

## Spannabis 08

A friend of mine told me about the cannabis fair (Hemp and alternative technologies fair) in Barcelona, 22–24 February, and as a reborn Swedish drug researcher it caught my attention and I said I would go with him. The day the fair started I called him around 13.00 to check when we were going. He said he'd come around to my house at 15.00. So at 15.30 he was outside my house, but said he'd got to go look for some "hierbas", weed. You can't go to the fair without it apparently. So he'd be back in an hour. At 17.15 he was back. And I thought ok, we still have time to make it to the most advertised speech of a cannabis expert. But off course, the train was not running as often or as smoothly as one might have wished and when we got there we also had a 30-minute walk to the fair. So, we missed all the speakers and I had to settle with the stands. The stands themselves were interesting enough, for a Swede who grew up hearing that smoking cannabis once was bound to end in heroine addiction and premature death.

We paid the 13 euro entrance fee and were told that to smoke we had to go outside. Ok, so what went on in there? It was far less exciting than one would expect from a drug sure to lead to death. This was a regular fair, where companies try to sell you their merchandise. In this case mostly seeds, smoking equipment, breeding equipment and other hemp products such as clothes, medication, and so on. But it could just as well have been sailing equipment or mobile phones. It was all about catching the consumers' interest, whether by means of a disc jockey, sex-related posters or even a live-band and fashion show.

The first thing we ran into was a stand selling a practical portable inhalator made of glass. My friend asked how it works and if we could try it. The sales-person explained how it works and said we could try it. She

could put salvia in it if we didn't bring our own stuff, which we obviously did. So she puts the marijuana in and heats up the glass from the outside with a lighter. You then inhale but no smoke comes out your mouth. It's called a vaporizer. It's advertising blurb said it was practical, since it doesn't draw attention...

We then moved on to a stand also selling vaporizers, but for home-use. You put a plastic bag on a little machine (one looks just like a radio) and the bag is filled with smoke when the grass is heated within the machine. You then inhale what's in the bag. This one is expensive, but my friend really likes it. The smoking with vaporizers is supposed to be better for the lungs, but the effects also last longer.

The cultivation of cannabis seems a research area in itself. There are seeds from different regions and these are mixed in different ways – making them hybrids. The seeds, or the plants, all have different, catchy names such as red cherry berry, uptown girl, blue cheese and morning glory. Interestingly there are so-called 'female' and 'male' seeds, of which the female are the ones that can be fertilized – thus female seeds are more expensive (the reverse to human sex where men are generally valued higher...). The guests of this fair were, however, some 90 per cent male. But the choice of seeds is just one part. Then there is the growing. There are lamps, pots with or without soil, and little shower-like cabinets in silver, with some kind of fan that provides moisture and fertilizers among other things.

The fair is, however, about much more than cultivation and consumption; it brings together business people from various countries involved in the manufacture and marketing of cannabis products. In a way it is perhaps a more serious business market than the known Barcelona fashion fair that I attended a couple of weeks ago. Around the fringes of the fair there were also the already mentioned invited speakers, giving talks also about drug policy, cultivation etc.

The fact that the selling and consumption

of this drug is still illegal in most countries cannot be denied, however much the organisers and exhibitors want to make it seem an ordinary commodity. But, the general idea of the fair is that it shouldn't be illegal and this is something that perhaps unites the visitors to this fair more than anything else. But I was expecting the political side to be more visible. Perhaps, there is no need to make this point among those who think alike. On the program was, however, one speaker talking about reducing harms (in Spain this is mainly carried out through information about how to use the drug and what to do in case of unexpected consequences). That speech was the only sign of this being a drug that could cause harm, except for maybe a little kit for analysing the drugs strength and quality that was sold in one of the stands.

I've grown up somewhat since I first heard about this "lethal" drug and realize that the information given to me was slightly exaggerated. But although I've changed my view about drugs in general, the fact that it is possible to hold a fair on the cultivation and consumption of cannabis still seems rather odd to me, and probably to my fellow countrywomen/men too, if they had been there (I did not find a single one among lots of foreigners). But walking around the 200 or so stands (covering 2000 m<sup>2</sup>) made me forget about that, considering how "normal" everyone else seemed to regard the products that were sold there.

After a while I had to go out for a cigarette, something that by many is considered more dangerous than cannabis (the reason why many cannabis users smoke their marijuana without mixing it with tobacco). Whether that is true or not, it's still weird to think that what my friend likes to smoke is illegal and has to be hidden, while my drug is legal and sold in every street corner shop. How can this be justified?

**Jessica Palm**, PhD

Calle Bou de Sant Pere 22 4-2

08003 Barcelona

E-mail: [jessica.palm@sorad.su.se](mailto:jessica.palm@sorad.su.se)

## Building capacity for action

European Alcohol Policy Conference,  
Barcelona 3-5 April 2008

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The third in a series of European Alcohol Policy conferences took place in Barcelona, 3-5 April 2008 with over 350 participants from a variety of backgrounds; in policy making, advocacy, research and economics.

Members of the Building Capacity project, which constitutes the Alcohol Policy Network Committee held a pre-conference meeting the day before the conference, in which the conference's outcome was discussed. The conference conclusions and recommendations can be viewed at the project's web page: <http://www.ias.org.uk/buildingcapacity/conference/index.html>

The conference proper was structured around the five objectives of the Commission's Communication on alcohol: to protect young people, children and the unborn child; to reduce injuries and death from alcohol-related road accidents; to prevent alcohol-related harm among adults and reduce the negative impact on the workplace; to inform, educate and raise awareness on the impact of harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption, and on appropriate consumption patterns; and to develop and maintain a common evidence base at EU level.

The programme included plenary sessions with presentations on e.g. the economic arguments to reduce alcohol-related harm, alcohol and injuries, alcohol and mental health and alcohol and liver disease, but the program also included roundtable discussions. Participants in the first roundtable discussion were ministers of the social and health field from Spain, Slovenia, Sweden and Estonia, as well as the regional director from WHO, and the director general of DG Sanco of the European Commission. Participants in the second roundtable discussion included internationally established alcohol