RESEARCH REPORT

Germany

CONCORDIA

Introduction

This research report has been produced within the framework of the CONCORDIA project which is funded under the ERASMUS+ programme.

The project focuses on harnessing the power of digital media tools to prevent the radicalisation of vulnerable youth and is being simultaneously rolled out in Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Romania, Cyprus, France, Finland and Ireland. The project will support key front-line workers to develop core skills to work with vulnerable youth to produce and disseminate counter-extremist narratives. It proposes bringing skills of front-liners right up to date where the production of digital media and the managing of social media platforms is concerned promoting high quality of youth work in response to the radicalization threat.

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What does radicalization mean in Germany?

Radicalization in Germany is not a peripheral phenomenon for some time now. Since the end of the 80's it is rather a part of social and political normality.

Processes of radicalization are increasing as soon as the economy is getting worse or problems with foreigners arise. So the present debate about radicalization and right-wing extremism already is the third of its kind in the last 10 years. The first big debate started at the beginning of the 90's as a result of the emerging xenophobic attacks (1991-1993), which represented a new quality of right-wing extremism in Germany. At that time the discussion focused on new forms of right-wing violence, the conflict concerning the asylum question, cause analysis and searching for (pedagogical) options to deal with it. The public discussion caused not only an intensive discourse within the scientific community, it led to a stronger pedagogical orientation towards the vulnerable youth – supported by specials programs of the federal and state governments (e.g. Action Program of the Federal State of Germany against Aggression and Violence 1992-1996).

The second wave of the radicalization debate started with the spectacular success of the right-wing party "DVU" at the election of the state parliament in the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt in spring 1998. The debate focused on the increasing move of youth towards the right-wing parties, the creation of "national liberated zones", the dissemination of right-wing comradeships and right-wing music; shortly the establishment of a "everyday right wing extremist youth culture" especially in Eastern Germany.

The current discussion is characterized through the following main topics:
loss of reputation of Germany as a location of business and science, danger of expansion of radicalization and racism by the internet, combating extremism by increasing repression – especially through police forces and justice and moral appeals to the citizens.

On top the refugee crisis leads to stronger conflicts between the "Right" and the "Left" and the danger of political motivated attacks is increasing.

Actuals surveys show how deeply prejudice, nationalism and the will to isolate and build walls up are ingrained. 60% of the persons think that Germany cannot deal with the high number of refugees. 70% even think that the high number of refugees will lead to an increase of crime rates – even though many statistics disprove this.

Even more persons (73%) supported that the laws concerning the deportation of criminal refugees should be tight up.

In the last years also the global phenomenon of religious radicalization (Islamism) appeared more and more in Germany. It is shown by increasing rejection of Muslims, Sinti and Roma, asylum seekers or homosexuals (University of Leipzig "Middle Study").

There 50 percent of those surveyed mentioned, that they feel as a foreigner in their own country because of the many Muslims. Almost half of the surveyed (49,6 percent) agreed, that Sinti and Roma should be banished from the city centers. 40,1 percent of those surveyed thought it to be "disgusting", if homosexuals kiss in the public.

Many persons with a radical attitude find a political home at the party "Alternative für Deutschland".

What are the reasons for radicalization in Germany?

Radicalization is a very complex and individual process. In its course internal as well as external reasons and influences are relevant.

This process often starts with alienation – a mental condition. The young persons are unhappy or unsatisfied in their life, they often have only few social contacts or not a strong social environment; maybe experienced a failure during the transition from school to work life or they went through a frustrating, unsuccessful search for an apprenticeship place. Muslim youth of have experiences with discrimination: They got the feeling, that their religion and origin is seen with prejudices.

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The search for the own identity plays a major role in this process. The search for belonging to a group and the search for the meaning in life. Often this is connected to the wish to be active, for "the good" and "truth" and against "the bad". […]

For the young persons the attractiveness of Islamism with a Salafist character results mainly from the black-white conception of the world. The Salafistic ideology departs the world in "the good" (Islamists) and "the bad" (unbelievers and dissidents). With this clear scheme of friend and enemy the Islamism is representing itself as a closed system for an explanatory model of the world.

For a number of reasons the Salafism – a fundamental tendency of the Islam – goes down well with these youth. This is especially among young persons with no father. Regardless if the father left the family or if he is dead or how he gets along in the society, the Salafists fill in this gap with their patriarchal ideology and their punishing God. The Salafism offers in particular an identity.

They step from a difficult, post-global world in a regulated, structured environment and get their sense, orientation and a mission. They find friends, community, social cohesion; finally they belong to a group. The group becomes a kind of youth culture for them: there is a clothing style, special symbols, certain YouTube-channels and Facebook sites and an own language […]. The Salafism also meets their needs of information and knowledge. It takes off many uncertainties through the offering of "truth" and authority.

For all young persons (Muslim or not Muslim, boy or girl), which did not find their place in society, or become the feeling that they somehow don't belong to it, it is valid: if instable personality structures are combined with these feelings, there is a time period of one up to two years, in which they are very vulnerable for radicalization.

Extreme right-wing orientations can be determined among 10 percent of young persons and young adults. Especially "vulnerable" for radical groups are male young persons at the age of 15 up to 18. The radicalization related to the Syria/Iraq conflict also has a female face. So it is new that there is an enforced recruitment of girls. Within this group especially so-called Islam-seminars or benefit events, the internet (47% trough social networks), the family, friends, contacts in school, contacts in mosque and in prison contribute to radicalization.

Use of social media

Radical organizations use especially social media for the dissemination of their propaganda:
It is a clever way for them to get in direct contact with young persons, to exchange pictures and movies and to convince them with targeted advertising and through manipulation. In Germany social media is especially attractive for young users: In the age group 18 up to 34 81 percent say, that they use social networks, in the group up from the age 35 there are only 39 percent doing this.

Which social media is mostly used?

FACEBOOK more than 28 million users (January 2015).

INSTAGRAM about 6,4 million users.

YOUTUBE around 4 million active users in Germany upload videos, about 20 million users visit YouTube within a month.

TWITTER around 3,83 million users have Twitter in Germany. Twitter is an important platform for the IS, because Arabic and European fighters get a direct communication line with their friends and relatives trough their mobile phones.

PINTEREST more than 3 million users (November 2015).

WHATSAPP 32 million active users at the beginning of 2015.

SNAPCHAT According to the German magazine Focus Germany is among the ten countries with the highest number of Snapchat users and counts to the top five countries concerning the expansion of users. The fascination of self-extinguishing pictures and videos, enriched with simple animations seems to endure. Especially that the users are young indicates, that the network will be relevant. 51 percent are at the age of 16 up to 24.

GOOGLE+ at the beginning of 2016 the network counted 15 million registered users, among them only 3,1 million were active.

Support for the Front-Liners

In order to deal with the danger of radicalization locally it is necessary for the front-liners (teachers, instructors, school social workers, streetworkers) to understand and reflect possibilities and approaches of action.

Two aspects need to be considered:
1.   Aspect – preventive education work with young persons.

In order to be able to do this work, it is necessary, that front-liners acquire skills and knowledge, which enables them:

- to explain extremism and recruiting strategies for the vulnerable young persons

- identify for and together with the young people in a group signs of radicalization and strategies for action

- to disenchant the phenomenon jihadism and

- to increase the ability of young persons to keep distance to extremism.

Reflecting the diverse action fields of radicalization prevention especially school and connected youth welfare (esp. School social work) are coming into focus. The school is the only social site, at which young persons can be met constantly over a relative long time period. These are ideal condition for prevention work of any kind. Therefore the enabling and qualification aims on teachers, instructors and social pedagogical staff in school.

2. Aspect – direct pedagogical work with radicalized young people. Front-liners must be able to get in contact with members of the scene, to get in a dialogue with them, to motivate them to changes and to initiate processes of dissociation concerning inhuman attitudes.

In order to be able to do this work and to ensure sustainability it is necessary for these front-liners to reflect actively with the following topics:

- to recognize extremist methods of argumentation

- to develop possible strategies to disprove these argumentation methods

- to acquire background knowledge of the Salafistic scene

- implementation of methods for de-radicalization

- to know and to use social media

- to aquire in-depth knowledge about the religious situation of young persons and the methods of misuse of religion for extremism aims

- to recognize recruiting strategies

Further necessary topics are conversational skills, nonverbal and verbal communication, psycho-social competences, intercultural competences, terrorism and violence, identity, ideology, pluralistic society, religion, inter-religiousness.

Summary

It depends on many factors why young people follow radical and extremist groups and movements. Individual blows of fate in the childhood play a role as well as experiences of non-acceptance in a foreign society, of no perspectives and powerlessness.

This comes upon the need of outbreak, dropping out and provocation on the one site and security and belonging on the other site. Thereof resulting and sometimes contradictory emotional states are enforced through growing up in a global and only hard to understand world.

Young people often look after (too) easy answers and clear guidelines. Besides all differences the approaches of extremist groups and movements all connect to the negative feelings, experiences and perceptions of the young pupils.

The methods of addressing, the propaganda and the manipulation are similar in political extremism and religious fanaticism. That's why the school besides the family and the environment of the young people is asked as an outrageous learning space to deal with these challenges.

Sensitivity for the daily life of pupils as well as factual information and clarification are to be considered. Global learning can make an important contribution – since we are talking about a better understanding of our world in general and the role of religions in particular. In-depth knowledge about the (religious) situation of the young people on one hand and about misuse of religion for extremist aims on the other hand are requirements for a better understanding of radicalization of young persons and for useful pedagogical prevention concepts.

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