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Sammy Baker case: Debate about police violence in Europe

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Experts discuss cases of police violence in Europe in Rotterdam, the Netherlands - focusing on the case of Sammy Baker from Wetzlar. What can be learned from these cases?

Wetzlar . Almost five years after the death of [Wetzlar](#) influencer Sammy Baker, the case is still causing discussion. In Rotterdam, the events of 13 August 2020, when the young man from Wetzlar was shot dead by police officers in Amsterdam, were the focus of a research night at the Nieuwe Instituut cultural center. Just like other cases of police violence in Europe. What can be learned from these cases?

The aim of the research night was to place Sammy Baker's case "in the broader context of police practice throughout Europe", reports Bob Trafford from Forensic Architecture when asked. He is a member of the London research institute and discussed the case with experts from the Berlin-based sister organization "Forensis" and the Dutch organization "Control Alt Delete", among others.

"In fact, the failures that led to Sammy's preventable and tragic death at the hands of the Amsterdam police - such as the excessive and unnecessary use of force or the failure to respond to mental health crises as medical emergencies rather than security threats - are repeated every year across Europe," Trafford said when asked.

Expert: Comparable failures in all cases

"Therefore, the theme of the research night was not only Sammy's story, but also the stories of other people across Europe who have needlessly lost their lives to police violence, the connections between these cases and the common strategies that activists and NGOs across Europe can use to respond," says the Deputy Director at Forensic Architecture.



The British research group "Forensic Architecture" has traced the events surrounding the fatal shooting of the Wetzlar influencer Sammy Baker. (archive photo)

Timo König

Sammy Baker's family commissioned the British research group 2022 to reconstruct the events of August 13, 2020, the anniversary of Sammy Baker's death, at their own expense. Together with its German partner organization Forensis, the non-profit organization from Goldsmiths University of London analysed the case and developed a 3D model of what happened in the backyard of Honselersdijkstraat in Amsterdam based on video recordings of witnesses. Their findings cast doubt on the previous findings of the Dutch judicial authorities, according to which the police officers acted in self-defense.

Demand: Acting together against police violence

The cases discussed at the research night in Rotterdam included that of 29-year-old Mark Duggan, who was shot dead by police in North London in 2011, and the killing of Sean Rigg in London in 2008. The Paris-based organization "Index Investigation" also discussed the case of Luis Bico as an "appalling example of extreme police violence in France" from 2017.



Justine Seewald-Krieger from Wetzlar (2nd from left) at the panel discussion in Rotterdam. Cases of police violence in Europe were discussed at the research night in the cultural center "Nieuwe Instituut".

Armin Krieger

The event brought up "consistent and comparable failures", says Trafford. "Not only in terms of the use of force, but also in the way cases are investigated, communicated to the media and the public, how victims and their families are treated after cases of police violence and how mental health crises are recorded by the police." The challenge is to "tackle these problems together across Europe", he explains.

"We hope that through events like this, as well as through the public interventions, exhibitions and other activities of our network, our work and the analysis that underpins it will reach new audiences to support the demands of families like Sammy Baker's for accountability," Trafford emphasizes. The words of his mother, Justine Seewald-Krieger, at the opening of the event were a powerful reminder that such a case "not only costs one life, but affects many more people through grief, trauma and irreplaceable loss".



Time does not heal wounds here: Justine Seewald-Krieger and Kai Baker in front of a collage with photos from Sammy's life. (archive photo)

Holger Sauer

The victim was criminalized, families suffered severely, said Justine Seewald-Krieger, who described the day of the crime in impressive terms and sharply criticized the subsequent investigation by Rijksrecherche - the investigative department of the Dutch public prosecutor's office.

Sammy's mother: "Time does not heal"

Panic attacks, anxiety, depression, shock, being unable to work or being unable to deal with everyday problems - these are just some of the problems family members face. "The pain I feel will never go away. Time doesn't heal, it changes things a little. They took my only child from me and acted as if nothing had happened," said the Wetzlar woman, who spoke out in favor of an exhibition on the topic at the Rotterdam Cultural Center.