

Energy Control: over 25 years breaking with the ban on drug use.

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ABSTRACT

The following article addresses the importance of Energy Control as one of the organizational references linked to the implementation of the paradigm of risk reduction in drug use not only in Spain, but worldwide. This programme focuses its work not only on health promotion based on generating and facilitating access to reliable information on the consumption of psychoactive substances, but also on promoting the free choice of this positioning, always without forgetting the pleasures linked to its use. To this end, it offers a series of services such as substance analysis, counseling, and guidance in consumption environments, etc. In addition, it carries out interventions in leisure spaces to provide information and support to consumers and generates the participation of volunteers, highlighting its peer education approach. In short, Energy Control, in its more than 25 years of history, has contributed to changing the social perception of drugs, going from considering them a problem to normalizing their presence in society, managing to change the narrative and the way of intervening in relation to drug use, fostering a culture of risk reduction and promoting a healthier approach to psychoactive substances.

Keywords: Drugs, Health Education, Health policy, Drug policy, Health, Value systems, Social Control.

Energy Control: más de 25 años rompiendo con la prohibición del consumo de drogas.

RESUMEN

El siguiente artículo aborda la importancia que Energy Control tiene como uno de los referentes organizativos vinculados a la implementación del paradigma de la reducción de riesgos en el consumo de drogas, no sólo en España, sino en el mundo entero. Este programa centra su labor no exclusivamente en una promoción de la salud basada en generar, y facilitar, el acceso a información fiable sobre el consumo de sustancias psicoactivas, sino en promulgar la libre elección de este posicionamiento, siempre sin olvidar los placeres vinculados a su uso. Para ello ofrece una serie de servicios como el análisis de sustancias, asesoramiento y orientación en entornos de consumo, etc. Además, realiza intervenciones en espacios de ocio para brindar información y apoyo a las personas consumidoras, y genera la participación de voluntariado, destacando su enfoque de educación entre iguales. En definitiva, Energy Control, en sus más de 25 años de historia, ha contribuido a cambiar la percepción social sobre las drogas, pasando de considerarlas un problema a normalizar su presencia en la sociedad, logrando cambiar la narrativa y el modo de intervenir en torno al consumo de estas, fomentando una cultura de reducción de riesgos, y promoviendo un enfoque más saludable hacia las sustancias psicoactivas.

Palabras clave: Drogas, Educación Sanitaria, Política de la salud, Política sobre drogas, Salud, Sistemas de valores, Control Social.

Energy Control: quebrar a proibição das drogas durante mais de 25 anos.

RESUMO

O artigo que se segue aborda a importância do Energy Control como uma das referências organizacionais ligadas à implementação do paradigma da redução de riscos no consumo de drogas, não só em Espanha, mas em todo o mundo. Este programa centra o seu trabalho não só na promoção da saúde baseada na geração e facilitação do acesso a informação fiável sobre o consumo de substâncias psicoactivas, mas também na promoção da livre escolha deste posicionamento, sempre sem esquecer os prazeres ligados ao seu uso. Para o efeito, oferece uma série de serviços como a análise de substâncias, o aconselhamento e a orientação em ambientes de consumo, etc. Além disso, realiza intervenções em espaços de lazer para fornecer informações e apoio aos consumidores e gera a participação de voluntários, destacando a sua abordagem de educação pelos pares. Em suma, o Energy Control, nos seus mais de 25 anos de história, contribuiu para mudar a percepção social das drogas, passando de considerá-las um problema para normalizar a sua presença na sociedade, conseguindo mudar a narrativa e a forma de intervir em relação ao consumo de drogas, fomentando uma cultura de redução de riscos e promovendo uma abordagem mais saudável das substâncias psicoactivas.

Palavras-chave: Droga, Educação em Saúde, Política de Saúde, Política de drogas, Saúde, Sistemas de valores, Controlo Social.

Introduction: the evolution of drug use.

Drugs and their different uses are a phenomenon associated with human beings' trajectory since records exist (Escotado, 1992). There are many ancient testimonies related to this reality, such as those linked to hemp consumption in Amerindian cultures, opium in China, or the importance of wine use in ancient Greece and Egypt. In addition, there are cases known of psychoactive substances that have occupied a central role in pharmacopeia, only to then be disowned, stigmatized, and persecuted for their consumption depending on the context. Some of the clearest examples of this phenomenon are found in substances such as heroin and cocaine (Freud, 1974; Escotado 1994), which, after being defended as healing elements, were constructed as negative elements, aspects that are transferred to the people who use them through a symbolic osmosis driven by much more complex interests than those merely related to health issues (Escotado, 1997).

Anyone not aware of the normalized presence of different psychoactive substances in everyday life is turning a blind eye to a typical social phenomenon of our context, as Romaní (1999) already defended, by giving current addictions the status of a characteristic social fact of contemporary society and avoiding-drug-centric conceptions based on biological universalities. This must inexorably lead us to consider the following reflection: If there have always been psychoactive substances and people who consume them, why has a present cultural construction regarding drugs and their consumption blurred as something timeless?

Drugs, nowadays, must be understood not only in terms of their chemical characteristics and as elements that pose health risks but within a specific context of extreme capitalism, multiculturalism, and globalization that does not forget the interests, expectations, and realities of both people and groups who consume them. Psychoactive substance use, once confined to specific spaces, behaviors, and symbols has broken through these barriers, creating a multitude of consumption situations, users, routes of administration, desired effects, markets, etc., which can only be understood through the combined analysis of the substance, the individual, and the context (Zinberg, 1984). This analysis breaks off simplistic and reductionist conceptions that only generate ignorance, fear, and the invisibilization of realities associated with drug use.

Focusing on the use of these substances in Spain, Usó (2013) highlights how opium, heroin, cocaine, hashish, and other similar molecules, were regarded in this country with the same consideration as any other drug. Initially, only the frauds linked with their commercialization were pursued, managing the competencies of those who sold them and determining where their advertising could appear. It was during the First World War, in which Spain remained neutral, that many people sought refuge within its borders. Alongside this demographic increase, there was a parallel rise in the use of psychoactive substances beyond therapeutic margin.

Subsequently, Spain's accession to international conventions, the enactment of laws such as the Corcuera Law (which allowed the Spanish State police to enter any residence without prior authorization from a judge as long as they had "found knowledge" that a drug-related crime was being committed or had been committed therein), and the reform of the Penal Code in the 1990s, intensified criminalization and violence associated with drug use.

This phenomenon, alongside with the change in heroin use, which evolved from its origins in countercultural lines to become a consumer habit in the 1980s, influences both nationally and internationally, to the criminalization and stigmatization of drugs users, especially through the figure of the "junkie" (Massó, 2015). However, during that period, the implementation of harm reduction and methadone programs emerged as strategies to address the HIV epidemic and reduce the social harm of drug consumption (Bones et al., 2020). Specifically, in 1987, the Spanish Ministry of Health and Consumption launched a campaign promoting the use of disposable syringes, considered the first harm reduction initiative (HR) that did not involve mandatory abstinence and in which consumption was outside state control. This was followed by others, such as needle exchange points, venipuncture rooms, etc, always without giving up the prevailing prohibitionism on drugs but shaping intervention through harm reduction (Usó, 2013). In other words, the Spanish case illustrates the complex interactions between drug policies, the social representation of drug users, and the health and legal responses to this issue, highlighting the importance of comprehensive and harm reduction-based approaches to address this matter effectively.

1. Theoretical Framework. Recreational drug use.

The abstentionist paradigm is a hegemonic model for understanding drug use as a behavior to be avoided due to the inexorable harm it purportedly causes to health, promoting abstinence as the only way to avoid this suffering. As expressed by Faura and García (2013), with this purpose, the access of certain psychoactive substances is criminalized, sanctioned, stigmatized, and restricted, except in contexts, uses and perceptions related or carried out by individuals associated with the biomedical field. This positioning, supporting public policies, favors socialization and educational processes focused on fear and abstinence, generating dynamics that make invisible all those who disobey these dominant postulates.

However, as described by Martínez and Romaní (2016), during the 1990s, the relational patterns with psychoactive substances in Spain began to change. It was from these years onwards when drug use, such as heroin, was replaced by others linked to nightlife and electronic music contexts, such as stimulants and synthetic substances, due to their entactogenic capacities and experience prolongation (Martínez and Pallarés 2013). If we add to this the increase in alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis consumption, we glimpse the beginning of a transformation in consumption patterns, the existing social representation of drugs, and the explanatory models that in turn guide the different types of intervention (Fernández et al., 2022). Decision-making related to the addiction phenomenon, supported by certain political positions, not only constructs level interpretative differences but also in the field of intervention (Bombarolo and Pauselli, 2007; Santana et al., 2023). This is reflected in the existence of multiple assistance possibilities based on different ways of addressing drug use, so the redirection of the hegemonic abstinent intervention type towards new ways of understanding this relationship must be a process of adaptation to new consumption patterns, contexts, substances, intentions, etc.

Just as new users and forms of drug use appeared, approaches were adapted, moving from harm reduction to risk reduction. According to Martínez and Pallarés (2013), this change was motivated by both new contexts and intervention groups. Especially by the risks and harms to be avoided. Sharing a syringe is not the same as sharing a bill for snorting as the former carries' different potential consequences than the latter.

As this position becomes more solidified, stigma and alarm begin to diminish in some countries of today's society, while simultaneously, a perspective emerges that understands drug use in festive contexts not as suffering but as a way of having fun linked to certain risks that the individuals will probably outgrow upon becoming adults (Prins, 2008). This maturation process influences not only how psychoactive substances are interpreted but also the contexts, patterns, etc. (Vidal, et al., 2022). This is reflected by the arrival of a view of their use based on already established ideas of harm reduction, such as: "psychoactive substances will always be consumed, so one must know how to do it in the least dangerous way"; "if they have been consumed for so long, maybe it's because it's not being done right", etc. Rodríguez et al. (2008) argue that these ideas have become part of the shared social imaginary about drugs today, laying the foundations not only for their legitimization but also for their normalization at a population level.

Psychoactive substances, their consumption, and their presence in different contexts are no longer seen by civil society as a problem but rather associated with psychosocial processes such as prestige, pleasure, fun, etc. The consistent step from articulating discourses and realities about drugs from potential problems to potential benefits brings certain changes in the image of those who use them, a reduction of the stigma associated with the phenomenon, etc. In other words, an identity metamorphosis from a dangerous, sick and wrongdoer person to a drug user intentionally seeking a balance between what drugs provide and what may be lost through their consumption.

However, as Romaní (2004) points out, unfortunately the normalized image that many people have in different contexts about drugs has been established long before the media, in certain care facilities and in the political sphere, as we can see in the following image (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Poster of the 'No to drugs' campaign of the Comunidad de Madrid (2022).



In this line of the normalization and response to the emerging reality associated with drug use, Usó (2013) indicated how gradually intervention resources more aligned with the current reality of drug use began to appear such as Energy Control (EC), Ai Laket, Consumo con ciencia in Spain and Échele Cabeza and Proyecto Soma beyond our borders. These initiatives focus on offering non-moralistic information about drugs, risk and harm reduction strategies, reflection on drug policies and much more, like what is presented in this text. Among them, the one with the longest trajectory is Energy Control, which we will introduce next.

2. Energy Control: Adapting Care Facilities to the Current Reality of drug use.

As described in the previous section, within the context of the drug issue in Spain, the use of certain substances linked with countercultural movements, certain healing processes, or interpreted as an identity trait of certain social groups, has transformed into a deeply rooted habit to consumerism and the search to escape from reality.

Up to this point, care facilities of the time focused their interventions on three types of actions:

1. Interventions on people who had developed a dependency relationship, without distinguishing between those who wanted to quit and those who did not.
2. Activities oriented towards the prohibition and/or repression of certain uses of specific psychoactive substances.
3. Actions focused on preventing the initiation or delaying the use of drugs.

All of this was supported by a drastic change in the way of understanding the use of psychoactive substances as part of the dynamics of a society marked by the crises of the 70s and the changes in drug policies of the 80s that led to this modification.

This leads us to reflect on... What happens to those people who want to use or continue using drugs? What about those who develop other problems not related to drug dependence? And what about those who construct their experience with these substances in positive terms?

In response to not only the emergence of new ways of understanding addiction but also new patterns, people who consume, consumption practices and spaces, psychoactive substances, etc., the Energy Control (EC) project was born in 1997. It presented a novel approach in the national intervention scenario with people who use drugs, which tried to respond to these new profiles and realities linked with drug consumption (Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Risk reduction comic book Join the party! (Energy Control, 1997).



This initiative emerged from the collaborative efforts carried out by drug users and workers at the Drug Dependency Care and Monitoring Center of Sants, currently managed by the Association for Well-being and Development (Asociación Bienestar y Desarrollo [ABD], 2024). According to the information on its website, EC integrates and complements the work, experience, and knowledge of all the people, professionals and volunteers involved, whose main objective is to offer a useful service for drug users (Energy Control, 2024). As pointed out in Insúa and Lledó (2014), EC's work does not focus on promoting drug abstinence and drug prohibition but rather seeks to reduce the potential risks linked with drug use that may appear in drug users.

Initially, EC focused its work model on generating spaces and informative materials addressed to reducing the harms/risks linked with the use of MDMA in leisure spaces/party environments, which they distributed directly to users (Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Information leaflet on MDMA use (Energy Control, 2002).



The information provided to people, whether users or not, focused on maintaining proper hydration, dosages, how to act in case of intoxication, etc. In addition, in 1999, a substance analysis service was opened in a facility provided by ABD in the Gracia district of Barcelona. In a very rudimentary way, the aim was to identify the main substances consumed at that time. This service later became one of the hallmarks of the whole program.

Simultaneously, EC's presence expanded nationally, opening its own branches in Barcelona, Madrid, Antequera and Palma, while also beginning to diversify its interventions and services provided. As the years went by, the program began to initiate actions focused not only on other substances such as cocaine, alcohol, amphetamine sulfate, etc., but also on consumption patterns and possible associated risk behaviors (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Information leaflet on alcohol and driving "¿Bebes, conduces?" (Energy Control, 2014).



Furthermore, the program went from merely providing informational actions in specific settings with limited tools, such as information booths at party environments, to developing alcohol tests, drug analysis, training for professionals, workshops in educational contexts, etc. EC always used communication methods adapted to the target population. In other words, EC adapted its intervention methodology to the new drug user profiles, the emergence of new substances, and the demands of both realities. These characteristics currently define the central axes of the program.

In the following years, Energy Control continued its work and gained visibility and recognition among the nightlife-consuming population, while also establishing itself as a useful harm reduction service for health policies. This began to be seen in 2002, the year in which received the award from the Jove Cambra de Barcelona for its work, a phenomenon that facilitated even more its consolidation within the field of addiction treatment/management in Spain. The program has continued receiving awards up to this day, such as the Honorary Mention of the Queen Sofia Award 2008 in its 17th edition for the Alcohol and Driving project, or the European Drug Prevention Prize in 2010. These awards are accompanied by the program's incorporation in the Trans European Drug Information (TEDI) database in 2011, a situation that positions EC in a relevant position and consolidates its analysis service internationally but does not translate into receiving greater institutional economic funding to fully develop all its services.

Another of CE's central characteristics is how it defines the users whom it works with. As explained by Rovira and Hidalgo (2003), there are people who decide to use drugs without thinking/considering the possible harm they can/may cause. This decision making is based on the search/pursuit for certain pleasures, which implicitly involve assuming certain risks. Energy Control, through empowering these people with access to reliable information, non-stigmatization, respect for their consumption, etc., aims to ensure that decision-making related to drug use mitigates as many risks as possible without forgetting the pleasure aspect. This is what is methodologically called/referred to as "pleasure and risk management".

This way of working inevitably entails a new interaction framework among users, professionals, and volunteers, which ends certain previous/past logics that depersonalize, question and problematize the former, for the sake of a more egalitarian relationship. This situation favors both the approach and the involvement of all parties involved in the dynamics proposed by the program, as well as the exchange of knowledge between users, experts and the different peer groups they are part of. This process of knowledge creation, developed by Energy Control over the years, has generated a large amount of technical knowledge on drugs, consumption patterns, interactions, etc., which fills both the gap of objective information generated by prohibitionism (Parés, 2013), and the lack of reference by users to the theoretical aspects.

Nevertheless, criticisms such as those by Fernández et al. (2022) show how EC, despite developing harm reduction strategies for people with unproblematic drug use, ends up fitting/framed within the hegemonic intervention model for these issues. In other words, despite this approach, its influence by neoliberal logic affects both bodily and experiential realms by prescribing appropriate relationships with substances, a process that generates an intervention model that shapes subjectivity from a specific health perspective. Sepúlveda and Romaní (2013) raised similar criticisms, arguing that the risk dichotomy will be replaced by a scale ranging from health (abstinence) to disease (addiction), generating segmented and focused ways of intervention. In other words, addiction intervention methods are applied through differential management policies (Castel, 1984).

3. What theoretically supports this type of intervention?

As we previously outlined, Energy Control responds in a concrete/specific way to certain demands imposed by the needs of the current societal drug intervention context. However, theoretically, what are its bases/foundations? This and similar questions will be addressed in the following section.

Energy Control does not position itself either for or against drugs (Energy Control, 2006), although they are in favor of their regulation to try to respond to current consumption reality, as drug prohibition and abstinence have not succeeded.

Moreover, two key phenomena are essential to understand the type of intervention in the addiction field carried out by EC:

1. The non-moralistic stance towards drugs and their users, always assuming a constant management of the possible risks and pleasures associated with these actions. This is generated through the development of educational and socializing processes related to psychoactive substances, based on accurate and contrasted information, often opposed to what is promoted by the abstentionist paradigm and prohibition centric approaches.
2. The assumption of risk reduction as the other side of harm reduction. As previously mentioned, Martínez and Pallarés (2018), state that the emergence of new consumption contexts and people using drugs has led to the introduction of new risks and harms to avoid. This change makes possible harms somewhat unspecific and improbable, thus advocating directly for the use of the risk term exclusively, a theoretical stance assumed by Energy Control since its inception.

However, if we must focus on a key concept to understand the theoretical postulates of Energy Control, we cannot avoid referring the work of Zinberg (1984), on the relationship between context, substance, and person as a necessary focus to understand addiction from a non-reductionist perspective, which underpins the interventions carried out by the presented program (Figure 5).

Figure 5.

Poster of the Zinberg Triangle (Energy Control, 2020).



It is worth recalling Zinberg's (1972) study on heroin use during a war conflict, wherein he demonstrated that the context influenced consumption, as the use of this substance significantly declined among people after the war ended. It was here that he first presented the importance of studying all the variables that influence the phenomenon of addiction, which he later presented in the first work cited by this author. More contemporary studies, as highlighted by Apud and Romani (2016), showed how personality and social context cannot be disregarded in addiction analyses, but rather are central aspects.

Thus, this multivariable model for understanding addiction, that influences Energy Control as Fernández (2018) points out, does not overlook either the biological dimension, as the influence on the organism is considered as part of the system; neither the psychological component, that identifies causes such as lack of self-control, emotional confusion, negative thoughts, etc.; neither social aspects such as socioeconomic status, purchasing power, poverty, technology, the different meanings associated with consumption among various social groups, etc.

It is interesting to highlight how Energy Control, in its theoretical and methodological foundations, advocates for responsible drug use, as well as the right of drug users to have information that helps/assists them in making decisions about their health, always in terms of prevention (Energy Control, 2006). This position/stance, contrary to abstentionist and prohibitionist positions that reduce all drug use to problematic, recognizes a Zinbergian heterogeneity in both consumption practices, substances, and people, thus assuming the theoretical position that not everything related to the consumption of psychoactive substances is problematic, but can even lead to pleasurable situations.

In summary, Energy Control aligns itself with the paradigm of health and individual freedom of choice to consume or not, focusing its action on risk prevention, and at the same time, on working to highlight not only risks related with consumption but also pleasures.

Before concluding, we cannot forget the role that volunteers play in carrying out all the actions we have just presented. They act as health agents, and develop peer education dynamics by intervening as equals among themselves (Gutiérrez and Robles, 2018), contrasting with the more traditional way of carrying out interventions in the field of addiction, where this role and the possession of the correct knowledge are assumed by a professional distanced from the reality of the phenomenon.

4. Method.

This article is based on a documentary review of Energy Control and its position in the field of addiction treatment in Spain. According to Bavaresco (2001), this type of research provides a preliminary understanding of the sources consulted related to the topic, presenting both the precedents and the postulates written on the subject.

From the selection and compilation of information linked to the selected epistemological context, through the study of journals, newspapers, books, and other similar media, in a systematic manner, either in the form of data that may have been the product of measurement made by others, or as texts that in themselves constitute the study events, the end of the research is achieved, according to Hurtado (2007).

This review arises from the need not only to understand the program that is the focus of this text, but also from the limited conceptualization of its intervention positioning that we can find in current academic literature.

5. Results. What constitutes Energy Control?

Energy Control mainly depends on the Bienestar y Desarrollo Association, which influences the following aspects:

1. Given that ABD owns the EC program, it is highly dependent, both economically and ideologically, on the former organization, even though Energy enjoys some economic sustainability due to funding sources such as the National Drug Plan, the Government of Catalonia, the Junta of Andalucía, the Madrid City Council, etc.
2. Directly related to the previous point, although to a lesser extent, Energy Control presents some level of management subordination with ABD. While the program has its own spaces, materials, organizational structure etc., there are certain decisions, processes, and materials, such as some vehicles, that are shared with other NGO resources, for example.

In short, the organizational subordination experienced by Energy Control prevents it from emerging as an independent project, but at the same time provides it with practically assured economic viability, projection, and consolidation within Spanish harm reduction policies.

As identifying organizational elements, Energy Control presents the following points:

Mission, to be a rigorous, honest and taboo-free reference for people who use drugs to manage the pleasures and risks associated with their consumption.

Focus. Related to living in a world in which there is a society educated in responsible consumption, in coexistence with drugs, and in respect for the people who use them, in a context in which policies contribute to this.

Values. Dynamism and innovation, responsibility and respect, person centered orientation and needs, genuineness and leadership, adaptation to reality, without taboos or paternalism. The main objective proposed by EC is to prevent potential problems and reduce the risks associated with the consumption of psychoactive substances, through a strategy of information, training, counseling and substance analysis, as objective, close and judgment-free as possible, offering people the possibility to assess and make their own decisions with greater knowledge and awareness, for the benefit of their health and quality of life.

The program is oriented to have a particularly effective impact on the population that uses drugs recreationally and in their direct environments, although not exclusively. Since its intervention principles are designed to be applied and made available to anyone whose professional and/or individual interests are linked to psychoactive substances and their potential uses. Additionally, in a complementary manner, it also identifies, channels and guides people who may be experimenting with problematic relationships with consumption and/or addiction toward the specialized addiction care network. It also works with civil society and certain public bodies, engaging in political advocacy in the field of human rights and public health.

Currently, Energy Control has the following organization structure (Figure 6):

Figure 6.

Energy Control organizational chart.



Note. Own elaboration.

First of all, it's worth noting that the highest position in the image above corresponds to the person who acts as a link between EC and ABD. Immediately, we find the people responsible for the two main areas of Energy Control today: international and national. The coordination group is constituted of the two previous representations, the coordinators of each of the existing branches in Spain, and those representing each of the services offered by the program. In addition, each EC branch has several territorial leaders responsible for Volunteering, Leisure and Free Time Interventions Substance Information, Counseling, and Substance Analysis Services, as well as others linked to research and dissemination services, prevention in educational environment, etc. depending on territorial needs.

5.1 What does Energy Control offer?

The social program Energy Control, linked to ABD, must be understood as an initiative aimed at improving the living conditions of the aforementioned population. This is achieved by offering a series of services which, according to Montoya and Boyero (2013), are the set of experiences resulting from the interaction between the organization and the users, always keeping in mind the most appropriate responses to their needs will influence the program's sustainability.

Currently, Energy Control offers the following services:

Multi-channel support for individual doubts and questions. This service is the gateway to EC, since its objective is to connect with people who use drugs and/or all those who want information about the possible risks and pleasures associated with drug use. In addition, this initiative acts as a way for early detection of problematic consumption and dependency relationships, in order to guide them to specialized addiction services. Support is provided both in person and online (website, social media, email, etc.).

Analyze your substances. It is the central service of EC today by connecting, cohering and complementing the rest. Its main objective is to offer information and advice, from a risk reduction

perspective, to people who have decided to consume drugs, through the application of certain laboratory techniques for the analysis of both the concentration of the psychoactive substance and possible adulterants.

There are three ways to access this service (Figure 7): in their own headquarters, in consumer environments linked to leisure, and through postal mail for those people who do not reside in locations where there are Energy Control headquarters.

Figure 7.

Solutions of psychoactive substances (Energy Control, 2020).



The program currently uses various substance analysis techniques including colorimetric tests, thin layer chromatography (TLC), ultraviolet spectrophotometry (UV), gas chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry (GC/MS), high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC), and liquid chromatography coupled to with mass spectrometry (LC/MS). Recently, Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) analysis has also been introduced at one of its facilities.

Interventions at parties and nightlife. This service focuses on carrying out interventions based on harm reduction principles, approaching and integrating into those spaces where drug use occurs in order to provide information, advice, and guidance on them (Figure 8). One of the main values of this type of action is that they are carried out by volunteers, who, being recognized as equals by the group they work with, act as kind of community health agents (Añel et al., 2023; Rocha et al., 2020).

Figure 8.

Nightlife intervention (Energy Control, 2020).



At the same time, it also seeks to work on the responsibility and awareness of both companies and the people who work in them linked to leisure, concerts, festivals, municipalities, and organizations that manage events and festivals.

Training. This service offers and provides specialized training in prevention and risk reduction aimed at professionals from multiple fields (health, university, local, etc.) and different sectors (public, private, etc.). Its main objective is to train, educate and develop different competencies related to Harm Reduction both for those in contact with drugs and/or those who use them, as well as for all those who want to learn about them.

Prevention in Educational Environments. This area encompasses actions focused on approaching spaces frequented by minors, adolescents, families, and youth, to provide information, advice, and guidance on drugs and their uses, appropriate to their concerns, age, and way of experiencing their reality.

The main objective of these actions is to prevent the first encounters with drugs and their uses from becoming problematic, supported by the implementation of risk reduction strategies, as well as to promote reflective decision-making among the people involved.

Advice and development of public plans and policies. Energy Control offers plan elaboration, reports, and professional proposals to generate, implement and evaluate policies, strategies and actions at local, regional, national and international levels. In addition, there is also the possibility of developing or implementing the proposed actions by its professionals.

Research and outreach. These actions focus on carrying out and outreaching scientific studies, including the analysis of emerging data from EC's activities and records, as well as the processes involved in their production, such as the Energy Control Observatory of Risks, Consumption and Care (OEC, Figure 9).

Figure 9.

Image of the OEC 2022 publication results (Energy Control, 2022).

Energy Control presenta los resultados de la primera edición de su Observatorio de consumos, riesgos y cuidados.

Energy Control

Its objective is to disseminate and generate scientific knowledge on risk reduction and drug use, based on privileged access to certain profiles and contexts of drug users.

Community Participation and Volunteering. This service offers the opportunity to welcome, train and involve people within the activities of Energy Control as volunteers. The goal is to encourage community participation among citizens in drug use contexts to bring risk reduction strategies closer through the peer-figure, performing tasks like a health agent but from the "peer to peer" work.

Chemsafe (figure 10). This resource, available both online in person, aims to provide information, counseling and substance analysis for people who use drugs for sexual purposes, participate in Chemsex sessions and/or belong to the LGBTIQ+ community that use such psychoactive substances.

Figure 10.

Image from the Chemsafe website (Energy Control, 2024).



Specifically, this service responds to queries related to risky or unsafe sexual practices in conjunction with drug use, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Conclusions and Discussion.

Energy Control has proven to be a pioneering organization in reducing the risks associated with drug use, adopting an innovative and progressive approach in a field traditionally marked by prohibitionism. Its mission, vision and values reflect a strong commitment to health promotion, respect for people who use drugs, and education about the risks and pleasures associated with the use of psychoactive substances. Its focus is on health promotion, health education and individual choice free choice in relation to the use of psychoactive substances.

The program presented in this text has succeeded in changing part of the existing social perception of drugs and their different uses, normalizing their presence and promoting a non-punitive approach over prohibition and stigma. Thus, Energy Control is a key player in promoting safer consumption, raising awareness of the potential risks and pleasures associated with drugs, as well as defending the rights of drug users both in public health and political spheres.

The new realities, substances and consumption patterns, made invisible by the hegemonic intervention models in the field of addictions, have been addressed by EC, offering services such as substance analysis, counseling and training in educational and party environments, without denying an obvious reality: the existence of drug use linked to parties.

It also highlights the relevance of volunteers in the organization's actions, who are incorporated through a training process that qualifies them as health agents, who act as peers among the program's target population, representing a significant change in how drug use is approached, moving away from traditional abstinence and external control methods. In a context where stigmatization and criminalization often prevail, Energy Control represents a model to follow in promoting a more humane, empathic, and effective approach to managing drug use.

Despite its positioning as a pioneer of in addiction intervention models, Energy Control has faced criticism for both its excessive tolerance of drug use, and for replicating aspects of the hegemonic model of intervention. The latter is produced by promoting neoliberal postulates in its interpretation of psychoactive substances, which impose a certain type of health on the subjectivity and corporality of its target population.

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