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Dealing in and Consumption of Illegal Drugs in "Urban Villages"

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Ongoing drug dealing and consumption in neighbourhoods of West German cities suggests diverse negotiation processes. But how exactly are dealing and consumption reflected there in immediate, everyday life and in the neighbourhood in socio-spatial terms? How do they take place and how do systems and structures manifest themselves? Such spatially structured systems, according to the basic premise, do not establish themselves only materially in and at the specific place, but are brought about through the social practices of everyone involved. It is thus to be assumed that residents in every neighbourhood learn on the ground, increasingly acquire local knowledge and are thus able to distinguish between what is relevant and not relevant. Overall, the neighbourhoods are perceived differently by residents and users depending on perspective, experience, social anchoring in the neighbourhood, possible courses of action, etc., different problems are mentioned and assessed in different ways. Qualitative ethnographic research as part of a German BMBF project revealed that apart from misdemeanours, especially concerning (bulky) waste and disturbances of the peace, it is petty theft and above all the dealing in and consumption of drugs taking place on the doorstep, especially of cannabis and to a lesser extent cocaine, that form part of the debates specific to the neighbourhood. Below, one such neighbourhood is described and analysed with the latter focus by way of example: its composition, development into a "hotspot", the process and structure of drug dealing and consumption and how these are dealt with, particularly by the police. Finally, the description and analysis form the basis for being able to answer the questions raised as well as those concerning the consequences.

INTRODUCTION

"We take the smaller of the two roads that lead into the neighbourhood we are currently researching.[1] Here, we have to make our way through an underpass below a larger bridge of the city motorway, which marks a boundary to the old part of the district and a transitional area. It is covered, with lots of space and a few parking places, which are not used very much now in the early afternoon.

We come across a group of young men, some of whom are still wearing work clothing, others everyday clothes. They blatantly stop what they are doing, register our presence immediately with quick glances out of the corners of their eyes and decide that we are obviously harmless as they cannot be bothered with us any further. The smell of cannabis is intense and almost impossible to waft away. Apparently, given what they are doing, it is vital for them

to be able to categorise whether people approaching them are with the police or not. The smell stays in our noses, as we are amused to discover, long after we have passed by the group. As we continue south in the neighbourhood on the larger road, we can see in the distance another group of youths and young adults who have obviously already identified us as strangers to the neighbourhood and clearly walk away as we approach." (Field note)[2]

Noticeable differences are made on the basis of everyday, assumed and supposed categorisations, which are displayed accordingly in everyday, public practices and either confirmed, i.e. verified, or not. All stakeholders are understood here to be participants in an (interactive) situation in their "mutual entanglement" (Goffmann 2001, 57), which is brought forth only jointly and thus both carried out and dramatically performed. Because the counterpart is always needed to confirm and cement one's own expectations. Important in this illegalised context is that the assumptions and categorisations of everyone involved should be as accurate as possible because miscalculations could have fatal consequences. With regard to the residents of the investigated neighbourhoods, these are relatively clear since the people in the district can be consistently allocated to rows of houses and apartments. Many grew up and went to school together here. Even if there is no ongoing direct exchange between different groups, they know each other by sight. Strangers who do not live locally are immediately apparent, as are we when we walk around there.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The neighbourhoods have been characterised by different waves of migration since the 1960s/70s,[3] thus the community selected here by way of example comprises people from countries including the former Yugoslavia, Russia, Poland, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia and Eritrea. Due to the different reasons for and routes of migration, the rules governing the right to remain have also differed since those days: from so-called guest workers with limited permission to work to refugees, tolerated and stateless persons without any permission to work. In particular, these regulations influence(d) the possibilities that were and are made available in the urban and national context of the host society (cf. Charim/Auer Borea 2012) and thus also the respective possible orientations and points of reference on the part of the migrants. Thus some people were affected by the ban on employment even after having been in the country for 20 years. Apart from the ban on employment, unemployment and poverty also increased following the closure of many industries in the 1990s. The neighbourhoods in question first came into sociopolitical focus only as a result of this and became relevant for integration policy and later for security policy.

Thus each neighbourhood and its respective places came about historically and is dealt with in long-lasting social and communicative processes. Different social groups set up and functionally care for their own territories in immediate proximity to one another, but only come into contact from time to time. The neighbourhoods therefore appear urban and village-like in their structure at the same time. Accordingly, the research project is based on a spatial understanding that takes into account the social and material structuring of spaces as well as their dynamics, processuality, how they came about and their diversity.[4]

The neighbourhood selected here is representative of some of the others. It is situated in a city[5], in the heart of a growing conurbation. The ownership structure is homogeneous and lies in the hands of

an urban housing association. When asked, many residents said that they like living here, there is space, it is quiet and many apartments are both large and well laid out as well as affordable and have a balcony. Thus, with a good 37 percent, there are almost twice as many households with children under 18 years of age here than in the urban area as a whole. The people living in the neighbourhood are also much younger on average (almost 35 years) than the average age across the entire urban area (almost 41 years).[6] With regard to unemployment, the figures for the neighbourhood differ only slightly from those of the city as a whole (just 0.2 percentage points higher). In total, at almost 79 percent, far more people with a "migration heritage"[7] live in the district than in the city overall (almost 54 percent). Two thirds of residents have been living in the neighbourhood for at least five years, many much longer than that. There are two childcare centres and one family centre, a neighbourhood help post and, on the northern edge, a youth centre with appropriate offerings. There is no social street work, although this has been regularly requested for years and a neighbourhood management team was recently set up. In the afternoons, there are frequently eight to thirteen-year-old girls on rollerskates in the quiet streets and boys of roughly the same age are out and about as well.

"The boys seem to like riding around on their very differently sized bicycles, some also with a friend sitting behind them, frequently cruising the same routes, know their neighbourhood, fool around and see what's 'going down'. So we are also very soon asked what we're doing. Our responses quickly spread amongst them. This shows how well networked these boys are with each other, how they pop up and disappear again, keeping an eye on things. Actually, not much happens, it is all a bit boring. Drug dealing and consumption make the situation definitely more exciting, especially because 'role models' and offerings are available here. For example, one of the boys who comes up to us is pale as a sheet and says, 'No, I can't answer, I'm not at all well right now.' Looking at him, you can't resist the feeling that he, at just twelve years of age, has consumed too much cannabis that afternoon." (Field note)

Thus, these boys also worry a long-standing resident (CaK1)[8]; he describes them as offspring who distribute various packages for a couple of euros or keep an eye out for the police, who are now controlling the area so strictly. We were also able to observe how one of them sat for quite some time at the entrance to an approach road, apparently keeping watch. He was later relieved by a boy of the same age.

Also during the stays in the neighbourhood, e.g. at parents' meetings, it becomes clear that the people often use the term "we", depending on context, gender, age and biography. An important common point of reference is the place. Even if, as already mentioned, there is no direct exchange between different groups, they know each other – at least by sight. That strengthens estimations, expectations and trust. Apparently, this neighbourhood collective is not aiming at harmonisation, but at appropriate places and localities. The diversity that exists in the neighbourhood, according to one consideration, results from an urban understanding of coexistence, from the logic of an urban society, but not from a national or civilian model of order that attempts to create one language, one religion, one culture, etc. Thus the normative characterisation of these spaces is in many aspects not uniform and the object of constant negotiations. As already alluded to here, these local norms and arrangements can exist in a hierarchi-

cally asymmetric relationship of tension to prevailing, hegemonic norms. Within this diversity, the language of the place, i.e. the lingua franca in which the people of different backgrounds communicate with one another, is German.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD'S REPUTATION

The city and the urban housing association noted that due to the size and layout of the apartments when they were occupied 25 years ago, mostly larger families with children, including those with an entitlement to social transfer benefits, are given the opportunity to move in. This decision had already triggered protests by residents in the adjacent, partly middle-class residential areas, which also appeared in the media. Despite all the protests and concerns, the apartments were rented out as planned. The negative image and stigmatisation remain to this day,[9] which apparently are still easy to find in the media. It is suspected that this image of the neighbourhood, especially its southern part, is due not only to the stigmatisation of the residents, but also the uniform, scantly renovated housing, which differs markedly from the other surrounding neighbourhoods in the district.

Everyone is more or less aware that the reputation of the neighbourhood is associated with migration, poverty, insecurity and criminality in the city and media circles. The empirical material shows from the perspective of residents that they know about the neighbourhood's stigmatising reputation, but frequently defend themselves against it. The fact that so many people pass judgement on the place without knowing more about life there is widely deplored. People are too quick to speak of a "ghetto", although there are well functioning neighbourhoods, according to one resident we spoke to. On the other hand, the neighbourhood also represents a "home", a place of refuge: as equals among equals. Despite the diverse community, people find kindred spirits here, also with similar (migration) biographies, which strengthens the feeling of home. Here, they escape the constant focus on their (ascribed) "difference", as, for example, schoolchildren continue to experience at school. Life in the district is therefore simultaneously curse and blessing, and influences biographical developments as well as educational pathways.

DEVELOPMENT INTO A "HOTSPOT"

Even if the neighbourhood is perceived differently by residents and users, one problem is clearly mentioned above all others: drug dealing/consumption (esp. cannabis), which happens in certain, if changing, places. A long-standing resident (CaK1) recounts how "cannabis kicked off" in the district back in 1971. He moved into the street in question 19 years ago. Dealing was already visible there at the time, too. He visited the police because of it now and then. He was told that they had everything under control, "they are just harmless matters and they're only selling a bit of hash". In the meantime, according to him, they no longer have anything "under control with just a few social worker measures".

The process and structure of drug dealing are essentially similar in pretty much all investigated neighbourhoods. There are a few people who run the show, then a large number of sellers as well as so-called assistants, who store the drugs in places such as basements or apartments. A total of six people of different origin are involved in the district in question. A senior police officer describes it thus:

"Personally, I have to say I am very close to all of them, these six families. I've known them all for many years, I know the little kids, I know the parents. Most of them are

really upstanding, normal people. Many of the parents also work. In two, three cases, it's the whole family." (CaP1)[10]

Above all there is one family, whose father, the so-called "boss", started smuggling cannabis and cocaine many years ago, was caught once or twice and sentenced to a couple of years in detention. Two of his four sons in particular are now active in drug dealing. Last time around, ten years ago, they were shown to be dealing in 80 kilograms of marijuana. The older dealers would not be happy to see dustbins burning or something being attacked on New Year's Eve nowadays. That would attract far too much media interest and be counterproductive for business. The family itself is widely dispersed across Germany, but also still resident in other European countries. Some of the sellers also have different family migration biographies, e.g. from Central and Eastern European countries, but are not family members. Due to this variety in the structures, which appear in almost all cases upon closer inspection, the police officers involved strictly reject the term "clan criminality" and speak of gangs or groupings. The hard core is a gang of six people, "who don't care much about ethnicity, they sell to everyone. This grouping has simply become well established" (CaP1). This also corresponds to the findings from scientific and empirical research (cf. Tzanetakis 2020, 40), according to which drug networks are mostly informally and somewhat loosely organised and above all consist of smaller groups of independent dealers. These deal "preferably with trustworthy colleagues from the circle of friends, family and with the same ethnic background". (ibid.)

Everyone involved grew up in the neighbourhood in question and lives there. Most have German citizenship. They apparently used to sell at relevant places in the city centre, but then moved to their own district to reduce the risk. In these areas, where these kinds of terraced houses and apartment blocks are found, there are plenty of homes of dealers who sell drugs directly in their own environment.

They use it like a "home base", not only know their way around the area very well, but also know their neighbourhood and use available social networks as well as basements, apartments, playgrounds and green spaces to store drugs, meet, consume and arrange sales. Due to the local circumstances, which they all know right down to the tiniest details, like in a village, they also immediately see when the police are coming, and spot everyone who does not belong to them.

The customers actually come from across the city and sometimes from distant points of the surrounding conurbation. According to the police, the neighbourhood is known for miles around for the good quality of its marijuana and cocaine. People are also not "ripped off", fair prices are demanded and "the amount is right" (CaP1), attention is paid to this. This builds trust and reduces uncertainty as formal aspects of market regulation are necessarily absent (cf. Tzanetakis 2020, 41). The "boss" does not get directly involved, but is available around the clock. "That has become established over many years and the word has got around." (ibid.)

Buying means being observed and so residents and the police also described how people drive or walk on to the street, where they are very quickly approached because buyers can be very quickly identified. Once the order and money have been handed over to someone, they forward everything to the next person as a middleman. The handover place is then given. The drugs are then handed over by yet another person. The deal thus passes through three or four points in order to make it harder for the police to gather evidence. Because

in order to be able to proceed cogently in court proceedings, the deal must be evidenced, observed and witnessed by the police in situ, i.e. actually being carried out. Only then can the perpetrators be convicted. Alternatively, large amounts of drugs have to be found and associated with the perpetrators. Thus, the procedure followed by the sellers is correspondingly extended and the handover points are regularly changed. They can therefore argumentatively pretend that they only gave it to the "friend" as a gift, and the situation concerns personal consumption, as we have been able to observe in a court case. According to the police (CaP1), the revenues largely flow to the country of origin and are therefore not washed locally, but "bunkered". For example, the prevailing attitude here would be that, say, property purchases in Germany only draw attention and could possibly alert the tax investigation department.

Since the very beginning, this situation has caused parents to worry that younger children are "taught" drug dealing and consumption by older youths and these youths could become a role model because they have "masses" of money. One mother said that drug dealing was like "glue", once you come into contact with it you can hardly break free again because it is a very quick, allegedly easy way to make money. Thus, there are children of the same age in the secondary schools who have much more money and could afford things like branded clothes.

"And the children, of course, get something from the exchange shelf, shall we say. Then the parents are worried [...] that the path to crime is simply very short. Because you simply have the neighbours. And you always have the feeling that lots of people here know about a lot a things.

But you don't talk about them. They are taboo subjects." (CaE1)

So in the neighbourhood, the subject of drugs is much more relevant amongst residents, especially mothers, when there were specific incidents. Children aged nine to twelve years are approached by drug dealers in the neighbourhood asking them to take some backpacks somewhere for 20–50 euros. There was a lot of concern about involving the police because people worried that the children would be taken away from them. The police officers responsible for the neighbourhood were invited to attend a meeting; on request, they came in civilian clothing and informed residents in detail about what happens when they are called in. Almost 40 women from the neighbourhood were represented. They wanted to work to make the district family friendly and also to make a statement that the district and its playgrounds belonged to them "[...] this cohesion, the neighbourhood cohesion, was visible here. That really was very impressive. The information conveyed here was also very helpful. Especially with regard to: we are scared of the police, so? [...] And as far as I know yet more women or fathers dared to call the police and say [...] there are youths here now, smoking weed and making some kind of racket." (CaE1)

So the drug dealing in the neighbourhood was above all made a subject by the residents themselves because at times it heavily determined life in the public space. But what finally turned the neighbourhood into a "social hotspot" in the media was burning dustbins and exploding letterboxes as well as stones that sometimes flew at police officers, and attacks on firefighters. As a result, the area shifted more and more into the focus of police and press, being described, for example, as a problem district that was degenerating into a ghetto. Certain groups of youth were described as being extremely threatening in nature. The media construct of such a place and

such a homogeneous group takes place in a socio-ethnicising demarcation, with the counterparty perpetually being made out to be something else. Instead of addressing the problem in dialogue, through early social involvement and the highlighting of perspectives, the focus is on restrictions and exclusion, which in turn obviously perpetuate the problem.

THE POLICE APPROACH

According to the police, the described neighbourhoods, like other similarly structured areas, are entirely "difficult areas" (CaP1), which can only be managed in the long term with sufficient personnel (and actually only in combination with other, non-police measures). Only after the local police were better equipped and a special unit with investigative team was set up, did these make contact with the neighbourhood and the relevant people. They did so in an open way because even in civilian dress and with constantly different vehicles they would have been spotted immediately. What proved practicable in the end was a combination of observations from various adjacent places around the neighbourhood and an open presence of uniformed police as well as, from time to time, standby police who carried out checks in the neighbourhood. Thus officers were out and about as civil observation units on the one hand, and on the other carried out stop and search and, if necessary, made arrests.

"Otherwise, I would say we treat them with the necessary respect I would expect from my counterpart. And we are actually shown respect in return [...] except when they run away, actually do attack, insult or shout at me or my colleagues, but we don't actually experience that." (CaP1)

The first goal, on the one hand, was to convict this group of six people, to take the drugs off them and to initiate appropriate evidentiary and criminal proceedings. On the other, it was also about showing the population that the police is doing something, so from their perspective it was also important to do a lot of patrolling and carry out lots of open checks. The younger people in the neighbourhood report that too many of them are constantly being stopped and searched by the police; even a long-standing resident says that he sees this happening a lot when he takes his dog for a walk. The youths and young adults stood endlessly against the wall with outstretched arms and had to regularly identify themselves. He still knows them all as children and is not entirely convinced about the sense of the checks. Other older residents were more satisfied with the police action and their presence.

However, what become clear in this generalised approach are the stigmatising attributions. Stigmas can also be understood as signs that convey social information. Biological features can be used for this, e.g. the appearance, age, gender, or cultural features, e.g. the veil, the use of hookahs or certain drugs, with the visibility of these signs playing a big role. Stigma are not a given in and of themselves, but based on an assumed agreement in relation to what is deemed "normal" and as deviant in any form considered deviant. They also depend on the ability of the "public" to decipher them (Goffman 1967, 64). These interpretations are reached with everyday practice and through/in media constructions. Goffman (cf. ibid.) describes stigmatisation as an interactive process, in which human characteristics are described not only as different, but as deviant (from the norm). He understands this process as a collective devaluation process, through which a concept of the "normal" is created and can be or become socially sustained. Thus the process of stigmatisation legitimises the existing, a status quo, (re-)produces and brings about features of feelings

of lesser value and superiority, and covers the social construction of both categories. Categorisations of the deviation could not be prevented in the negotiation processes, but the processes can be controlled more or less actively. They are only and continuously (re-)produced by the process as such. Ultimately, this is about forms of social inclusion and exclusion, about a constructed opposition of "belonging" and "excluded". Accordingly, stigmatisations are part of racist categorisations. Thus the global, long-since failed approach of the "war on drugs" (cf. Tzanetakis 2020), which was supposed to guarantee a world free from drugs, is not reflected discursively here either; the drug trade continues to be illegalised and ethnicised, and drug consumption across all levels of the population hidden and partly tolerated.

It remained virtually impossible to prove the dealing was taking place. So the observation primarily served the purpose of providing an overview. Making dealing more difficult through flushing out and roughing up was a focus of the police work in the neighbourhood in question. It is about "irritating, hurting" (CaP1), said one officer. When they arrest people, these people lose goods and money, but they still continue working. This also affects, for example, a young man who has been arrested three times for dealing in narcotics. The dealers quite obviously include this in their calculations and the profit margin still remains high enough. The question here would be what appropriate alternatives and perspectives there are that could be highlighted, and whether, given the socio-economic circumstances, the choice of such a line of business may not be entirely sensible. Or vice versa: For which problem is drug dealing the solution?

In the course of the investigations, the focus shifted increasingly to the buyers and attempted to make procurement as unpleasant for them as possible, so that they no longer even show up in the neighbourhood to buy drugs there. Here, too, the question is whether the demand ought and should not be discussed differently. The benefits and risks of the current drug policy ought probably to be discussed more urgently than ever. Because which substances and drugs are socially accepted and permitted depends on historical and cultural factors and is quite changeable (cf. Feustel 2020).

CONCLUSION

Networks and social controls are initially important as mechanisms for managing crises and problems in every neighbourhood, although in the (urban) city – other than in "We" groups – they do not (have to) focus on homogeneity, but on functionality. Clearly, (functional) networks in the districts are important because they provide capacities for action and problem-solving.

The "drug problem" clearly cannot be resolved with current approaches and is frequently just pushed somewhere else. So the drug dealers never really go away. Their spatial and social network constantly readjusts itself. Clearly, different approaches are needed. Apart from the demands for (more) street/social workers in the neighbourhood, a debate on fundamental changes to the prohibitive handling of drugs is obviously more necessary than ever before. Neither the global, long-since failed approach of the "war on drugs", which was supposed to guarantee a world free from drugs, nor the functioning and flourishing global drug trade or the demand for and consumption of drugs across all levels of the population are (jointly) reflected or questioned. The benefits and risks of the current drug policy ought probably to be discussed more urgently than ever. With regard to the neighbourhood, it is often said that better social mixing is

required, which, given the diverse composition within the neighbourhood, seems rather helpless. It remains to be questioned whether urban areas should/ought not to be designed so that they offer a plethora of possibilities for contact and design, instead of basing themselves on principles of exclusion. A society that is based on the recognition of difference could also achieve this with the help of an inclusive plan that accepts the interests of all neighbourhood residents on an equal basis. A debate including both a comprehensive drug-accepting and explanatory approach as well as a diversity approach (cf. Meuser 2009) should be strongly encouraged here.

[1] *The explanations are based on the three-year joint research project "Migration und Sicherheit in der Stadt – migsst" (Migration and Safety in the City – migsst) (migsst 2018) financed by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). It concerns analyses of general needs and requirements with a focus on the so-called safety (work) in eight anonymised districts in various west German regions heavily characterised by migration since the 1960s/1970s. The investigation is carried and evaluated on an empirically qualitative and ethnographic basis. The goals include the elaboration of recommendations for action for municipalities/cities and police forces. The contribution contains parts and revisions of the article: Sozial-räumliche Gestaltungen – Stigmatisierungen, eigenwillige Aneignungsprozesse und gesellschaftliches (Gegen)Steuern (cf. Frevel 2021).*

[2] *The empirical, social science investigation in the context of the migsst project is carried out on a qualitative basis and occasionally on an ethnographic basis (cf. Breidenstein et al. 2013), in order to approach the neighbourhoods appropriately and "unlock" them. It combines this procedure with conversations, interviews, sound recordings and documentation of every kind. The neighbourhoods are always sought out via "strolling", in the course of participatory observation. Where possible, this involves talking on the ground to residents as well as local business owners or other users of the district.*

[3] *Recruitment agreements were concluded by the West German government with a large number of countries between 1955 and 1967, in order to resolve the labour shortage in the expanding post-war economy. These did not "envisage any permanent presence of the recruited workers. For this reason, they were designated as 'guest workers'" (Goeke 2011).*

[4] *See also the approach of Löw (cf. Löw 2001, 158–161), according to which spaces constitute themselves from the placing, the relational arrangement of people and social goods by means of "spacing" and "synthesis" and the distinction from appropriated physical and social space according to Bourdieu (cf. Bourdieu 1991, 32), whereby the physical space is penetrated by social structures.*

[5] *Further sources (anonymised): Amt für Statistik sowie Stadtplanungsamt der Stadt C, including documentation of the specialist dialogues of the city and social aspects of urban development.*

[6] *Further figures: as at: 31.12.2018.*

[7] *As most children, youth and young adults have no personal experience of migration, mostly their grandparents or also parents are immigrants, and they themselves were born and grew up in Germany, it would be more appropriate to speak of a "migration heritage" (cf. Özdemir 2020). Thus the history of migration in Germany is also subject to the same legal and discursive attention because "its social positioning [has been] characterised by the narratives since the labour migration of the 1950s through to the current debates on refugees" (Özdemir 2018, 1). Their belonging to Germany has recently once again been questioned and placed in parenthesis by the label of having a migration background, as "something different is seemingly [hidden] in the background" (Özdemir 2020).*

[8] *To preserve the anonymity of our investigated cities and districts, they are given systematic codes. Uppercase letters describe the respective city, while lowercase letters a and b refer to the respective two districts and other uppercase letters are assigned to areas, for example: M: municipality, district, city or P: police.*

[9] *Further press sources (anonymised): regional newspapers of city C, incl. from August 2019, September and December 2018.*

[10] *See further in endnote 8.*

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