

## Investigation into case Sammy Baker much milder than leaked concept

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The parents of Sammy Baker are shocked about the conclusions drawn by sociologist Jaap Timmer in his final report on their son's death. The 23-year-old German was shot dead by police officers in New West over three years ago. In **a draft version** of the study, Timmer strongly criticised the officers involved, but in the final report, the conclusions are more nuanced and mild.



Sammy Baker on Honselardijsktraat in New West - AT5

More than three years after Sammy Baker's death and several investigations further, the relatives and the police are diametrically opposed. After the Public Prosecutor's Office (OM) - based on an

investigation by the National Criminal Investigation Department - concluded in 2021 that the officers acted **in self-defence**, Baker's parents started civil proceedings against the police. In those proceedings, the relatives, assisted by lawyer Richard Korver, asked for an expert investigation. In August 2021, the parties agreed that police sociologist Jaap Timmer should investigate the case, with a psychiatrist also writing a report. In addition, the British Forensic Architecture (FA) - at the request of Sammy Baker's parents - also launched an investigation into the case. Both reports are now drawing their conclusions, which are far apart.

## **The case in brief**

Three years ago, 23-year-old Sammy Baker, a German fitness influencer, was shot dead by police officers in Amsterdam. Sammy was in town to celebrate his birthday and visited a coffee shop in the Red Light District, where he shared several joints with friends and ate space cake. Moments later, he started showing confused behaviour and went missing. Concerned, his mother travelled to Amsterdam where she found him in Nieuw-West.

Meanwhile, the police were also looking for Baker, when an officer tries to approach him on foot, Sammy runs away barefoot, pursued by several officers.

The chase ends in a fenced-in courtyard on Honselersdijkstraat, about a three-minute walk from Poeldijkstraat. With his mother and his friend a few hundred metres away, he walks around with a knife at his throat and wrists.

Several officers ask him in English, German and Dutch to let go of his knife. But this does not happen. "We are here to help you," an officer can be heard shouting on video footage. To protect the officers from Sammy and his knife, a dog handler is deployed. But against instructions from his supervisor, he decides to approach the German from behind.

The officer grabs Sammy by his neck and brings him to the ground. Once on the ground, Baker begins to struggle, screaming and supposedly waving the knife around. During the struggle, two cops decide to shoot, the German does not survive the police bullets.

## Firm criticism in draft version

Earlier this year, the draft version of the report written by Jaap Timmer came into the hands of AT5. The researcher expressed **strong criticism** of the actions of the Amsterdam police. For example, a dog handler pulled his own plan and Timmer lashes out at the operation's supervisor. "The role the Officer on Duty (OvD-P) gave herself was a more coordinating one, not a commanding one. The OvD-P in question (...) did not make it clear before or during the operation that she was going to call the shots. If she had actually wanted to lead the operation, she should have given orders and mandates explicitly named as such, including tolerance limits, violence instructions and the like."



**"The OvD-P in question did not make it clear before or during the performance that she was going to call the shots"**

JAAP TIMMER IN DRAFT

Timmer gives as an example the deployment of a dog handler, the OvD-P requesting his deployment to protect the officers present in the courtyard from Baker. But he decides, at the direction of other officers, to approach Baker from behind and overpower him. An action after which the situation escalates and the German is shot dead.

## Final version milder

After the parties concerned were able to read the draft version and were allowed to comment on the content and ask additional questions, the sociologist was milder and more nuanced. The police would have had the express intention of finding and bringing the missing Baker to safety, and despite instructions from the officer in charge at the scene not being followed, this would have been mainly due to Sammy Baker's unpredictable and dangerous behaviour, presumably as a result of his excessive cannabis use.



Sammy Baker

Timmer also chooses his words more carefully now. Whereas in the draft version he still states that with police personnel more at a distance it would "probably" have been possible to calm Sammy

down, Timmer swaps that word for "maybe" in the final version.

What is also striking: Timmer concludes his paper by saying that there are some characteristics of the 'suicide by cop' phenomenon. Sammy Baker might have deliberately confronted the police only to be shot to death. Something not mentioned in the draft version.



**"Repeated escalations and mistakes created a situation where Sammy was senselessly killed"**

BOB TRAFFORD - FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE

In addition to Timmer's research, British Forensic Architecture - in collaboration with research program "Argos" - has also drawn its conclusions on the case. In recent months, a team of scientists built a 3D model and reconstructed the situation in the courtyard. One of the most striking conclusions is that the statements made by officers would not be accurate at crucial points.

**'Agent not in immediate danger'**

"Three officers have stated that the dog handler, while working Sammy to the ground, ended up on the ground with him. Since Sammy had a pocket knife in his hands, the prosecution also sees the joint fall as a reason why other officers had to come to the aid of their colleague. But analysis of available video footage shows that this is simply not true. The officer in question remains standing and was therefore not in immediate danger," they said.



**"The officers still had the option of stepping back at any time"**

FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE

Adding to that, from Sammy, there was no danger at all. "Thanks to

reconstruction techniques, Forensic Architecture has been able to determine the body position Sammy was in. He was lying on the ground with his buttocks and lower back in contact with the ground. His head and shoulders did not rise significantly from the ground. With that, Sammy was not in an offensive position; he was lying on the ground by himself. The officers still had the ability to step backwards at any time," the investigation states.

Based on Forensic Architecture's research, investigator Bob Trafford concludes that repeated escalations and mistakes created a situation where Sammy was senselessly killed.

## **'Conclusions far from reality'**

On the conclusions of the investigative agency and Argos, the police responded:" Their conclusions paint a picture that in our view is far removed from reality. Based on investigations by the National Criminal Investigation Department, the prosecution has drawn the conclusion that it was self-defence. Even a sociologist and police scientist, namely Jaap Timmer, appointed by the court as an expert, does not reach these conclusions in his final report that the commercial agency believes it can draw."

The police says about Timmer's final report: "We want to hold our procedures and arrangements up to the light and ask ourselves: what can we improve? It is important that we reflect and learn from everything that happened on that 13th of August in 2020. We have asked Jaap Timmer to help us do this."

The parents' lawyer-Richard Korver-called the differences between the draft version and the final report "remarkable". "To my mind, these are entirely explained by the additional questions."

When asked what the relatives and Korver will do now, the answer is that they will first wait for the psychiatrist's report. "Depending on that outcome, we will determine a further strategy," Korver said.