

Linnæus University

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Independent Project: Final Written Report

SAFE is the new cool

A guide for teenagers on how to do drugs responsibly



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ABSTRACT

In this essay, the research question: "How can I make teenagers use drugs more responsibly without using a scaremongering approach?" will be explored. The process will include theoretical research on the definition of drugs in relation to a strategy for reducing risks in the lives of adolescents, from a sustainable take. Another question that will be answered is why anti-drug campaigns fail, and my solution to this will be given. The result of this project will be in the form of an interactive online guide for teenagers. The aim of this project will be to provide high school students with a way to find important information they should know, before trying drugs. The case study is Romania. Here drugs are still a taboo subject and they are not explained nor talked about, in schools or families. Therefore, my guide provides explanations based on several people's experiences and opinions about the most common drugs here.

KEY WORDS

Drugs, addiction, teenagers, taboo, recreational, medicine, youth, trip, safe, cocaine, cannabis, pills.







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INTRODUCTION

With this work I intend to demonstrate that, especially in Romania teenagers need a guide on how to do drugs safely. They need to see the bigger picture and, if not being also to talk with someone about it, they would be able to find in my guide what they need. This will help them to understand better what is it that they need to find out, namely the experiences and opitions of the people that tried drugs at a specific moment in their life. So when they will be curious to find out more, they will already find some answers to their questions.

The audience are high school teenagers and the reason for this will be described in the chapter 3 which talks about the specific audience. The previous campaigns has left many questions unanswered, in Europe and especially in Romania, where still no big improvements have been made in the last years, since drugs are still a taboo subject that is not commonly talked about, not even inside families. The data gathered is still insufficient because the more I went deeper in the research the more I found out areas not explored, but my interactive guide is like a proposal for a bigger piece that I would have done if I would have had more time.

Still, I strongly believe that the drugs I chose to focus on are every relevant, due to the interviews I conducted with numerous appropiate subjects (because of their age and their experience), more than 16 people, and I managed to create 6 different scenarios, for 3 different drugs, the most commonly used in Constanta, Romania. In the 1st chapter, I will attempt to explain the reasons of why I started this project and what my position is; in the 2nd chapter I will establish the theory part of my project as well as I will position it in a context; in the 3rd chapter I will present what research I did, the collaboration and specific audience. In the 4th chapter I will present what turns and breakthroughs I had, and how I worked; and in the 5th chapter I will tackle the +change aspect of my thesis and the knowledge I gathered, through an analysis. In conclusion, I will attempt to demonstrate that my findings are relevant and all in all, my thesis can consist of a project that could make an important change for teenagers if it would be implemented (talked about in schools for example).

The success of the project would be measured in the number of teenage readers and, ideally, it would be about how it would influence them, their social life, mental and physical health. It would also be considered a success if the guide would be officially used by a specialist, e.g. a psychologist, explaining the drug problem to teenagers, or a high school counselor or coordinator, when (if) talking about drugs during class.





Even if the case study was Romania, due to my personal understanding of the place, the public is every high school teenager who knows English and is in a place where drug-related topics are still taboo. Due to lack of time, the guide was delivered as a final in English, but for a later version of the guide I would like to translate it into Romanian and make it bilingual. This would allow for more inclusion and accesibility, because in Romania not all teenagers know English.

1.1. Independent Project

1.1.1. Project description

I started by researching the matter of legality of drugs, having the curiosity of why certain substances are legal and some are not, even if the cause of death is met by both legal and illegal drugs (it turns out that drugs are legal in some countries nowadays. When it became legalized in the beginning, in some of those countries where drugs were legal, such as Colorado, drug users were seen as "lab rats" (Lopez, 2014). I then continued researching children's books about drugs, and then went into analyzing why programs such as DARE end up failing, and even promoting the drug use. At first I had the idea that all drugs should be illegal and that all of them are bad and have only negative effects, but then as I went deeper in the research I conducted, I found out that there can be a rational consumption, and that one doesn't necessarily become addicted, if he is trying drugs in a period of his life. As the neuroscientist Carl Hart says in an interview, based on his own experience, "used in an informed and responsible manner, they fulfil a purpose with only the smallest risks" (Anthony, 2021).

Amongst other, I researched about different campaigns such as D.A.R.E. It is a series of classroom lessons, held by police oficers, to teach children from kindergarden through 12th grade, how to live drug free and violence free. I found out that these certain campaigns fail because, instead of preventing the use of drugs, by scaremongering, they should provide honesty in what happens when someone takes drugs. There is a fine line between exaggeration and presenting the risks of drug use. By scaremongering, they use this exaggeration with the hope of making children/teens scared and not wanting to try the drugs. In D.A.R.E., "teens were simply too good at catching and dismissing clear exaggerations about the detrimental health effects of relatively harmless drugs like marijuana, and that helped discredit DARE's overall efforts." (Lopez, 2014) They might, for example, try marijuana and see they don't die, then be curious to try the other drugs too, with more confidence. Moreover, what this program did was also to foster curiosity among students, because it started telling children at a too young age about the existence of drugs. This made students "become very curious about these drugs they've learned about from police officers" (Wolchover, 2012) as they got a little older.



After I found out about such programs and campaings outside Romania, I went into research due to the personal question I had, namely why in Romania drugs are still a taboo subject and the safety of it it is not taught in environments such as schools, universities. I also chose this country because of the personal understanding of the place and because it is the environment I am in now. It became a practice along my independent project to bring the discussion about drugs around the table with different people that I encountered.

I got to find out that, according to research from Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, (2015), as youth makes the transition from school to high school it happens to be a major transition there emotionally, especially. So "it is believed 16 is the pivotal year for adolescents, who face increasing peer pressure to experiment with drugs and alcohol". Therefore I want to address my project to high school teenagers, age 14-18; 14 being the age when they face a high risk for experimentation, and age 18 being the one after the consumption declines, until around the age of 22, when the risk nearly ends. And due to the fact that drugs are a taboo subject they are not quite offered an explanation to, or talked about, in schools or inside families.

In my guide, I hope to let them know they are not alone and read stories that they might relate to in a certain way – I will communicate the information within different narratives based on the stories of people that I interviewed.

1.1.2. Goal of the project

The goal of the project is that I want to expand on how to talk about choice, by shifting the perspective from this is "good" and this is "bad", or "this gives these positive effects but also these negative effects". I want to show the many uses of drugs, and the effects they can have, using people's experiences as a guidance. Within the information I will provide in the guide, there can be seen layers of care of self and of those that are part of a specific group. I will do this accordingly to what are the main used recreational drugs by high school teenagers in Romania. If a teenager searches online, he/she mostly finds resources of news with people that die because of some specific drugs, or different links to websites with descriptions of drugs, the bad effects that their usage can create and different classifications. As a +change aspect, in my guide I talk about why people do drugs, trying at the same time to include opinions from people that tried drugs for different purposes, such as trying drugs for a party vs. having a serious addiction, as well as doing it from a medicinal perspective. Hopefully I will have the different ways of usage (e.g. in combinations). As a take away, it will be shown the most important thing, namely that not everyone's story, nor experience is the same.





1.1.3. Project questions

In the research, along the way, the main questions that helped me are:

- Is it better if substance use programs/campaigns base more on honesty rather than scaremongering?
- Are health consequences of drug use affected by the specific and situational factors, as well as the broader social framework?
- What are the most used/known types of drugs in Romania?

1.2. Myself as a designer

1.2.1. Why I started this project

I personally was interested in this topic because I was in a toxic relationship where I had the chance to experience how living with a person that takes drugs can influence the life of the other individuals that surround him, and also his life on a private matter - mind and body. It is a topic that I also hear about and encounter at least once a month on the news; I have also had a neighbour that passed away due to this. It is also interesting to me the way how they are differently advertised, presented as deadly and just advised/ forced not to do it because of death, with no other explanation offered. So I also was very moved by the propaganda of legal and illegal drugs and how different it is. Another layer here is also the example of me as a person that, in Romania until I finished high school I didn't know anything about drugs before I moved to Sweden and I entered the university. But that only had to do with the toxic relationship I had. After coming back to Romania I got interested to find out more about this situation, because obviously I was seeing the entire framework with different eyes, being older and having experienced how it is to be surrounded for a while by a circle of people that enjoys certain practices.

1.2.2. What I like to work with

As a designer I am interested in questions related to complex large-scale problems, and I have a desire of analyzing and understanding these, to communicate them clearly to a young audience. I do think that my knowledge expanded along my studies and that I adopted the role of design in relation to my own work, by making a change through my projects from the perspective of all social, economic, environmental and political fields. Together with combining my artistic practice and the design process, many times I had youth as a target group, or families.

My project in the last module focused on children and it was an analogue interactive game, called "Offscreen", through which they could have an interesting learning experience and having brought up the experiences that they miss the most, while online learning.



Through interviews with children I managed to find out the main differences they feel during the pandemic due to the changes within the educational system. This current project is directed towards education too, as I plan to inform youth regarding the use of drugs. As for the medium, now I have a digital interactive guide. I saw this as a challenge for myself which I succeeded in making.

I have worked before with books, but more analogue, with the aim of these being used as a guide book directed towards families, from where children could get an understanding if they would read it or it would be read to them by their parents. Examples of these are the do it yourself (DIY) called "Another life to textiles" within the Småland module, or "Can we face reality" within the Power relationships module. I also did zines like the ones in the Interaction 2 module, where I created a guide zide for an athletics club How to organize Kalmar AK's Open House, and I also made a critical magazine booklet "Stop undressing Mother Nature" directed towards a young audience interested in textiles, in the Antilogo module.







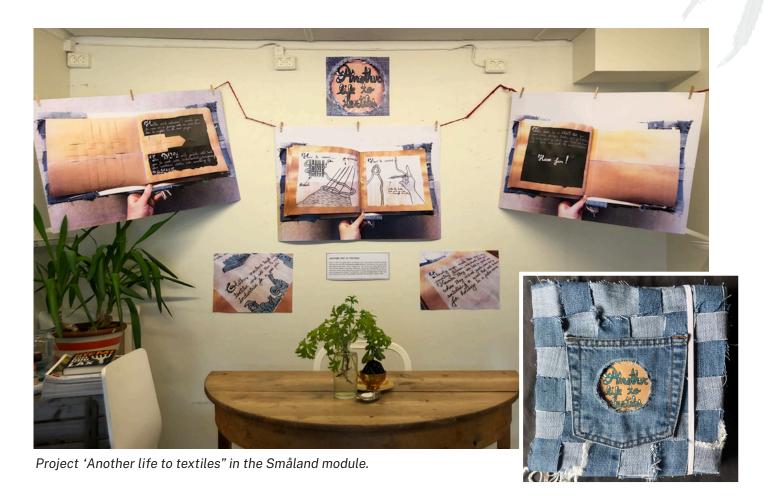
Project 'Offscreen" in the Change module.



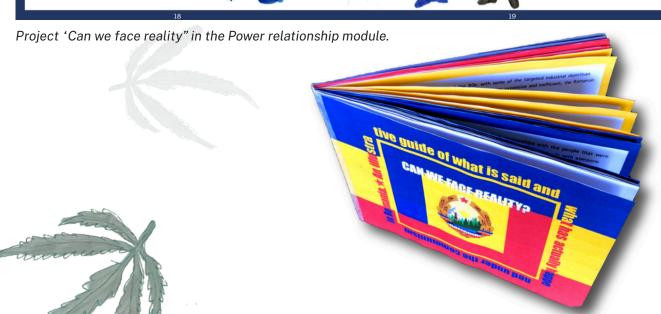
Project 'Another life to textiles" in the Småland module.

















Project 'RE-AK", zine called 'How to organize Kalmar AK's Open House, in the Interaction Design 2 module.



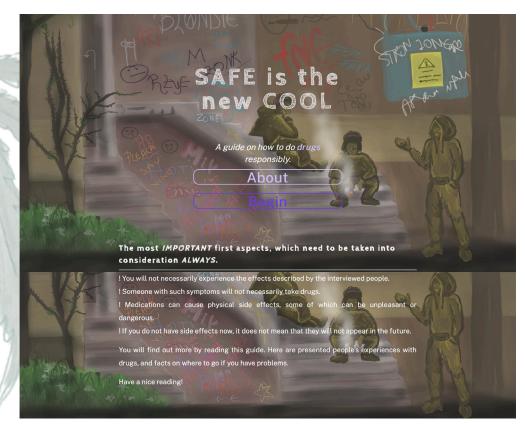


Project 'Stop undressing Mother Nature" in the Antilogo module.

In this current project "SAFE is the new COOL", my position is that of a designer who aims to help youth take informed decisions, by educating them about the main popular types of drugs. I want to show that doing drugs can have different psychlogical implications; I want to inform youth about drug in an honest way, by presenting all the different perspectives that diverse people had while doing drugs. This is not a black and white topic. I focus on how they can do drugs more safe, as no experience can be 100% guaranteed to be safe. It is a shift away from the "scaremongering" approach used in programs such as DARE. I now want to also further develop my skills (by including the research) in the book making, illustration and graphic design skills (improving layout and combining analogue with digital skills).

Now my project would be a guide on drugs, conceptualized as an additional resource about a matter that parents do not usually talk about, to their teenagers. Due to drugs being a sensitive subject, and still seen as a taboo in Romania, neither the parents nor their teenagers want to initiate the conversation. It would be both a substitute and also a resource, where readers would get to read real confessions of people that used drugs, in Romania.







Project "SAFE is the new COOL" in the Independent Project module. Screenshots taken to showcase 2 parts of the guide.





2.1. Sustainability

My project works with a very complex topic. It analizes how the consumption of drugs is affected by how an individual lives his life, his past/history (such as the heritage) and the environment that he lives in. The world drug problem bears within society (social development, health), economic development, since "Poverty also has strong links with drug use, albeit in a complex and mutually reinforcing manner. Indeed, the brunt of the drug use problem is borne by people who are poor in relation to the societies in which they live, as can be seen in stark terms in the wealthier countries." (the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016, p. 17) and environmental matters (most drugs come from cultivation + transportation/trafficking), and political; there is also a matter of gender inequality, as in research from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2016) it is said that "There are marked differences between male and female drug users in terms of preferred drugs and drug-related vulnerabilities." The topic also touches on the socio-economically problematic conditions, like extreme poverty, inequality, social exclusion, affective deprivation, in cases like internal migrations, displacements, lack of education and job perspective of a teenager.

2.2. Context

A teenager may choose to use drugs out of curiosity or for fun, due to the pressures of his entourage and the need for social acceptance (social norms). Starting from a zoomed in point of view, where I will interview youth about drug use on an individual scale, I wanted to zoom out and connect it with the larger societal framework. I also thought about navigating these by combining the rural with the urban, because "youth experiences, perspectives, and strategies related to substance use are deeply situated within geographical, social, and cultural contexts" (Jenkins et al., 2017a). And as it is further concluded by Jenkins et al. (2017), "youth, regardless of their own pattern of use, describe their substance use experiences and decisions in relation to the broader social context of their friends, peer groups, and community; youth variously describe their use as congruent with, or explicitly in contrast to, the dominant contextual experience in their communities".

The stake stands in the attribution of damage to poverty and criminalisation of drugs, rather than their psychoactive effects. It's not about drugs, but the context in which they are taken, that harms people.





METHODOLOGY

I mostly worked all the first half of my independent project doing a lot of research on drugs, and it wasn't until the point that I learned very much about them, and talked with university teacher in psichology Baiceanu Mihaela (Varasteanu), that I stopped and then narrowed down the research that I had done.

I generally in my projects value a lot my research and that is why it had been very hard for me to detach from all that I found out, but I think it is a good thing at least because I really cleared my mind and set the new knowledge so that I am really now hands on the information and I also feel very well informed on the topic overall.

I had a non-linear process for the fact that my idea of the outcome changed a lot, but not without a proper reason. I kept questioning the outcome and style along with the research that I did in the process. A moment of breakdown was the 50% presentation where I realised that I will have to communicate the outcome through a narrative, but also that I was kind of doing that already, without being necessarily aware of. The most important and shaped ideas came to me after al the dicsussions and interviews I took, especially with the students.

Then I took careful consideration and looked again at all the research and brainstormed. I looked at the main reasons of why I started this project – the idea wasn't to be an additional wikipedia, but an interactive guide from which teenagers would learn how to do drugs in a more safe way and what to expect from those drugs, because they cannot find the necessary (enough) information about it, and even if they find the theory, they won't find the practical side – so the human interaction is missing, and also what they can find on the internet is just either too scientific for them or simply they find it too exhausting to read all those hard, theoretical terms. And because of this, they are left with questions that they would have to answer by themselves.







3.1. Research

3.1.1. Material Research

I read articles, read books (psychology also) and other science papers about drugs, alcohol and anti-drug campaigns – both Romanian and European sources. I also went into analyzing what a harm reduction approach is, as I also researched the different drugs appearance, to see how they are illustrated in different cultures and related to different arts (psychedelic art), and in music – rock and reggaeton music album covers for example.

What helped me the most are the qualitative and quantitative data that I gathered through interviews, has been a key outcome – (qualitative due to the questions and the nature of answers– very long and explanatory) and the random conversations that I had about drugs. All my interviews were taken in an urban area/setting. The responses that I got might be influenced by the setting I was in, because it is possible that, at some extent, I would not have had that many answers from the people in the village; they are more reluctant in speaking about drugs (I asked some people that I knew they took drugs but they did not tell the truth to me) but still, at some extent they would have meet at least one experience, that being the party context – people that stay in the village still go to a party in an urban setting.

3.1.2. Visual Research

I watched documentaries with the intention to spot a visual language of comunicating about drugs and I saw more movies which included drugs and had different stories. One that is worth mentioning is the movie Party Monster (2003) and I think now that, for my characters within the book, I will draw inspiration from the outfits of those who did drugs in the movie – for the character that will do drugs in my book. As it was very interesting to me that Michael "wanted to use not the bodies of his friends but their appearances and identities; he selects his circle as if furnishing a room" (Ebert, 2003). This movie was also an inspiration for some possible scenarios within the book.

At some point I was trying to map out ways in which I could develop my storytelling as a Create your Own Adventure Book narrative. In this way, I saw the movie Bandersnatch and I looked up the scenario's structure. I will also look at other author's scripts of this kind of narratives. Since it is a complex matter I am dealing with, I need freedom in developing more scenarios – I thougt it might also turn out as a regular children's book, but with some kind of exercises. Or a (do it yourself) DIY on a Create Your Own Adventure Book as in the Ocean DIY Pop Up Book for Kids. Of course if I would have ended up doing that, I would have adapted the visual language to fit my tar-



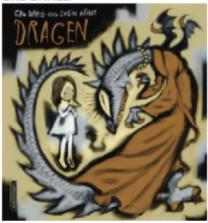
get group. As this project encouraged "creativity, storytelling, and writing practice" (Zalewski, 2019), with a book like this I thought I would have managed to do the same.

The last idea from my first brainstorm then was that it will be a game with cards, through which youth could create a life story by collecting the cards they choose throughout the game. I was also inspired by the illustrations and colors found in the books such as The Dragon by Gro Dahle, Missing daddy by Mariame Kaba and The Elephant in the Living Room by Jill M. Hastings.

As the interest for the illustration and for the target audience changed, so did my illustration style and references. Here are some references concerning psychedelics, as first I was goin to include psychedelics in my guide as well.

THE DRAGON

GRO DAHLE



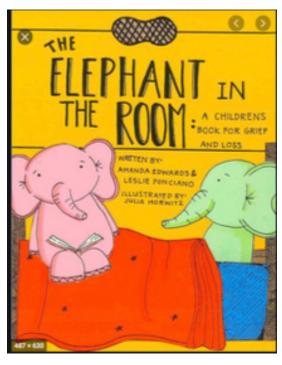
I have liked the illustrations in these books and also the range of colors. So I took inspiration for the illustrations that I made.



Party Monster movie, 2003.

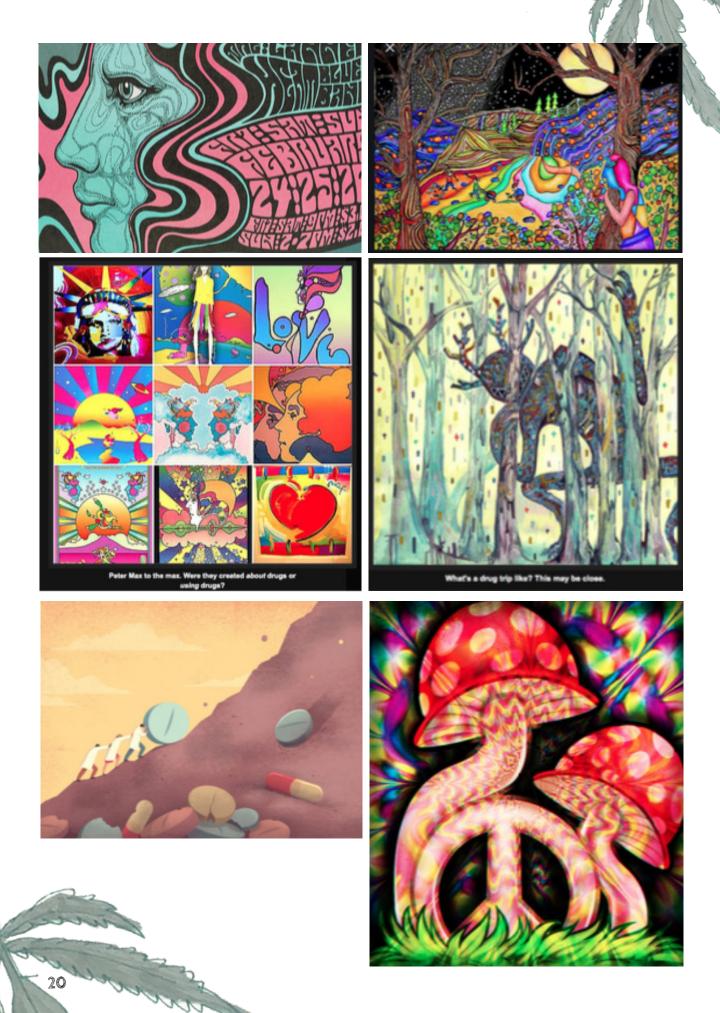
MISSING













3.2. Specific Audience

Because "research shows that key periods for drug abuse are during major transitions in a child's life" (Simona, 2009) I choose to target youth around 14-18 y.o. (14 being the age when they go from elementary school to high school). At this stage – early adolescence children are prone to encounter drugs for the first time. As doctor Simona (2009) argued, when they enter high school, teenagers face additional educational, social, emotional challenges. At the same time they may be exposed to greater drug availability, to those who abuse such substances and social activities involving drugs. These challenges increase their risk of abusing alcohol, cigarettes and other substances. But I will keep it open to the extent that the guide would have as an audience high school teenager.

As I saw that many children's books are also used by the healthcare system, I believe that I can create something that can too be used as a tool for education in areas such as healthcare, social services or being used in schools as an education tool. I see my guide being used by school counselors or coordinators, in class as spreading the information needed around this age group, or addiction prevention specialists, or it could also be found in libraries and bought by youth themselves, or by parents, who would give it to their children.

3.3. Collaboration

Another thing that I master now is finding the right time to ask specific questions, as for my Independent project I ask almost anyone new that I met, what their experience with drugs is, this being a thing I didn't think in the beginning that I will do. Some of the responses from people I interviewed I have integrated as quotes in my guide for more credibility; The many answers I got and opinions, helped me to fix the matter of scenarios and I also figured out, with their help, how sensitive I should be.

I interviewed seven persons 25+ years old (Roxana T., George T., Raluca R., Romi R., Costin P., Mirabela V., Prof. Varasteanu) and nine students from the University "Ovidius" in Constanta (Georgica F., Nasir R., 3 friends of Nasir, Mihai P., Adnan R., Diana S., Cosmina P.). I asked them many questions but the main questions written (after which I developed more questions during the interviews - different questions in each interview) were:

- What are the 3 drugs that come in your mind first?
- Did something trigger your choice of what drug to take? i.e. the context you were in or the people you were with?
- At what age did you start? What was the worst/best experience?
- Is there something that a person should know if they try cannabis/pills (ecstasy)/cocaine?



All the interviews helped me to choose what drugs to focus on, what are the contexts that can be illustrated in my guide, but also, after the talks I had, I found out interesting points of view on some drugs that I didn't even read about before, because I personally thought they are not popular or used as much, as in the case of inhalants, for example. But they were more used in the past and just by a specific category of people.

With teacher Arina Stoenescu I chose to collaborate in a way that I ask for feedback in illustrations. I also had interviews with boys and girls around 20 – 29 years old in Romania, in order to use their responses to see their point of view on drugs, how they think in relation to drugs at the specific moment in their life (before going to high school and after entering this new "world"), how much they know and how they think about drugs, to understand better my position and role.

Another important person in my project was Mariana Stanciu, a psychologist for children and adolescents in Constanta, Romania. I have been in contact with her several times throughout the process. I started by explaining my project to her and she really liked my take on the subject, the initiative and the illustrations. She told me that in Romania drugs are a taboo subject as sexuality is.

Her opinion is that this should be taught in schools but it is almost impossible, telling me about a case when a councelor tried to explain in class about this and how parents came to school very bothered by the situation. She told me that, from the teenagers who come to her and have drug problems, the main reasons why a high school teen uses drugs is, among other things, the need to integrate and show up among their group of friends / colleagues. She also said that the way they do drugs is to use eye drops before going home, so that their parents do not know they're using drugs.

This helped me see if I was on the right track with my guide and also what I should include / or if I should take something out. The three drugs seemed to be a good choice as main subjects in the guide and then. After seeing my illustrations and saying that they are very suggestive, it followed a session in which I showed her my layouts with the text I included together with the illustrations. This way she could tell me if I should leave anything. or change something, be more sensitive. Or, if I should add more explanations, based on her knowledge of how high schoolers think about drugs.







DESIGN PROCESS

4.1. Create your own adventure book

So I firstly had the idea of making a create your own adventure book and I sticked with that for a while, but after one workshop called Unpicking, with one of my university teacher called Marie O'Connor during the Module 2, when I looked in depth into the different types of drugs and saw the different classifications and what they do and how they affect in the short and long term. I said to myself that these informations are very helpful and I wanted to use that information from the research into my actual project. I tried to figure out a way of how I could do that, and I decided to think of an adventure from another perspective, namely that a drug can take you into different adventures. I wanted to make them aware of all they should know before deciding whether to take a drug or not.

Apart from the positive and negative aspects, I firstly also wanted to educate them on the fact that psychedelics are also used in medicine for example, which is a very important fact, among other things. But after talking with the university teacher that I interviewed in Constanta, (who I chose to understand more of what the situation and perspective on drugs is in the educational system, related to this). Still, being a teacher that works with teenagers I got convinced that talking about psychedelics does not present that much necessity to be my guide.

From a harm-reduction framework I want to educate how they should prepare in terms of set and setting, what they should do before, even talking about what choices they can make in terms of music, and what they should do while they are tripping, and after. I used this framework in my research with the aim to understand the larger societal conditions of drug use and its relation to drug abuse, and hopefully this would help me to further treat the (root) cause and not the symptoms. i.e. to show how to do it safer, instead of just presenting the positive and negative effects.

I am also critiquing the scaremongering approach used by campaigns such as DARE. Moreover the main problem in doing drugs is believed to be that teenagers do it in an abusive way. Actually a part of the blame is attributed to the fact of mental or emotional distress they're experiencing that makes them self-medicate through drugs, and they also don't know how to do it safe. This happens because in some cases they might not even know what those drugs are made from and they can get a wrong dose. Or, they might be in the wrong environment with people that can handle more than them.



Another possibility is that they have gone through experiences that made them come to the idea that drugs are the solution to anything.

4.2. Interactive guide

4.2.1. Content of the guide

I worked with multiple storylines but not for creating a story anymore, but an online guide, as a website, to make it both interactive and available for a wider audience, easily. I will have looser image between image and text to allow for these different storylines, I will make multiple analogue drawings (hopefully each day a sketch) and then scan them and work with them digitally - the way to create this is with Twine storytelling generator; I firstly wanted to work only digital but I think as a part of my own style, it would be good to combine analogue with digital means.

I wanted to talk about more things in my guide but after doing all the research, I realised that the most important part in the guide would be to communicate the most frequent things that teeenagers should know. Then to transmit some feelings, emotions and perceptions of different people that tried the specific drugs. I wanted to also talk about the possibility of using drugs for a medical purpose in a controlled, supervised medium, and also talk about the idea that people can self-medicate by using them – I also know a person that self-medicated using psychedelics.

Since the beginning I knew that I want to have the guide be split in chapters: I first had in mind to make a categorization in schedules, how they are treated by law, but I took that out because it didn't fit the overall concept of the guide, after I analyzed it better. Instead, I have at that point added a chapter on medicinal uses for psychedelic drugs (such as treating depression, death anxiety, chronic cluster headaches or addiction - alcohol dependence, or nicotine) and a chapter on how to have a good trip, and what to do when you or someone has a bad trip. Apart from these I have had a chapter on reasons why someone does drugs, a chapter on classes of drugs, and what are the main recreational drugs (used for pleasure without medical justification) – I might make this section smaller, focusing on only what are the most common ones. I also have a section on "what is a drug".

After the 50% presentation, point on which I have also had the discussion with the teacher Baiceanu Mihaela in Romania, I decided that I will communicate through multiple scenarios where I will have different quotations from the answers i gathered from people, using pseudo-names, to create different "naratives" within which I will have included the different drugs that I am focusing on, communicating different experiences and perspectives with different chapters for



each – cannabis, pills (ecstasy), cocaine, and the alcohol which is included and excluded, depending on each person's preferences, since alcohol can be used in combination with the other 3 drugs).

Before interviewing the students I had an idea of using the reasons why someone would do drugs. But the more time I spent finding people to ask, the more I narrowed down my idea. I also became able to look at the bigger picture from a different perspective than before – I started to see different patterns repeating and realize that the most important drugs are cannabis, cocaine and pills (ecstasy) – being used amongst teenagers and adults. Then I started to illustrate the scenarios that were the most commonly being told to me.

After the last interview I had, I managed to sort my stories and make the content by the order of popularity, namely that the drug that is most common would have 3 scenarios (Cannabis), then cocaine with 2 scenarios and then pills with one scenario. I chose to finally focus on the most popular drugs used by teenagers and olders in Romania, my study case being Constanta (see in chapter 3.3. Collaboration).

Now the guide has an interactive "menu", with the structure:

- > START the title, then a section where it is ABOUT, DRUGS and BE-GIN, together with a section that they should read before beginning.
 > DRUGS what a drug is (in short, everything that one puts inside their body and alters the function, with the exception of food and water); also there is a summary about the people that tried drugs;
- > ABOUT information about myself and my experience (+ the reason why I did this peoject, briefly) and what they will find in the guide;
- > BEGIN the proper content; they can click on: cannabis (3 cases at a campfire, on a rooftop and home), cocaine (2 cases in a club's bathroom and inside a car, in a parking lot) and pills (1 case at an outdoor festival). "Pills" reffers to ecstasy;
- > WHY PEOPLE STOP;
- > GET HELP.

Through this structure I will show how they are used (in combination with alcohol, with one another or used single), the frequency that they are used with, the context and the experiences and opinions before, during and after taking the drug is taken.

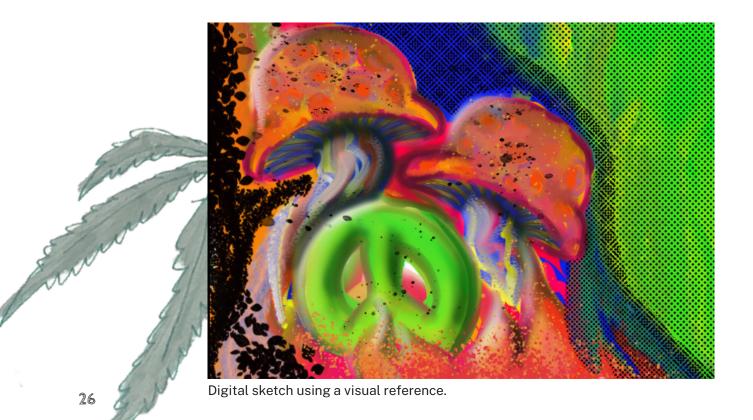
In the guide I used fictive names, just to show there were different people, but I didn't use the real names of the people that told me those quotations.



4.2.2. Visual language

I experimented a lot with analogue and digital tools. I looked for inspiration on illustration for children's book characters and then I came up with animal fictional characters which in the end I got to eliminate because I moved towards high school teenagers, so the illustration style didn't match. The illustrations were more for younger children.







Then I also experienced with creating fictional human characters.

Lastly I experienced with drawing some drugs and tried then to write the title digitally, and then make a spread with the drugs, but it ended up looking like promoting drugs, and I did not intend to communicate that.









The visual I was inspired by, when making the spread.











These all were experiments that I decided to not include in my guide. But the digita ones helped me to see there is more potential for me if I work digitally. Still, I then researched again for visuals and I had the following analogue results.













After these experiments I had, combining analogue tools with digital ones, I decided I will work fully digitally. I also took inspiration from the surroundings (e.g. graffiti on the walls and the parking lots.)









I finally chose to illustrate through my drawings the scenarios/the setting of the action where the experiences are created (both physical and mental), things that won't be described in the text which would appear throughout the guide. After I made the illustrations for each scenario (campfire, rooftop, home, car, club, festival) I firstly decided to make them doubled and flipped, as one. This I thought to do in order to show opposition, or that there are at least 2 different stoies for each drug. But then I saw it would decrease the impact, so I choose to zoom them in to let the details talk more.

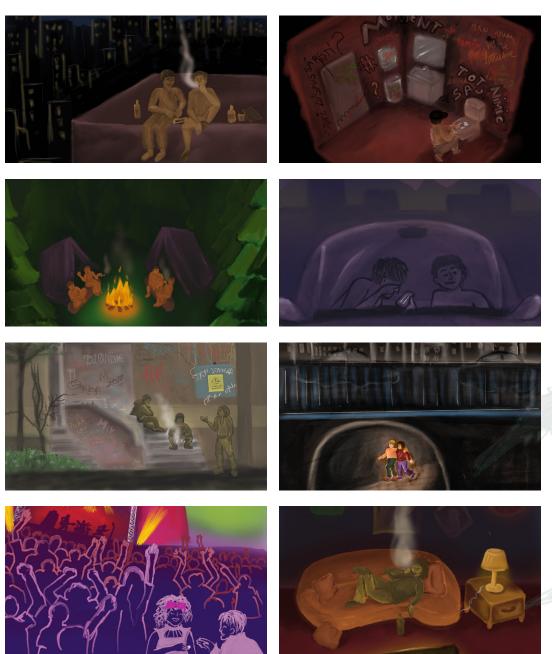
This only happened when I took courage and started drawing digitally. I learned a drawing program in which, after taking all the interviews, I started sketching scenarios out of the knowledge I have gathered. I took into account all the discussions I had with people and drawn from imaginery the background for the quotations I wanted to include in the guide.

The text would consist in diverse quotes subtracted from people's answers to my questions, each of them being spread in the right section; for example in the scenario of a person sniffing cocaine from a toilet I will write the thoughts and perspective of those persons that did that, at that time of doing the action, and after the time, like a day after – experience, opinion and lesson. So, there will be included information on why people started using drugs, how, why did they give up/didn't make a habit/dependence, what they felt like during, what they felt after - opinions.

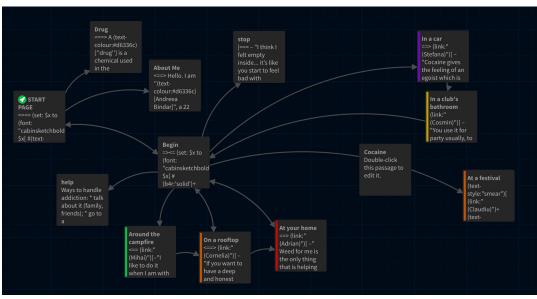
I tried to have the text written with more fonts but I finally decided to go with Public Sans. It is a font that has a sensible touch and can be used for serious projects at the same time, and it is suitable for screen interfaces, it is string and neutral. I combined it with Cabin Sketch font, in some sections, to add a layer of a vibrant, youthful and hand written feeling – thus more personal take. But I also wanted to subtly induce the educational touch, as it looks almost like it was written on a table, with chalk (they are likely to be familiar with this, from high-school classes when the teacher writes with chalk on the table). It would also be more appealing for the target audience, as well as it will give a unique character and nice flow, making it look original on not too scientific.

The platform I programmed the guide with is called Twine. This is mainly used to create interactive games or non-linear narratives. I wanted teenagers to be able to click, to engage with all the content since all the information is important. By this I also wanted to make them more intrigued and keep their attention span more active through the entire navigation of the content.





The illustrations I made for the different scenarios.



How the structure of the guide looks in Twine.







Example of how a scenario looks in the guide, before and after clicking on each name (cannabis case one) – the text is scrolling down, the background remains the same. The example is given using a screenshot.





A N A L Y S I S

In this project I investigated all paths, parallel, and how they inform each other (party context, school context, day to day life, and rural and urban areas, in Romania in relation to the most used types of drugs. Moreover, I got to understand that it's not the drugs but the acces to information and the context in which they are taken, that harm people, since drugs can have both positive and negative effects, depending on each person.

The main drugs in focus being finally cannabis, cocaine and pills (ecstasy), I found out that among others, according to European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2019), the marginalized people in society, so also, people of colour, queer people, poor people, and also those in the rural setting, have different choices than the rich people. For example, people that are marginalized do crack cocaine which is more dangerous than powder cocaine. This last one is consumed by more middle to upper class people. The crack cocaine is injected or smoked, and sometimes can be also used in combination with opioids. It is used in occasions such as meeting at the edge of the street with some "friends", or something equivalent. On the other hand, the powder cocaine, preferred by rich people, is used in context of parties either home or in clubs, private gatherings or general lifestyle, used in combination with alcohol and/or ecstasy. The way of consumption is by it being snuffed.

As for my visual language I got to understand that everything I researched, both the visual and material references, helped me to define the style and the colors that I used. I changed many times the outcome of my project, but it seems that I never erased any idea, I just kept developing based on analysis after try-outs and each response that I got. The more people I interviewed, the more I was contemplating in my mind the scenarios that I used as background for my guide's cases/scenarios. This project wouldn't have been possible without the collaboration with society. I kept something from the beginning, as I did not change entirely the concept, but instead I kept trying to find the best solution in terms of the medium I should communicate the research that I gathered. For example, the set and setting in the illustrations is created after I have had taken the interviews. After I chose the excerpts from the answers gathered, I had feedback sessions with the psychologist I collaborated with, in order to be sure that I am sensitive enough and I have a horizontal communication. I've also shown the guide to some people that I have interviewed and told me that they really like the illustration and can understand why it looks that way. The structure of the guide also changed a lot and I also included advices through the guide.

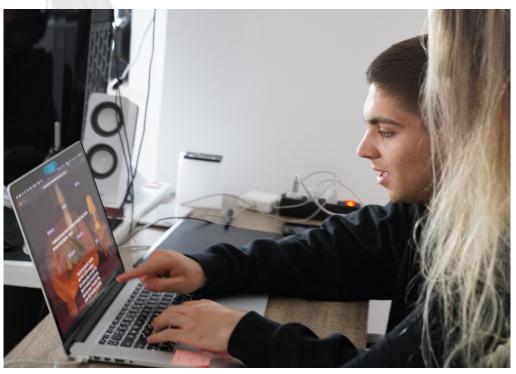


The last details that I decided to include were an illustration for the beginning and one for the content part, to keep the vibe of the guide alive throughout the navigation. What I added at the end was the background illustration for the rest of the guide, as well as I made one final illustration for the "Why people stop" and "Get help" section. That was an illustration with one individual carrying aother, outside of a bridge tunnel, showing the other the "bright" way that should be followed (in my vision).

5.1. +Change Aspect

Telling the truth would be better for youth because it would help them make distinctions and decisions when taking drugs. But for anti-drug campaigns this is almost impossible because they get funding only to showcase the negative effects of drugs. That's why I come up with this change in perspective. I think that this is a way more sustainable approach and would influence youth for the better. And I, as a designer, can make this happen. A long-term benefit of the guide could be seen in society, in addition to the one it will have in the life of each individual. Even if on a large scale the matter of taking drugs would still exist, at least they would do it in a safer way and the deaths would be less likely to occur.

Moreover, as discussions about drug use are still a taboo subject in Romania, I really believe in the need of a project like this, because within this context, to be informed is to live. As a side note, one can do drugs without getting addicted to them; but being forbidden makes youth more curious. In addition, I believe that at a certain point, if all drugs would be legal, the illusion of one being cooler by doing drugs, would be abolished.



Documentation of a teenager using the guide.





CONGLUSION

Finally the outcome of my project became an educational guide on how to do drugs responsibly, in which there are narratives/quotations inspired by real life scenarios, told by people in Romania. I communicated the information through different phrases that include the drugs I am focused on: cannabis, cocaine and pills (ecstasy). I emphasize on the main idea that is to bear in mind, namely that youth should at least make informed choices when it comes to drugs.

For this, they need acces to real life experiences connected to this matter, from where they could find the pure honesty and know how to do drugs in a safer way. This would create a more sustainable future, as this would help reduce domestic violence, crime, rape and child abuse, which are often associated with drug use. In addition, through the choices that I made concerning the illustrations, the guide promotes the care of adolescents, as well as it reinforces care as a lifestyle, focusing on social wellbeing, social cohesion, friendship and the community.

My guide is therefore bearing an opportunity for teenagers to find out the important things they should know about drugs, and the fact that, among other important things, the set and setting is very important and they should pay attention to. By this guide I want to help them use drugs and alcohol without having very bad consequences in their life. Last but not least, it is about social inclusion, as it takes into account the real questions that teenagers might have, as well as the opinions of those who have tried drugs, giving them voice.



Link to download the folder, and then open the file "SAFE is the new COOL"

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/3/folders/1N2NAg9mSz8S3YXTH6vGgQWzaPhWFALHK



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