



WORKING WITH EUROPE ON RADICALISATION PREVENTION

AN OPEN DISCUSSION PAPER

In the globalised world there are challenges that all citizens should be involved in discussing and action upon. These challenges must be addressed by everyone, not only the few, and not only through representative democracy.

Climate change, pollution and human rights are among these global challenges. So is radicalisation.

Based on careful studies of the most recent research and practice, such as the British RAN initiative, and on such Erasmus+ projects as CHRIS and PRIDE, Working with Europe has the need to contribute to the discussion of radicalisation, what it is and how it can be prevented.

In particular it is the aim of this text to question popular definitions of radicalisation and superficial and popular ways to engage in various forms of prevention.

The text does not pretend to provide ready-made solutions, but rather to point in some useful directions.

In this paper we focus exclusively on young people.



This paper is based on a double perspective:

On one hand, we consider the desire of public authorities and governments to be able to detect and prevent individuals' extremist and violent actions is a big illusion.

On the other hand, we believe that the globalised world and its internet and media cultures will produce more and more radicalisation potential among young people, and that it is therefore possible at collective levels to take action to prevent young people from various forms of radicalisation leading towards extremist mentality and even towards terrorist action.

The paper is concerned with this collective perspective only.

CHAPTER 1



WHAT IS RADICALISATION?



If we ask people in the streets many would say that radicalisation is about young Muslims planning and carrying out terrorist attacks.

It follows that young Muslims, and in particular young Muslim migrants and refugees, are more at risk of being radicalised than other young people.

The truth is, however, that this “group” of young Muslims make out only a small percentage of de facto radicalised young people, for example in Europe.

The popular media narrative “The Muslim world contra the Western democracies” is totally dominating the discussions of what radicalisation is and how it might be “prevented”.

If we take a look at the groups of young people, young adults and adults de facto showing radicalised behaviour, the picture is quite different:

- some groups of Muslims, yes
- Nazi and fascist groups on the rise across Europe
- right-wing fan groups linked to major football clubs, the so-called ultras
- individuals with various social and/or psychiatric difficulties
- “ordinary” young people out of simple boredom and frustration
- young people recruited by major drug cartels and gangs
- social groups revolting against policy or the system

These are typical examples of what we find in the “big bag” of people and groups showing radical and violent behaviour.



The diversity of people and groups at risk of being radicalised is quite surprising, at least to the popular narrative.

It shows that very many different people and groups with very different background and motivation are being radicalised.

Radicalisation is therefore linked to very different phenomena, such as social radicalisation, ethic or moral radicalisation, political radicalisation, religious radicalisation, criminal radicalisation - and individual radicalisation based on personal life stories.

A considerable part of radicalised action might be linked to simple social and/or individual frustration, anger, hatred and desperation, such as for example violence in connection with football matches.

It is therefore, and this is extremely important, impossible to reach a solid, coherent and unambiguous definition of who might be at risk of radicalisation.

Along with increasing social alienation in the globalised world and in globalised life, it can be expected that radical behaviour will increase, at individual as well as at collective levels.

This is bad news for policy-making and for various forms of radicalisation preventing initiatives, and bad news for organisations and professionals engaging in designing radicalisation prevention.

We need to get used to talk about very mixed individual and collective narratives when discussing radicalisation.

If these observations are at least more or less correct, we might need to create collective and systematic radicalisation prevention instead of punctual prevention, such as for example in connection with young migrants or in connection with school kids showing “at risk” behaviour.



But what is, in fact “radicalisation”?

The term “radicalisation” is linked to a mixed narrative including other terms like “extremism”, “violence” and “terrorism”.

This is why one popular narrative can say that radicalisation is about young Muslims planning and carrying out terrorist actions because they (have learned to) hate Western civilization and Western hypocrisy.

Anyway, the term “radicalisation” is today a negative and threatening word. Nevertheless, the term “radicalisation” covers a great variety of mentality and behavior - and totally different contexts.

It covers mixed groups of young people and young adults creating violence in connection with major football events. Some of these groups are called, and call themselves, ultras.

These groups appear to be close to fascist narratives, but as football fans their political messages are totally blurred.

It covers some young Muslims dedicated to fight Western lifestyle.

It covers dedicated political groups, left as well as right, revolting against the Western societies.

Earlier some of these were left-oriented, such as IRA and ETA; today most of these groups are right-wing groups with clear fascist and racist messages.

And, importantly, it covers all sorts of individuals carrying out violent attacks, such as in schools, in busses or in other locations.

These individuals are mostly characterised by having personal life stories that end up in various forms of “terrorist” actions. Some of these people have mixed social and or psychiatric diagnosis, but not all of them.

And then: what about the yellow vests in France, seeking conflicts with the French police? They are also radicalised, as are the (peaceful) Catalan independent movement which leaders face decades of imprisonment in Spain. And the teachers and journalists criticizing the Erdogan regime in Turkey? Are they also “radicalised”.



These examples tell us one thing: the term “radicalisation” is

- almost useless to characterize various forms of social and individual action
- used by different political narratives to cover up their own “radicalisation”

One of the problems seems to be that “radicalisation” gets mixed up with “terrorism”: radicalisation is most likely to lead to terrorism.

But are all forms of radicalisation negative, threatening or undesirable?

Are the radicalisation narratives mostly serving our old and crumbling so-called democracies covering up the increasing social and political failures of the Western countries to manage the globalised world?

Is radicalisation always undesirable and unjustified?

Whereas “terrorism” should always and without exception be deemed unjustified, the same cannot be said about radicalisation.

Let’s take a look at a few examples of situations in which radicalisation might be highly justified, also if they might include some form of “violence”:

- population groups being seriously suppressed by governments
- refugees living in inhuman conditions and with very poor life perspectives
- social groups being ill-treated by governments and national economic policy
- young people with almost no resources and very poor life perspectives
- populations fighting for freedom and independence
- individuals or groups of people deprived of their human rights

You are invited to think of concrete examples of such “justified radicalism” in the European history and in particular in today’s Europe.

You are also invited to involve young people in the discoveries and discussions.



In summary, the term “radicalisation” is extremely complex, and this leads to towards the following conclusions:

- radicalisation cannot simply be linked to terrorism
- radicalisation can be linked to all sorts of phenomena such as religion, politics, ethics, ideologies, personal life stories and the need to belong to a narrative and a group, no matter the price
- radicalisation is not by definition negative or undesirable; on the contrary, in many situation radicalisation is necessary and fully justified
- radicalisation can take place at all levels, including social, group and individual levels
- it is not possible in 90% of the cases to profile young people at risk of radicalisation; anyone might be radicalised under certain circumstances

The first consequence for radicalisation prevention is that it needs to be very careful defining radicalisation and who might be radicalised, and it needs to

apply a very broad, open and non-conventional approach to the phenomena of radicalisation.

It is urgent to clearly separate “radicalisation” from “terrorism”.

Every approach to radicalisation needs a deconstructive approach.

CHAPTER 2



WHO CAN BE AND ARE BEING RADICALISED?



Globalised life and global clouding is, set aside its many and even unimaginable opportunities, expected to create mental and social difficulties among very many in particular young individuals and groups.

We have not seen the real social and psychological impact of the “digitalized life” yet.

We might need to recognize that this can be the major source of “radicalisation” or desperate action in the near future.

As a Danish PM said recently:

“I have 100.000 followers on Facebook, but no one to talk to”.

The Germans call this “Entfremdung”, alienation, and this “cultural virus” should be taken extremely seriously. It is the price of the unstoppable and unregulated global growth economy.

We already observe the first symptoms among young people across the world.

Therefore we need to answer the question WHO CAN AND ARE BEING RADICALISED? at two different levels: the general cultural level, and the specific group level.

The thing is that radicalisation can happen at both levels, the global cultural level, as well at individual level.

The *general cultural level* is increasingly important to radicalisation prevention, and is often overlooked in policy and practice.



The general cultural level is very difficult to define, as we only able to observe the top of the iceberg.

However, it is possible to point to a number of phenomena in what we call *globalised life and global clouding*.

This term is intuitive and covers a range of phenomena produced by globalization, the growth economy with its consumption patterns and globalised communication technology, and how this affects social and personal life. The irony is that globalised life offers hitherto unseen communication opportunities, but at the same time leads some young people towards depression, isolation and social desperation.

At the same time more and more young people need to live in and manage mental and emotional economy situations of *extreme conflicts* such as for example:

- years and years in an education system that is becoming increasingly irrelevant to many young people and does not at all match the young people's 21st century way of thinking, learning and living
- being constantly exposed to consumerism and what amazing things the world can offer, being however far from what some young people will ever be able to even come near
- between the narrative of "everything is possible" and the local and personal reality
- between global information, communication and media narratives and the personal life situation
- building personal identities from the supermarket of possible identities and roles available

At this general level of *globalised life and global clouding* many young people will evidently get lost, and some of them will get lost in a way leading towards desperation.

In some cultures young people use alcohol and drugs to manage these conflicts, but some young people might instead turn to various forms of radicalism to manage their lives.

Obviously, these challenges will need to be addressed systematically and at general level, not through punctual radicalisation prevention.

More about this later...



At *specific group level* different "threats" will need to be addressed. Specific group level means groups of young people and young adults joining radicalised communities, such as fascist movements, football ultras or various forms of religious groups.

In addition, we will see many young people joining for example climate or pollution movements, and at some points it is indeed possible that the forms of protest turn into more direct action, such as Greenpeace.

In these cases what is called "radicalisation" is just around the corner.

The problem is that if we look at the Western societies, for example Europe, young people are creating more and more resistance towards traditional forms of politics. Neither the European Union nor the national governments have been able to create new forms of political participation that matches life in the 21st century.

This creates increasing disinterest in things like democracy, elections and political parties among very many young people in the new generations.

Some young people react with political apathy, while others at some point might turn their frustration into various forms of radicalised mentality and behaviour.

It is a fact that fascist movements, in different forms, are on the rise across Europe and frustrated and angry young people might be tempted to join these movements.

There are no signs that groups of young people and young adults will be less tempted to join such groups in the near future.

Of course we also have to include what could be called an individual level of radicalisation.

This level is about young people and young adults with various forms of deeply complicated life stories that at some point need to act out their problems, social or psychological or both.

We need to admit that there will always be such people in our globalised world and that we can do very little about it.

The problem is that global media provides these people with more and more radicalised role-models day by day.

This cannot be avoided either.



So, *in conclusion*, who are at risk of being radicalised?

In the globalised world, perhaps everybody, but then again perhaps not...

Young people with considerable frustration energy and poor life perspectives should be considered at risk of various forms of radicalisation, but the problem is that many different life situations in the globalised world can produce such frustration.

What might at an intuitive level characterize a young person with what we might call “radicalisation potential”?

- young people in extreme life situations, such as young refugees
- young people in poor life situations with little positive life expectancy
- young people “failing” in basic schooling, mostly due to their non-academic learning styles that fits badly with the traditional education system
- young people with problematic personal, family or social life stories
- isolated young people with poor social relations

Easily seen, a very high number of young people can be found in one or more of these categories.

And, once again, a clear, solid and unambiguous profiling is not possible.

It is of the utmost importance to clearly state that at the individual level there is no direct causality between a certain life situation and being radicalised.

What we are dealing with is a mix of experience, observation and uncertain probabilities, but that’s all we got.



What happens is that at some point or during a life period various often strong feelings and thoughts are produced, forming what we call the “radicalisation potential”.

“Radicalisation potential” is a form of mental energy.

Such mental energy can take on the form of frustration, hatred, anxiety, aggression and anger, typically then connected to the creation or construction of

a hostile narrative: the strong emotions and thoughts can be linked to one or more enemies, such as authorities, the well-off people, a country, other races, and ideology - or even the competing football club.

The hostile narrative is not in any way rational or well-justified. It is a projection of a social and/or mental complex.

Now, it might be of interest, still at intuitive level, to ask the question:

What kind of young person is not expected to produce radicalisation potential?

Following our general assumptions, very many different young people in the globalised world might end up radicalised; however, intuitively we would point to the following *examples* of characteristics of a young person not expected to be radicalised, or at least expected to produce little “radicalisation potential”:

- a young person with successful life experience along the early years and along the teenage years
- a young person with a very strong positive and optimistic identity
- a young person with strong family and social relations, to which the identity is linked
- a young person with very good life perspectives and a promising life to look forward to
- a young person deeply engaged in his or her favorite activities, whether in or outside school
- a young person deeply immersed in challenges that demands the young person’s full attention and energy
- a young person that is very successful in education, sport, music or similar

The list is far from exhaustive, but offers some useful indications.

Nevertheless, we have seen examples of young people with such characteristics not only being radicalised, but actually capable of carrying out terrorist actions. This is, of course, most disturbing, but confirms the careful approach to radicalisation included across our text.



The form of radicalisation depends on the community to which the young person belongs, such as: a fan club, more or less criminal communities, social networks recruiting young members, specific migrant communities, etc.

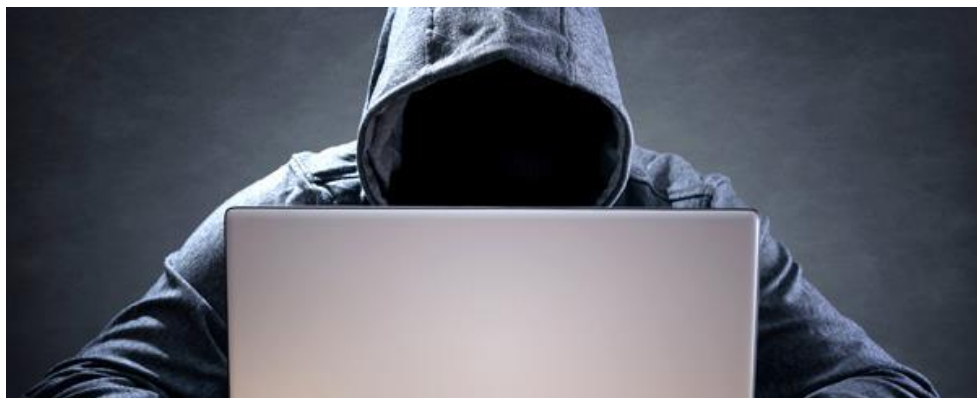
The radicalisation might - without any clear justification and logic - be linked to political, religious, cultural, gender-based and similar narratives.

The important thing is not the content of the narrative, but the narrative’s capacity to channel the “radicalisation potential” towards clear hostile messages; to link the internal energies to clear and identifiable external enemies.

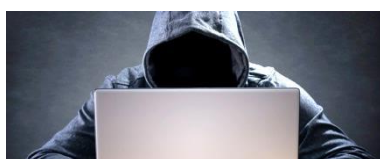
Some would, in fact, call this process a form of acting out of strong complex psychic energies, representing a form of “conflict solution” for the young person.

Having carefully tried to intuitively describe what kind of young people might be at risk of radicalisation, and what not, let us try to discuss what radicalisation prevention might be about.

CHAPTER 3



RADICALISATION PREVENTION



Let us discuss briefly what kind of radicalisation prevention measures are typically practiced across Europe. We can in this context only discuss the most typical measures and provide some critical perspectives.

Campaigns

From time to time public authorities launch various forms of campaigns against radicalisation. Such campaigns can be implemented in online environments, in schools, in the media or in public space in general. As those campaigns are not in any way linked to the at risk young person's social or mental energy or life situation, they might have very little effect. They are extrinsic to the life of at risk young people.

Involvement

Various initiatives across Europe seek to prevent radicalisation by offering for example young migrants to be involved in community activities, in sport or in similar activities. The idea is, of course, to involve at risk young people in positive activities, to give them positive social networks and thus counter possible tendencies to radicalisation. No doubt such initiatives can be and are successful as they link to the lives of the young people and offer them real-life engagement. The problem is that most of these initiatives:

- are punctual
- are too superficial
- do not link sufficiently to the life situation and life perspectives of the young person

However, the best involvement initiatives certainly have an effect on some at risk youth.

Observation

In some schools and youth associations the staff is carrying out various forms of observation with the aim to report to the social authorities or to the police. Such activity might be preventive at punctual level, but do not have the capacity to create sustainable radicalisation prevention. What such activity might accomplish is to prevent individuals from engaging in the final steps of radicalised mentality and action.

Self-reflection and identity

Some youth organisations across Europe engages groups of for example young migrants or refugees in workshops or in similar work processes in which the young people are invited to create dialogues with other young people or with youth workers and in some cases with resources from the community, including role-models.

The aim of this activity is for the young person to engage in self-reflection and reflection on the person's life story and life narratives.

The identity-creation is at the heart of this activity, helping the young person to build resilient and positive identities from some time complicated life stories. Such activity might have some effect on the young people involved.

Information

Public authorities, educations and other institutions are from time to time providing information about radicalisation online or in the form of certain events. Such activity suffers from the same weaknesses as public campaigns, as they are totally extrinsic to the mental energy and life situation of at risk young people. Therefore such activity is expected to have very little impact on any at risk young person or group.

Open dialogues

In some communities open dialogues are established between presumed at risk youth, other young people and for example local politicians.

How well-meant those open dialogues might be, they are still punctual events without any substantial impact on the young person's mental energy and life situation.

Persuasion

In various contexts schools, teachers, politicians or various political or religious communities are making an effort to persuade at risk young people to change their mind - and engage in social life, active citizenship and democracy. Evidently, such persuasive efforts have no effect on the young person at risk and might in fact even be counter-productive.

Counter-narratives

More subtle prevention measures are relatively new and mostly take place in online communities.

They aim through the creation of strong counter-narratives to build positive images of active and democratic action-taking to fight various forms of extremist narratives circulated on the internet.

Such initiatives might, if well-designed, have some effect on many young people, but they still suffer from being extrinsic to the at risk young people, only offering ideological alternatives and not alternatives to the young person's mental energy and life perspectives.

The most efficient counter-narratives are, by the way, created by the at-risk young people themselves.



What characterizes these initiatives?

First of all they are characterized by a sort of confusion: we do not know how to counter and prevent radicalisation among young people.

Secondly, most of the initiatives reflect the mindsets of the establishment, the education system and the traditional Western political discourse.

In fact, most of these initiatives tell more about the creators of the initiatives than about what we call young people at risk of radicalisation.

Bearing in mind that these initiatives are very different, and that some of them might have an impact on at risk young people, we nevertheless dare to list a number of critical characteristics of these initiatives:



- Most prevention initiatives reflect traditional political and educational thinking, based on various forms of **idealistic** information and communication



- Most prevention initiatives are based on the **pedagogics** of the old traditional education system



- Most prevention initiatives are based on intellectual and emotional work processes, not including **real-life action**



- Most prevention initiatives are linked to various forms of traditional **therapeutic empowerment** approaches



- Most prevention initiatives are deeply rooted in 20th century paradigms and mindsets, not reflecting the dramatic and **life-wide changes** of the 21st century



- Most prevention initiatives are limited to processes of dialogues and reflection, not able to bring about real **changes** and new life **perspectives** for at risk youth



- In conclusion, it might be questioned if most of these prevention initiatives are able to create the **needed deep and sustainable impact** on youth at risk's identity, personal narratives and life perspectives

This critique might appear somewhat harsh, but taking into consideration the state of confusion and lack of orientation of European and national policy response to radicalisation, it is sometimes necessary to paint some very clear pictures of what works and what does not; in particular if it is true that the cultures of 21st century globalization are expected to create more and new forms of “negative radicalisation” among young people.

The critical comments should be taken seriously when designing new initiatives to prevent form of radicalisation leading to violence and extremist action.

These critical statements lead us towards our final text, called “EPIC RADICALISATION PREVENTION”.

CHAPTER 4



EPIC RADICALISATION PREVENTION



Before we discuss what *Epic Radicalisation Prevention* is or might be, we need to establish a basic approach to the question: where can prevention activities engage with young people at risk?

Of course, the simple answer is: everywhere where the young people are. But taking into consideration the complexity of successful radicalisation prevention, it is not possible or realistic to establish efficient initiatives in the streets, in the families or in various forms of traditional sport clubs.

The approaches should be much more systematic and wide-ranging. Punctual interventions are not really useful, neither are somewhat arbitrary individual interventions. Individual interventions are useful in special cases, but not as a strategy, so to speak.

What we are trying to say is that efficient radicalisation prevention (or whatever we choose to call it) should take place at collective level. One simple reason is that we consider radicalisation potential to be linked to collective movements and collective conflicts strongly linked to our globalised and internet-based 21st century cultures.

Another simple reason is that precisely because it is impossible to predict what kind of young persons might be drawn towards negative radicalisation or violent extremism, we need to establish efficient radicalisation prevention where almost all young people can be affected: in schools and in various forms of youth organisations.



In short, 21st century and efficient radicalisation prevention strategies should first of all address the young people in primary and secondary school, in vocational schools and in any form of secondary chance provision - and in parallel in any form of youth work with the capacity to engage young people in various forms of community activity.

However, such school and youth organisation prevention should be based on very innovative approaches, going far beyond traditional approaches to teaching and youth work.

School and youth organisation strategies are precisely the two levels to which we have referred above.

Formal and non-formal settings must be engaged in parallel and each of them to exploit their very different engagement potential to the max.

What are the key criteria for promising radicalisation prevention in schools and youth activities?

Based on the descriptions above of young people at risk of radicalisation, we can open up this field with the following criteria for what we can call sustainable radicalisation prevention.

We can call this first draft list “The 10 Criteria for Successful Radicalisation Prevention”:

1. **Engagement from the early teenage years to build up strong identities**
2. **Engagement in activities that reflect and respect, not the establishment, but how 21st century youth think, learn, work and live**
3. **Empowerment to take action, not just to reflect**
4. **Creating something real and useful for oneself and for others**
5. **Engagement based on the young person’s passions**
6. **Expressing oneself with art, media or technology**
7. **Developing capacity to change the world around oneself and build useful life perspectives for oneself**
8. **Linking intellectual and emotional processes to real-life engagement**
9. **Engaging the young person in important and valuable real-life missions with concrete results**
10. **Allowing the young person to accomplish and to take pride in the accomplishment**



Epic Radicalisation Prevention can therefore be described as a strategy that involves young people, including young persons at risk of radicalisation, in developing *capacity to take action in the world*, to accomplish something real and important in the world - and to take pride and build up a strong identity through those engagements.

Easily seen, this goes far beyond traditional academic teaching, therapeutic empowerment and typical youth activities.
And far beyond what normally happens in the classroom or in the football club.

We consider such engagement extremely relevant to in particular for groups of young people that might be labeled “at risk of radicalisation and extremist actions”.

Epic Radicalisation Prevention is thus based on realism, not on idealism: human narratives are not only based on what you think, but what you do.

The term “epic” is used to explain that the approach:

- allows the young person through accomplishing valuable missions to build up new narratives that integrate in the person’s progressive life story
- enables the young person to create coherent self-images on which strong identities can be based
- links to deep engagement over considerable time periods: immersion
- helps the young person configure positive relations between the self, the others and the surrounding world
- creates connotations of adventure, exploration and challenges in which one might get totally absorbed

Epic Radicalisation Prevention is precisely expected to offer the young person such deep, immersive, challenging and exciting experience that sustainable impact on the person’s identity and self-images is possible.

In a way this reminds us of the creation of “alternative narratives”, but to be efficient such alternatives narratives must be produced by the deep engagement of the young person, not by external resources.

The core of this approach is that (at risk) young people are given a solid opportunity to accomplish important things in real-life, to take pride in such accomplishment and to use a series of accomplishments to build up a strong identity and positive life perspective. Such engagements are expected to absorb and transform what might be called energies of radicalisation potential.

A good example of such Epic Radicalisation Prevention is Marc Prensky’s global youth project *Better Your World Education*.

Prensky did not think of radicalisation prevention when developing this innovative education approach, based on what 21st century youth needs, but the approach will obviously have a most positive effect on young person’s that might be considered at risk of radicalisation.

<http://arise-net.world/>



SCHOOLS

- How can Epic Radicalisation Prevention or similar approaches be practiced in school?

Efficient radicalisation prevention in school must be done at systematic level, not punctually. Punctual engagement, for example in a class debate, is precisely non-epic and will have very little impact on young people.

Obviously, there are very many ways in which such efficient radicalisation prevention can take place, but let us in this context focus on two most promising approaches: open schooling and Global World.

Open schooling in which the young people learn through being deeply engaged in real-life challenges and missions in the physical and online communities precisely possess very many of the criteria described above.

What is important is that such open schooling and such real-life missions must be serious, authentic and accomplishing. Small artificial community engagements do not work.

They must include strong intention to change, to create something useful and to work with also complex challenges in the surrounding world.

And, first of all, they must build on the full dedication of the young people.

Importantly, this form of radicalisation prevention does not at all need to be about “radicalisation”. The open schooling engagement is in itself preventing radicalisation.

The other approach we call Global World.

This approach is about a change in the traditional school curriculum.

Such 21st century global challenges as climate change, pollution, human rights and... radicalisation cannot anymore be considered subjects among others to include at some point in the school curriculum - or through small punctual projects across the semester.

One of the consequences of globalization is that it such challenges as climate change, pollution, human rights and radicalisation is now a concern of each and every citizen in the world.

This means that engaging in these challenges, and the capacity to engage, must be systematically included in for example secondary school curricula and practiced in all schools.

We therefore, as the second systematic method to create efficient radicalisation prevention, propose to include what we call **Global World** in the school curricula, as a mandatory activity across all school semesters.

If this happens in a traditional way, little radicalisation prevention will result. But if it happens in an innovative open schooling way, such systematic and not punctual engagement will create rich opportunities for the young students to absorb and transform radicalisation potential into a series of real-life actions, or Better Your World actions, as Prensky calls it.

Key criteria for successful Global World radicalisation prevention are:

- the activities are directly addressing local, national and online challenges in such fields as climate change, pollution, human rights and radicalisation
- the activities are carried out in teams and in close collaboration with a variety of collaborators
- the activities not just aim to give the students’ knowledge, but aim to develop capacity among the students to engage and to influence and to bring about change
- the activities can be carried out in very many flexible ways across the semester, but the activities should not be punctual but epic and immersive
- the activities should allow the young students to accomplish missions and to build pride and self-confidence from such accomplishment
- the activities should always engage the young teams in online collaboration with peers from other countries and from other parts of the world



YOUTH WORK

- *How can Epic Radicalisation Prevention be practiced in various forms of youth work*

Various forms of non-formal youth initiatives have considerable potential to engage young people in activities with strong radicalisation prevention perspectives.

One very important reason is that youth work is relatively independent of prescribed curricula and objectives defined by the authorities.

Youth work is therefore in principle much closer to real-life in the communities than schools.

This strength is, however, also a weakness.

Most youth initiatives are weak organisations driven by a few dedicated youth workers. They receive little funding, little support and are in general not taken seriously by local governments and other stakeholders.

Basically, they are considered “after-school” activities; to pass the time and get young people off the streets.

What kinds of youth initiatives are relevant to radicalisation prevention?

The answer is complex.

In this context - what kind of youth activities might help absorb and transform radicalisation potential - there are two very different forms of youth initiatives responding to the question and in two very different ways:

Traditional youth initiatives

Such youth activities are sport clubs, music clubs, technology clubs and similar. Young people join based on their interest in this activity.

Such youth activities can contribute to radicalisation prevention, but mostly in very *indirect* ways.

If such initiatives are supposed to develop capacity to contribute to radicalisation prevention and to absorb and transform radicalisation potential, they need to:

- qualify the way they work with and engage the young people
- reach out and include such young people that might not be “ideal” participants
- deliver solid and exciting engagement with strong future perspectives for the young people
- engage some of the young people in wider activities around and linked to the core activity
- offer the young people engagement at such a level that the engagement is important to the young people’s life perspectives

Evidently most sport clubs, for example, are very far from having such capacity.

New forms of youth initiatives

However, new forms of youth activity are being developed in many countries; youth activities that *directly* addresses such challenges as climate change, pollution, human rights and radicalisation.

They are evidently very different from traditional youth activities, as they engage young people in global challenges with very strong political, social, ideological and action-oriented missions.

Due to their action-oriented work forms they are expected to make considerable contributions to radicalisation prevention.

They share very many characteristics with what is called open schooling.

Enabling youth activities to help prevent radicalisation calls for strong action from local policy-makers:

Whereas the described radicalisation prevention directions for schools are depending on the educational authorities and on the school managements and teachers, systematic radicalisation prevention in youth work is strongly depending on the local policy-makers and the local governments.

It will take considerable change and innovation in field of youth work to make this happen.

Therefore future-oriented and responsible local governments and policy-makers should launch, drive and engage in the following initiatives, based on a renewed understanding and outlook of youth work and its radicalisation prevention potential:

- **Local governments should identify and map a number of relevant youth initiatives and establish collective dialogues**
- **Local governments should help these youth initiatives increase the levels of actions through additional funding, in particular in the form of joint funding from the local government and key community resources and stakeholders**
- **Local governments should establish collective capacity building for the selected youth initiatives**
- **Local governments should work closely and continuously with the selected youth initiatives to support their ability to serve as radicalisation prevention resources**
- **Local governments should help the youth initiatives identify and empower possible role-models among the participating young people**
- **Local governments should ensure that the youth initiatives reach out to new groups of young people and is able to offer them rich engagement**
- **Local governments should ensure long-term sustainability and perspectives of the selected youth initiatives, including working toward local eco-systems of youth activities with the potential to support radicalisation prevention**

No doubt, local governments and communities will in many ways benefit heavily from the close collaboration with the local youth initiatives.



Obviously and importantly this approach to radicalisation prevention needs dedicated involvement of many resources in the community, not only the school or the youth organisation!

We should, as indicated, at some point be able to talk about “eco-systems of sustainable radicalisation prevention”.

Radicalisation prevention is a community responsibility.

Considerable experimentation, including with support from the European funding programmes, will be needed in schools as well as in youth initiatives to establish what works and what doesn't.

Such initiatives can receive considerable support from the Erasmus+ 2021-27 programme - from the School sub-programme as well as from the Youth sub-programme.

The new Erasmus+ period is expected to provide a considerable increase in funding compared to the 2014-20 period.



Any efficient radicalisation prevention needs to be designed and carried out in close interaction with the young people themselves



In this paper you will find very critical comments to global internet, networking and clouding.

We are very aware of, and celebrate, the incredible opportunities offered by the internet and global networking; however, the internet, global networking as well as globalised economic growth in general are double-edged swords: on one side incredible opportunities, on the other side incredible threats.

In this paper we are only concerned with the possible threats of such global networking in the case of young people and the possible development of radicalisation potentials.

Senior European Project Manager
Jan Gejel
jan.gejel@skolekom.dk

European Project Manager
Mireia Masgrau
mireiamasgrau@gmail.com