

## **Educational video interviews linked to pedagogical materials help teachers address group hate and violent extremism.**

Group hatred and violent extremism threaten our efforts for a free, diverse and humane society. Whether it be a series of murder committed by the right-wing extremist NSU group (National Socialist Underground terrorist group), suicide bombers, acts of arson and violent attacks motivated by racism, or even hateful comments made on Facebook, all these acts arise from a **deep-rooted, impulsive hostility** to 'the others' and can affect anyone and everyone.

In particular, extremist-terrorist milieus seek to recruit and win over **young people**—especially those who are particularly vulnerable to resentment, devaluation of 'others', self-glorification and violence. On the other hand, all adolescents are and have always been interested in topics of radicalism, fairness, and justice and follow news in the media about extremism and terrorism.

In this matter, **schools and youth centres** have a special responsibility. Young people from all backgrounds come together in these places. However, what happens when the topics of radicalism, group hatred and extremism is brought up in the classroom can be very difficult, and sometimes even frightening. Here teachers need support and concrete assistance; in some cases, it may be necessary to bring in external workshop facilitators, who also need good material.

In addition, **media and the Internet** play a central role for young people and their current living environments. For socially disadvantaged youth, their influence often appears to be even greater. Propagandists and recruiters of all kinds of violent extremism have always taken advantage of this. Media and the Internet also are a major factor in how adults form opinions. The fact that **on-line media** can particularly polarize the social mood has been clearly demonstrated by the right-wing populist and anti-fugitive agitation of the past year.

In addition, a special **echo-chamber effect** has been observed. This leads to the fact that anonymous network communities, regardless which age group, only share content they like with each other, which mutually stimulates and validates their opinions. Other views and serious attitudes and points of view no longer penetrate their self-created "filter bubble" or are simply ignored. This prevents the rational debate and the respectful discussion from occurring, and keeps people separate from each other.

**Authentic video interviews** with people affected by hatred and violent extremism or who were former perpetrators can be a helpful educational tool. If such short interview films are introduced sensitively, and when they are carefully pedagogically linked to systematic offline activities, they can very much contribute to building an awareness of human rights, especially among young people. Even with a broader audience, such interview films are effective in promoting reflection and a civil attitude.

One thing, however, must be made clear: Internet and the media alone are **fundamentally unable to "deradicalise"** people or even provide secondary

prevention.<sup>1</sup> For those young people who, due to their background or life experience, already hold extremist and/or inhumane opinions, but are not yet organised or involved in violent activities or criminal offenders, cannot be reached with short films on the Internet. Such film may even have a negative effect, promoting cynicism, devaluation and mistrust.

As a result, the often mentioned counter-narratives available on the Internet are **particularly ineffective** among the young people who we are most concerned about<sup>2</sup>—even though media and policy makers often refuse to believe it.

However, the fact that videos with a message put on the net are ultimately relatively ineffective, is due to the nature of the issue at hand: violent extremism has much less to do with an ideological or religious message than we have believed for so long. Extremism is above all affective, deeply rooted in life experience and impulsive. Therefore, an **emotion oriented exchange** is needed, one which can only be achieved through a **direct interpersonal work** relationship.<sup>3</sup> Although the Internet may be part of the problem to some extent, for many key reasons it cannot solve the problem and can only assist in solving the problem.

The short films and interviews of the platform extremedialogue.org have therefore been provided with a **careful pedagogical link** to exercises and materials, which help teachers and youth workers. The chosen interview partners are highly suitable:

**Jimmy** is a **Syrian** resistance and human rights activist who endured **prison and torture** in the early days of the conflict. However, in 2014, when the half-way predictable terror of the Assad regime was replaced by the erratic, wild minions of the IS, Jimmy fled to Europe. His comrades from that time are now either dead or have also fled. Jimmy also talks about his present life as a fugitive in Germany, his non-profit activities and how to deal with deep personal pain.

**Daniel** is a former **neo-Nazi and White Supremacist** from Canada (from the international Hammer Skins movement). He was one of the most violent of his 'comrades' and committed countless brutal acts of violence. Today he talks about the domestic circumstances of his childhood, about how he recruited newcomers and how 9/11 inspired him to look into Islamists resources in order to fight against "the system". For several years, Daniel has been fully committed to the prevention of extremism and group hatred.

By processing video material of 7 to 15 minutes in length for a placement time of at least three hours per school, the **central pedagogic offline principle** is preserved. In both prevention and education, the direct personal relationship between fellow pupils or young people and teachers must be worked out—without personal pedagogical guidance and support, relying on so-called counter-narratives available on the Internet is ineffective.

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1 Cf. Harald Weilnböck (2015): "Confronting the counter-narrative ideology. Embedded face-to-face prevention - and youth (media) work." and (2013): "Do we really need 'counter narratives'? And what would that be anyway?..." Auf: <http://cultures-interactive.de/de/fachartikel.html>.

2 Harald Weilnböck (2015): Short Notice: Counter narratives don't work - it is proven." (ibid.)

3 Harald Weilnböck (2015): Responding to violent extremism needs more investment in human resources/ practitioners, less in videos and internet." (ibid.)

On November 29, 2016, at 10:30, Extremedialogue.org will be presented to the German public in the Schauburg Cineworld in Vechta. An audience of pupils, teachers, social prevention workers and media representatives will attend. The interest in the city of Vechta is high. The audience will be comprised of a school class from a local high school, a university seminar from educational studies department and a course of state youth work trainees, plus various local stakeholders and press as well as one staff member from the state of Nether Saxony's Prevention Council. CI's local coordinator Sebastian Ramnitz (ContRa e.V.) says: "The good mix of the over hundred visitors will assure that the Extreme Dialogue tool will be introduced to students/ teachers, university, and youth work trainees alike. From there the tool will filter down into more regular usage by established educational prevent structures in Nether Saxony and beyond."

For the **future of media-based work** on social resilience, two major challenges remain:

(1) Experienced practitioners of secondary and tertiary prevention who work directly with young people know that the overwhelming majority of their clients will not become **picture perfect 'former' extremists**. Very few of them will be completely 'deradicalised', as seen in the interview with Daniel. It is important to know this, because the average 'former' does not stir us to tears, at least not so easily. They do not fit the image of the perfectly repentant sinner, which occupies our conceptions as influenced by film depictions.

On the other hand, these 'average former' extremists are all the more authentic and instructive in all their gray tones, as are other important interlocutors whose presence is irreplaceable for the development of sustainable resilience in the community. So the question is: how can we interview such 'formers,' 'entangled ones,' or the practitioners of detachment and exclusion work, and others (see also derad-narratives.eu) - and how can we prepare their expressions for journalistic and educational needs in an open society?

To implement this experience in pedagogical practice will not be easy if the media and policy makers continue to prefer simple but striking solutions to the complexity and diversity required.

(2) The second challenge is, after all, half-solved. The preventive media approaches of the future will probably not be based entirely on **high-quality video-ready videos** to the same extent. We will recognize that young people want to do something themselves. It is precisely the more unruly and radical young people who do not want to merely be educate and "enlightened". They distrust this—and this is actually not bad at all!

In the future **self-expression, the Do It Yourself (DIY) approach** will be taken more to heart - one of the most important principles of the civil society youth cultural approaches (as for example with Cultures Interactive, Berlin, the Viennese Youth Centres and others). The focus will be on practical **DIY media workshops**, where young people themselves design video clips. Depending on the inspiration, these could be thematically focussed short films, or those which are mainly dedicated to personal self-expression, identity and biography issues—see CI's media and Youtubing workshop<sup>4</sup>, derad-

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4 Dirk Lamprecht & Harald Weilnböck: YouTubing-Video-Workshop und die Wir-unter-uns-Gruppe - im European Fair Skills Ansatz. In preparation for: Erlebniswelt Rechtsextremismus. Menschenverachtung mit Unterhaltungswert. Hintergründe - Methoden - Praxis der Prävention" (5. aktualisierte Ausgabe, ed. by Stefan Glaser/ Thomas Pfeiffer, Wochenschau Verlag) - 2017. Draft on: <http://cultures-interactive.de/de/fachartikel.html>

narratives.eu or the We-amongst-ourselves-Group<sup>5</sup> for approaches of dynamically narrative work.

Here as well, an **accomplished and human rights-oriented moderation** is necessary, and should be even more emphasised. First, the practical questions: How do you ask people questions? What are narrative-biographical interviews? How does camera directing work? How do you do editing and cutting? And then the important question of attitude: this is important, as it should be possible for everyone who is more or less human rights oriented to participate. And the focus should always remain on what every teenager always most wants: respect, human attention, fairness and justice.

The products of these workshops are certainly not for the public media; rather, they are suitable for a **small, local circle**. They should be used in direct interpersonal conflict—a narrative-shaping exchange—in which a positive self-awareness experience and a civil attitude can arise.

The videos on Jimmy and Daniel may serve as formidable examples here – and can inspire the young people’s own work on profiles and topics around radicalisation and violence.



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5 Silke Baer & Harald Weilnböck: Hate Crime Prevention and Deradicalisation in Environments Vulnerable to Extremism: Community Work with a Fair Skills Approach and We-Amongst-Ourselves Group. <http://cultures-interactive.de/de/fachartikel.html>