

Title: About "schwarze Sheriffs" and "Kiezläufer"
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Abstract:

Schöneberger Norden, a neighbourhood of Schöneberg, close to West-Berlin's centre, struggles with, amongst other socio-economic problems, its youth. Some youth display deviant behaviour, intimidate and act aggressively towards people on the street, shop keepers and the elderly. This has also resulted in violence and damage to public and private properties. They are held responsible for causing a climate of fear and insecurity. The police have set up a prevention team to address this problem and the local government has installed a 'quartiersmanagement', backed by the 'Socially Integrative City' federal program ('Stadtteile mit besonderem Entwicklungsbedarf – Soziale Stadt'). In addition, two initiatives in Schöneberger Norden focus on prevention through presence on the street. Firstly there are the 'schwarze Sheriffs', initiated by the housing society that owns many apartments in the neighbourhood and secondly the 'Kiezläufer' of a non-profit organisation for street work or mobile youth work. Both initiatives are based on the principle of direct presence though their focus is very different, as are the results. What is their contribution to a safer neighbourhood and what possibilities are still unused?

Essay:

Schöneberger Norden is a small neighbourhood of about 80 hectares and almost 17.000 inhabitants, in the very northern point of Berlin's Schöneberg district in the west part of the city. In the last decades this neighbourhood has suffered from a typical downward spiral that is part of a complex process of local segregation. This has resulted in a general devaluation of the social environment. Due to the high numbers of unemployed and social welfare dependent people, and the high rates of immigrants who have come to live here, Schöneberger Norden has become less and less attractive to the economically stronger part of the population.

In particular youth, to a large extent now with a migrant background (97% of the children at primary school have a migrant background), have started to trouble the community with socially unacceptable behaviour. They have little guidance from their parents; they have poor economic perspectives with their flawed education and they face being ignored or rejected by society. Under these circumstances negative behaviour seems to be the most effective way for them to get attention, though not the sort these youth need. In the process they yield more fear than respect and seem to be out of parent's or society's control.

The crime rate, connected to the youth in Schöneberger Norden is not exceptionally high and mostly limited to petty crimes. Instead of crimes, the youth display harassing or intimidating behaviour, make insulting remarks or are threatening – all of which are not legal offences. But are all undoubtedly very disturbing for the social climate in the neighbourhood. With no borders set, the deviant behaviour expressed by youth in Schöneberger Norden turned into defacing or damaging public and private property and occasionally physical violence, which was given extensive attention in the local media. Unfortunately, constrained by their rules and operating procedures, the police can only take action when this behaviour results in actual crime. More police, as a blunt security measure, turned out to be of little help. Moreover, the police neither addressed the social climate amongst residents of the neighbourhood who feared the youth, nor could they address the needs of the troublesome youth.

By the end of the '90s, the situation had become so dramatic that unconventional measures seemed to be necessary. Facing problems instead of ignoring them, improves the chances of solving them and prevention is more effective than a cure. With this wisdom the district administration and the police started a 'soft offensive'. The police district responsible for this area (Abschnitt 41, by area the smallest in Berlin), set up a special unit, the prevention and intervention team (Prävention und Ermittlungsteam, P/E-Team). Their task was to build a network which included the youth, the schools, parents and social cultural youth work. Financed by European Union and the federal programme 'Soziale Stadt' ('socially integrative city'), the district administration installed a 'quartiersmanagement'. This team of neighbourhood coordinators had to build a new social network, and to activate residents and institutions in the neighbourhood. Together with the prevention team of the police and many other actors in Schöneberger Norden, they also started a monthly public meeting, the 'Präventionsrat' (prevention council) in which all issues of concern for residents could be addressed. In this way, a very concrete public authority presence was re-established in the neighbourhood, and with its work it has managed to regain respect and real authority. Though, for restoring the social climate and eliminating the deep rooted fear and insecurities, it seemed to still have a long way to go.

Here comes the central point to this debate. To be able to change this 'culture of fear', to prevent deviant behaviour of

youth, but also understand their cause, one has to be present. This is why the Quartiersmanagement and the P/E-Team, among other initiatives, mostly have their offices in the neighbourhood and are deeply rooted within the community. But it is possible to take physical presence as a means of prevention one step further. The youth to be targeted are on the streets, in public areas, where also most of the problematic behaviour takes place. The street is where these youth seem to rule, where no-one dares to set them boundaries. The street is also typically the place where those can be found that otherwise would stay below the radar of most social work based cultural centres.

One step further in prevention would thus mean going on the streets. Being on the street means being seen. This gives both a signal to frightened neighbours – someone cares and will do something in case of trouble – and a signal to the youth to remind them that their actions will have consequences. Merely by showing authoritative presence criminal, but foremost deviant, behaviour can be diverted and a feeling of security can be established. Showing presence on the street results also in seeing what is going on. That way it is then possible to intervene and to interact, discourage unacceptable aggression, enforce rules and award positive behaviour. Being physically present on the street gives the possibility of getting inside the social network of these youth, of having a direct relationship and therefore a significantly stronger impact on those who are hardest to reach. To go onto the street is therefore considered to be essential for any preventative work and for establishing a social climate in which people feel secure. 'To see' and 'be seen' in the context of prevention through presence could serve basically two purposes: to control and enforce law and order or to build a network, connect people and counter anonymity.

Interestingly in the Schöneberger Norden neighbourhood two quite different projects, initiated by two very different institutions went out on the street in order to address the security issues caused by youth. Firstly, the housing society, owning over four thousand apartments in this neighbourhood, contracted a company specialized in security services. So-called 'schwarze Sheriffs' (black sheriffs, according to the black uniform) walk, mainly in the evening and at night, around the blocks and the common areas in the apartment buildings. Secondly, a non-profit organisation for mobile youth work, has street workers, 'Kiezläufer', whose main task it is to walk the streets of the neighbourhood. Both will be presented here in more detail to illustrate how they contribute to a safer Schöneberger Norden and what the power of physical presence to prevention of deviant and minor criminal behaviour could be.

Even though the security guards, 'schwarze Sheriffs', are primarily guarding the properties of the housing society, their effect on the wider neighbourhood can not be neglected. 'Schwarze Sheriffs' have a name that is clearly meant to compel authority. But the colour suggests that it is not just all about respect, these 'sheriffs' want to strike youths with awe. Indeed, their appearance is intended to impress and keep potential trouble-makers at a distance. Always in couples, dressed in a black uniform with bomber jacket and accompanied by a dog, they do their surveillance in and around residential buildings. They make sure that no suspicious individuals enter the buildings and violate any of the house regulations. And if still something happens, the 'schwarze Sheriffs' are there to keep a situation under control until the police arrive.

The 'schwarze Sheriffs' therefore effectively prevent and they also contribute to a safer environment. However, they are not equipped to create trust. Since the start, about four years ago, communication and cooperation has improved, especially with residents and the police. The means of the 'schwarze Sheriffs' to prevent through presence, still are primarily discouraging deviant behaviour and guaranteeing security through a one way attitude of controlling and rule enforcement.

The social work called 'street work' is, like the name 'Kiezläufer', by no means a new invention; it is a method which was started in the '70s. 'Kiez', local Berlin slang, refers to the direct neighbourhood in which most people do their daily business and foster most of their social contacts. 'Kiezläufer', literally 'neighbourhood strollers', can be understood as part of street work or 'mobile youth work'. This method has recently become popular again as it was realised that some youth remained beyond the reach of traditional social work. In Schöneberger Norden social workers from a non-profit organisation which specialises in working with youth which are out of reach of the traditional social work, have social workers who make their rounds through the neighbourhood several days per week.

'Kiezläufer', some of them with a similar background as the youth to be approached, go out on the street and look for these young people at places where they hang out; mostly at specific sites in public space, on street corners, play grounds or parks. Contrary to the 'schwarze Sheriffs', their task is not to enforce rules or security. The 'Kiezläufer' go in couples as well but, in Schöneberger Norden, are not dressed in a uniform. Walking around, they maintain and extend their network of street contacts. Their first goal is to make contact, but also to rebuild a social network in the neighbourhood. They gauge the mood among residents, youth and shop keepers, signal problems, tensions and

irritations. During their neighbourhood stroll the Kiezläufer keep in contact with most key actors in the neighbourhood. And because of the casual contact with many of the youngsters on the street, they have often a unique access into their social network. At the same time these street workers foster a personal and direct relationship within the professional network of institutions, like schools, cultural centres and others, in and around the neighbourhood.

As they have no enforcement capacities, their main function is to signal problems, pick up irritations or worries. Seldom the Kiezläufer solve problems or settle disputes themselves, most often they pass on information, refer people with their problems to the relevant institution or are asked to act as intermediaries. On the other hand, through for example the prevention council, Kiezläufer provide other institutions with valuable information 'from the street'. Prevention of unacceptable or even criminal behaviour is a goal that 'Kiezläufer' indirectly address through their presence, countering anonymity through building a social network. 'To be seen' has its first goal, to be accessible for all people in the neighbourhood, youth and other alike, 'to see' simultaneously results in building up a social network, gaining trust, not just between 'Kiezläufer' and the people, but, over time, also among the people in the neighbourhood.

Schwarze Sheriffs and Kiezläufer have their workspace in common and both react to the signals from the neighbourhood community that the social climate is one of fear, aggression, resignation, anonymity and ignorance. Being in direct contact with this environment in the neighbourhood is a starting point for both. 'Being seen' and 'to see' give the best opportunities to act against asocial behaviour and are attempts to re-establish a lost social cohesion.

Still there are major differences between the 'schwarze Sheriffs' and the 'Kiezläufer'. These differences seem obvious, as most of them can be explained by their fundamentally different backgrounds. The first obvious difference, that between commercial and non-profit, I will address in a moment. Firstly, I would consider another important difference; the task of the 'schwarze Sheriffs' is basically object oriented, whereas the 'Kiezläufer' are primarily subject oriented. The work of the 'schwarze Sheriffs' is centred on residential apartments and their physical quality. Therefore it is understandable that 'to be seen' is focussed on direct behavioural influence. And 'to see' means basically, to catch trespassers red-handed.

On the contrary the work of the 'Kiezläufer' is centred around the residents of the neighbourhood and generally focused on re-establishing the social cohesion. Youth with socially unacceptable deviant behaviour have to be integrated into a local community with an active social control. Logically 'to be seen' has therefore a quite different purpose, as does 'to see'.

Not long after the first rounds of the 'schwarze Sheriffs' some residents had complains about abuse and inflexibility of some guards. Intimidation was also directed towards innocent residents. According to the housing society though, the security service was welcomed by many of the residents. But indeed private security in public space has quite often been criticised from a fundamental point of view. According to them providing security should be a public service and be under public control. Through the commercialisation of security and the privatisation of public space, security would turn from a public good into a service only available to those who can afford it. But should one conclude that it is best to exclude the private sector if it comes to prevention and security? Or should one be glad with the concerns and involvement of a housing society? Over time, the 'schwarze Sheriffs' managed to establish a good working relation with both the police's prevention team and social work. Whether it is a real contribution to sustainable change in the social cohesion that could support a safer neighbourhood society is not obvious and still subject of debate.

But could the reason for the lack of a greater success be found in a lack of structural communication and cooperation between the private institutes and public and non-governmental institutions? The 'Kiezläufer' are embedded in a well established network and backed by shared professional knowledge. In the field of community building, housing societies are generally fairly new and often they do not share many social and professional contacts with institutes who have long standing experiences with deviant social behaviour of youth. And, what goes for housing societies, applies maybe even more for private security companies. As these companies tend to move more and more into the working field of community building it would be good if cooperation were extended and intensified. Will the neighbourhood then be too small for both the 'Kiezläufer' and the 'schwarze Sheriff'? Unlikely, but one has to stay optimistic and assume that one day there will be no need for either of them.

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