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Walking the Beat as District Police Work

The following remarks describe the implications, challenges and opportunities of communicative police work, carried out rather independently of events, sometimes also referred to as preventative policing. How do police officers get information, knowledge and an overview in this context? What do they accomplish with this type of work? The work processes of the police units are reproduced in their practice and are described and analysed using recurrent, cyclic sequences.

CHRISTIANE HOWE,
Sociologist at the Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt University, Berlin.

"Ultimately, this type of work can only be carried out on the streets. Even as a unit leader, I have to be on the streets, because I couldn't reflect on them otherwise. We probably have 300 prostitutes with different backgrounds here, various guys too, and there are other kinds of relationships as well. Who's with whom, where do cars stop – I couldn't understand this from just reading about it. So, I have also have to create a picture for myself in order to be informed. […] We need to do our work more or less on the streets. In the end, we are only successful if we are present there" (an APA unit[1] leader, transcribed conversation).

In the neighbourhoods examined here, there are people with different backgrounds, interests and concerns visibly out and about: long-established residents, newcomers, new immigrants, as well as drug-users and people involved in prostitution or associated with the gay and party scene. Different norms of "different individuals and heterogeneous social and cultural groups" (co)exist in these places (Wehrheim 2004, 21). On the one hand, coexistence requires a certain degree of tolerance, and on the other, constant spatial negotiating processes are needed to determine what is tolerable to what extent and where.

Local conditions and (perceived) security conditions seem to be more multidimensional and complex as a result of ongoing social change (Rosa 2005). The police face this situation with a combination of approaches, aiming to obtain well-founded information relevant to them in order to gain and maintain an overview of these social spaces. In addition to core police operations, i.e. the prosecution of criminal offences and emergency response, there is also an increasing focus on one aspect: communicative police work, carried out rather independently of events, often close to citizens or certain scenes, sometimes also referred to as preventative policing. This constitutes the subject of the following remarks.[2]

The (work) processes of the police units are reproduced in their practice and are

described and analysed using recurrent, cyclic sequences: walking the beat, which is characterised by movements and observations as well as exchanges and conversations. In addition, police checks and research efforts take place – in advance, in the meantime or afterwards – and differences are made with the encounters. Due to the scope of the article, I will only be able to go into two aspects in more detail.

The sequences are described by way of examples and can only be discussed here briefly. They should not only be understood as examples for or of something. At the same time, they demonstrate the specific and general nature of this kind of police work: the typical, everyday occurrences have been selected, i.e. those that represent the normality of the day-to-day work (Breidenstein 2013, 139–141).

The focus is on the following questions: How do police officers get information, knowledge and an overview in this context? How do they work with a group of street prostitutes acting as the occupants of the space and with the other players involved in street prostitution? How do they gain and stabilise access? How do they create trust? Finally, how do they transfer this applied, socially bound and constantly changing knowledge within the police force?

The basis for the account in this article is the ethnographical monitoring of this police practice spanning a total of four weeks in two different cities (Hamburg and Zurich) within the framework of ethnographic practice research on crime prevention (CODISP[3]) and research on human trafficking in the light of institutional practices (ProsCrim[4]). The monitoring activity included participating in walking the beat, in the normal day at the station, in meetings, breaks, dinners, deployments, etc. Observations were noted (field notes/sketches – subsequently anonymised), conversations were held with police officers during and about their work (interview transcripts or recorded, transcribed interviews – subsequently anonymised) and documents were collected. In addition, extensive field descriptions of this type of work and preliminary analyses were presented to the those being researched. These were also discussed and reflected on with the participants.

WALKING THE BEAT

"The rounds were done with me just like they are always done. We set off, without bags, only equipped with an ID card, a mobile phone, a pen and a note pad; the officers had their weapons too, which protruded occasionally from under their shirts or sweaters. So I set off with them like a colleague. They let me walk with them, even though I'm not introduced on the first day. Only two women ask if I'm a new colleague. The answer is no. They don't pose further questions" (field note).

Everyone engaged here is dressed in civilian clothes – jeans with trainers or walking boots –, even though the majority of them belong to the constabulary. Among them is the occasional woman and person with immigrant background. Various skills and experiences gained from previous professional activities, including language or culture skills, are valued, however, these are not prerequisites. The police officers always introduce themselves as such and are well-known. Each of them has their own way of approaching people, depending on their personality, opportunities, professional knowledge and history. The units do not work in the police shift system, so they are not operationally dependent and can "take their time in case of doubt".

We always go at least in pairs, sometimes also in groups of three or even five. This way, I am told, nobody in the history of the world would ever tell anything about

what they had supposedly done. Thus, they would have witnesses and could mutually control their approaches better. The district is a world unto itself, everyone knows each other well, and if someone behaved badly, it would be known in a "flash" in the whole district, according to an APA unit leader.

The visible cultivation of the business of prostitution is prohibited in public spaces within these districts as per the restricted zone regulations. If such cultivation by those working there can be proved by others, i.e. repressive police or law enforcement officers, then they have to pay a fine. Multiple violations can amount to a criminal offence. According to the assessment and experience of the officers I accompanied, the prostitutes either try not to get caught by repressive police officers or to pay the respective fines. "With the big effect that they have to work. They only do this type of work here. In my view, we actually pervert them a bit, because we only actually further increase the pressure on the women to work here" (APA unit leader, transcribed interview).

The violation of the restricted zone regulations is basically an administrative offence. These administrative offences enable the use of the opportunity principle, a certain margin of discretion: they can, but do not have to be pursued. This enables a kind of communicative, preventative prioritisation by the police, without violating the legality principle, i.e. the obligation to prosecute.[5] Thus, in the abovementioned districts, this communicative, preventative approach, especially for the target groups of police work, must be clearly distinguished from the everyday repressive police work.

MOVEMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

"First, we go through the back, and then the main streets. We stop and stand from time to time, get to the main road, back to the main square and stroll down a road in the middle. There are people of visibly different origins out and about on the streets. A corresponding infrastructure has developed along with them. There are numerous grocery stores from all around the world, cafés, fast-food restaurants, regular restaurants, cheap hotels, internet cafés and the possibility to directly transfer money internationally, travel agents, agencies, intermediaries and shops of every kind, churches and mosques – diverse offerings with advertisements in various languages. Obviously, newcomers and fugitives can also find contact points to their respective communities here, which help them with information about the circumstances in the new world and provide suitable contacts.

We also meet women on our rounds who are either on the way to somewhere, are coming from a hotel or are standing at their usual spot. Some women meet their relatives (fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands), partners and/or friends on the main square in-between.

On one round, an APA employee notices that a transwoman is unusually busy. He points this out to me when he sees her from a distance. He also thinks that she is rather agitated, and wonders why and what's going on with her. […]

On a later round, a woman comes to meet us. The two I'm currently out with are of the opinion that she's new (as am I, after two weeks spent in the district). We had never seen her before and she gave the impression of being unsettled by the circumstances, the way she walked up and down. We go up to her, the two of them introduce themselves and ask what she's doing here. She's defensive at first, looks for some kind of reason and pretends to be waiting for someone as if she were just there by chance" (field notes).

The police officers filled her in on what goes on in this district and, based on their

work assignment, about the movements of the street prostitutes. They behave in a similar way to having a stroll with an observation task: there is evidently no hurry, they look away and pause a while, they look around and take in what's happening to them. This kind of walking around becomes (relatively) unrestricted over time, "time is therefore not subject to any functional rationality" (Neumeyer 1999, 11), which is a suitable form of movement for deciphering and "following traces" (ibid.), since traces are not left consciously, but unintentionally. Sometimes they can be left behind by themselves by certain assignments and by police procedures.

The rhythm of this strolling without any prior intention corresponds to a specific perception of the time and space of the city, since those objects that are being observed are constantly moving in changing configurations (see Neumeyer 1999). The image of a specific city or district is hard to read; it is characterised by layers, overlaps, constant fluctuations and complex materiality. In order to be able to read its images, it is necessary to immerse oneself in the mass, in the district, in being part of it and in the act of physical movement through the urban space. The movement of the strolling body can be adjusted to contemplations, so it is possible to stand still or walk while constantly paying attention, or even to turn around or approach to gain some prudence. References and networks, how and where people move on a daily basis, atmosphere and tempo are all conveyed by this sensory mobility. Thus, changes, unusual events and occurrences, new things or those "out of order" quickly become apparent and are recognised.

At the same time, this method allows the strollers to always a maintain a certain distance through the registering, scanning observation of the urban spaces. They do not participate in the real sense, although they are part of them. Meaningful, personified information fed by movements, images, noises and smells are all created by these movements, the mobile participation and, at the same time, by the adjustment to the district as well as by the changes in location and perspective. These result in personified forms of knowledge.

Both police officers and prostitutes are characterised by observation and necessary assessments of their counterparts. The police officers can be recognised by attentive and interested people by the fact that they walk along together quietly and rather slowly whilst gazing around. If this framework of movement disappears, for example, if an officer walks along a street alone or I converse with one in an animated manner, they look away or through us. This suggests that prostitutes, in particular, must also be scanning their environment, as they are faced with the restricted zone regulation. This is also visible and apparent when it comes to making contact with potential clients via glances.

Only this daily, common presence and activity in the district, this spending time "in the immediate presence of others" each day (Goffman 2001, 56) creates an ordinary social order. The order of interaction is only shared in the execution of actions. They become binding, established and thereby redirected in that there is a reciprocal reference to each other. Thus, this reciprocal process stabilises social order and control, establishing reliability and trust, which are repeatedly generated in a kind of self-reinforcement.

The nature and manner of these strolling movements remain improvisational based on the circumstances of the environment (Ingold 2011). Police officers are part of the district and can be found in the image of the district – sometimes they leave the image or stand at the edge of it. Only his continuous, zooming change between

near- and far-sightedness enables them to perceive, see and feel 'errors in the image' and avoid possible complications.

Even in the APA unit, police officers only gradually become knowing members by participating and contributing to this everyday practice. Here, people form a knowledge and learning collective with shared goals and interests. Lave and Wenger coined the term 'community of practice' for this (Lave and Wenger 1991).

EXCHANGES AND CONVERSATIONS

"We are greeted by some women. Some only nod, some hurry on quickly, time and again the women say: 'Hello? Hello, well, how are you?' Sometimes the police officers enquire: 'What's your sister doing?' or 'Do you have your passport?' or 'How was the hearing?' The police officers themselves also offer greetings, they always stop and ask: 'So, how are things? Is everything ok? How's it going?'" (field note).

Almost all of the women speak German, many however in a very simple, characteristic style, in a kind of infinitive, present tense fashion. They can neither use personal or possessive pronouns correctly, nor connect tenses or sentences well. Thus, statements are often made without any connection to each other. If they try to tell longer or more complicated stories, it is sometimes difficult to understand them. The exchanges and interviews are often about the women's working conditions, sometimes about their families, however, the main topics touch upon stress and the arguments with hotel operators, colleagues, friends or relatives. Sometimes, events in the district are also discussed.

In addition, the women often don't talk about incidents or stories chronologically, but often speak in circles about particular events, such as parties.[6] A member of staff, who has not been at the APA for very long, tells me that it was difficult for him to adapt to this language, and he still can't make sense of it from time to time. At the beginning, he had not understood the women at all, until he slowly got the picture. Now he also knows the individual stories better: "It's also difficult with these whole families: brothers, sisters, cousins, who's married to who. It's a bit like a village where somehow everyone has something to do with everyone else and you really can't get to grips with it at the beginning. And all of them have a long story."

The police officers try to understand these stories and connections and attempt to arrange them in a certain way. They audibly adjust their language to simple constructions in the present tense and conform to the other party to the maximum extent possible. When it doesn't work at all, they need to fetch someone with appropriate language skills or one of the women's colleagues who already speaks better German.

We always go to the surrounding pubs where the women hang around, either alone or with clients. We also visit hotels charging by the hour as well as dosshouses. There too, the officers know the circumstances and the people who work there. They ask questions in a similar way they do on the street and have a chat here and there.

This continuous, communicative presence allows all participants of the district to refer to their world, exchange information over their circumstances on a daily basis, describe incidents and communicate about versions and interpretations. Police communication here is primarily characterised by the need (desire or necessity) to make yourself understood instead of influencing.

Many stories are told, there's a lot in circulation. All APA officers are interested

in these stories, they often know different versions and assessments of the different actors and they always enquire about them. In part, they have the impression that you can never really figure out what the stories are actually about, as the women themselves decide how they tell them and how much they reveal. You mustn't be fooled here, as one of them summarised.

The police officers of the APA units develop a daily presence and become participating collaborators of trust bases and (working) alliances. This is how they are able to connect, continue to have conversations, be the first to record statements, which can be placed into an existing bigger picture and thus also examined. This kind of understanding, which continues to be discursive throughout the (pre-/post-)processing of the police and the authorities, is the first step that generates knowledge relevant to the police. This means that a permanent form of informative, personal exchange is generated with this daily presence, as well as through the primarily understanding-oriented communication. Thus, these actions can be described primarily as communicative and only then as strategic in the sense of Habermas. Habermas speaks of communicative actions "if the action plans of those involved are not coordinated by egocentric success calculations, but via acts of understanding" (Habermas 1981, 385). Strategically, this action involves a second step insofar as the involved actors influence their counterparts in order to achieve their goals in their own sense. It is a procedure which is rationally laid out in the context of police work, is always reconsidered and, at the same time, constantly tested implicitly.

At the same time, the situation in the district is characterised by a certain (power) asymmetry; the police is an institution, i.e. there must be a certain conduct towards the police officers, either by deliberate evasion, non-observation, rapid passing by or through other forms of greeting. Those actors in the focus of attention are in a certain way obliged to an acknowledgement ranging from a (nodded) greeting to a conversation. In addition, it is assumed or feared that the police officers have a better overview and a well-founded knowledge of the district and its people, and they know more than they show in any case. Thus, they retain their advantage and, in a certain way, are always the representatives of the state. The asymmetry also manifests in the fact that they can/may officially ask personal questions, expect honest answers and may also demand identity papers or require people to accompany them to the station. Moreover, they are the contact persons for a wide range of legal questions and problems as well as for areas of conflict, which would break the framework established here.

On the longer term, these cyclical rounds reveal a temporally shifting social process, which can be described as a form of giving, taking and giving back (reciprocating), or as a transmission (Mauss 1968; Adloff/Mau 2005) of all kinds of information (especially on the part of the women), as well as time, interest, offers for talks and assistance (especially on the part of the police officers).

The interactions and actions in the district are continuous, observable and embedded in stories. The durability and regularity of their encounters suggests reciprocal behaviour, in the sense of mutual recognition. It produces behaviour on all sides which oscillates between normatively binding and strategically offered. Thus, the principle of this gift action (Mauss 1968), this process from the perspective of the participants, is not merely productive and consciously intentional. The 'gift' is at the same time a self-serving and uninterested

exchange. It encompasses a complex game of voluntariness and obligation. It is paradoxical: it is underlain by an unspoken obligation to be voluntary. Gift relationships, therefore, include uncertainties. They are not fixed per se and generate trust in just this way.

A process begins with the acceptance of a gift. This implicitly imposes a delayed reciprocation (i.e. one provided with a time lag), somehow given voluntarily, thus creating social obligations and ties. This also includes a (symbolic) acknowledgement of the other person.

A classic police influence in the sense of the state monopoly on force via police officers only applies to a very limited extent or not at all, especially with regard to its objective. There is a (power) asymmetry here due to the professionally framed contact and the task of the police; nevertheless, this type of giving is in principle voluntary and thus uncertain. At the same time, rules and expectations must always be established and presumed, i.e. there is a pretence that a (social) relationship exists in order to turn it into reality. A subsequent exchange creates and constitutes interpersonal relations, alliances and a range of mutual obligations. Networks, social structures and social order(s) arise by the existing unspoken and obligating norm of constant reciprocation and at the same time by its voluntary nature, given that it cannot be forced onto anyone. The officers are also repeatedly confronted with questions and requests for support throughout this process, which they must deal with in a dual sense: on the one hand, they must respect both the legal and personal limits of their professional role, on the other, they must not simply reject established trust or destroy/damage the relationship building process.

All information is collected piecemeal by the police officers, they exchange this and their assessments with each other as they are doing their rounds and throughout their discussions before and after. Thus, they prepare their encounters on an ongoing basis – partly 'underway', or they review them in further conversations, for which they casually seek out certain people. They check and sample through mutual tales, sometimes via phone calls or later by researching on the computer/web. Thus, they approach the circumstances and the possible coherent versions and interpretations.

On the basis of the police work assignment, the officers must investigate certain incidents or even uncertainties. Their assessment is based on connections of knowledge experienced and obtained from the district and through their rounds, as well as on retrieved police-institutionalised knowledge. Available pieces of information are merged with further potential information, facts and data – via phone calls as well – to provide a more comprehensive picture. This becomes clear upon writing a note: it could become relevant again in the future through something that is currently unknown or unlinked. Writing a piece of knowledge down is necessary to make it verifiable and comprehensible. Moreover, it evolves into representative police knowledge, which, among other things, become effective through policies and standards (as well as laws).

EXCHANGE AND TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE

No universal truths and hierarchies play a role in these situations of collective exchange and exchanges of experience. The focus is on the abilities of all police officers to report on everyday encounters and disputes, and to reflect discursively on them together. This exchange with reference to everyday experiences, realisations and knowledge in the possession of

all employees is a central element of the job: there are collective and cooperative interpretative processes (Habermas 1981) within an APA unit, which are also carried further within the police force. These interpretative processes check what is available, what has occurred and judge them to be true or correct. They also legitimise knowledge and render it applicable. This continuous reflection minimises misjudgements and frustrations.

Furthermore, the information flows regularly into the situation on the ground, into reviews on the district and into the exchange between criminal investigation authorities, primarily conducted between departments responsible for human trafficking and prostitution, where investigations, including covert procedures, take place. Even here, the exchange of information, experiences and assessments is almost exclusively oral. 'Of course we can manage all possible information in writing, however, the soft data can provide a small piece of the jigsaw, which ultimately helps the case along […]. These are more likely to come together in a conversation than when you really write everything down right to the smallest detail' (head of a unit).

The negotiation of situation definitions and their interpretation, i.e. this form of communicative action (Habermas 1981), is an essential part of their work. It requires reflexivity and disassociation, since dialogical validities are (must be) run through and checked to be able, in the best case, to communicate about an interpretation/version and agree on one. Furthermore, these discursive and cooperative interpretative processes simultaneously create a necessary distance from the target group and the district time and again. They also provide self-insurance and self-understanding about the police officers' own profession.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Commitments, agreements and behaviours, as well as norms and their boundaries, are all negotiated and established through this work in the urban district. This "arena of collective action" (Strachwitz 2015, 60) with its specific action logic differs from the state with its structural monopoly on force and its mere assertion of law; moreover, it also differs from the market with its exchange logic.[7] This process can be described with Habermas's negotiable "consensus of norms", which must be preserved and developed further, and within which people's freedom should be affected as little as possible (see also Strachwitz 2015, 68 ff.). Thus the consensus of norms stands in contrast to the strict framework of norms, which would then have to be implemented by those representatives of the monopoly on force that are present. These negotiations require reflection on the role and task of the police. The challenge here is not to lose oneself and to deal with the aspect of proximity and distance[8], since a community spirit is formed here, which 'results directly from the coexistence of people' (Arendt 1986, 146).[9]

The boundaries of what is socially acceptable and legally possible, the area of what still has to be accepted, which enables both police officers and prostitutes to cooperate well and amicably, are explored together. Interest and commitment from both parties are thus further stabilised and intertwined.

A form of collective knowledge, a "communal knowledge", is developed (Sørensen 2009). In this case, knowing means obtaining experience in a loose provisional manner and possessing experience in the form of already learned skills. In this context, knowledge and learning take place neither only in the head, nor only in practice. Gradually, practical experiences are gathered in a community. Thus, the com-

petence of the community increases, which in turn affects the community itself.

This "local knowledge" (Geertz 1983) of the police officers enters the police organisation primarily as a result of continuous oral reporting, through the exchange of knowledge and via constant discursive and cooperative investigative processes. It is available in certain places, however, not in the sense of the application of programs or technical formats of information storage. This communicative, procedural character of police work and the specialised form of knowledge stand alongside the usual organisation-internal control based on (statistical) recording and management.

This work, with its challenges and pitfalls, could be scrutinised more closely in the future, thus potentially defined better, as "a lack of access and cooperation cannot be compensated by means of repression. It's more important, however, that the police acting as allies are basically expanding their capacity to process problems and are shifting the assignment of their tasks themselves. They no longer create local order(s) for people, groups and environments, rather, they do so with them. An embedded, suitable order develops from the outside" (Scheffer et al. 2017, 264). Might this be an approach worth considering?

Interactions, (professional) relationships and networks develop collective capacities to deal with problems. Integrative moments are created in combination and together with day-to-day efforts on the ground. They also transform the police selectively and culturally. It is therefore possible that the status of this specific type of work is not uncontroversial within the police. This type of work also needs special safeguards and freedoms, as it is ultimately concerned with questions of social cohesion, community spirit and social order. "This cooperation creates a special capacity for processing problems, which exceeds all capabilities of the state. The participants build confidence and trust where otherwise distancing categorisations dominate" (Scheffer et al. 2017, 270).

High social competence, extensive experience, and sometimes diplomatic skills are needed here. For this, the exchange of experiences and continual mutual reflections are needed. To this end, it was necessary to create appropriate organisation-internal conditions in order to analyse the challenges and opportunities of this specific and perhaps future-oriented form of police work, and to promote it in certain circumstances.

[1] *I described two districts in their similarities and chose a pseudonym for the police units (APA) in order to ensure extensive anonymisation.*

[2] *The article is a revision and amalgamation of Howe 2016 and Howe 2017.*

[3] *CODISP: Concepts for the Development of Intelligence, Security, and Prevention – an ethnographic, Franco-German research project funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research under the National Programme for Civil and Urban Security (2012–2015), headed by Thomas Scheffer, Naika Foroutan, the research team of Christiane Howe (coordination), Eva Kiefer, Dörte Negnal and Yannik Porsché – see also: www.codisp.de.*

[4] *ProsCrim, a Franco-German research project (2014–2016), funded by the German Research Foundation, headed by Rebecca Pates, Mathilde Darley and the research team of Anne Dölemayer, Christiane Howe, Julia Leser and Daniel Schmidt. It deals with the question of how human trafficking is visible to the state, and strives to make a comparison between the institutions, regulations and practices in Germany and France.*

[5] *The principle of legality is a legal obligation which no order can/could annul. Senior police management have determined in some places that all officers must basically draw attention to violations of restricted zones. As described here, the APA units are exempt from this, so they do not have to write any reports, since they would otherwise not be able to carry out their work, i.e. their work assignment.*

[6] *It should also be pointed out here that this narrative structure also causes numerous problems, since a coherent, linear temporal structure of relevant narratives is of enormous importance for the police or the courts, i.e. in interrogations and statements. The linear temporal order facilitates criminological and legal correctness, and enable truth and honesty to be checked, in the sense of motivations and reasons: they have done this and that at this time, and then this and that has happened to them.*

[7] *See also Honneth 1993 on the communitarianism debate in Germany, also Braun 2002.*

[8] *See also Scheffer et al. 2017.*

[9] *According to Arendt, this can also be conceived as a form of citizenship (Arendt 1986) or according to Etzioni, as a form of social self-regulation from below (Etzioni 2009).*

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