

Youth under pressure – a pedagogical perspective on Juvenile violence and Ordnungspolitik



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'Youth is under pressure', 'Binge drinkers leave behind 6 tons of litter', 'Brawling was my greatest hobby', 'No spitting!', 'Police: both prevention and repression'

Picture: www.pixelio.de
(Photographer: System-quelle.de)

These headlines exemplify the image many have in Switzerland – whether urban or rural – of our young people: their visibility in the media and as well as in discourse recently backed up by reports on 'drinking and brawling' in public spaces and – related to that – vandalism and littering. In particular, trendy phenomena such as 'Botellones' – spontaneous mass 'booze-ups' in streets and public areas organised via the internet (Facebook) – and their negative consequences are blown up into scandals. Sensationalist media reports about extreme phenomena such as binge drinking, (mass) brawls, wanton and gratuitous vandalism or hooliganism round off the visible picture of our youth. These reports are then seen as proof of incremental juvenile delinquency (1). In addition: these 'youths' are held responsible for the increased disarray in our public spaces – such appears to be the consensus.

Suggested solutions for these problems can be summarised as follows: Only a clean place is a safe and therefore a 'good' place. This is evident for instance in the public discussion regarding anti-loitering policies or in tightening up police regulations. The installation of CCTV cameras, or so-called 'Mosquitoes', whose aggressive, high-pitched noise is designed to repel young people, are related measures. The call for law and order, repression or use of the police as 'cleaners' is becoming stronger. In consequence, police are increasingly active in fields traditionally reserved for pedagogical and social workers.

From a theoretical and professional standpoint this development is fatal. The current media discussion about 'youth' rarely considers the possibility of dealing with public spaces from a pedagogical and social point of view. The following questions are never even posed: how significant is a 'public space' educationally and as a place children and youths make their own? Which parts can they rightfully challenge, which parts can they shape and which are given? Why is it central to a young person's development to be able to find out what is challengeable, what flexible and what fixed? What can they learn from their peers that they cannot learn in school?

The job of the social workers should be to propose plausible models for solving the latent problems. The Swiss National Fund presently supports a [research project at the Institute for Social Work at the FHS St.Gallen](#) that promotes this strategy. The project aims to reveal the connections between measures taken, forms of public disorder and models of operation and interpretation of those involved (those who consider there is a problem, those who have to deal with the suggested problems and those perceived to be the cause of the disorder). This knowledge can then help counteract current forms of juvenile violence using social and pedagogical means without resorting to law and order policies.

Annotation:

(1) Current research into the development of youth violence by, for example, Eisner, indicates that the number of youths arrested and sentenced for acts of violence has dramatically increased over the past few years. Whether or not youth has really been responsible for this

violence, or whether the increase can be attributed to better detection rates on the part of the police, or charges more frequently brought by the victims, is unclear from the data.

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