and 3. religious (i.e. ceremonies of some of the Brazilian syncretic churches, e.g. Santo Daime). The rituals in indigenous, mestizo and European style were characterized by Luna (2011).

Over the past ten years, a number of interesting research projects on ayahuasca has been implemented in the Czech Republic. There have been pilot studies focused on its use in the treatment of addiction, in psychotherapy and personality development and the results revealed it has a positive impact on these areas (Kavenská 2008, Kavenská 2013, Horák 2013, Kavenská 2014). Similarly, results of other research in biomedicine and social sciences confirmed this fact (Giove 2002, Lewis 2008, Mercante 2013, Bogenschutz, Johnson 2016, Nunes et al. 2016, Tófoli, de Araújo 2016, Talin, Sanabria 2017).

In addition, original publications on shamanic tourism (Kavenská, Simonová, 2014) and the motivation of Czech participants in ayahuasca rituals organized in Europe were prepared by local researchers (Kavenská, Vosáhlová 2013). Horák et al. (2015) published the first scientific paper on globalization of ayahuasca and its possible therapeutic application in local conditions. Recently, information on the subculture of Czech users of traditional Amazonian medicine was recollected (Horák, Vosáhlová 2016). Partial research on the Brazilian syncretic churches has not been carried out yet.

However, according to our informants they also operate in the Czech Republic as stated above.

In the last ten years, a number of interesting final theses pertaining to ayahuasca have been successfully defended in the Czech Republic, i.e. 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 2010, Kavenská 2012).

In addition to a number of popular domestic and foreign books (Kuchař 2001, Velíšek 2008, Luna 2002, Narby 2006), mass media raised public awareness on ayahuasca in the Czech Republic. There are several websites focused on the topic, such as forums and online groups of drug experimenters, sites of organizers of exotic expeditions to the Amazon or webpages of spiritual leaders and seekers. In recent years, Czech Television has also broadcast several remarkable documents describing its utilization in various settings, such as *Otto Placht – malíř džungle* [Otto Placht - Jungle Painter], *Sít noci* [Network of the Night], *Brána smrti: Z housenky motýlem* [Gate of Death: From Caterpillar to Butterfly].

Since ayahuasca is not legal in the country, those that use it are mainly connected through informal confidential social networks. As far as its expansion is concerned, ayahuasca rituals are organized in all regions of the Czech Republic, most notably in Prague, the Central Bohemian and Pardubice Regions (Horák 2015). It was confirmed by our informants, who participated in them in most of the Czech regions (except Karlovy Vary and Ústí nad Labem).

Ayahuasca is utilized in so-called autonomous zones, i.e. situations and environments in which gather people who experience their situation as unacceptable or unsatisfactory. Therefore, they defy in terms of laws, mechanisms, and institutions that maintain discipline and control in society (Bey 1991).

### METHODOLOGY

During the fieldwork done in various parts of the Czech Republic from November 1, 2015 to December 4, 2016, interviews were recorded with ayahuasca users.

A total of 46 interviews was collected (Baker, Edwards 2012). Their average length is 50 min. (standard deviation: 20:50). Total length of audiorecordings is 2358:22 min. (i.e. 39:30 hours.).

There was also the participant observation of ayahuasca rituals carried out as a basis for their redescription finally completed thanks to diary records and support of other participants.

To ensure the reliability and validity of data, the triangulation was performed. It was based on the inclusion of a total of 7 researchers representing different scientific disciplines (i.e. anthropology, psychology, religious studies, and international relations) in the team focused on the data collection and processing. In addition, the data collection took place at different times and locations.

All interviews were conducted with volunteers contacted either, thanks to previously distributed online questionnaire, the results of which were published earlier (Horák 2015), or through participants already included in the research sample. All participants provided an informed consent. The names of all subjects included in the research sample were changed to maintain anonymity (Miovský 2006). The Grants Committee of Internal Grant Agency, Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies, Mendel University in Brno, approved the protocol.

The research sample consists of 23 women and 23 men who have in the past at least once participated in some kind of ayahuasca ritual. By sex, the informants were not selected deliberately. The average age of the informant was 34.5 years (standard deviation: 11.8). The youngest was 22 years old, the oldest 70. As regards to the family status, 58.6% of the informants were single, 23.9% married and 17.4% divorced. 41.3% had completed secondary education, 54.3% were university graduates and 4.4% graduated from higher vocational schools. 91.3% of informants were of Czech citizens. In addition, citizens of Polish, Dutch and Slovak also participated in the research. However, their number is not statistically significant.

As for the profession, mayors, painters, psychologists, students, architects, administrators, women on maternity leave, academics, therapists, neurologists, professional soldiers, IT specialists, graphic designers, economists, musicians, farmers, psychotherapists, journalists, interpreters, doctors, technicians, and retirees participated in the research.

The interviews with informants were analyzed by the Grounded theory method (Strauss, Corbin 2002). Firstly, each audio track was transcribed and then coding was done in Google Sheets. Secondly, the coding that consisted 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 case of 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 so-called *coding frame* was created and constantly specified (Schreier 2012). Similar results were confirmed by other researchers in the team who conducted their data analysis 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 to the parent code indicates its *density*, i.e. how much it is interconnected with others. Ready codes can be also merged thematically by parent code into so-called *code families* (Glaser, 1978). Code families that are characterized by semantic relation between codes can be arranged casually and displayed in diagrams (Elo, Kyngäs 2007).

In the second step, the so-called *axial coding* the codes were implicitly selected from 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 encoding*.

In this step, the codes from open coding were categorized according to their groundness and density and those that predominantly prevalent were 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.

### RESULTS

During the open coding, 4845 codes were created. As shown in Figure 4, there are 8 code families that are most embedded in the displayed narratives.

Figure 5 shows code families with the highest density. In this case, 11 were selected.

Due to the limited extent of this article, it deals with the most represented code families only.

### STYLE OF WORK

Considering the style of the work, organizers of ayahuasca rituals that take place in the Czech Republic use independently of their origin the techniques that are typical in the Amazon. Commonly, smudging, ophthalmic or nasal application of tobacco, cleansing with a rattle (i.e. *shacapa/surupanga* in Quechua), laying on of hands or perfume application (e.g. *Agua de florida*) is performed. A specific technique represents a cleansing with a liquor that is also used to rinse the mouth. At the end of the ritual, personal experiences from the altered states of consciousness are mostly shared, thus facilitating users to integrate them into everyday life.

It is clear that the style of work has an impact on the context in which ayahuasca ritual is conducted, albeit to varying degrees. Many informants had experience with the Quechuan tradition. One of them told us:

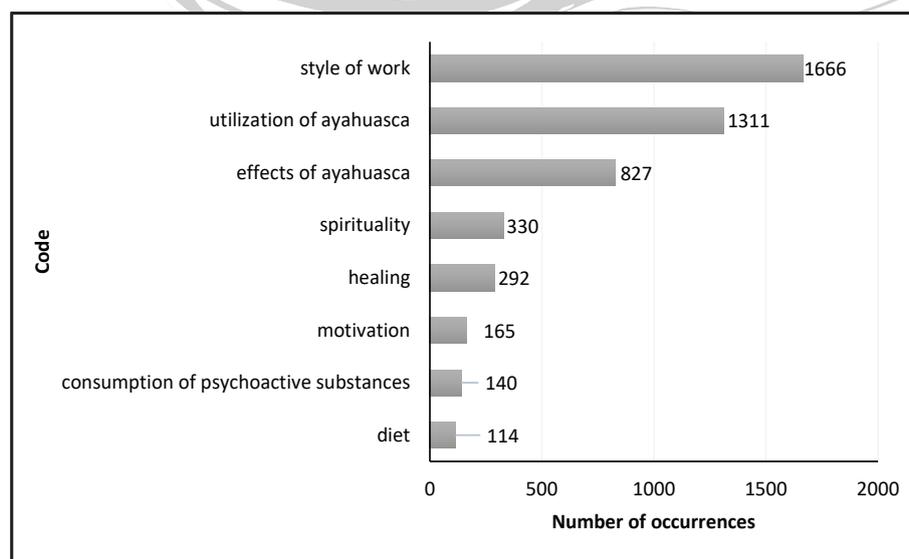


Fig. 4: List of code families most embedded in narratives of our informants. © Own processing.

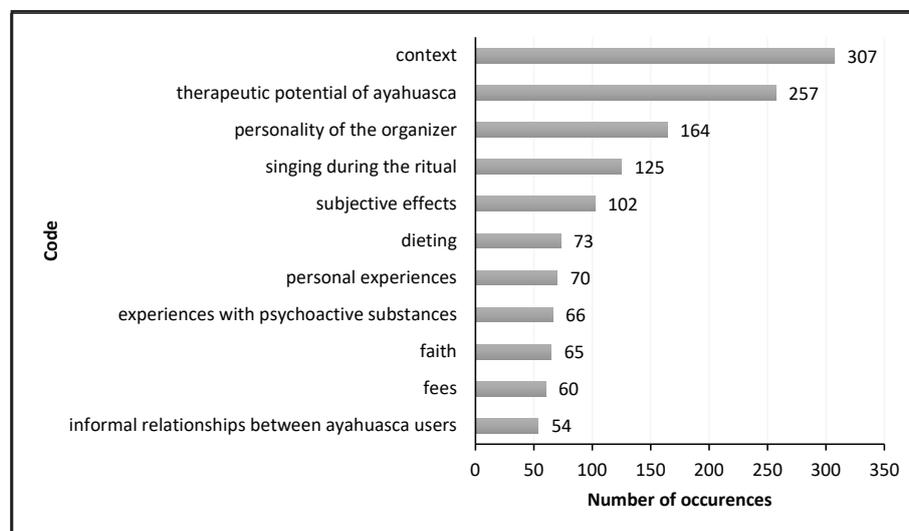


Fig. 5: List of code families with of highest density. © Own processing.

*"I like the Quechuan. That means it's in the dark. It's overnight, you know. It's probably at all the ceremonies that people are not talking there, though... that they do not talk there all the time. (...) It's 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's still one person who's doing it one on one. That's what I forgot. And I'm seeing him at the moment. (...) He puts you on a massage chair and actually does something like Reiki. You drink and he plays music... And it's... it's interesting, because he's actually opening 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>1</sup>*

#### PERSONALITY OF THE ORGANIZER

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, 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's why I remember the Twins because we were driving... We had José in the car and went to the cottage, right? He just came from Croatia, but we organized... my husband organized a healing of a friend, his classmate, who hasn't got Parkinson, but multiple sclerosis, sclerosis he has... (...) He then ... We paid him a week in Croatia, but it was canceled, yeah ... So, we did it quickly and invited him to our friend's cottage to do the ritual there. He just cured our son ... (from epilepsy, Horák's 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, it was huge... It was for all those who did not get to... (Croatia, Horák's 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. Does not continue in this practice as spending 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 by the following narrative:

*"I was involved in more ceremonies here. (...) In 2002, we brought here... brought a person with whom... the first person we actually had drunk with medicine in Peru and he*

*stayed for two months at our cottage and there... There were ceremonies for friends and for 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 sharing of experiences with the healer associated with interpretation of visions. The only difference was that Daniel did not perform so-called individual 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 and 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. According to the informants, he has a student in the Czech Republic, Jiří Horák, who uses similar techniques, but organizes rituals for a smaller number of participants (on average 5). In the past, they also differed in the work ethic. While the clients of the Ecuadorian healer pay some amount of money for the participation in the ritual, the Czech healer did his work for a gift that the patient has decided at his discretion. Jiří has had a separate practice since 2014.

Also, there were clients of Milan Burian interviewed. Milan is a Czech citizen, who performs rituals in dance halls in Prague and the Pardubice region. In addition, he also organizes expeditions to Peru. In this case, the informants stated that rituals are 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>2</sup>

Another organizer working in the Czech Republic is a Dutch neoshaman, Arnold Uhlenbeck, who bases his practice in the so-called process-oriented psychology and experience he gained in Santo Daime. Arnold occasionally organizes rituals in the Hradec Králové Region, where he 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 me during a personal meeting:

*"I've already reduced my doctor's office to just one day a week... I'm no longer nervous about it ... I really burnt out, I'm done now. I had an office which I operate as a doctor [at home]. It means I attended between 30 and 40 people a day who were 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 labourer. So now I'm... Actually, I've just stopped doing that at the end of the year. It wasn't because of financial reasons. I was doing well... I had plenty of patients, and insurance companies were paying, but I decided that I don't want to do that anymore. And as*

1 There is no unity in the nomenclature of syncretic churches. Santo Daime was studied by Dawson (2013).

2 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.

*I stopped that, I started to open up 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 Monteiro 2012). 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. This is illustrated by the following narrative, where the ritual of Rebirth that he does at Easter time and basically simulates child-birth is described:

*“These 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'll 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. And by the fact that there is a lot of 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 actually born legs down, are suddenly the opposite. Some of them, who got stuck... Actually, it happens and there's a lot of things that they realize during that moment, you know. Well, and then... then when it's over, I play the music to get them back, right, and we continue...” (G39A1823-1855).*

In the Moravian-Silesian Region, there has been also another organizer of Polish origin living, Mateusz Kowalski, who became one of our key informants after finding out that besides the implementation of originally composed workshops he dedicates himself to giving public lectures. 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 them since 2012.

Finally, one of the people interviewed and 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 that currently lives in Slovakia. A sweat lodge usually precedes Santiago's rituals, who sometimes serves during them both ayahuasca and peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*).

#### SINGING DURING THE RITUAL

In most cases, the organizers (sometimes also with the participants) sing spontaneously the so-called *ikaros*, or healing songs, not only in native Amazonian languages, but also in Spanish, English, Russian, Ukrainian or Czech. The singing is based on the idea that the intonation, vibration of the song in whose words a certain intention is compressed, can affect individual's state of mind (consciousness).<sup>3</sup>

One informant told us: *“Some ikaros 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 does like that (he is blowing gently, Horák's comment) or whistles... But 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, music groups perform during the rituals. In some places, there are also songbooks used (e.g. containing hymns in Portuguese, as it is common in case of ceremonies performed by syncretic churches).

Neurologist and therapist, who facilitates rituals, said: *“Everyone gets that [songbook] and he (the organizer, Horák's comment) mentions the number he sings and starts playing... And those who are here have already known the songs. And I know them, so I sing with him, yeah... We sing as if it's two-part singing, when it is possible, and when somebody who can sing comes, we sing like three-part. And 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>4</sup>

#### REDESCRIPTION OF A NEO-SHAMANIC RITUAL PERFORMED IN THE SOUTH BOHEMIAN REGION

This ritual was performed by the “bioenergetic healer” Santiago Hernández in one of the South Bohemian centers of 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.

Then they were warming up stones in the fire, and around 3 pm the purge began in the sweat lodge. Four times, they were all closed in the dark in a secluded hut, where they sang and prayed in four directions and the elements connected with them (see Figure 6). The organizer of the ritual sprinkled red-hot stones with water and put on them aromatic plants. 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 do not mistakenly resemble the shape of a sweat lodge to the mother's womb, where the participants of the ritual return to consolidate their contact with the Mother Earth and rejoice in overcoming their own 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 participant suffered since his mother's death for a long time with back pain

<sup>3</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” have the root in the Latin word *incantare*, equivalent to *en- + cantar* (Bustos 2008, Callicot 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Tito La Rosa is among the popular artists.



Fig. 6: A sweat lodge. © Own processing.

and he could not get rid of. In the course of the sweat lodge ritual, “it rumbled sharply” in his back, as he declared, and the pain completely disappeared.

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 interconnects the participants by singing together with a person, who observed it from outside.

After the sweat lodge, all the people act as a harmonious community and gradually set off to rest in the main hall, followed by a common dinner consisting of vegetable soup, chickpeas and lettuce. Whoever wants can offer grated cheese. All 11 people were tired after the previous ritual and they were eating food except for one person, who did not go to the sweat lodge. The dinner is followed by the rest based on the healer’s instructions. It continues until 10 pm.

At about half past ten in the evening, everyone gathers in the ritual room. Participants prepare their sitting space and evenly spread along the walls of the room, the center of which is dominated by an altar with 5 burning candles and knitted jaguar heads. These statutes, as it later turns out, have much greater significance and meaning than it firstly appeared at first. Before the ritual, the organizer has mentioned that if a healing process is going to be too demanding for some of the participants, focusing on the light of the altar, the jaguar heads can 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 before the beginning of the ritual planted wood and hot coals. The organizer lightens the cedar twigs in the bowl, rounds off the participants and fan them with the eagle pen. Then he asks all of them to come to him one after another and serves “medicine”. Most of them came to drink ayahuasca, which the healer has in front of him on the floor in two glass jugs. But later it turns 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. According to our knowledge, this organizer is the only one who organizes such rituals in the Czech Republic, where ayahuasca and peyote are used at the same time. As it is clear later, it does not cause any problems in the ritual performance.

As soon as everyone returns to their places, the healer will ask his helper to round off the participants with *palo santo* (*Bursera graveolens*), and they are cleansed with its smoke. As soon as he settles down, they will 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 apparently 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 whose 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 addressing, being 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 so that they are not next to each other.

The second half of an eight-hour long ritual is characterized by the decrease in effects. 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 that he helps himself this way in individually guided rituals.

The healers resonant voice sounds again in the morning, when the songs enclosing the ritual and motivating the participants are performed. Symbolically, the ritual ends at about 9 am after the cook with her helpers prepares breakfast. It is sanctified in the 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 and thank to all the elements through the calumet, the sacred pipe, from which they breathe for four times to express a self-acceptance, and exhale as a sign of the return (this number also symbolizes the number of elements). The fifth, last breath and exhalation of smoke serves to make the spirit of everyone present.

Just as it was at the beginning, all participants will join in a circle at the end of the ritual.

They will 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 wisdoms transmitted by ayahuasca. Everyone and everything in the universe forms a unity and a whole.

A sharing of experiences follows. It is accompanied by commentaries made by the healer. A rest continues until lunch, after which participants move one after another to their homes.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article presents current knowledge on the use of ayahuasca in the Czech Republic, as well as the characteristics of their organizers, information about their style of work, and the redescription of a neoshamanic ritual performed in the South Bohemian Region.

For this article, there were data from 46 people, who at least once participated at the ayahuasca ritual in the Czech Republic guided by one of the 9 organizers, collected. 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 informants declare that ayahuasca is used in the Czech Republic in a (non-clinical) therapeutic or spiritual context. We argue that 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 the different environment.

Ayahuasca is popular because it has a promising therapeutic potential in the treatment of addiction and other lifestyle diseases (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. A part of it, they also use it to detoxify organism and enhance immunity.

The utilization of ayahuasca has its own risks that cannot be ignored. On the organizer’s side, they can be caused by a lack of pre-screening of users, who may experience contraindications due to 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 into account when administering this preparation 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 as a result 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.

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