

***‘Violence Prevention Network’ & ‘Cultures Interactive’:
EU good-practice research on de-radicalisation work in
prison and community – and the factor of culture***

by

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With regard to hate crime, Germany’s “immigrant society”, as is the case in many western countries, faces two major dangers: right wing extremism on the one hand, and religious fundamentalism/ Jihadism on the other. And while the violence is committed by a relatively small number of citizens, extremism and hatred often come from the midst of our societies. For, right wing extremist views do clearly have their roots in the resentments which mainstream societies’ harbor against foreigners and other off-stream and disenfranchised groups. And violent actions inspired by a religious fundamentalist world view often show some correspondences to the ordinary religious beliefs and moral attitudes of the respective community. Also, what is true for almost all offenders of these and other forms of extremisms, their acts are determined by micro-social delegations from their families, peer groups and community milieus.

Thus, what the mostly quite young hate crime offenders commit, is, what a significant section of more advanced age-groups of the citizenry sometimes thinks – or sometimes even feels like doing. For sure, this makes the task of effectively dealing with this acute issue not any easier, since the pedagogical attitudes, approaches and methods which are called for in order to prevent and intervene with extremism and hate crime, do not only have to be found and developed – drawing from various sources of societal and scientific knowledge, like pedagogy, social work, sociology, violence studies, psychology/ psycho-therapy – and also cultural studies, dealing with the narratives, factual and fictional, which are ventilated by the media and inspire our worldviews and habits. For, ideally, some base knowledge about the nature of hate crime as well as about the appropriate pedagogical approaches and methods should be shared and supported by what is mainstream consciousness in the society into which the offenders are to be reintegrated.

In this paper I will talk about two Federal Model Projects of exemplary work in de-radicalisation carried through by two NGOs in Berlin – who are at the forefront of such a society conscious approach. One, *Cultures Interactive* (CI), is engaged in communities and schools. Its target group is at-risk adolescents from disadvantaged communities, who are likely to get entangled into extremism, youth delinquency and violence. As its name already indicates, *Cultures Interactive* works with youth-cultures as Hip-Hop, Techno, Gothic etc. But most interesting is, how this is combined with particular pedagogic exercises. The other NGO, *Violence Prevention Network* (VPN), works in prisons and delivers a special group-dynamic training program for young offenders convicted of hate crime, which also includes a systematic approach to civic education.

In the second section of this paper I will refer to two EU research projects, which study these NGOs' quite successful work. The 'good-practice' research aims to find out more about just what it is that makes this work so effectual. One project – "Towards Preventing Violent Radicalisation" (TPVR) – is driven by the London Probation Trust and in Germany focuses on VPN, the second – "Literary and Media Interaction as Means of Understanding and Preventing Adolescent Violence and Extremism" (LIPAV) – is commissioned by the EU's Research Directorate (in the section of psychology/ culture research) and conducted by *Cultures Interactive*. These results will then enable us (1) to draw conclusions as to the criteria for good-practice, inducing pro-social change with the participants and (2) formulate the impact factors of and practice-guidelines for successful de-radicalisation work.

Before I go ahead and give you summaries of these two approaches of intervention, I would like to underline why I have turned to the AIF and proposed this topic: I am convinced, that there are other and comparable pockets of innovation in working with hate crime offenders throughout Europe – and that such initiatives should form a European network and work together more closely. For, it has been found that community organizations and social entrepreneurs in non-profit NGOs – like VPN or CI – can be essential in preventing polarization and violence and intervening into endangered sectors of social life. Often they have been found to be more effective than statutory organizations like criminal justice, probation or state social work. For, other than government employees, NGO-practitioners find it easier to access even the most vulnerable environments and penetrate the language, habit and cultural narratives of (ex-)offenders and their followers.

Therefore, as to de-radicalisation, the European Union Council's 'Stockholm Program – for an open and secure Europe' (2009) stresses: "Key to our success will be the degree to which non-governmental groups ... across Europe play an active part". However, such groups and NGOs' do need professionalization, adhere to quality standards, grant methodological transparency, receive academic and consultancy support, and have (inter-) national exchange of good-practice – which will also provide them with a more stable and productive relationship with governmental bodies at home. Thus, such European network would be helpful in systematically preserving the rich knowledge, skills and services of these non-governmental NGOs and in further developing and mainstreaming their methods into ongoing work.

(I) Two exemplary good-practice approaches of de-radicalisation

What is these two NGOs approach like? How is it exemplary? And what can we learn from them? *Cultures Interactive* (CI) mostly works in East-German communities and increasingly also in inner city districts, be this predominantly "nationalist" or predominantly "ethnic" communities. On occasion CI has also worked with adolescents in Poland and the Czech Republic. The approach of CI combines elements of three kinds:

(a) In their preventive work in disadvantaged communities, the *Cultures Interactive* team brings in young representatives from urban youth-cultures, who give workshops in youth-cultural activities, as Breakdance, Skateboarding, Slam Poetry/ Rap, Techno-DJ-ing and Digital Music Production as well as Visual Design as in Graffiti or Cartoons/ Comics. This first of all has an important motivational impact, which is crucial, since here one is dealing with adolescents who are hardly accessible any more to school education, because they simply have stopped attending school – and get increasingly cynical about life in western societies in general. Therefore, youth-cultures provide a pathway to reach those, who are already almost un-reachable.

Another quite concrete impact factor is, that in socially deprived communities, the adolescents do not have access to any youth-cultural identification other than being ‘national’ and ‘anti-foreigner’ or being ‘ethnic’ and ‘Muslim’ respectively. Because: either there weren’t any other youth-cultures to begin with, or the two or three left over hip-hoppers of a small town may have been roughed up and driven underground. Delivering first-hand experience in urban youth-cultural practices, therefore, means introducing an element of lived diversity into the community.

Moreover, not only are the instructors authentic representatives of their particular youth-culture, they give their workshops in a historically conscious and pedagogical apt fashion.

Firstly, while guiding the exercise of youth-cultural techniques, the instructors also teach about the civil rights background and the situations of dreadful social plight, that these youth-cultures generally come from. Hardly anybody in these courses – and also the school teachers of the young people – are aware of the fact, that HipHop came from deprived neighbourhoods in US American inner city ghettos, which are stricken by violence, drug-traffic, gang-related crime, sexism, racism, and homophobia. Hardly anybody is aware that it is for this very reason, that HipHop has developed an ethos of anti-violence, of life without drugs and of respect for everybody.

Secondly, the instructors are prepared to confront and discuss those aspects of the contemporary HipHop-industry, which mystify violence and sexism as for instance gangster rap or porn rap. Thus, youth-cultures are not only motivating, they also contain many opportunities to raise issues, which are essential both for de-radicalisation, and for education as such.

(b) This strain of activity is then picked up by the second element of the *Cultures Interactive* approach: civic education, which means information, instruction and discussion about issues of extremism, NeoNazi organisations, the Third Reich, xenophobia and the like, – and also about what the benefits of human rights and of living in a free society are. This second element of the CI approach encompasses pedagogical exercises and role plays, which aim at conveying social and emotional skills to the

participants as for instance: emotional self-control, non-aggressive conflict solution, the capacity to debate and moderate different opinions.

Furthermore, post-classical civic education, as *Cultures Interactive* practices it, also includes a particular approach of “narrative” interaction, in which stories are told, and the personal living environment is focused. “Narrative” interaction, in a word, means: If you talk to an at-risk young person or even an imprisoned hate crime offender, and if you want her or him to change the behaviour, you better do without leveling arguments and referring to ethical principles, as classical civic education might do. Much more powerful it will be, to have the individual tell her or his stories, and engage in what these stories tell you about the personal experiences and subjective angle, because then you can really work with the person and are not restricted to difficult and always debatable task of discussing arguments and rectifying ideological stance.

(c) Having made very good experiences with this post-classical form of narrative civic education, *Cultures Interactive* went even further and included some elements which are normally found in psycho-therapy. Because telling stories is a quite personal process, a group setting of free talk was introduced, which basically functions as a self-awareness group. It is labeled the “We-Amongst-Ourselves-Group”, and it has proven tremendously effective in getting in touch with the teenagers, forging a personal connection and having them open up to each other and the facilitator, in the sense, that they also become more able to take something in, meaning: to see things somewhat different than before. It has been amazing, how much the quality of the workshops in youth-cultures and civic education was raised, since this self-awareness group was introduced.

This leads us directly to *Violence Prevention Network*. This NGO has developed special training for those juveniles in prison, who are convicted of violent crimes and Hate Crimes, imbedded in a Neo-Nazi or Islamist context. And this training is a group-training, working on what has happened in the past, and dealing with one’s self in the present – and above all within the training group. A crucial prerequisite to take part is the person’s willingness to speak to a group about oneself, about one’s lives prior to prison, about families and friends, one’s political orientations – and in particular about the acts of violence one has committed. This distinguishes the *Violence Prevention Network* program from classical methods such as anti-aggression training. In this approach, the young adults are not reduced to their being a criminal offender. Instead, each one is taken seriously and is respected as a person, who has his own strengths and weaknesses, and his own history. At the same time, however, the offender will eventually be confronted – before the group and with the help of the group. He is prompted to take responsibility for what he did and arrange for a violence-free future life. So, the approach is an accepting and understanding one, and it is a confrontational approach at the same time, since the person is accepted, but not the crime – which is confronted.

Just as with *Cultures Interactive*, the first group sessions focus on life histories. The individuals are encouraged to explore their memories of humiliation, and their own experiences with violence and abandonment – experiences, which they themselves often do not have much of an emotional response to. They then recognize the connections with their readiness to use violence and adopt attitudes which are politically or religiously extremist.

At the same time a feeling of trust, mutual acceptance, and a willingness to help each other, is developed in the group. Methods like pedagogical exercises, roll playing, drawing a biography curve, assist the process. This confidence is needed for the violence sessions, which are the central element of the group work – and which every participant has agreed to take part in. These violence sessions aim at reconstructing the actions and feelings during the violent act itself. They are highly demanding for trainers and the group alike. Curiously, confronting the inhuman brutality and the ghastly injuries, inflicted on the victims often proves as being just too much for the offenders themselves. But they quite aptly assist each other, without letting anyone of the hook. After this strenuous group experience, most of the individuals are able to accept their responsibility and build a new sense of self and of empathy with others.

Practical exercises in dealing with situations of conflict, provocation and insult, without resorting to violence, complement the program, as well as family and friends sessions in the prison, and a post-release coaching.

Working with the participants’ right-wing or fundamentalist attitudes is an undeviating and challenging task throughout the training. However, going through a group process of this kind makes this task decidedly more feasible.

The main target of this work is public protection, i.e. that the rate of re-offending, which with hate crime is generally estimated at around 80% is reduced – and thus the number of victims is reduced.

(II) Two EU projects of empirical good-practice research

Due to the limited space, the findings of these two separate studies which have recently been undertaken on the projects¹, will be synthesized to what is their common denominator. What exactly is it that makes these two quite comparable approaches – the one in prisons, the other in community prevention work – so effective? For, while both NGOs clearly demonstrated good practice in working with vulnerable youths in the field of Hate Crime, the precise factors and conditions behind their effectiveness have yet to be explained. Hence, both studies had to first answer the question of *how and according to which criteria* good-practice may be recognized. Also, besides the

¹ ‘Towards Preventing Violent Radicalisation’ (TPVR, EU-Directorate ‘Justice’); ‘Literary and Media Interaction as Means of Understanding and Preventing Adolescent Violence and Extremism’ (LIPAV, Marie-Curie-Program, Directorate Research).

quantitative criterion of a significant reduction in the recidivism or offending rate, the research needed to pinpoint qualitative indicators in order to be able to make good-practice discernible on the spot, to systematically develop further the method, and to make it transferable to different countries and cultural contexts. For, only then is good-practice transferable, if one is able to go beyond describing its methodical elements, which mostly are quite evident, but if one also knows the intervention's less visible *impact factors*.

Therefore this research ...

1. ... inductively reconstructs how the offenders' and vulnerable persons' 'processes of developmental change' work during the intervention and also explain why the change processes work the way they do, and, following from this, determine which impact factors are at work and which criteria are most helpful and reliable in assessing these change processes.
2. ... and provides general, transferable recommendations for the methodology of de-radicalisation work which apply to various cultural contexts and national milieus of social work in prison and in probation.

Methodologically, in both projects a qualitative-empirical design was used that makes use of open, non-thematic methods as biographical-narrative and focused-narrative interviews with participants and facilitators, group discussions and participative observation. Data pertaining to research questions regarding the *factor of culture* – on other words: asking how the individuals of such target groups draw on and makes use of cultural/fictional narratives from film, TV, song lyrics, etc. (which pertains mostly to the LIPAV project) – was collected using a specific media-experience interview and in part via a group-analytical media interview. This sub-field of the research investigates the question how and to what degree of success the person, in his or her mental treatment of a fictional narrative selected by him or herself, consistently attempts or avoids to confront a particular personal “developmental challenge” that possibly also has to do with his or her delinquency or vulnerability to delinquency. This material likewise was evaluated using a sequence-analytical, abductive hypothesis-forming technique, which in addition to the usual analytical steps also draws on the resources of clinical psychology and psychotherapeutic research.

What then has been found in these two studies to be the empirically most reliable indicators of an ex-offender's or vulnerable person's enduring pro-social change?

(A)Appreciation for personal memories: Here the studies came to a counter-intuitive answer: One might intuitively expect that criteria like ‘offender's remorse’, ‘their insight in the condemnable and destructive nature of his actions and attitude’, or ‘their empathy for the victim’ are useful criteria for assessing successful de-radicalisation. The two studies however show that one of the most unfailing and comprehensive

indicators of mental change processes is that the offender/ vulnerable person shows a new attitude about and *appreciation for personal memories* and for the *emotional experience of remembering*, irrespective of the subject matter of the memory; and that the person has, thus, increased his/her capacity to uncover, bring to mind, emotionally re-experience, and also verbalize memories of personally lived-through events. In light of this, it has been assessed as particularly indicative if ‘memories with a *positive emotional charge*’ are expressed/valorized and also if such memories pertain directly to what the person experienced during the intervention when working with the group.

The two studies document and analyse various pieces of interview material supporting the above hypotheses and draw upon empirical violence studies research to further explain why it is, that successful de-radicalisation is indicated by the person’s ‘appreciation for personal and emotionally positive memories’ or simply speaking, by the offenders’ or vulnerable persons’ getting in touch with what they experienced during their life history – and in her/his experience during the pedagogical intervention spent with the group.

In particular the studies show the wide *scope of indicators* pointing towards the impact factor ‘appreciation for personal memories’, ranging from quite evident to less visible clues. The range spans from (rare) emphatic expressions such as “this was the first time in my life, I had such a memory ... that I created a memory like that ... and this memory is still in my head, to this day ...” to less discernible indicators such as “this is awful ... I can’t remember anything we said [in the training] ... but I’d love to, because the training was great fun mostly ... I’d love to tell you more ... and then we could write a book about it”. This tends to be the case in people who suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder with very little access to and verbalization capacity for memories about personally lived emotional experience, who, however, may at least have discovered a strong personal wish to remember more.

Isolating the criterion of ‘memory/ emotional recall’ is not to say, that observations pertaining to the offender’s remorse; their insight in the condemnable nature of his behaviour; or their empathy for the victim may not be significant guidelines of reconstruction. It just means that the new *appreciation for personal memories* and for the *emotional experience of remembering* is more reliable and indicative as an analytical criterion for enduring personal change. In an interview or during intervention, the expression of empathy or remorse may sometimes be the result of pretence, self-deception or simply of good-will which, however, might then all the more easily break down in the face of real-life conditions. Furthermore, such seemingly obvious criteria will keep us from discerning less obvious and more important change-processes and they do not give us any help when facing interview material in which no expression of empathy or remorse can be found.

(B)Personal confidence and trust: A second essential indicator which witnesses mental change processes of de-radicalisation is that the offender/ vulnerable person shows signs that *he/she has built personal confidence and trust* with facilitators and with the group; and that the person has thus, increased their capacity to built trust in relationships and stay trustful even over quite challenging, conflicting, and exhausting experiences of (group) interaction. Here, the studies document and analyze various passages of interview material which show how indicators of trust-building look like with these target groups of individuals. Reference to empirical violence research underlines how significant – and indicative – issues of trust are with these individuals, who tend to not trust anyone easily and sometimes lean towards almost paranoid modes of perception and interaction.

(C)Narrative interaction: As third essential indicator for processes of mental change and de-radicalisation it has been reconstructed: The offender/ vulnerable person shows a new sense and appreciation for *telling stories/* narrating personally experienced occurrences and actively listen to such narrations; and the person has, thus, increased his/her capacity to *partake in narrative interaction*. This criterion, which is likely to coincide with the criteria of ‘memory’ and ‘trust’, may take into consideration any given narrative, irrespective of its content. However, it particularly pays attention to the narratives which the person gives about conflict-ridden and affectively charged subject matters – as is touched upon for instance while working on the offender’s biography, and on his biographical history of violence and denigration/ humiliation, as well as in the reconstruction of the violent crime scene (particularly in the VPN courses).

The two studies proceed to document and analyze interview material which shows different aspects of „appreciation for and capacity of *narrating* personally experienced occurrences“, as well as of different qualities of *personal story-telling* in terms of coherence, completion, and emotional saturation. Furthermore, in reference to narratological research the studies underline the importance of ‘narrative listening’ and ‘co-narrative interaction’ as well as the necessity that the method of intervention provides story-generating tools.

(D)Emotional learning: As a further essential indicator for mental processes of de-radicalisation it has been determined: „that the offender/ vulnerable person shows signs which indicate experiences of ‘*emotional learning/emotional intelligence building*’, i.e. that the person shows signs that *s/he* begins to realize and reflect upon her/ his own affects and upon situations in which *s/he* was mostly guided by emotions. This might include observations and thoughts about what consequences these emotions had and maybe even: how the situation could have had a different outcome and how one could possibly take influence on and moderate ones emotions in comparable scenes of interaction (which one module of both approaches systematically picks up on by role-play training of emotional scenes). Here the studies analyze the pertinent interview material as to what the contexts and setting conditions are under which such experiences of ‘emotional learning’ may occur and further develop.

Particular attention is paid to indications which signal build-up of emotional memory and emotional learning around scenes/ emotions of *embarrassment/ shame, insecurity, fear, and helplessness* – be it helplessness in the actual group of the intervention and/or in prior life situations, since scenes with such emotional charge are most remote from verbalization and self-reflection and often linked to dynamics of escalating aggression. Also this indicator is likely to be relevant in situations in which issues of *political convictions, partisanship, and extremism* as well as issues of *religious believe, feelings, and fundamentalism* play a role.

(E)Dealing with ambivalence: A further indicator, which is often closely linked to the above mentioned scenes, pertains to issues of ambivalence and of dealing with ambivalence, or, one step before this, concerns interview passages in which the person recognizes others and/or oneself as being contentious in nature, i.e. as being of two or more minds about concrete real-life situations and about other people and of having to make decisions and negotiate compromise. This indicator is, about leaving behind the ‘black and white’ world and entering in a world of different shades of color.

(F)Capacity to argue: As further indicator for mental processes of de-radicalisation was found to be that the person shows signs of a newly build appreciation for and *capacity to argue or struggle with others in non-destructive ways* - be it issues of political, religious, or personal nature, i.e. to argue without either turning abusive/ verbally violent or withdrawing and cutting off the interaction. Particularly indicative are signs of a newly built capacity to interact and negotiate conflict *in group situations* – which generally increases the level of fear/aggression and tend to be more regressive in their affective dynamic than interactions between two or three persons.

(3)The impact factors in good-practice de-radicalisation work

One of the most significant factors in the impact of *Violence Prevention Network’s* (VPN) social-therapeutic group-work techniques as well as of *Cultures Interactive’s* (CI) approach of youth cultural social training has proved to be, that the interventions were able to generate an interactive atmosphere in which a trusting and resilient relationship was established both towards the facilitators as well as within the group itself. This “trust” proved to be essential, as an all-or-nothing condition, without which the pedagogic techniques and methodical exercises would only have been of limited impact and barely capable of prompting a lasting change in the individual’s attitude and behaviour.

Why this should have been the case was not immediately obvious. Nevertheless, it was already known from empirical violence research that people tending towards violent and extreme behaviour live according to a marked system of distrust that can sometimes assume paranoid features.² The question, however, as to how, in psychody-

² On the „paranoid style of attribution“ in „violent imprisoned men“ as well as the tendency towards

dynamic terms, this mistrust is conditioned and obtained, and above all how VPN's and CI's intervention method still managed to generate trust and resilience, remained for large parts of the research unanswered.

Initially it was possible to isolate a few formal factors:

1) it seemed to be of utmost importance that the facilitators *come from outside* and not from within the environment of the institution itself. Obviously, the prison is particularly susceptible to distrust. It is very difficult for a prison psychologist to succeed in credibly guaranteeing the confidentiality of the conversation when he or she has a direct institutional involvement in decisions that are life-altering for the prisoner. However in any youth-work contexts of violence prevention, it generally also proves quite recommendable that the team be independent from the everyday contexts of the young people. Above all the components of the self-awareness-group required a protected space that internal staff and facilitators would have been unable to provide.

2) That is by no means to say, however, that the institutional environment should remain uninvolved, or that it should not accept and absorb the external impulse, and support and extend it using the means available to it. On the contrary – and this is the second formal factor: the effectiveness of the two approaches (VPN and CI) was closely connected to the necessity of involving in the intervention's sphere of impact not only the young people themselves, but also and in principle the *institutions and local environments* to which they belong. It is therefore propitious and helpful when these institutions expressly signal their "respect" for these "outsiders", for example by simultaneously commissioning training for staff members and by seeking institutional consultancy. *Violence Prevention Network* therefore also often works with prison employees and takes on consultancy roles in higher-level administrative-technical and political structures. *Cultures Interactive* offers vocational trainings to social workers and school teachers. This consultancy activity gave rise to networking effects that in turn had a positive effect on the work with the young people themselves.

3) The third formal factor contributing significantly to the generation of trust and resilience, and thus to the lasting impulses for change that arose, is the fact that VPN's and CI's work is done *in the group and with the group*. The research interviews clearly indicate that the basic trust of the participants, and thus the degree of impact that the behaviour-altering effects have upon them, are crucially dependent upon a *group-dynamic* approach being taken. In other words, it is essential that attention is paid to the *processes* and the *developments* of the participants in the group and their *relationships* towards each other, and that these processes and relations are conceived of as the primary object of the group work. It is clear that what is said and experienced by

„preventative attack“, cf. Tedeschi, J.T. (2002): Die Sozialpsychologie von Aggression und Gewalt. In Heitmeyer/ Hagan: Internationales Handbuch der Gewaltforschung, Westdeutscher Verlag, p. 585.

attentive and active participants in a professionally-led group goes much deeper and has a doubly lasting impact.

This observation seems to be particularly pertinent with the groups of young people at issue here, because almost all violent hate-crimes are generated by clique behaviour – and thus are the product of uncontrolled processes of a so-called escalating *anti-group dynamic*.³ It is therefore all the more true to say that in both approaches an essential social-therapeutic goal of the work is the ability to enter into, maintain and make use of triangular (at the minimum), multi-pronged and complex group relationships. These methods of intervention therefore intuitively placed emphasis on demanding from their participants the art of talking openly and personally within the group, and of being confidential and discreet outside the group – without at the same time insisting that they be utterly silent and act as though they were members of a secret society.

Moreover, the ability to successfully practice trust, confidentiality and “respect” across the range of loyalties and group- and relationship-contexts in one’s life and school/work environment can be seen as the highest goal of *civic education*, in the post-classical sense of anti-bias work. After all, societies in which the opposite of freedom, liberality and non-violence predominate can be recognized simply enough by the absence in them of trust and confidentiality, and instead the presence of indiscretion/denunciation, intrigue, surveillance, fear/exercise of power, and selfish segregation – a misanthropic and anti-social situation that can exist in smaller or larger groups and for which terms such as “anti-democratic” or “extremist” are far too vague. It seems all the more appropriate, then, to aim for what can only be achieved through dynamic and open group-work, namely to provide participants with the ability to find their way in a world consisting of occasionally conflicting and competing groups, and to provide them with the necessary abilities of self-integration and self-delineation.

More broadly, the findings also point to the fact that *the one-to-one supervisor*, no matter how talented, is unable to through his or her work to achieve this demanding pedagogic goal, and that the expectations and self-images of practitioners often equate to a systematic (self-)over-exertion that negatively affect the work. This is especially true for the target group in question here, since violent offenders, or those vulnerable to such behaviour, often grew up fatherless (because the latter were absent either de facto or emotionally). They were thus socialized in a dyadic and *tendentially symbiotic two-way relationship*, which was mostly cramped, insufficiently delineated and chronically over-exerted. For this reason, all social- or psychotherapeutic interven-

³ On the other hand, it should be said that the psychopathic individual offender fundamentally requires forensic psychiatry and is out of place in normal prison and its capacity for intervention. It is particularly important to point this out given the misleading question occasionally expressed as to whether it does not constitute a limitation of a technique such as VPN that it only applies to a selected sub-group of violent offenders. It became evident that the technique, as soon as the necessary framework conditions are provided, can in principle be applied to all types and all degrees of crime. (And even in forensics, excellent work is done with – psychotherapeutic – groups.)

tions carried out between two persons are subordinated to additional structural limits that, in the interest of quality assurance, should be cause for concern. Having said that, the two- or three-way conversation has an important *supplementary function* (especially in prison work) and is above all useful when individual results need to be consolidated or when individuals have to be stabilized because the group process becomes too intense for them – a permanent risk with precariously situated groups such as this. Accordingly, the results also indicated that a further formal factor influencing trust-building lies in the precise *dosage of group intensity*, which is regulated through flexible setting changes from the whole group to small groups and to two-way conversations, or through the change to pedagogic exercises and role plays. Nevertheless, it appears to be crucial to the success of the work that *the group* always remains the main point of reference, against which the various individual measures are placed in perspective.

Above and beyond the formal factors, the interview material also raised connected questions as to how the *professional persona and group-interaction style* of the facilitator contributed to producing the aforementioned prerequisites for generating a climate of “trust and resilience”, and how the facilitator succeeded in moderating the interaction within the group in such a way as to be effective in terms of trust and hence of changing behaviour. There are many indications to suggest that the personal attitude of the facilitator represented a *direct influencing factor* – although such observations run the risk of being mystified as a personal talent, whereas in fact it is of a thoroughly technical nature and as such can be communicated and acquired.

Analyzing VPN’s and CI’s methods revealed a central aspect of this personal facilitation style to be a kind of conversational and group guidance, which can be called the “*life-world*” mode or briefly: the *narrative* mode of interaction. This denotes that the centre of the group’s attention is occupied by each participant and his or her self and personal experiences, and that the primary interest is the individual, lifeworld experiences of that particular person, to which the other group members relate at an equally personal level. Compared to this, all other components – teaching and training plans, exercises and definite pedagogic content – are assigned a secondary valence, because in order to be lastingly effective they depend on the existence of a relational basis that always offers the possibility for participants to confidently return to narrating their experiences.

In work with violent offenders, then, all morality and all judgments are initially dispensed with. Similarly, in local prevention work, where the primary concern is civil-societal issues of tolerance and diversity, or political educational issues of prejudices and group-directed misanthropy, then any argumentation, information and ethical or value-based considerations are initially put to one side. In both cases, the working approach is primarily concerned with the release of the individual, lifeworld narratives of the participants; with their *subjective experiential perspectives* and *biographical early histories* – and with the exchange of these perspectives with the other members

of the group. In this respect, the two approaches intuitively followed the *pedagogical primacy of narration*, and it discovered and took to heart the fact that people, especially when it comes to making lasting changes to their attitude and behaviour, open up when they are able to *develop their personal narration in a trusting relationship*, to do so in a way that reveals areas of their individual experience, and when they can share these perspectives with other people in a process of group exchange. Aspects of ethics, morality and judgment then seem to return of their own accord, not from the facilitators, but rather from personal motivation.

Of course, the experienced practitioner will hardly be surprised by this. It is well known that morality, judgment, arguments and information have always demonstrated limited effects; people have been quite right to warn against “overestimating” the “power of factual arguments” as opposed to the level of “feelings and emotions”⁴). This is truest of all for vulnerable youths, who automatically react with cynical contempt or inner retreat wherever moral or pedagogic value pressure is generated. Yet regardless of how well known this fact is, it often seems difficult to abandon the moral-judgmental impetus and to acquire and to put into practice a *facilitator style of lifeworld-narrative and relationship-based access*. This, at any rate, represented a particular challenge both for VPN and CI when it came to training new co-workers and introducing them to the work and the *facilitation style* of the approach – which was after all an innovative, self-developed approach.⁵

In concrete terms, the difficulty for methodological approaches like this consists primarily in motivating participants to even begin with *trusting narration* – given that as a rule they are often somewhat disinclined to talk about themselves and about emotional subjects. The ability to narrate in this sense of the term is a quite difficult skill that requires the person first recognizes their own subjective narrative perspective as such, and that he or she is sufficiently familiar with its content in order then to be able to present narrative episodes as detailed and accessible stories and to exchange these stories with others. However the greatest objective difficulty is above all the fact that the personal experiences recalled by this group of participants, for example in the area familial background, often involve exceedingly negative experiences that can only with considerable difficulty (or not at all) be narrated spontaneously – and as such, block other more immediate narrative content.

The skill of narrating is also difficult insofar as the narration – and this is especially the case with negative subject matters – can take a form that is always more or less *detailed and conducive to personal development*. As is well-known, one can “lie to

⁴ Cf. Spangenberg, R.: <http://www.politische-bildung-brandenburg.de/extrem/praevention.html>

⁵ However it became all the more clear how necessary it is to continue, by means of systematic accompanying research, objectifying, documenting and didacticising good practice techniques, in order to provide orientation for further methodological developments in this and other areas of social work and „education“.

oneself”, “kid” oneself and others, remember essential details “only dimly” and jointly cultivate anti-narrational defense mechanisms. On the other hand, together with the group, one can take risks in narrational self-discovery – which in principle produces social-therapeutic effects. From a narratological perspective, it should be recalled that psychotherapy as such is defined allegorically as the “continual re-telling of one and the same story”, only that this one story “is re-told ever better” (Roy Schafer). This can be taken to mean that, through narrative representation, the decisive episodes of a person’s biography and life-world can 1) be increasingly elaborated and completed, so that 2) they can gain increasing intensity in emotional expression and in the affective engagement of the narrator. Thereby the emotionality of the narration increasingly comes to approximate what was thought and felt during the experience itself.

This *process of narrative-forming* often extends to the listeners and co-narrators in the group, and/or is to a great extent prompted and supported by them.⁶ The “better” – in a narratological sense – the story is told, the greater the probability of releasing long-lasting impulses for personal change and development. From a scientific perspective, too, there is a great deal to be said for trying to elicit development-conducive forms of narrative in the group, and for that reason for the facilitator to adopt the attitude of *lifeworld-narrative and relationship-based access* as the benchmark for the group-culture being aimed for in the intervention.

In view of the quite wide spread programs of fully modularized *cognitive-behavioral trainings* in various areas of socio-therapeutic and social work, it can be said that it is this very element of *lifeworld-narrative and relationship-based* interaction and *co-narrative* dynamic – often called also open-process interaction – which is missing there. Experienced practitioners in this field share the impression that the avoidance of narrative, open-process interaction goes back to a institutional and/or personal hesitation or inability to build trust and relationship with violent offenders and vulnerable persons and that this, for a fair number of these trainings, is the main reason of their relatively limited success in bringing about lasting effects.

How, then, did the facilitators proceed in order to initiate a *narrative process quality* of this sort?

Throughout it was possible to observe that the group and workshop facilitators in their own ways signaled *their personal readiness to enter a relationship*. In doing so, they made use in particular of the basic fact that the more one demonstrates a credible personal interest and a “*reliable attentiveness*”, the more open others are, both towards themselves and in the way they speak about themselves. However this attentiveness has

⁶ The biography researcher Gabriele Rosenthal has in this connection spoken of narrated and experienced life stories. In: (1995). *Erzählte und erlebte Lebensgeschichte. Gestalt und Struktur biographischer Selbstbeschreibungen*. Frankfurt a.M. (Campus). Rosenthal, G. (2004). *Biographical Research*. In: Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubrium, J.F. & Silverman, D. (Eds.). *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage, 48-64.

to be entirely credible and to stand up to all kinds of testing – especially with young people, who relentlessly and minutely scrutinize their counterparts before they trust them.

As concerns the central question as to which further conditions need to be fulfilled so that this trustworthiness and attentiveness at the level of the personal relationship can be reliably applied, the evaluation resulted above all in two findings. Helpful, though as a rule overestimated, is the ability and the readiness of the facilitator to involve *themselves as a person* and sometimes also to reveal personal information about themselves, in order to appear to others as authentic and inspire trust. However this factor is in fact demanded by young people lesser than is generally thought – and sometimes feared. In most cases, the questioning from the adolescents is a matter of fairly uncomplicated and easily manageable initiatives in order to carry out a first contact probe, something that basically is very welcome. (Notably, in almost all cases the facilitators tended to respond to the questions directly and in a measured fashion, without insisting too soon on professional abstinence and neutrality, which comes into play at a later stage during more critical moments. The facilitators, with their process- and relation-oriented approach, go on the basis that a principled abstinence would – logically enough – be understood by the young people to mean that there is something else, something external, that is more important to the facilitator than the working relationship at hand, and that therefore that the young person him- or herself is of merely secondary importance).

On the other hand, what is generally underestimated, despite it being of central importance, is that the openness and the attentiveness of the facilitator, though thematically unrestricted, is by no means entirely unconditional. Successful praxis was characterized by the fact that the facilitator demonstrates an attitude that can be called an *attitude of critical attentiveness*. Essential for this is that the facilitator, alongside his or her credible guarantee of confidentiality and trustworthiness, also unreservedly expresses any (un)reasonable doubts, conjectures or enquiries concerning the statements, representations and stories of the participants, and that an atmosphere is thereby created in which everyone can show their true colours and thus, by daring to express themselves, enter into negotiations over their relationships. This is standard in dynamically-open group work, however by and large something that the young people barely have experience of.

Critical attentiveness, in other words, deals with precisely this conflict-prone contact and the frictional points of reference, without of course acting in a way that is aggressive or deprecatory, or even overbearing or suggestive. It is far more the case that the facilitators pursued the goal of practicing an exemplary mode of *respectful skepticism*, which does not jeopardize the dignity of the person, but which, on the contrary, for the first time gives the person’s dignity its due. (While “human dignity” is only very formally guaranteed by an undifferentiated and contact-abstinent notion of tolerance or acceptance, in a successful negotiation of difference it can be properly given credit.)

The *critical attentiveness* practiced by these two approaches observes the basic difference between person and criminal offence, and thus corresponds to a fundamental attitude that is *as accepting as it is confrontational*.⁷ One might have thought that this combination would be impossible (at least if one bases one's assumptions on the discourse of classical political education or youth work), however it has proved essential as a technique of intervention.

Moreover, this combination contains a specific pedagogical value. The *attitude of critical attentiveness* involves the practice of a skill that this target group can be seen to be sorely lacking, yet one they urgently need to learn: the ability to get along with people who are very "different", to overcome large subjective perceptions of difference, and to act acceptingly-attentively as well as, in critical moments, critically-confrontationally. They must also learn to maintain this ability in emotionally dynamic group situations – and not to react, as they had previously, with avoidance, uncompromising schism or violent escalation.

Particularly as concerns the "lifeworld-narrative" technique, the "*culture factor*" opens up a highly original spectrum of methodological possibilities – that are not yet systematically used by *Violence Prevention Network*, but showed their potential with the work of *Cultures Interactive*. The trusting narration of personal experience can be particularly effectively prompted and intensified using cultural and fictional narrative and/or individual creativity. Particularly with youths from problem areas, a group which is hard to reach, *Cultures Interactive* employs forms of praxis taken from urban youth culture that offer the young adults readily accessible methods for personal self-expression, and which can thereby help to attain a significant deepening of the pedagogic process. Even drawing on films or song texts that the participants indicate to be personally important or interesting, opens up numerous possibilities for working on biographical or lifeworld experiences, which can then be taken up in the group discussion. In a person's mental handling of a fictional narrative of his or her own choice, particular personal themes or "developmental challenges" are consistently brought to the fore that can be used for the shared process. Of course the prerequisite for this is that a *lifeworld-narrative and relationship-based access* approach is used and that the facilitator practices an *attentive-critical attitude*.

In comparison with the fundamentally different, what could be called behaviouristic approaches, it can be said that, when taken out of context, individual elements out of a complex technique like the VPN or CI approach have proven barely to function and sometimes even to be unadvisable – in other words, to remove particular exercises, role plays, methods of arrangement or didactic modules of civic education from the

⁷ Also cf. Harris, D.M., Selyn, J. & Bush J.: Positive and Supportive Authority: An Approach to Offender Management and Supervision (in preparation), and: Harris, D.M. & Riddy, R. (2008). The Thinking Skills Programme Facilitation Manual. Ministry of Justice. Harris, D.M. & Bush, J. (2010). Ono to One Cognitive Self Change. NOMS Cymru.

concept as a whole, and to practice them outside the trusting, process-based and relational context of the directed group, will barely be successful. Even maintaining the process-based context requires that care must be taken not to carry out the modules, exercises and role-plays etc. too early, before the framework of trust necessary for life-world narrative work has been reliably generated. This is because there is a danger that the exercises are only performed by the participants for the sake of politeness, or that they descend into more or less open boredom, and that the biographical investigations remain superficial and clichéd.

The even greater risk of a technique that tries to employ selected exercises while dispensing with the context of relations, process and group, is that in acutely emotional situations particularly vulnerable individuals will enter states of fear and rage, since they are unable to rely on the security of a relational framework of trust, one that because of their psychologically fragile condition they absolutely require. Methods such as the “hot seat”, where the violent offender is provoked with insults and physical assault, so that he learns not to lose control and resort to violence, need to be cautioned against. People that have learned both the narrative and the pure training approaches were able to provide particularly useful assessments here. External assessments also reached the conclusion that methodically isolated provocation exercises of this sort are disadvantageous. They run the danger of exacerbating precisely what these young people can do all too well (and what is not good for them): bottling things up and hanging in there, until in real life the affect breaks out – at the expense of others. A *critical-attentive* attitude and systematic relational and narrative work in the trust-framework of the group is therefore an essential prerequisite if individual exercises and modules are to have a lasting and low-risk impact. It is all the more important to emphasize this, since in the last decade anti-aggression work has been strongly characterized by such approaches.⁸

(4) Summary of impact factors and practice guidelines

Hence, to sum up, the good-practice research on *Violence Prevention Network's* and *Cultures Interactive's* methods of intervention has formulated the following criteria indicating that a method is effective and that participants begin to embark on favorable changes of attitude and behaviour. Valid criteria are any signs which indicate that the offender/ vulnerable person

(1) has begun to build a greater degree of *personal confidence and trust* with facilitators and with the group – and thus increased his capacity to built trust in relationships even during conflicting and challenging phases of (group) interaction.

⁸ It is possible to learn a this lesson through a similar methodological trend in psychotherapy: the family arrangement of Bernd Hellinger. Here, the long-established and highly effective methodological element of „family constellation“ has been removed from the therapeutic (trust) framework and been used as an isolated – and sensational – technique. The bitter consequence has been psychiatric interments and suicides, as well as occasionally highly questionable ideological implications.

(2) has begun to build a new attitude about and appreciation for *personal memories* and for the emotional experience of *remembering personally lived-through events* – in particular positively charged events.

(3) has begun to developed a new sense and appreciation for *telling stories/* narrating personally experienced occurrences – regardless of what scope and significance the experience has – and actively listen to such narrations, and thus increased his/her capacity to *partake in narrative interaction*.

(4) has made experiences of *emotional learning / building emotional intelligence* and thus has begun to realize and reflect upon one's own personal emotions and about situations of emotional involvement – in particular situations and emotions of embarrassment/ shame, insecurity, fear, and helplessness.

(5) has acquired some recognition of *personal ambivalence* and has thus experienced that he himself and/or others often are of two minds about concrete real-life situations and that one has to make decisions and negotiate compromise.

(6) has begun to built a new appreciation for and capacity *to argue or struggle with others in non-destructive ways* – be it issues of political, religious, or personal nature, i.e. to argue without either turning verbally abusive or withdrawing from the interaction.

In view of these basic criteria of favorable personal changes, the following impact factors and practice-guidelines for de-radicalisation work could be determined: The methodological prerequisites of any successful approach are

(i) that the facilitators of the pedagogic intervention come from *outside the institution* and are able to act independently; this is required in light of the indispensable process of confidence-building which is generally most difficult to achieve with this target group; being able to provide a *secure and confidential space* for the participants to speak and interact, seems to be one of the most important success factors of these approaches;

(ii) that the *institution* does, however, signal its high esteem of the incoming outside facilitators (which requires containment of any impulses of professional competitiveness or feelings of envy) and that the institution itself is *interested and actively involved* – for example in staff training or workshops given by these facilitators;

(iii) above all, that significant parts of the work takes place *in the group and with the group*, and thus attention is paid to the processes and developments in and of the participants and their *group-dynamic* relationships with one another, a prerequisite which is due to the fact that hate crimes are generally group-dynamically induced and that hate crime offenders and vulnerable persons have often been raised in overexerted

one-on-one relationships to their single parents – and therefore are all the less experienced in and more vulnerable to escalating group-dynamics;

(iv) that a *conducive dosage* of group intensity (off-set with pedagogical exercises and supplementary-supportive one-on-one conversations) is borne in mind;

(v) that the professional persona and intervention style of the facilitator focuses on generating a *trusting and resilient* relationship, both in the group and in the one-on-one sessions, and that this relationship is nurtured constantly;

(vi) but also, that a facilitator style of *critical attentiveness* is adopted which also seeks out points of contention and conflict, at the same time observing the basic distinction between the person, which is accepted, and the offence, which is confronted – so that an *respectfully-enquiring exchange* can proceed *both acceptingly and confrontationally*;

(vii) that on the basis of this relationship a mode of *lifeworld-narrative* and *relationship-based* access to the young people is created that enables the occurrence of a trusting and *development-conducive* narrative about personal experience;

(viii) that the factor of *civic education*, political and ideological exchange as well as the *factor of culture* is incorporated (for instance in the form of fictional media narratives) in order to add to the experiential depth of the pedagogical process;

(ix) that the intervention on the whole does, however, feel compelled to following an entirely strict syllabus; due to the above stated principle of the *lifeworld-narrative* and *relationship-based* approach, the need for an *open process* is acknowledged in which the participants group’s spontaneous issues are given priority;

(x) the principle of working with an open process *lifeworld-narrative* and *relationship-based* approach also implies *methodological flexibility* and *eclecticism* with regard to pedagogic tools and therapeutic resources. In particular, the studies and other topical evaluations have recently demonstrated the pitfalls and deficits of two approaches which have been quite predominate during the last decade: (a) pure *anti-aggression trainings* by themselves as well as (b) fully modularized *cognitive-behavioral trainings* seem to have had less effect then previously assumed – unless they are embedded into and off-set with an open-process narrative framework of proceedings;

(xi) that *protective relationships* are inaugurated already during prison time, calling on suitable family members, friends or community members whose personality is fitting the needs and challenges of reintegrating hate crime offenders/ vulnerable persons;

(xii) that with de-facto offenders in prison a *post-release coaching* is put into place which assists them in beginning their new life in the community.

These conditions seem propitious for setting in motion mental processes that in turn can lead to the development of essential personality competencies and emotional intelligence and to the alteration of certain attitudes and forms of behaviour. Clearly, in the future an innovative, interdisciplinary and application-oriented technique is called for. Also, in the development of such innovative interventional methods for use in social work, there are good reasons to look for possible ways in which both the factor of culture and culture studies and the clinical-therapeutic field might be of assistance – and thus to ease the not always easy relationship between social, cultural and clinical work, and between clinical and cultural/social scientific research.

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