

## **‘The softer side of security’: The role of social development in Cape Town’s policing network**

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### **Abstract:**

In the past, geographers have argued for a policing network that mainly consists of the police, private security companies and voluntary policing. This paper revises the idea of policing and social control by arguing for an extension of theorisations of the policing network to include social development agencies within certain governance arrangements. Although they are partially effective, private security companies and ‘hard policing’ strategies are limited when controlling targeted groups such as particular sectors of the urban poor. Acknowledging and responding to those limits, Improvement Districts have invested in social development programmes. Guided by statistics and the pressure to produce ‘success stories’, meaning fewer visible street people, social development actors are associated with the ‘softer side of security’. Being governed under the same auspices, private security and social development furthermore complement each other. If the urban poor refuse offers of social development assistance it is likely that those individuals will be referred to private security companies. In this set-up, participation in social development programmes is not entirely voluntary as it puts pressure on the urban poor. Thus the policing and social control strategy becomes more effective. This research is informed by extensive interviews and participant observations in Cape Town. The case study addresses wider questions on the control of sectors of the urban poor and suggests that policing landscapes can be more nuanced than often depicted.