

DeRadicalisation

in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate



Civic Education Programs as Preventive Measures in Germany

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Executive Summary

This report provides an analysis of three civic education programs in Germany aimed at deradicalization. The programs employ participatory methods, treating participants as active subjects of civic education and deradicalization, with a focus on fostering tolerance, critical thinking, and democratic engagement. The analyzed methods and projects include the Verantwortungspädagogik method used by the Violence Prevention Network, the narrative discussion groups project conducted by the "cultures interactive" nonprofit organization, and the "Stage free for respect" project by the "Miteinander" nonprofit organization.

The report presents a summary of the scope, target groups, implementing organizations, and supporting institutions for each program. It provides a detailed description of the methods or projects, their theoretical and practical assumptions, and implementation procedures. The report also discusses the lessons, achievements, and challenges encountered during the implementation, based on available documentation, publications, and evaluation reports.

Across all three cases, the programs encourage participants to critically reflect on their experiences and actively engage in challenging their own prejudices. They provide spaces for tolerant exchange of opinions and dialogue, even when radicalized views are expressed. Establishing transparent connections between facilitators and participants is a common challenge, particularly in school-based projects where students may be hesitant to engage. Training teaching staff and working with third-party moderators can help overcome these challenges.

Roleplay and theatre-based activities, as seen in the Miteinander e.V.'s initiative, play a valuable role in the deradicalization process by allowing participants to explore different perspectives and empathize with others' realities. Evaluation reports primarily rely on qualitative assessments, with limited statistical data. The fluctuating nature of student engagement makes it difficult to obtain comprehensive survey results. While prevention-oriented work is emphasized, political education also proves to be essential for exit counseling and supporting individuals in distancing themselves from radical spaces.

German NGOs like EXIT highlight the importance of removing individuals from radical spaces and encouraging critical reflection on their ideological backgrounds. Prevention workshops and roleplay activities can be adapted to meet the needs of individuals seeking deradicalization. Overall, the report emphasizes the significance of participatory practices in deradicalizing civic education in Germany, while also acknowledging the challenges and the need for tailored approaches in supporting individuals on their deradicalization journey.

1. Introduction

This report describes and analyzes three civic education programmes/projects directed at deradicalisation in Germany. Along with the guidelines for this deliverable, we follow the definition of the “civic education programmes” as those educational initiatives, which goal is affecting “people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities” (Crittenden & Levine 2018) and also promoting critical thinking and “civic engagement and support democratic and participatory governance” (Rietbergen-McCracken 2018). Such programmes aim to improve the individuals’ self-efficacy as active citizens in liberal-democratic polities as well as function as preventive deradicalisation measures by fostering tolerance to diverging political opinions, familiarising with alternative ideological perspectives, and, in this way, keeping and increasing the distance from violent groups.

Along with the guidelines, we focus on those programmes and projects in Germany that employ specifically participatory methods. Such methods treat the programmes’ participants not as objects of counter-propaganda but as active subjects of civic education and deradicalisation. In this way, the participatory methods amplify self-efficacy, empowerment, civic engagement, and cooperation.

We chose for the analysis the following methods and projects that are based on a participatory approach in deradicalising civic education:

- *Verantwortungspädagogik* (“pedagogy of responsibility”) method used by the Violence Prevention Network;
- narrative discussion groups project conducted by the “cultures interactive” nonprofit organisation;
- “Stage free for respect” (*Bühne frei für Respekt*), which is a project of the “Miteinander” nonprofit organisation implemented within a cluster of *Vielfalt tut gut* (“Diversity does good”) programme.

The chosen methods and projects target a variety of social groups at risk of right-wing and jihadist radicalisation and operate on different scopes, regional (*Land*) and federal. Based on the study of the projects’ documentation, publications, and, when available, evaluation reports, for each method/project, we

- 1) summarise general profile information on the scope, target groups, implementing organisations, donors and supporting institutions (presented in Appendix 1 in a concise form);
- 2) provide a detailed description of the method or project, the theoretical and practical assumptions it is based on, and the basic procedures of implementation;
- 3) discuss the lessons, achievements and challenges to be overcome in the course of implementation of the methods and projects that are indicated in the available reflections and evaluation studies.

The report ends with a comparative summary of the discussed methods and projects in order to highlight the effective participatory practices in deradicalising civic education in Germany and their typical challenges.

2. Violence Prevention Network and the concept of *Verantwortungspädagogik* (“pedagogy of responsibility”)

2.1 General information

Currently operating under the slogan “We talk to extremists, not about them”, Violence Prevention Network (VPN) is a German NGO that engages with deradicalisation and prevention of radicalisation, mainly far-right and jihadist radicalisation in Germany with a focus on at-risk youth and imprisoned individuals. Much of their work has focused on ‘enlightenment’ about topics of inter-religious controversy and the stigmatisation of Islam and Judaism among German youth. It was founded in 2004 and operated mainly on EU and German state funds, all of which are transparently laid out in detail on its website at www.violence-prevention-network.de. Their work has often used participative methods, with the explicit mission of preventing and combating radicalisation by appealing to the consciousness of at-risk or already radicalised individuals and offering them resources to detach not only physically but also emotionally and ideologically from spaces of any form of extremism. They have labelled and trademarked their method as *Verantwortungspädagogik*, or “pedagogy of responsibility,” which has been applied to numerous projects conducted at the regional and federal levels, of which many there are published evaluation reports and five permanently running advice centres in individual Bundeslaender. The organisation states finding a way with this method to “reach people attached to anti-democratic structures in a non-humiliating way and allow them a return to democratic collective life,” as the website cites. For this section, we went through some of these reports and the last published volume (nr. 16) of their editorial *Interventionen. Zeitschrift für Verantwortungspädagogik* (“Interventions: Journal for the pedagogy of responsibility”), which specifically focuses on primary and secondary prevention, to get a better understanding of the method’s traits and of how its efficiency can be assessed and explained from an angle of civic education and participatory methods. We do not focus on their deradicalisation work, with mostly individually tailored counselling for people seeking an exit from radicalised spaces, but only on the prevention-oriented work. However, looking at prevention-oriented strategies we also aim to infer potentially useful methods of political education that can equally be applied to deradicalisation and reinsertion work.

2.2 Description and analysis

The sort and spirit of activities planned within programs that use the pedagogy of responsibility method can be looked at from the chronicles compiled by participating pedagogues in the mentioned VPN’s journal volume on the topic of primary and secondary prevention (VPN, 2021), which also has recounts of prevention work both in schools. While these contain little to no statistical assessments of VPN’s work and its impact, there are useful first-hand reflections on the successes and shortcomings of the methods conducted and how they are conceived and reacted to.

In Aktas & Nowicka’s recount of their work in multi-day workshops on Islam and confessional diversity, aimed to sensitise school children to engage in intercultural and interreligious communication, even ideas such as organising excursions to mosques, churches and

synagogues are laid out. The work in the classroom has to feel democratic to all, encouraging curiosity, transparency and exchange, for which sitting in a circle and doing activities such as tandems encouraging Christian and Muslim students to interact directly are recommended, and this is then complemented by the excursions outside the school that allow for a “demystifying” glimpse of Islam or minority religions. Trainers have to work with enough sensitivity to be trusted by students and teaching staff in the schools where workshops are conducted, trying to relate to them and the ways their identities around religion are configured, as they could be suspected to have come with a mission to tell students that their religion is the root of hate and violence or not compatible with Germany. It is also important to have distinct gendered approaches that allow girls and boys to better reflect on their different lived experiences with religion and family, with moderated conversation rounds that help students understand and critically engage with gender roles. Similarly, Thilossen reflects on the experience of school workshops in the Middle East and how the region and ongoing conflicts are imagined among German schoolchildren. A strong prevalence of ‘collective ascriptions’ to different peoples in the Middle East (e.g., “the Jews,” “the Arabs”) is stated to exist in German schools, however with a reluctance among students to engage in serious discussion on ‘the controversial parts of democratic collective life’. The project aims to open constructive conversation and critical reflection on the Middle East, its variety of religions and relationships between confessional groups, which are also represented in mixed settings in German schools, with an aim to develop nuanced understandings of the conflict, destigmatise the region and deconstruct stereotypes on Judaism and Islam.

These interreligious and Middle East-themed workshops, led in ‘tandems’ of trainers of different faiths, were also very similarly conceived and conducted with potentially at-risk youth during the Berlin-based MAXIME project (2014-2016), as shown in the evaluation report (Minor, 2016). While this report also lacks statistical assessment, in-depth interviews with involved pedagogues show general satisfaction with the concept, with two activities being seen as particularly impactful among students: roleplay activities, such as UN simulation sessions about the Middle East conflict, and visits to sites of cult, such as mosques. However, there is an indication that, when conducted by the same teaching staff students are acquainted with from regular lessons, they feel a certain reluctance to dive into transparent discussions and more freely expose their thoughts on controversial issues.

Similarly, both the 2018 report of their Hessen regional Advice Centre, and the 2019 report for the program sponsored by the Hessen regional government ‘*Den Extremismus entzaubern*’ (‘To break the spell on extremism’) (Hilkert & Johansson, 2019) mention workshops on the same topics, with a recommendation in the former that all workshops be conducted and moderated by Muslim individuals (Möller & Neuscheler, 2018), something that is also briefly mentioned in the MAXIME report from Berlin. This gives them credibility to establish contact with the students and gives the impression to be talking to and not about people. The Advice Center’s work also included so-called ‘conversation appointments’ with the students outside of the school building, in cafes or fast food joints, for example, which reportedly made students feel more relaxed and encouraged to discuss doubts and questions more transparently in a way they would not feel able to in school. This, however, with the idea to make pedagogues available to students beyond the regular school schedule and to make them seem not necessarily bound to school contents and teaching style, led to pedagogues having to lose, to a certain extent, the boundary between their free time and work time, and putting the professional boundaries with students that may feel encouraged to consider them friends at slight risk.

Anhalt & Kieck also lay out their model for “communication in value dissent,” which is taught in workshops for pedagogues to develop skills to react to everyday professional situations in which radical-right or otherwise radicalised perspectives are actively represented or raised by clients, coworkers or students. They suggest going beyond mere counterarguments to discuss and develop structured dialogue-oriented reactions. This further embodies VPN’s more empathy or compassion-based approach to deradicalising interactions, which is not supposed to shame or humiliate the person representing radicalised positions but to appeal to them more sensitively and constructively.

2.3 Lessons

VPN’s work shows a focus on deconstructing myths and stigma around the different religious communities represented in German schools and society, particularly Judaism and Islam, because of how these could be perceived to be alien to Germany by German students, a view that acts as a breeding ground for far-right radicalisation (see, for example, how radical-right agents perpetuate the myth of the ‘great replacement’), and also how students of these faiths could come into tense situations around each other due to the Middle East conflict, which VPN also organises multiple workshops on. VPN’s prevention work in schools can then be argued to go deeper than a traditional discourse on tolerance and diversity, as it does not merely preach to respect, not fear or not hate the ‘other’, but to critically question and deconstruct students’ preconceptions about what the ‘other’ is and the dangers the ‘other’ can pose. The visits to sites of a cult are deemed particularly impactful in this sense, as they help students go beyond discourse on tolerance and respect in the classroom and just offer them a real-life glimpse into the spaces radical-right or jihadist narratives may teach them to fear and hate. The recommendation to have pedagogues that work as workshop moderators or trainers be Muslim and/or Jewish themselves is useful and stated to lead to more profound and transparent conversations in class, helping a more sincere process of breaking down stigma and stereotypes among the students they work with.

The concept of “pedagogy of responsibility” is used transversely across multiple initiatives as a ground element of the organisation’s brand. Even in projects cited here from before the term was coined or began being used regularly, the methods used were congruent with the basic idea of “pedagogy of responsibility”. The method encourages transparency in expressing doubts and questions present among the target audience, school children in the case of the projects reviewed here, leading to honest processes of working with existent stigma and prejudice that students are not made to feel ashamed for having internalised, but are accompanied, actively encouraged and offered an alternative, more inclusive views in the process of deconstructing them. Even though it is mentioned that students may feel the reluctance to enter controversial discussions with their teachers and peers, in which their views may be scrutinised, this friendly approach to preventing ideological breeding ground for radicalisation, through situations that may begin as awkward and tense, ultimately leads to what is arguable a deeper, more sincere form of accepting inclusion and tolerance as personal values.

What the principle of “pedagogy of responsibility” entails for radicalised individuals seeking an exit, especially those in prisons, in which VPN conducts a significant part of its work, can not be reviewed here, as we have dealt only with prevention work centred on schools. However, the general principle of offering compassion and not shaming is generally seemed to be

maintained, encouraging previously radicalised individuals not only to assume that the ideological spaces they formerly participated in are objectively bad, but to distance themselves ideologically and sentimentally from them through dialogue and transparent exchange, in which democratic values are promoted.

Finally, something that is notable in VPN's work, particularly in the report of the Hessen regional Advice Center, is the acknowledgment that students may feel more invited to share and interact with the project if they are not conducted by the same teaching staff from their regular lessons, and if at least portions of the work happen outside the school, helping them dissociate the NGO's work from the school's curricular activities and the way they can be imagined as strict, boring or constraining. This matter is discussed in this report in the case of Miteinander e.V.'s work.

3. Narrative discussion groups by “cultures interactive”

3.1 General information

The narrative discussion groups (*narrative Gesprächsgruppen*) is a project of the “cultures interactive” (CI) organisation, which has been conducted since 2019 (<https://cultures-interactive.de/de/das-projekt-narrative-gespraechsgruppen.html>). CI is a nonprofit association and youth welfare organisation that has been active for 15 years in the prevention of right-wing extremism, working primarily in the Eastern German lands but also in other Eastern European countries. CI focuses on youth culture workshops, political education, and group work.

The narrative discussion groups aim to prevent right-wing radicalisation, promote civic education and teach democratic values to young people. The project addresses the problem of the political representation crisis and insufficient trust in democratic institutions, which makes teenagers especially vulnerable to right-wing extremist propaganda. Other goals of the project include facilitating general narrative skills and social competencies. As Kossack et al. note, “by reproducing a democratic society on a small scale, the narrative discussion groups in schools make it possible to learn and experience democratic processes of relationship and group formation, conflict/confrontation, self-articulation and discussion.” (Kossack, Weilnböck & Vögeding, 2021, p. 8)

CI targets teenagers from the seventh school grade (at least 12 years old; however, some narrative discussion groups were also conducted with the primary school pupils), focusing on the schools in the countryside and small towns where high support for far-right parties and their impact on the formation of the youth political attitudes and values could be expected. The narrative discussion groups method is implemented on the meso-level of schools where CI facilitators lead regular discussions with the pupils over one or two school semesters. CI finds the schools typically through the school social workers and administrators or through their contact people among the ministry officials. One of the main aims of the project is to anchor the narrative discussion groups in the regular school curriculum eventually (ibid., p. 3)

The project and CI are supported by the regional government of Sachsen-Anhalt and the Federal Central for Political Education (BPB). CI partners with the federal programme “Democracy Live!” (*Demokratie Leben!*), which is a state-sponsored program (administered by the Federal Office for Family and Civil Society Affairs (BAFzA)) to “promote civic

engagement for diverse and democratic coexistence and to work against radicalisation and polarisation in society" (BMFSFJ, n.d.), and which describes itself as a "central pillar of the federal government's strategy for preventing extremism and promoting democracy." The federal programme involves over 160 model projects to develop and test innovative participatory methods of democracy promotion, expanding diversity and preventing extremism. The narrative discussion group is one such method of intensive holistic political education focused on provoking and developing group discussions on the topics of interest for the pupils building from and reflecting on their personal experiences. Beyond reflection on the individual cases, CI develops and implements a target group-oriented method of quantitative and qualitative evaluation together with academic researchers (Kossack, WeInböck & Vögeding, 2021).

3.2 Description and analysis

The method of the narrative discussion groups is based on the well-known principles of group self-awareness borrowed from group psychotherapy, while the narrative dialogue techniques build on the method of biographical narrative interviewing (WeInböck, 2022, p. 7). The narrative discussion groups encourage the teenagers to express their personal experiences, explain their views and listen to the views of others, engage in a substantial conversation about the topics of their concern. In the process, they learn how to be honest with each other, to deal with their own feelings and grievances and a tolerant discussion of opinion differences (cultures interactive e.V., 2019)

The project's scope has been limited so far. However, the partnership with the schools and officials on the regional, federal, and EU levels has been expanding. For example, in the first semester of the 2019/2020 academic year, the project was conducted with 123 pupils from three secondary schools and 35 pupils from one primary school (Kossack, WeInböck & Vögeding, 2021, p. 15).

CI conducts the narrative discussion groups in a single or double lesson once per week during regular teaching time based on the existing classes in schools. Usually, two groups of about 8-13 pupils are formed from one class. This allows splitting into even smaller groups of 4-6 pupils on an occasional basis (based on gender, other relevant criteria or polarising questions arising from the group dynamics) (WeInböck, 2022, p. 8). The groups are formed spontaneously. However, CI pays attention to gender and cultural diversity (for example, the groups should involve both German pupils and pupils with a migration background). The two groups have their sessions in separate rooms accompanied by two facilitators each. The composition of the groups remains constant throughout the whole period of implementation. In parallel to the two groups, there is also a time-out area to be used if the participants feel overwhelmed by certain topics or intense group dynamics. Besides, the disruptive participants of the discussion groups may be sent to the time-out area by the facilitators. (Kossack, WeInböck & Vögeding, 2021, p. 6)

The topics of the discussions are intentionally not foreset. However, as CI claims, in the process of conversation, the pupils usually spontaneously come to the "central social issues", including racism and migration, prejudice, bullying inside and outside the school, friendship, family, gender and sexuality (cultures interactive e.V., 2019). The group leaders facilitate developing a narrative from individual cases with the 'how'-questions and avoid the 'why'-

questions that would provoke abstract rationalisation rather than narration from the lived experience.

One of the expected outcomes of facilitating trusted lived-experience narration on the urgent issues of the deprived communities is a risk of giving a floor to extreme right-wing views (including those punishable according to German law, such as the case of the Holocaust denial discussed in Weilnböck, 2021). Even in these cases, the facilitators do not rush to contradict or rebuke the pupil immediately but use the situation for political education, respectfully supporting the open and frank expression of the thoughts, observations, and feelings. In this way, they gradually build trust over the series of discussion sessions. Such situations turn into an opportunity to explore the individual and social backgrounds of the statements that cross the lines. For example, in the case of the Holocaust denial, the facilitators proceeded with the following: "I don't agree with you about the Holocaust (which you probably already thought yourself). But tell me how you come to this - and who you actually are. Do you often have conversations about these topics? Why don't you tell us a little about the people who tell you this? What else do you experience with them? Do you ever have arguments? Do you sometimes have questions? What do you usually experience when you say something like that at school?" (ibid., p. 6). The facilitators also try to involve the rest of the group in reflecting on such statements and events (ibid., p. 7). Furthermore, at the end of the discussion session, the facilitators leave 'homework' to think through the next week (ibid., p. 10-11).

Obviously, the necessary prerequisite for the success of narrative discussion groups is an open and not predetermined character of the discussion, which should also remain confidential and voluntary (Weilnböck, 2019, p. 6). Specifically, it is agreed that the substance of the group discussions stays there; the teachers and school administration never participate in the discussion sessions and cannot even enter the rooms unannounced. (ibid., p. 6). However, the group participants certainly can and should, within certain limits and in a friendly way, talk about topics and issues that were discussed beyond the group. (ibid., p. 12). Furthermore, the facilitators may sometimes give short summaries and remind the pupils of the topics, motives and processes from the previous sessions in order to support the group's memory and self-awareness (ibid.).

3.3 Lessons

CI published a systematic evaluation of how well the project achieved its goals at the initial stage based on assessing the outcomes of the narrative discussion groups in 2019-2020 (Kossack, Weilnböck & Vögeding, 2021). The evaluation methodology combined quantitative and qualitative methods such as the survey of the pupils and facilitators, case reconstruction, and process analysis of the project team. The evaluation, however, did not include a control group of pupils who did not participate in the narrative discussion groups. Therefore, the basis of the inferences is rather perceptions of the participants of the process rather than an experimental design that would allow measuring the impact of the narrative discussion groups on the pupils' skills and attitudes.

The evaluation research focused on how the participants perceived the improvement of the narrative skills and social competencies and the perception of the democracy promotion impact of the narrative discussion groups (particularly strengthening the democratic practices and countering prejudices and violence). As for social competencies, the evaluation study

found that a large majority of participating pupils agreed that the discussion groups opened a space for narrative-biographical dialogue in the school context (ibid., p. 16). At the same time, only slightly more than half (54%) of the pupils agreed that the communication with each other in the groups was respectful and about the same number (58%) agreed that they felt safe in the groups and could trust their classmates (ibid., p. 16). About two-thirds of the participants reported self-efficacy and recognition of their personal experiences in the course of participation in the narrative discussion groups. However, only a minority of the pupils (42%) derived concrete, practical options for everyday life and school communication (p. 17). The authors of the evaluation study assessed achieving the social competence goals of the narrative discussion groups rather positively.

The extent to which the democracy promotion goals were achieved was assessed somewhat more modestly by the participants. For example, less than half (48%) of the pupils had the impression that they discussed interesting political topics (ibid., p. 18). However, as the authors of the evaluation study noted, this may be the case of not perceiving the gender- and sexuality-related topics (usually discussed with significant engagement) as 'political' at all. At the same time, a larger number of the pupils (58%) agreed that the "groups contributed to a better understanding of different opinions" and that the groups helped them to develop their skills in effectively managing conflicts in a non-violent way (52%) (ibid., p. 19). Furthermore, the groups were perceived as more successful in stimulating the reflection on the prejudices and their consequences. For example, 60% of pupils agreed that they had better understood the causes of hateful attitudes, while two-thirds agreed that they understood how discriminatory behaviour affects other people (ibid., p. 19).

Overall, the pupils assessed the discussion groups rather highly on average (2.2 points on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 was the higher value). Furthermore, 72% of all pupils responded that they would like to participate again in the narrative discussion groups (ibid., p. 20).

The facilitators assessed the groups even more positively, although one should keep in mind that they evaluated their own work. The facilitators agreed that the narrative discussion groups contributed to improved social competence skills and positively evaluated political education goals (ibid., p. 21-22). Noteworthy, the facilitators assessed significantly better than the pupils the democracy-promotion effect of the groups (ibid., p. 23). Finally, the facilitators found that they were largely able to manage the pedagogical challenges, even though they did not have specialised training in conducting the narrative discussion groups (ibid., p. 51). This is important from the perspective of expanding the use of the method.

The relationships with teachers in the schools where the narrative discussion groups were practiced were evaluated as generally good. However, the evaluation report noted that more regular communication with the teachers is crucial for the method's success. The teachers cannot participate in the group discussions for confidentiality reasons and require more than just a one-time training as it was initially planned and carried out (ibid., p. 54-55).

Finally, in terms of securing stakeholders' support on various levels, the project succeeded in expanding cooperation on the regional (land), federal, and EU levels as well as in establishing trusting relations with the responsible education ministries in selected Eastern German lands. Nevertheless, it would be too early to claim that the project has reached the stage of a regular institution.

Overall, the available evaluation assessed the implementation of the narrative discussion groups rather positively in achieving its goals and having good potential for intensive and

extensive development. Its success in facilitating primary and secondary deradicalisation, expanding the scope and institutionalising should be assessed, ideally, with an experimental design and in a long-term perspective.

4. *Vielfalt tut gut* (“Diversity does well”) project

4.1 General information

Between 2007 and 2010, the project *Vielfalt tut gut*, sponsored by the Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and Youth, ran across Germany with 93 participating entities engaged in the design and development of initiatives to promote democratic values and deradicalisation, mostly on a regional level, across four topic clusters: “Confronting historical and current antisemitism,” “Working with at-risk far-right youth,” “Prevention and education offers for a migrant society,” and “Early prevention” (BMFSFJ, 2008). Integral evaluation reports published on the *Vielfalt tut gut* program also show a lot of work done with more participatory methods across Germany (Bischoff et al., 2011.; Sischka, Schwietering & Beyersmann, 2011).

4.2 Description and analysis

One of the basic information pamphlets on the program published mid-way through its execution in 2010 cites some model projects developed for each theme cluster, one of which is *Jungenarbeit und Gewaltprävention* (“Youth work and violence prevention”), which was designed by the Potsdam-based organisation Manne e.V. for cluster 2 of the program. This project targeted at-risk male youth, training local male youth pedagogs to design activities, such as camping or climbing, to offer boys where they may find spaces to reflect on their masculinity, boundaries and self-esteem. This type of gender-conscious approach to deradicalisation, offering alternative ways of organising and socialising to young men in areas with prominent far-right scenes, helps dissuade radicalisation not through direct ideological attacks on far-right discourses but simply by encouraging participation in alternative spaces that are safe for questioning driving forces of radicalisation, such as hegemonic masculinity and a lack of progressive youth culture. By the end of the training, local pedagogs were allegedly fully competent in creating and disseminating activities of this type on offer for at-risk youth to come together (ibid.).

Understanding this initiative to represent the general intent of cluster 2, which in the report is specifically deemed to have the aim of working with the target group of “youth endangered by the far-right”, we take a closer look into projects in cluster 2 and choose the Sachsen-Anhalt-based initiative “Stage free for respect” for an in-depth review, given its aim at civic education using role play and theatre-oriented activities.

4.2.1 “Stage free for respect” (Bühne frei für Respekt)

Another initiative that employed participative methods in cluster 2 as well, with a focus on arts, was “Stage free for respect” (*Bühne frei für Respekt*) by Miteinander e.V., which targeted school youth, particularly ‘action-oriented’ individuals showing affinity with far-right ideologies,

in the eastern state of Sachsen-Anhalt (Miteinander e.V., n.d.), where far-right inclinations are also comparatively strong. In groups and using creative methods of self-expression, particularly theatre, film and choreography, school students were made to reflect on their politics in a safe, tolerant environment. The project took place in schools, with a partial side project called *Frei Sein* ("To Be Free") in juvenile detention centres. The project describes itself as one in which participants are subjects, and not objects, of deradicalisation, engaging actively in activities that lead to critical questioning of far-right ideologies, and in which the organisers are not mere "sellers" of democracy but engage in the collective learning process with participants, rejecting any authoritarian form of promoting progressive values.

In an evaluation report published by Miteinander e.V., many of the theatre or roleplay-oriented activities and their effect on participants are documented, with a final compilation of recurrent efficient activities and methods used in these workshops (Milke, Böckmann & Lau, 2010). One of these is, for example, called "Stereotypes in the city train," in which participants are made to think of stereotypical figures they routinely encounter in public transportation, for example, alcoholics, families and homeless people, and to reflect on their attitude towards them through roleplay. By creating a fictional reenactment of an everyday situation, participants start reflecting on their unquestioned routine experiences and the prejudice they may not have been aware of before. Similarly, the report recommends an activity called "Lined up," for which participants are asked to spread out in a room with fewer chairs than participants. Making up new rules that discriminate certain participants from accessing the chairs (e.g., "those with blue socks have no right to a chair of their own"), participants are encouraged to reflect on injustices and come up with their own strategies to solve the problem, for example, through protest or solidarity with those having lost access to a chair. Because of the diverse reactions to these 'unjust' rules introduced during the game, ranging from resignation to violence, the exercise helps participants get sensitised on rule-following and critical questioning of injustices.

Some groups choose to create full theatre plays over multiple weeks of cooperation, during which an organiser claims in an attached review they reduce the use of violent language and physical aggression as means of communication and learn to work in groups with tolerant ways to exchange opinions and perspectives. The report recommends that topics approached in the theatre projects be discussed in the classroom, creating a thematic congruence between frontal lessons and the extracurricular engagement in theatre activities, both of which should be assigned the same value. However, the issue of participating in extracurricular activities associable with school and school content is also mentioned to discourage many students who do not find it appealing or helpful to their image to participate.

A global evaluation report of *Vielfalt tut gut* directives focusing on cluster 2, which the aforementioned initiatives were parts of, rates the overall results of these preventive-pedagogic projects as "very good to satisfactory," have generally had access to the target group, having 'influenced different constellations of far-right endangerment' and having 'strengthened processes of democracy-oriented work with at-risk youth' (Sischka, Schwietring, Beyersmann, 2011). Pedagogical techniques from other initiatives within the topic cluster and their impact on youth are also described (albeit without statistical assessments of their efficiency), such as identity-reflexive work emphasising critical (self-)reflection on the biography of at-risk individuals or the creation of segregated 'subcultural' or 'identity-specific' work groups to produce safer environments for reflection (e.g., among girls only).

4.3 Lessons

Miteinander e.V.'s theatre-oriented initiative, in the context of the generally well-reviewed *Vielfalt tut gut* program, shows roleplay activities to be an efficient opportunity to disseminate, apply and popularise pedagogic contents on radicalisation prevention within extracurricular spaces that ultimately get to be seen as informal and recreational by at-risk students. Some of the exact activities conducted in the sessions and the progression of creative projects, such as the writing and conduction of full-length plays, are well documented in Miteinander's report. As mentioned, something that is mentioned often is an initial reluctance among students to engage in the activities, as the extracurricular sessions, conducted in schools and often appear with the same teaching personnel, are seen as 'uncool' or a continuation of the strict and boring nature of regular lessons. In fact, one of the project chronicles laid out in the report mentions a theatre project was initiated during regular German class hours in school. This reluctance to participate in something so easily associable with school makes sense, as the teenagers deemed "at-risk" are also often disenchanted with school or do not view school as a place for voluntary learning. In using this project as a model to imitate, it is impossible not to acknowledge the immediately uninviting factor of the activities being conducted in the same physical spaces and with the same staff in which the regular class is conducted. This calls for a more culture-conscious approach to youth from pedagogues, as 'old-school' discourse on inclusion and tolerance may appear outdated and cringeworthy when interacting with younger generations, particularly seeing the way social media has helped amplify new discursive approaches to politics, as well as slang or lingo and imagery among youth. Understanding these and being able to incorporate them into the programs to make them appealing and not associable to traditional school contents and style seems like a relevant task.

The Potsdam-based *Jungenarbeit und Gewaltprävention* ("Youth work and violence prevention") initiative featured in the program's brochure a problem shows that, beyond activities aimed at disseminating pedagogic contents and progressive discourse in the context of the school, much of the appeal of the far-right to youth, particularly in rural Germany, can be combated simply by offering youth recreational opportunities and social spaces in which and a more lax and progressive understanding of masculinity is encouraged, without involving curricular contents. However, something addressed in the evaluation of cluster 2 was the negative impact of the very broadly defined target group, as what constitutes a state of endangerment by the far-right is very loosely established. In this sense, consistently conceived and applied criteria are necessary to define where and how German youth can be categorised as 'endangered' or 'at risk' (Sischka, Schwietring, Beyersmann, 2011).

Beyond cluster 2, the overall *Vielfalt tut gut* evaluation comes to heterogeneous conclusions given the variety of projects involved, which is also acknowledged as a methodical obstacle in the report (Bischoff et al., 2011). However, the final evaluation report is quite in-depth and comprehensive and features expert assessments that review the conception and execution of the local initiatives, as well as an "effect analysis" (*Wirkungsanalyse*) in which members of the target groups are surveyed in the context of an experimental research design, happening over two years, with the progress in the execution of the initiative as treatment or intervening variable. However, many empirical obstacles appeared during the experimental research design, such as many students leaving the school or experimenting before the last treatment and survey.

5. Conclusions

The programmes and projects analysed here show German institutions and non-governmental stakeholders of deradicalisation to believe and have made significant investments in participatory methods of deradicalisation. Across all three cases, we see encouragement for at-risk individuals to reflect critically on their lived experience and actively engage in diagnosing and deconstructing their own prejudices in spaces tailored to accommodate a tolerant exchange of opinions. In such spaces, even radicalised views expressed by individuals are not immediately deplatformed, shamed or suppressed but approached through dialogue. This must not necessarily imply a political debate but even activities as simple as getting to know and interacting with people from different faiths or backgrounds to demystify one's own views of the 'other.'

The challenge of establishing friendly and transparent connections between facilitators and participants is present across all initiatives, especially where school students are involved. Projects in schools for which regular teaching staff is trained to act as facilitators face the obstacles of students not trusting teachers' discretion and hesitating to stay engaged in extracurricular activities associated with the school itself. This is particularly the case among the 'at-risk' of radicalisation students, as they are usually the most disenchanting with school and most hesitant to engage with it beyond what is mandatory. For this, training teaching staff to better connect with students outside of regular school lessons or working with third-party moderators remains a necessity.

Roleplay or theatre-based activities, as we see particularly in Miteinander e.V.'s initiative, can serve an important purpose in this process, as they offer an opportunity to fictionally reenact everyday situations or stereotypical figures and contemplate them from a 'depersonalised' angle. These also encourage participants to "put themselves in the other's shoes," taking on roles distant from their real identity in an attempt to empathise with others' realities and courses of action. In this sense, the roleplay activity conceived to accompany this report in Work Package 10 of the D.Rad project serves as an opportunity to put this strategy into practice with practitioners in the field of social work.

As for the projects' success, we find evaluation reports to mostly lack statistical assessments, with the exception of the CI project on the narrative discussion groups, which published the results of a survey conducted among students. Survey results seem to be hard to obtain because of how quickly the pool of students engaging with a programme can fluctuate, which may explain the predominance of qualitative assessments in many reports cited here. None of the projects conducted an experimental design study to measure the effects of their methods.

While this review engages with the prevention-oriented work, political education proves to be a necessary tool also for the exit-counselling for radicalised individuals in the process of ideologically and sentimentally distancing from radical spaces. German NGOs such as EXIT, which work less with participatory prevention methods and focus on exit counselling, emphasise this need to remove radicalised individuals from radical spaces and encourage them to reflect critically on the toxicity of their ideological backgrounds and to embrace democracy. In this sense, many activities done in prevention workshops, including roleplay ones, can be reinterpreted and tailored to fit the needs of individuals looking to deradicalise.

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