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HATE CRIME PREVENTION AND DERADICALISATION IN ENVIRONMENTS VULNERABLE TO EXTREMISM: COMMUNITY WORK WITH A FAIR SKILLS APPROACH AND WE-AMONGST-OURSELVES GROUP

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1. The Radicalisation Awareness Network of the European Commission

In June 2012 the European First-line Deradicalisation Practitioners Working Group met for the first time. It is part of the newly developing Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), which was initiated by the European Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström, and which aims to set up an extensive network of practitioners who are committed to preventing and combating violent extremisms in Europe.

The RAN especially wants to bring together and support those practitioners who are active in the first-line of this difficult area of work, working directly in the social field. For EU policy has – finally – recognised the great urgency of the following questions: how may we change the attitudes of young people who vehemently reject civil rights and liberties and human rights, and who tend towards violence and extremist or exclusory life styles? How may one motivate them to abandon behaviour patterns of misanthropic radicalism directed towards individuals and groups, and to take part in democratic and intercultural practices? In other words: how may vulnerable young people be "deradicalised" – to make use here of this unpleasant and indeed problematic word?

The practitioners of the RAN working group, who came together this June from various EU member states, unanimously observed that deradicalising young people is immensely exhausting and methodologically very challenging. This is indicated by the sobering recidivism rates for people convicted of hate crimes, which in all countries is put at around 80 percent.

Above all, the pan-European discussion showed that immediate first-line deradicalisation is (so far) in fact scarcely being practiced at all. This is because hardly anyone in the respective countries is actively and systematically engaging on the front line with those young people who are vulnerable to extremism or who have effectively already adopted

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extremist ideologies, life styles or forms of behaviour. In many of the newer EU member states, such approaches to youth and social work seem so far to be non-existent. Generally speaking, the respective national public has little understanding of the volatile nature and complexity of hate crimes, and demands – if anything at all – nothing but more severe punishments, which, as is known, have no effect whatsoever. But genuine deradicalisation work is not very prominent in the old EU member states either, even in countries where large government programmes aimed at prevention and at the strengthening of civil society have been initiated. Thus, a recent analysis of the relevant national programmes that were run in Germany in the last few years showed that only four percent of the funds deployed went to immediate pedagogical work aiming to deradicalise vulnerable or dangerous youths.

2. Good practices for the prevention of extremism and violence with vulnerable young people in economically underdeveloped municipalities and districts – some basic principles

In view of this European situation, RAN participants have set the primary objective of deriving from the detailed knowledge of their respective national spheres of action an effective pedagogical procedure for deradicalisation. Here, Cultures Interactive e.V. (CI) was able to draw on various experiences from the immediate work with young people at risk of engaging with extremism and prone to violence. At the beginning of the last decade, CI intuitively started to work with an approach to deradicalisation appropriate for young people. Urban youth cultures were deployed on the one hand to take preventive action against right-wing extremism, fundamentalism, misanthropy and violence in affected regions and boroughs, and on the other hand to improve the job prospects and develop the skills of young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. CI developed and tested models for promoting democracy, focusing in particular on economically underdeveloped regions in the new federal states of Germany, as well as on at-risk inner city districts. For this the organisation works with approximately 40 freelance collaborators providing civic education oriented towards the lifeworld of the young people, as well as youth culture and media workshops (on topics such as rap, music production, DJ'ing, graffiti, comics, singer-songwriter, skateboarding, photo, radio and video production and others).

Many youth-cultural practices – dance (break dance), vocalisation (rap), writing (slam poetry), digital music production and editing (DJ'ing), acrobatic skills (skateboarding), creating images (comics, graffiti) – are not just suitable for motivating the adolescents by employing experiential pedagogy. Beyond that, the practices also allow for an integral connection of the peer learning approach with historic and social information, for example about the civil rights content of hip-hop. Engagement with cultural practices is supported by specific pedagogical exercises, which include elements of diversity training, anti-bias methodology, and anti- aggression and gender work, as well as conciliatory and moderation techniques. Along with school project days, workshops for open youth work, and intensive pedagogical qualification training courses, CI offers community counselling, continuing education and coaching for participatory processes focusing on

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social regions and involving young people.

The principles of the Fair Skills method developed by Cultures Interactive e.V., Berlin, are as follows:

3. The time-out practice when working with large groups of young people with an affinity for right-wing ideology

In the field, the CI team was invariably confronted with volatile groups of school students and young people who were either living in rural regions pervaded by right-wing extremism and nationalism or living in inner-city districts ethnically polarised and under the influence of Islamist radicalism. The events often developed turbulent and tension-filled dynamics; various forms of disturbance interrupted the work. It became abundantly clear that whoever actually faces the target group, the unapproachable youths, can only rarely assume ordered and plannable working conditions and is permanently challenged to come up with suitable methodology.

Besides CI's interest-led youth-cultural approach, what was interesting for the exchange with our European colleagues in the RAN task force was above all two methodological practices, which had been developed out of practical experience: (1) In response to often highly dynamic and turbulent working conditions CI practitioners had quite soon – and perforce – started to introduce a specified time-out area at their events. This provided a place where young people could be sent who, because of disruptive and destructive behaviour or cynical and misanthropic provocations (mostly of a right-wing extremist or ethnically radicalised nature), had become prohibitive to the overall process. Waiting in the time-out area was a small intervention team, who in immediate contact with the disrupters sought helpful methods of discussion in a smaller setting and in the process tried out various approaches. (2) Out of this and in collaboration with a specialist from the field of psychotherapy, a new workshop module was later developed. In this module the social-therapeutic method of group self-awareness was adjusted to meet the demands and conditions of this target group. This is how what CI calls the "We-Amongst- Ourselves" Group was conceived.

How does one deal with wilful disturbances and ideological provocations of a hateful and misanthropic nature? What does one do when radicalised or hostile, aggressive and cynical youth behaviour encumbers the events – and what does one do with these youths once they have been transferred to the time-out area?

For the event as a whole – whether it is a school project day or a future workshop – it is important that destructive behaviour and extremist and cynical statements as well as clothing with the respective symbols are not ignored, which is often the case in the everyday life of schools and youth clubs. These indications and statements (a) must be recognised for what they are as quickly as possible, be taken seriously and addressed openly, and (b) their propagators must be put in their place in a manner fitting the situation, that is, a well-moderated and pedagogically potent manner. Here, it is the

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highest priority to prevent young people from abusing the event with the above mentioned behaviour by appropriating it and employing it as a platform for political agitation – or simply for vain showmanship – and/or by utilising the event to intimidate and bully others.

Clarifying rules

In order to guarantee the large group is capable of working and of following an open-ended process, rules and sanctioned that are in effect at the CI events must be clearly communicated from the start. Among these rules are, for example, listening to each other, no insults and misanthropic hate statements, fundamental respect for the other people present.

Countering misanthropic disturbances

Equally important as the responsibility for protecting the group is recognising the big pedagogical potential that lies in the disturbances, cynicisms and acts of intimidation. Misanthropic emotions and extremist slogans are after all our primary topic. The aim is to prevent them and address them effectively. And this cannot just take the form of an abstract pedagogical dry run, in which participants argue, moralise and perform cognitive-behavioural correction exercises. It is much more beneficial when one is able to work in a process-oriented and experience-based manner with immediate situations that arise in the group. Nowhere more so than in situations of immediate threat is it possible to powerfully convey what it means to secure the peaceful working environment of a constructive event (thereby essentially protecting the free society itself), and to convey what it means to give rules to the event and to guarantee their application in sovereign fashion. The occurrence of cynical and misanthropic provocations may thus be used as opportunities with definite pedagogical value, and as such are basically indispensable.

Talking about it – yes. Agitating, provoking, offending – no!

But first of all the group has to acquire the ability to recognise and preserve the difference between a destructive and misanthropic statement on the one hand and the expression of a personal opinion on the other. And they must be able to make use of this ability regardless of how extremist, inappropriate, factually incorrect and uncomfortable the expressed opinion may be and how problematic its expression in the context of an event of classic political education may at first seem. After all, in the CI workshops practitioners explicitly want participants to express all their personal views and experiences, and in the engagement with these views and experiences seek to develop direct links to the lifeworld and intellectual situation of the young people. This is because without these views and experiences civic and youth-cultural education would simply not work – at least not with our primary target group. So whoever is approachable for an open discussion will become the focus of the group work – it does not matter with what view or opinion he or she has drawn the attention of the group. Only those who abuse the event as a stage for agitation, provocation or aggression discharge will be dismissed and sent to

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the time-out team.

Regarding such a dismissal, it is important that it is done in an entirely transparent manner. It must become clear for everyone why and according to what rules the workshop facilitator intervenes – and that the facilitator is acting responsibly in doing so. In particular the disruptive person must have been given the chance to explain him- or herself and to gain insight. Whereas the group must be able to recognise why the intervention was imperative and what costs a failure to intervene would have created. It needs to have become clear that the dismissal by no means curtails freedom of expression, but on the contrary, is deployed for its protection, because a situation has arisen in which the validity of fairness, respect and human dignity has been undermined. The practice thus allows participants to experience at first hand how the protection of an event that was self-organised and motivated by a belief in a civil society represents a great good and a fundamental right and how such (self-) protection may be enforced without violence, but in a decisive manner and following transparent rules.

Being critical and attentive

For this it is also necessary that the dismissal is carried out not in a derogatory or disdainful, but in an assertive and responsible manner. Already in the act of dismissing, one may convey even to the most obtrusive disrupter or the most toxic provocateur that the facilitator would actually prefer to keep all participants together, since everyone is important, and furthermore, that every missing voice represents a loss for the group, in particular the angry voices. One may let one's regrets be felt and one's hope that the loss is just temporary, that the person thus will return. All the more so, considering that even in the rudest disturbance one can usually recognise some substance, which when expressed in a different manner may be turned into something constructive. In light of this, it is a big advantage if one is able to say that one is prepared and that a time-out team is ready and available. The focus is thus not so much on the disruptive person, but primarily on the disruption itself, its nature and the way one can deal with it.

Deconstructing right-wing cliques

From a practical perspective it is generally advisable not to dismiss entire cliques even when they appeared as such during the disturbance. It is better to use dismissals as a way of temporarily separating such groups by only dismissing those participants who have unquestionably broken the rules, while their supporters or presumed followers remain at the event. This segmentation of cliques is in itself a valuable process, because most often in this process the opinions – of a right-wing extremist nature and disrespectful of human rights – themselves start to differentiate within the group. They start to become more moderate and to disintegrate.

What follows is a relevant example from the field: when the opinion '"foreigners" don't belong to Germany and should be expatriated or live in a ghetto' is expressed in a workshop then this is initially an opinion (albeit one disrespectful of human rights) with

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which we have to engage in our work with young people.

One method could be to analyse with the group the implications of the expressed opinion, by asking the proponents to amplify and elaborate on what an expulsion or a forced ghettoization of demographic groups actually means, and, above all, by asking them to elaborate on how they envision the process in detail. This involves asking how such a ghettoization would be implemented in practice, what occurrences must be expected, who of the people present would take part in the implementation, and what forms of pressure participants would personally be willing to exert. If some of the proponents – as was the case at one event – now firmly and with bitter hatred become set on accepting even a severe "race war" in order to establish the "purity of the residential estate", then this would provide a chance to simultaneously achieve two essential pedagogical gains:

On the one hand, this ultimate escalation (of a quite common opinion on "questions relating to foreigners") can be made discernable as what it is: right-wing extremist in nature and disrespectful of human rights. Experience has shown that the opinion, when taken to this ultimate extreme, will not be backed up by all the initial sympathisers anymore. There is thus an inner differentiation of the group and of the opinion as such, and processes of differentiation inherently have a deradicalising effect. On the other hand, it becomes possible to isolate a specific person or a spokesman and to express a specific extremist fantasy – a paramilitary civil war informed by racist ideology – along with its explosive emotional setting. In a situation primed in this manner one may tentatively ask whether it is not maybe the case that – as experience has shown – there are personal reasons for such strong hatred.

These personal reasons do not need to be named and discussed. It is sufficient and educational to simply point out that in general personal reasons for extreme hatred do exist, but that – if one talks about them at all – one would tend to do so in a small, intimate setting. One may add that such talks, for example, are part of the social-therapy undergone by violent offenders in prisons and that they often do lead to a reduction of hatred. Just being able to mention this kind of information means that one was able to draw major pedagogical gains from a disturbance or a provocation. In this context, the time-out area may also be presented as a special offer that enables a discussion in a small, intimate setting, thereby conveying that the area is by no means just a type of penalty box for obtrusive participants.

In the time-out area

But how does the CI team then deal with disruptive people who are removed from the groups? The task one is faced with in the time-out area, to engage in a discussion, is not easy and sometimes shocking. In particular girls sometimes uninhibitedly express hateful opinions in this small setting, for example: "The foreigners there in this asylum seeker home, they are all burning. That is not a shame." In such cases methods of political education certainly will have no effect. Such young people basically require long-term social-therapeutic supervision, for which there are hardly any resources in the context of

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open youth work and schools. The CI time-out team can at most provide an impulse. Nevertheless, it is sometimes downright astonishing what can be set in motion even in such a limited setting as the time-out talk between three or four people.

The work of the intervention team basically follows similar strategies to the work in the youth culture and education workshops. But here the participants can of course be addressed and involved much more directly, and have to take immediate responsibility for their behaviour. Furthermore, the pressure of the large group is absent. The strategies pursued by the practitioners in the time-out area are as follows:

(1) First of all, forms of argumentative questioning may be employed, which aim to point out contradictions, misinformation and the consequences implied by the expressed slogans. This, however, primarily serves as a way to start the discussion. The more consolidated the provocative attitudes of the young people are, the stronger is their resistance against rational and logical means of argumentation and their rejection of factual information, and the more one has to try to go beyond this and reach them on a lifeworld-narrative level.

(2) Asking questions relating to lifeworld narratives is thus the primary method of the time-out team. In this way, the practitioners try to address the personal experiences that hide behind the slogans (and that quite commonly contradict them). Concomitantly, an authentic personal relationship can at least to some extent be established in the discussion. The honesty of the participants in regards to their experience, which is encouraged through this approach, is best suited to at least momentarily reach beyond the dynamics of the blockade and the merely provocative tough-talk.

(3) If a participant exhibits a very stubborn and blocking attitude, this may offer an opportunity to reach the young person by deliberate personal confrontation and by focusing the issue on her or him and her or his social situation. (4) In all of this it is an effective tool for the members of the time-out team, who – in accordance with the concept of peer-education – are mostly themselves not much older than the participants, to offer themselves as persons to their counterparts. This is done by the practitioners asking themselves available as discussion partners with their own life story, who are willing to give information, who talk about themselves, and make offers for personal exchanges.

To give an example, one CI practitioner who represents the youth culture movement of punk and supervises the respective workshops often pursued a strategy of indirectly addressing the right-wing extremist statements of participants sent to the time-out area by telling them about his recent and past personal experiences with being ostracised or treated with hostility as a punk. Furthermore, he talked a little about how he had actually come to be a punk. With such an approach, intuition, dosage and timing are of course very important.

Vitalising through stories

But most of the time the young people are generally very curious when there is a fairly accessible discussion round in place, and they want to learn more, for example, about the

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essentially completely foreign sphere of punk, of which they had never previously met a representative. Here, one may also sound out to what degree the young people have themselves, and in spite of their very different surroundings, experienced comparable ostracism, hostility and intimidation, (and have nevertheless themselves just then, in the context of the event, participated in defaming and ostracising others). This role reversal, or put differently, the narrative change of perspective between a personal experience of being the victim and one of being the offender can have a radical effect on the time-out situation.

For this purpose, the practitioners often introduce stories they were told by other young people at previous events or stories taken from specialised literature. These stories might also be concerned with occurrences of intimidation in the clique or in the family, or they might be stories from the immediate surroundings of right- wing extremist organisations. Experience has shown it to often be the case that especially the young people who are difficult to reach will indicate on a non-verbal level, which ones of the narratively addressed topics concern them personally. So that during narratively sounding out the young people through storytelling the body language often quite quickly makes it clear when there is, for example, violence or an alcohol problem in the family.[1]

Being Confrontational

Direct personal confrontation may be an option, if, for example, students are sent to time-out because in the larger group they are incessantly voicing neo-Nazi slogans, and in time-out they are not approachable on any other level of dialogue. In this case, one may – carefully – ask pointed questions, such as what they believe Hitler would have done back then with disrupters or delinquent youths like themselves, or what it would mean, in practice, if national-socialism ruled in their school or in their class. If faced with heavily jingoistic expressions of masculinity other forms of confrontations are in turn an option. For example, asking the young people what they have actually achieved in life so far apart from destroying things and scaring people. This is an option, because the loud and aggressive facade of the disrupters most often hides great uncertainty and fear of showing initiative and failing, a fear of facing life's basic challenges.

Of course, such confrontations have to be entered in with caution and good timing, making sure the other person is treated with fundamental respect and fairness. The participant needs to feel at all times that there is a personal interest in a mutual discussion, in which to be proven right or to devalue the opposition is not the point. Thus, if the young people can in fact point towards constructive achievements and initiatives, then respect and appreciation should be unreservedly expressed. One may actually need to help the participants to recognise their own achievements (for example achievements at home) for what they are in the first place.

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[1] Incidentally, the workshop situations, in which the young people work closely with the practitioners, for instance standing together at the DJ desk or touching hands to support each other when skateboarding, always are a good setting to exchange perspectives on an equal footing.

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Another effective strategy for the time-out discussion is to engage in a double perspective, which differentiates between the person and the opinion. The double perspective emphasizes that one does not just perceive the right-wing extremist slogan, but is also willing to perceive the person as a whole, especially when other aspects of the person become visible or the person shows signs of being "actually quite a nice guy". This perspective, of course, must not be employed as an empty gesture, but must be backed up by an authentic personal observation on behalf of the practitioner. This is why, through all the difficulties and struggles the work entails, the members of the time-out team consistently keep their eyes open for whatever might be sympathetic in the person they engage with – and do so in spite of the person's potentially monstrous opinions. Working on a lifeworld-narrative level generally provides multiple indications pointing towards reservoirs for sympathy. At the same time, the possibility always remains to confront and question in a defined and open manner the monstrous opinions put forward by the participant.

From all of this it becomes clear how demanding the challenges to the pedagogical talent and ability of the practitioners in the time-out team are, how difficult the work is and what qualification it requires.

4. The We-Amongst-Ourselves Group within the workshop setting

In light of this, it is not surprising that – as a result of the volatile practical experience with its target group – Cultures Interactive quickly came to take the method of the short-time pedagogical time-out discussion a decisive step further. The development resulted from the following basic realisation: in all CI events and workshops – and in particular in the one-week courses, which CI held in the context of the more recently conducted Fair Skills project – the disturbances and tensions, that is, the immediate dynamic of actions and relationships of individuals in the group, in fact represent the most rewarding subject mater for political education and deradicalisation.

This is why, together with a specialist from the field of psychotherapy, CI developed a module it calls the We-Amongst-Ourselves Group (WAOG). The WAOG essentially follows the principles of group self-awareness exercises. It is based on the practices of youth welfare services and social-therapy and was adapted specifically to the education setting of Cultures Interactive and its Fair Skills courses. To summarise the module's aim, the WAOG wants to sustainably stimulate the social and emotional intelligence of the participants and to support their capabilities to enter into relationships. It wants to help them to speak about themselves of their own accord and in a clear and committed fashion, and to listen to others fair-mindedly.

In practice, this takes the following form: once a day, the eight to twelve participants of an event come together to sit in a circle, and in process-oriented manner – without a predefined topic or aiming at predefined results– they talk about diverse occasions, topics and experiences from their lifeworld or about observations concerning occurrences in the

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event. The facilitator of the WAOG is trained in psychotherapeutic group work, but here solely assures that the setting is upheld and that participants adhere to the basic rules of the We-Amongst-Ourselves Group. These rules are: everyone may do, but no one must do; preferably only one person talks at a time; mutual respect and protection are obligatory; everything said stays between the participants; everyone may take a break. Only if need be, the facilitator helps with finding a topic, organises the change of speaker, sometimes adds short summaries, or asks a question for clarification. Apart from this, the space belongs to the participants. To the surprise of many colleagues in the field who doubted if something like this would be realisable with the target group in question one thing very quickly showed: the young people make use of this open group situation in an engaged, intensive and sometimes rather unreserved manner – in particular those among them deemed "difficult to approach".

There are various essays on the We-Amongst-Ourselves Group being prepared for publication. To briefly summarise, one can say: the conversation in the We- Amongst-Ourselves Groups frequently starts with a discussion of friends, or of the participant's leisure and youth culture activities. It also often deals with conflicts, experiences of betrayal and with violence; but also with loyalty, helping each other or with what brings fun in life and what is precious. Sometimes participants, without further ado, start talking about their own background and family, about conflicts and problem areas within their families, about tensions with parents, abuse/violence, periods in children's homes, paediatric psychiatry, delinquency, juvenile detention/prison. In other sessions participants just "chill out" together and chat. Here, the talk frequently involves films and songs that the participants like to watch or listen to and what they like about these, and they talk about what one might maybe watch together in the evening of the event. Then in turn there might be talk about experiences with suicide, early death and beleaguered friendships. In discussions involving participants from disintegrated milieus, there might be talk about how quickly one can get tangled up with the Bandidos or the Hells Angels, how the local drug and mafia scene operates or of places where one has to be scared of right-wing bullies.

Thus, in the We-Amongst-Ourselves Group the immediate lifeworld of the participants gets discussed. Things get addressed here that remain unsaid in the political education and youth culture modules. Furthermore, it becomes palpable, how unhelpful it is to try and work on civic education while not involving the actual life- experiences of the young people. In particular, since in the group the classic topics of civic education surface by themselves anyway – and do so with a maximum of personal concreteness. That is, topics such as dealing with the opposite sex, sexuality, homophobia, the petty political power-struggles of the cliques and school classes. Or someone recounts that he or she were right-wing at one point and how that had come about; or what it means to be a Muslim, to have "honour" and to have to act by it.
The transitions to the political education modules are seamless, and these modules then tend to turn into something closer to political and personal education. Some of the stories that are exchanged turn into youth-cultural projects – graffiti, a rap song or a comic. Most of all, however, it becomes clear how much civic tolerance and suitability for the job

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market is essentially based on the ability to speak about something oneself has experienced and to listen attentively to someone else. Youth- cultural democracy education, acquiring soft-skills and a methodology based on lifeworld-narratives are mutually dependent on each other.