

Presentation title:

Young people's experiences of private policing in the night-time economy: stereotypes, commercial interests, aggressiveness, and violence

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Night-time economies have prospered in most European cities in the last years. These are distinctive space-time contexts, marked by alcohol consumption, disorders, tensions and conflicts. Private policing stands out in the night-time economy, specially because bouncers are widespread in nocturnal consumer spaces. Alongside, young people are prominent users of nightlife places, and these are important contexts for contemporary youth identity and socialization. A strong proliferation of night-time economy places was also observed in Portugal, especially in the main urban areas, and consequently of private policing. However, research is lacking on youths as key recipients of private policing. Drawing on six focus groups with 46 youngsters from Lisbon and Porto, this study explores young people's experiences of private policing in the night-time economy. Although recognizing effectiveness in their work, youths problematized two types of activities performed by bouncers - access control and order maintenance. Concretely, they alluded to discretion, discriminatory behaviors, lack of consideration for people and predominant defense of the establishment's interests, aggressiveness, and violence. Concerning access control, the narratives indicated that certain social groups are persistently excluded or must pay more money to have access to the spaces, namely: males, ethnic minorities, people with rundown clothing, and "ugly" people. Youths related predominantly the exclusion of these social groups with stereotypes of troublemakers and with the defense of commercial interests by bouncers. Moreover, young people pointed out aggressiveness and violence when bouncers were carrying out access control and order maintenance activities. The above-mentioned problematized practices were associated with the occurrence of aggression and violence in nightlife in general. Results will be discussed in light of procedural and distributive justice theories, and security governance debates.