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## Unintended but not unanticipated consequences: youth work, organized crime, and concealed radicalization

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### *Abstract*

This is a case study of youth work in a deprived neighborhood in Gothenburg, Sweden. The case is retrospective, and the period studied was 2012–2016, when gang violence became prevalent and young adults from the neighborhood traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) and similar violent movements. Kingsfield (pseudonym for the neighborhood) is one of the several deprived areas in Gothenburg that has been reported in the media for intense violence in the last 15 years, but it was never mentioned as an area that was also a potential recruitment hub for ISIS. The retrospective case study sets out to examine how this recruitment was missed both by the media and the bureaucrats of the city of Gothenburg. The empirical data were collected from semi-structured interviews with eleven professionals working in Kingsfield during 2012–2016. The case study revealed a potential misuse of youth workers with immigrant backgrounds in Kingsfield, which could have led to an unintended support for criminal structures. The study draws theoretically on De Zwart's (2015) distinction between unintended and unanticipated consequences.

### *Article History*

Received May 19, 2023

Accepted Sept 1, 2023

Published Sept 29, 2023

**Keywords:** Youth Work, Organized Crime, Sociology, Concealed Radicalization

### Introduction

The city of Gothenburg commissioned a research group [name omitted for anonymity] in 2019 to study how the city handled violent radicalization and recruitment of foreign fighters by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), among other groups, in Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2018. Gothenburg, in the Västra Götaland county, was one of the largest suppliers of foreign fighters from Sweden, and per capita, one of the most prevalent in Europe (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017). Literature suggests that such recruitment mostly occurred in the deprived neighborhoods of the north-eastern part of Gothenburg. Out of the approximately 100 foreign fighters who joined ISIS and similar movements from the Gothenburg area, a large portion claimed to be from the north-eastern parts of the city (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017). For this research project, it became important to ask why other areas of the city that

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were suffering from similar problems as the north-east (i.e., low income, weak school results, high crime rate, etc.) were not included in the public discussions on those who left to join ISIS and similar movements. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, an underrepresented region with similar concerns about youth radicalization to Gothenburg was chosen. This region was renamed Kingsfield to preserve anonymity.

Interviewing professionals about something that happened more than five years ago (2012-2016) is complicated, particularly when they seem to have had only a vague understanding of what was going on in Kingsfield at the time. Furthermore, asking professionals about why they do not have knowledge about something they have not heard of is a poor outset for a study. However, a previous study (Author, 2021) revealed that youth workers in northeast Gothenburg were the first to recognize and raise concerns to the municipality about people travelling to Syria to join Islamist terror groups (Author, 2021). There was a probability that this could also have been the case in Kingsfield if the situation had unfolded differently. Thus, the decision was taken to focus on youth work in this part of the city. The focus for this study is therefore to scrutinize the organization and management of youth work in Kingsfield between 2012 and 2016.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do professionals in Kingsfield today (late 2022) talk about the intention of youth work conducted in the area in 2012–2016?
2. How do professionals who worked in Kingsfield at the time talk about the outcome of their work conducted in the area from 2012–2016?
3. What is the conclusion drawn on how Kingsfield handled reports on radicalization to ISIS and similar movements between 2012 and 2016?

## Previous Research

Two research domains influence the current study. The first concerns youth work and prevention of criminality in general by employing so called credible messengers; the second has a much narrower focus on youth work and prevention of violent extremism.

It is a common idea within youth work and social work to hire credible messengers, that is, persons who have a past that younger individuals at risk may identify with, and this is

helpful in gaining access and building trustful relations (c.f., Drake et al., 2014; Harries, 2018). In her research in social and pedagogical work, Johansson (2006) has shown that masculine role models are often portrayed by biological and stereotypical masculinity, that is, firmness, courage, physically activity, and strong bodies. This contrasts with a masculinity that is more inbound, emotionally engaged, and focused on the needs of others. According to Johansson, this leads to a weakening and guilt tripping in women, particularly mothers of young boys growing up without a father and who are rowdy. However, Johansson also suggests that this belief that only strong men with a past can handle and control these boys impairs the opportunities to empower young men at-risk. A similar conclusion was drawn by Koutakis (2008) who stated that youth clubs as arenas for preventing criminal careers among young people in deprived neighborhood had an opposite result. In a longitudinal study, Koutakis showed that over time, when all other factors such as socioeconomic standard are considered, there is a greater risk for a criminal career among youths who attend youth clubs than those who do not. It may not necessarily be the clubs' fault; it could perhaps be the result of a recruitment pattern. However, there is no indication that youth clubs prevent criminality among youngsters.

Without doubt, policies on how to prevent violent extremism and radicalization to terrorism have been massively implemented since the first years of the new millennia (c.f., Andersson Malmros, 2022; Bossong, 2010; Malkki, 2015; Nohrstedt & Hansén, 2010; Strand & Eklund, 2015). These policies contributed to recontextualizing the prevention of terrorism from hard measures deployed by police, military, and other security organizations such as interventions to soft measures such as social work, education, and youth work (Author, 2018; Davies, 2008; Herz, 2016; Hodges, 2011; Husband & Alami, 2011; Kundnani, 2014). These soft measures are mostly for first line professions, and thus, we have seen a growing number of studies on how professionals, such as teachers, social workers, counselors, and youth workers comprehend and execute these new assignments. However, introducing prevention of violent extremism (PVE) as a duty for youth workers has turned out to be something abstract and these measures are jeopardizing the role of the youth worker. For instance, in a study on how these workers in the Netherlands relate to PVE assignments, Van de Weert and Eijkman (2019) noticed that youth workers paying attention to individuals at-risk is not something new. It is part of the routine to prevent alcohol and drug abuse, sexual exploitation, or

criminal behavior among young people. However, signs of concern for radicalization to violent extremism are seldom convincing to the youth workers and are often seen as abstract and hard to utilize. For instance, Sivenbring and Andersson Malmros (2019) showed that youth workers in Sweden were more concerned that their trustful relations with young people may be compromised due to their PVE assignment. The reason is that youth workers see their role as striving to support individual youths, while PVE work may take the form of security work in which safeguarding the society from potentially dangerous persons becomes a priority rather than safeguarding vulnerable individuals. The risk of mingling social work for people in need with detecting potential future risk has been reported in several studies (Author & NN, 2021; Dryden, 2017; Finch & McKendrick, 2019; Haugstvedt, 2019, 2020; Herz, 2016; Lid et al., 2016).

Deploying credible messengers, particularly young men with a history of a deviant lifestyle to reach out to youngsters who seem to be at risk is common practice. This practice is likely to complement the policy to deploy youth workers as first line practitioners to prevent radicalization. However, reaching out to young people to prevent them from living a deviant life is different from reaching out to them to save the society from future terrorism. Either way, research that supports the idea that deploying credible messengers is a functional strategy that can prevent young men at risk from adopting a deviant lifestyle is scarce. A recent study by Koehler et al. (2023) concluded that police officers are more credible messengers than former extremists in reaching out to radicalized individuals, suggesting that there might not be a hard line between security driven interventions and building trustful relations.

### **Theoretical Outset**

This study was challenging since it attempted to understand how the recruitment to ISIS and similar movements in the Kingsfield area occurred under the radar by interviewing those who did not see what went on under the radar. However, in the process of the study, it became clear that youth workers in Kingsfield had overall knowledge about under-the-radar activities in general. This finding inspired the theoretical lens for analyzing the data.

As the study will show, the city of Gothenburg invested and still invests in youth work with the intention to reduce recruitment of youths by organized crime groups, but some of that investment has become counterproductive, at least in Kingsfield. This was clearly not the intention, but it would be superficial to claim that the consequence was unintended without asking oneself if it was totally unanticipated.

From a theoretical point of view, Merton (1936) was the first person to coin the term unanticipated consequences. In his sociological examinations of purposive actions, he identified the differences between the ability to anticipate the outcome in unorganized and organized action. Merton argued that organized actions create a better opportunity for analyzing the relationship between intentions, instructions, and outcomes. This may be seen as self-evident, but De Zwart (2015) argued that there has been a conflation between the terms “unintended” and “unanticipated” consequences. According to him:

Anticipating the outcomes of purposive action is the core business of policy makers. They frequently fail, of course, /.../ Still, I argue, policy makers foresee more than we give them credit for. /.../ [the choice between the terms unanticipated and unintended is] by no means arbitrary; it clearly distinguishes unanticipated consequences from, say, those that are unintended but anticipated. (p. 284–285)

De Zwart continued to account for the usage of the terms in academic literature and concluded that the term unintended consequences is totally dominated the scene. It is not per se evidence that the two terms have been conflated. Along the same line, Giddens (1993) defined unintended consequences as “consequences which results from behavior intended for other purposes” (p. 765). Giddens’s definition allows a differentiation between unintended and unanticipated. However, the domination of the term unintended suggests that either the terms are conflated or there is only vague interest within sociological research to scrutinize what policymakers anticipated but not intended. No matter how we approach these debates, theoretically, unintended consequences that can be either unanticipated or anticipated need to be studied. Therefore, anticipating possible unintended consequences should be an essential task for all policymakers, and academic literature and research should provide empirical and

theoretical tools for this purpose. In this case study, I will draw on De Zwart's arguments and deploy *intentions*, *anticipation*, and *unintended consequences* as the analytic terms.

## Methodology

The study is a retrospective case study based on interviews with professionals who worked in Kingsfield between 2012 and 2016. Eleven interviews were conducted with six youth workers and two managers of youth workers. In addition, one principal, one politician, and one police officer working in Kingsfield were also interviewed. Four of the interviewed youth workers worked in youth clubs in the area during the study period. Two other interviewees had worked in clubs and as field workers. The managers held different positions related to youth work and crime prevention, but for ethical reasons no further details can be revealed. The politician was a representative of a large party at the time and the police officer was in a senior position and had detailed knowledge on Kingsfield. Former representatives of a youth organization named the Guardians were also invited to participate in the study, but they declined. All the participants had more than two years of work experience in the Kingsfield region during the study period. The participants were recruited by approaching youth clubs in the area and by reaching out to the management. All participation was voluntary and written consent from all participants was obtained with respect to the ethical standards for research provided by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). The study received ethical approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. All individual information is omitted, and all participants have either been given pseudonyms or their names left out. Specific events may, to some extent, have been altered to not compromise on the participants' right to be anonymous.

This case study is a retrospective analysis of how the informants talk about a particular event, which is most likely not on-going, in a particular geographical area. The participants were interviewed individually about their experiences. Each semi-structured interview lasted about one hour and was transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data were triangulated by comparing the statements with official documents, policy instructions, minutes from political meetings to validate the data from the informants (Denscombe, 2014). The transcriptions were then searched for recurring themes in relation to the research questions, a common

methodology within case studies (Yin, 2006). This process called for five follow-up interviews to obtain more detailed accounts in relation to these themes or to verify specific situations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Results

Before we go into the data, some contextual information about Kingsfield is needed. The area is referred to as being vulnerable by the police (Polisen, 2021). This means that the area is socioeconomically deprived, with high unemployment and crime rates. In this area, child poverty is widespread and life expectancy is significantly lower than the average for Gothenburg or Sweden (City of Gothenburg, 2015). The area is also frequently reported in media for gang criminality and a gang war that started in 2010 which is still prevalent.

### *Intentions and unintended consequences*

All the informants talked about the social unrest in Kingsfield that was on the rise during the focus period. The participants talked about child poverty, school failures, segregation, unemployment, and organized crime. They also mentioned that counter-measures during leisure time are seen as watershed for young people. Most young people make use of this time for either creative purposes, such as homework, engaging in sports, joining other civil society organizations, or part-time jobs. However, some are using this time in a negatively, such as socializing with or joining criminal milieus or gangs. Hence, youth work and clubs have been and are still seen as important tools for initiating reforms in Kingsfield. However, it was also reported that reaching out to the youth of Kingsfield can be problematic. This was partly because crime and rowdy behavior among the target group impairs what the youth workers see as fruitful youth work and partly because there was a social gap between the youth workers and the youth. This gap existed because most of the youth workers were of Swedish ethnicity and lived in different neighborhoods, while majority of the youth had immigrant backgrounds. Therefore, it was decided that the youth clubs should only be open to younger visitors and those who are older than 16 years would be denied access. Magdalena, who at the time worked as a youth worker, explains:



You see during that period [2012-1016] we only hosted youths until the ninth grade. Today until they turn 20, but back then until they started upper secondary school. After that they, so to speak, floated away from us.

Magdalena's reflection voices the *intention* of the city—to restore some sort of workable situation (i.e., peace and calm) at the youth club, the age of the visitors was lowered. Younger visitors were seen to be more fit for preventive work, possibly less demanding and easier to control. Lowering the age for all was more convenient than pointing out and banning disturbed or criminal youths from the club, irrespective of their age. The *unintended consequence* of this decision was that they also lost connection with many of the younger visitors who stopped coming to the club in solidarity with the older youth. Thus, the youth workers lost the broad knowledge of what was happening in the neighborhood. Their work became less mobilizing as it was limited to a particular club and less present in the neighborhood. While the age policy improved the situation in the youth club, youth work became isolated and less relevant to the youth in Kingsfield, in general. Notably, the intention was not to intervene with youths who were already in criminal circles or in their late teens, but to create a more workable and less stressful environment for the youth workers in the club.

Another strategy to lower the barrier between the youth workers and the youth in the community was to employ credible messengers, that is, young men, often with immigrant background who had grown up in the area. In this study, Juan was one such youth worker and he explained that he was hired because:

I'm easy going, I make contact with people... I'm a social chameleon so to speak, I fit in everywhere in all kinds of groups since I'm sort of neutral. /.../ I was born and raised here in Kingsfield; thus, people know me. You see people here... there is a constant suspicion, they do not trust the city management, the city at large, they do not trust the police...

Juan continued to describe how he was familiar to the gang criminals in Kingsfield, and how he managed to move around freely unlike the other youth workers who were not from the



area. He described how this ability became helpful when there was a need to calm situations. However, this neutrality is similar to a double-edged sword. On the one hand, he, and others like him, were essential for reaching out and calming situations, but on the other, it was unclear, particularly for their managers, which side these credible messengers supported. For instance, Petter, who used to be one of the managers for youth work in Kingsfield, claims that it was always a problem to recruit credible messengers.

[Youth workers] that, so to speak, were too involved, tainted [by being friends or relatives to criminals], then it is hard to say “no.” Staff members with a past in the neighborhood, you know a past. They have done things that were not acceptable, and then come to work for us. So, yeah, it is very hard... a fine balance, this thing with recruiting from the neighborhood.

While the intention to recruit credible messengers is clear, there is also potential anticipated consequences from the outset. Even if the details of the consequences could not be foreseen, it was understood that the upside of reaching out to youths would coexist with a potential downside, that is, untruthful professional relations. In addition, there was another operational level involved, namely the political level. The social unrest in the area was the backdrop to the formalizing of a semi structured youth movement, referred to as “the Guardians” in this study. The Guardians demanded, in 2012, a youth club for all the youth in Kingsfield, as a response to the fact that the youth club was closed for those older than 16 years. This was seen as something positive and an opportunity for the ruling political constellation (the Social Democrats) to kill two birds with one stone. There was a building in Kingsfield that used to belong to the Labor movement, called “the house of the people” (or Folkets hus). The leading politicians intended to save this building by allowing the Guardians to have their youth club there and thus supporting the building with taxpayers’ money. For instance, Morgan, one of the politicians at the time explained:

... I knew that it was a problem with getting good youth centers and youth activities. We had a Folkets hus also in Kingsfield and there was a heavy squabble between the opposition and us about whether Folkets hus should receive municipal

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support. [So, if the Guardians could have their youth club in Folkets hus then] The Folkets hus [could receive] a municipal grant so that they could go one with their business there.

Here, two different intentions are visible. The primary intention appears to be to save the Folkets hus, which was important for the Social Democrats since this institution is at the core of the Labor movement (Arbetarrörelsen in Swedish), and the secondary intention was to open a new youth club. If the youth club alone had been the primary objective, there was no need to involve the Folkets hus, and the management could have simply instructed the youth work managers to open a new club in another building or instructed them to allow access for those older than 16. At the end, the idea of involving the Folkets hus was terminated. However, the promise to open a new youth club was already made, resulting in severe unintended consequences.

As the case study unfolded, different actors were identified, that is, permanent staff of youth workers, “credible messenger” youth workers, managers, politicians, and the Guardians. On some level, they seem to work with the same intention to improve the social life of youth in Kingsfield. However, when observed closely, there were other rationales at work:

- The permanent staff youth workers strived for manageable youth work by expelling older youth.
- Credible messengers were hired because they had the capacity to control rowdy youth but they were also seen as having potential conflicting relationship with the criminals in the neighborhood.
- The ruling party that wanted to save a particular building related to the Labor movement.
- The Guardians was formed to get public funding for a youth club where all youth are welcome.

These conflicting rationales became a fertile ground for a significant separation between intentions and outcomes and, as we will learn, it could have been and was anticipated.

*Anticipated consequences*

The present level of management seems to have no recollection of the political aspirations to save the Folkets hus by turning it into a youth club. However, the responsible managers remember that they were instructed to open a new youth club in co-operation with the Guardians. During the interviews with the managers in charge, they recalled that they were reluctant to do so and feared that such cooperation might allow criminals to access both municipal resources and youngsters. On this matter, Niklas, who at the time was a Youth work manager, says:

Well, the Guardians stormed a political meeting and I believe that they scared the politicians. However, it was decided that I should have a dialogue with the Guardians. So, I did; the politicians were also involved. We developed a concept, but it was clear that the Guardians wanted to run this club as their own. /.../ In this dialogue we demanded that the Guardians should cancel their relations with the criminal elements that were involved in their own organization. We knew for a fact that there were criminal individuals within the Guardians. The shootouts between criminals in the neighborhood, well those involved, and some of them who died were part of the Guardians.

The political intention was to create a new youth club with better outreach than the old one. Consequently, the Guardians were seen by the politicians as a breath of fresh air and as representatives for the youngsters of Kingsfield. However, within the municipal organization the available information indicated that this decision would have unintended but anticipated negative consequences. For instance, Petter, the senior manager of the youth club, explains:

Well, that youth club was my despair. It is very hard to run structured work with co-workers who are out of line. I had co-workers who were uneducated and could not live up to the standard needed at all. So, it just did not work out. A lot of those who turned up [visitors to the youth club] were frustrated and angry young men. They were sitting in an area we used to call the living room. All of them covered

within their hoodies, arms crossed, staring at each other. I mean, playing music like “Fuck the police”...

According to Petter, there was too much of a gap between the needs of the visitors to the youth club and what the youth workers were able to provide. The visitors were to a large extent involved in crimes and upheld criminal lifestyles. They needed advanced social work, rehabilitation; in several cases, they were involved in police matters. Consequently, the new youth club was able to reach out to new groups but lacked adequate resources for meaningful youth work. The youth club was taken over by youngsters rather than the municipality. According to Petter, this led to:

We got ourselves into real tough problems. A lot of fights and threats, and girls were scared away [from the youth club]. Staff was frightened [talking about those staff who came from outside Kingsfield], due to these influential, strong youths who were involved in crimes. That problem was constantly present; [what was worse] we had youth workers who were friends and relatives to people deeply involved in organized crimes. You see people with such contacts with criminals were the ones who should conduct youth work. Maybe they were not active in criminality themselves, but their close friends surely were.

Interviewer: Was this well-known?

Petter: Yes, it was very well-known. I heard it from the police that our youth workers were seen frequently with gang leaders in the cars [the cars belonging to the municipality intended for social field work] and these criminals were their relatives.

The outspoken strategy to overcome the gap between the permanent staff and youngsters in Kingfield by recruiting from the neighborhood became a failure during the cooperation with the Guardians, including hiring untruthful staff members, at least according to Petter and Niklas. The gap that the municipality wanted to close allowed unreliable and unpredictable partners into the youth worker organization. Suddenly, they had employees who

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were not loyal to the organization. Although participants were unable to remember the duration of this situation, it is claimed that this lasted for several years. There is also a need to consider that the Guardians from this period refrained from sharing their experiences and they dissolved in 2015. After this, it took at least another year to reconstruct the youth club, in 2016. However, the most important observation in relation to the aim of this study is that it was during this period, 2013–2015, that young people started to leave Kingsfield to join ISIS and similar movements. The think tank Doku showed that in proportion to the population size, the number of ISIS recruits were similar in the north east of Gothenburg and Kingsfield (Lodenus & Sandelin, 2023). Although it is difficult to make a clear connection, this travel pattern coincided with a period when the youth work in the area underwent a turbulent phase caused by conflicting intentions. To put it differently, during a very sensitive period when young people were radicalized to become potential ISIS terrorists, one of the few opportunities for the municipality to reach out to potential recruits via a youth club was not tangible or possible since they had limited or no control over the youth work in Kingsfield at the time.

In the end it was a formal situation that caused the municipality to engage and change the management of the youth club. On this problem, Silvio, one of the youth workers in the municipality, recalls that the youth club violated the lawful permission of the facility by allowing people to live in the club.

You had people living there, staying overnight. Nobody was able to figure out how it came about that a youth club was turned into some sort of hostel. So thus, it turned out that their management was not allowed there any longer.

It is a bit ironic that when the intended purposes led to unintended but well anticipated consequences, the malfunctioning youth work was terminated on a bureaucratic basis. While it was seen at the political level as a feasible strategy to address youth concerns, by allowing the youth in the neighborhood to run their own clubs, the politicians ignored the warnings from management that the criminals had compromised the youth work. The same management that had hired credible messengers to overcome some sort of ethnic gap in the youth work knew that some of these “problem solvers” could not be trusted. However, none

of this was a formal reason for terminating a tainted youth club; rather, it was a bureaucratic ban on sleeping in the club that became the reason for ending the cooperation with the Guardians. Without knowing the full story, it could be argued that youths staying overnight at the club were only vaguely, if at all, connected to the real problem of recruitment to criminal gangs or the radicalization to support and travel to ISIS and similar movements in Syria and Iraq.

*Unanticipated consequences – missing the radicalization to ISIS*

As mentioned in the beginning, it is hard to analyze why people did not know of the radicalization to ISIS in Kingsfield. The radicalization took place during a turbulent period with conflicting intentions between the involved parties; thus, it was difficult to control and unify the youth work through commonly shared goals. In the northeastern part of Gothenburg, the youth workers played a crucial role, particularly the credible messengers hired there, to detect, report and intervene against this type of radicalization. However, as mentioned previously, several of the credible messengers in Kingsfield were compromised because of their connections to gang criminals. Rolf, one of the police officers in the area at the time, was upset that the municipality did not, as he saw it, take warnings from the police seriously. Rolf was uncomfortable with criminal individuals involved in youth work organized by the municipality and the Guardians. According to him, this led to a public sponsored youth work club, a place for recruiting young people to organized crime.

I think that it is always a risk with individuals and groups who are involved in organized crime... they are always looking for opportunities to recruit new young persons. /.../ I can assure that we saw how contacts were made that lead to recruitment. /.../ [However, it is more complex than that] these guys have grown up together, raised in the same yards. So, if you are in a group or you just have grown up together and thus know each other, you see what I mean. Anyhow, it is still a serious problem when individuals like these [criminals] get involved [in the Guardians]. [Rolf, police officer]

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The notion of a nexus between youth work and organized crime was shared by the managers in Kingsfield. A potential problem with this situation was that it contributed to a culture of silence. Consequently, information that could be harmful to pass on remained among youth workers (i.e., credible messengers) and never reached colleagues, managers, social welfare department, or the police. Regarding this, Petter, manager of youth workers, talks about a particular group of youth workers, who were deployed as social field workers in Kingsfield during 2012–2016.

This group of field workers [that I am talking about now] was a tight group and very dysfunctional. They had, so to speak, torn down many managers before me; anyone who tried to straighten this group got themselves in a hard situation. I am absolutely convinced that if it was not for these field workers, we would have known a lot more about what was going on in Kingsfield. They had a clear role to filter all the information about what was going on in Kingsfield... I am afraid that we partly had the same situation among the other youth workers too—I mean people who filtered the information before it reached into the organization.

Instead of building positive bonds and receiving information about the situation in Kingsfield, information was reduced and filtered. There is no way to tell what information was lost and it is even more impossible to understand the importance of this lost information. Nevertheless, we have independent statements from both managers and police officers, which indicate that the youth work in Kingsfield became a tool for recruiting youngsters into crime. If this recollection is correct, it signals that important information about criminality was filtered, thus obstructing both social work and police work. How this affected the possibility to retrieve information about the radicalization to ISIS cannot be determined with solid empirical support. It can only be concluded that it was unlikely that information about radicalization was completely unknown among the credible messengers and activists in the Guardians. After all, one of the spokespersons of the Guardian was publicly known to have become a fighter in the ISIS and later died in Syria (references to that event cannot be disclosed for ethical reasons).



Nonetheless, this cannot be considered as the fault of the Guardians or other activists who tried to improve the everyday situation for youth in Kingsfield. The malfunction and responsibility were primarily organizational, with conflicting intentions, and as it appears not all of them were outspoken intentions. We must remember the context: a deprived and segregated neighborhood, in which some youth workers focused on creating work that they could control, credible messengers being hired to control those who the permanent staff could not control, and politicians trying to solve a completely different problem. The rise of the Guardians can therefore be understood as a justifiable response to the fact that the everyday life of the youth was at best secondhand priority to the municipality and employees. However, being upset is perhaps not enough, or as Silvio, one of the youth workers, puts it:

You know it is not enough to build an organization on wrath and anger if you want it to last. It simply does not work. You have to take on the youngsters in a totally different way. If you cultivate their anger in a positive way it can be turned into something positive; if not, it can be something very negative. It does not help to make everyone your enemy, the police, the municipality and the social welfare department. In the end, you need to work together with them; in the long run you will be heard and can set goals, find finances and so on. This is something that the Guardians, according to me, lacked. They had no real visions; it was more like “Here and now, we are frustrated.” This was something they made use of to gain attention, to make a swift shift.

At the end of the day, it was not only the Guardians who tried to achieve a quick fix with deeply rooted social and economic inequality and injustice. Closing the youth club for those older than 16 years of age to get rid of uncontrollable youngsters and hiring credible messengers to gain control where other youth workers failed are shortsighted actions that may appear actionable, but they can, from the outset, be anticipated with unintentional consequences. Trying to get control will trigger new forms of resistance, rather than self-evident knowledge.

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## Conclusion and Discussion

It is important to note the limitations of this study, both in terms of the relatively few informants and the passage of time since the focus period. Thus, too bold or far-reaching conclusions should be avoided. Nonetheless, the relationship between unintended and unanticipated consequences as a theoretical premise that lies at the core of this study was examined.

In a complex machinery, such as the municipality in Kingsfield, all forms of work always lead to unanticipated consequences. In this superficial way, unanticipated consequences became anticipated outcomes. This is not a satisfactory conclusion; hence, the case revolves around intended actions that, according to the informants in the study, were anticipated to be overwhelmingly negative from the outset. Niklas, one of the managers who was instructed to open a new youth club with the Guardians, said:

...we got this assignment from the politicians to have this cooperation with the Guardians. I found it very... well how shall I put it? It was hard, morally, to implement it. We knew right from the start that there were severe criminal elements among the Guardians. Those who we hear about today as being imprisoned or being shot dead in the streets, they were active back then [in the Guardians]. Admittedly, there were also a lot of youngsters among the Guardians who just wanted to do good and take decent action for other youngsters. /.../ [Anyhow] we were instructed to start a youth club in cooperation with the Guardians. And we just wondered, “Why the Guardians, why shall they be given a youth club and how about other civil organizations in Kingsfield?” There were others, you know, the basket club, football clubs, karate clubs, chess club. What about them?

It was not a lack of other organizations in the neighborhood, according to Niklas, which could have been involved. According to the study participants, the politicians had been warned by both their own staff and the police. Clearly, these politicians had a rationale for giving the assignment to the Guardians and perhaps we could talk about the zeitgeist, that is,

the appreciation of a self-mobilized youth movement that knew how to make themselves heard. Nevertheless, decision making and responsibility were distributed in a blurred matrix of people, organizations, and intentions. This had unintended but not unanticipated consequences. The only genuine phenomenon that could be described as unanticipated was how radicalization to ISIS and similar movements in Kingsfield were missed out. The most important conclusion is that better organized youth work in Kingsfield during 2012–2016 could have provided the same opportunity to observe, report, and engage against the radicalization to ISIS, similar to the youth work in the northeast of Gothenburg during the same period. The purpose of this study is not to point a finger at the participants, or the young people from the Guardians. Each one of them may have been caught in a highly complex matrix of relations, powers, inequalities, and divergent goals. Naturally, there will always be such matrixes, but from an institutional point of view we can learn to anticipate more of the potential unintentional consequences.

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ISSN: 2363-9849

Editor in Chief: Daniel Koehler