Militant Extremism in a Preventive Perspective.

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Foreword

This article comprises experiences and lessons learned from the past 5 years of preventing violent extremism in Denmark. The first part regarding pilot projects consists largely of exempts from the MHT Consult review of the project and the second bit about the comprehensive strategy and organization is inspired by models presented by the PET². It seeks to explain in detail how the entire effort is built upon existing structures within the frame of crime prevention and inclusion. There is hardly a possibility that other countries can import and adapt this framework. However, inspiration and ideas are free to be used in whatever context. For further materials regarding the Danish model, contact the author of the article or visit www.sim.dk (it has publications in English).

Background

2008 saw the launch of a targeted Danish effort against radicalisation and extremism. The government had put out a frame called: “A common and safe future”.

At this point in time, at the request of Gilles de Kerchove, EU’s counter-terrorism coordinator, Denmark was selected as the EU leading country for deradicalisation and prevention of extremist views justifying violence. As lead country, Denmark, and more

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² Danish Security and Intelligence Service (in Danish: Politiets Efterretningstjeneste)
specifically the Division for Democratic Issues at the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, has been responsible for developing and coordinating knowledge, methods and tools that may enhance the effort against radicalisation and extremism. The first efforts were undertaken by the above mentioned in collaboration with a range of partners across the country.

The EU-funded pilot project “Deradicalisation – targeted intervention” has been a pivotal point of the Danish effort. The Division for Democratic Issues has headed the project, which moreover has been anchored in a national partnership between the Division for Democratic Issues, the municipalities of Copenhagen and Aarhus, the East Jutland Police and the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET).

**Pilot projects**

The pilot projects are based on three pillars – or strategies - and these pillars have been consistent up till now.

A **mentoring strategy** focussing on individual mentoring programmes aimed at young people showing signs of radicalisation or engagement in extremist environments. The mentoring strategy was primarily anchored in Aarhus Municipality, but has also been practised in Copenhagen Municipality\(^3\) and in the Prisons and Probations Services’ project “Back on Track”.

A **counselling strategy** focussing on individual and collective counselling activities aimed at professionals working with young people. The counselling strategy was primarily anchored in Copenhagen Municipality, but has since been used in Aarhus Municipality and is now a part of the comprehensive disengagement programme based on “Info houses” in each of the 12 police districts.

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\(^3\) Copenhagen Municipality is used as a synonym of the City of Copenhagen.
An **exit strategy** focussing on individual disengagement processes aimed at individuals who are engaged in violent extremist circles or have been convicted of or charged with extremist criminal activities. The exit strategy was originally anchored in PET but is now also a part of the mentioned “Back on Track”-project.

The development and implementation of the three project strategies has been focussed around four areas of development:

- **Organising the cross-institutional collaboration and the individual strategies.**
- **Defining target groups for the strategies.**
- **Developing methods to support the strategies.**
- **Competence requirements and competence development in the strategies.**

In the context of developing the organisational structure of the project, organisational models have been built to support the cross-institutional collaborative effort as well as each of the three project strategies in the municipalities and PET.

In the context of the project’s target group definition, a range of target group profiles have been formulated, describing the target groups on the basis of their affiliation with extremist environments and their need for support and intervention.

In the context of method development, an array of methods and tools have been compiled for the purpose of the mentoring processes, counselling processes and exit talks, focussing particularly on radicalisation and extremism.

In the context of competence development, a skills enhancement programme has been conducted focussing on the special efforts of the three project strategies.

Figure 1 below provides a complete overview of aims, strategies and areas of development in the pilot project.
Lessons learned from the holistic collaborative approach

With its cross-institutional partnership, the pilot project has bridged the gap between the preventive efforts of the municipalities and the security efforts of PET, based on lessons such as:

- The sooner a preventive effort is carried out to effectively address worrying behaviour and welfare problems among young people, the smaller the risk that such welfare problems may lead to political or religious radicalisation towards extremist crime or terror.
• The better equipped the municipal youth workers are in terms of having the knowledge and methods for handling early signs of radicalisation, the smaller the risk that young people become deeply involved in a radicalisation process.

• The more the municipalities and PET are able to exchange general, non-personal information about extremist environments as well as methods for dealing with worrying behaviour, the better the possibilities of averting radicalisation and extremism among young people at an early stage.

As one of the most important findings the pilot project has highlighted the need for authorities to adopt a holistic approach, ensuring a systematic interplay between security-related and preventive efforts in the general national effort against radicalisation and extremism.

In practice, this has manifested itself in the mutual benefits that the project partners have gained from sharing knowledge and exchanging methods for addressing personal welfare problems and worrying behaviour among young people.

Thus, one of the main conclusions and learning points was that it is necessary to extend and develop the level of collaboration between PET and the municipalities, in relation to the future efforts against radicalisation and extremism among young people.

It was recommended that the project partners carry out a systematic dissemination of the positive lessons and benefits from the cross-institutional collaboration and the holistic approach among other police districts and municipalities in Denmark. The dissemination took place in the context of the course activities, which the Division for Democratic Issues and PET organised for personnel in the Danish SSP system. This in turn presented the opportunity to form info houses or similar structures in each of the police districts.

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4 The Danish SSP system is a local collaboration between Schools, Social services and Police with the aim of preventing crime among children and adolescents in the municipalities and local areas.
A comprehensive strategy for the prevention of militant extremism

The Danish welfare model in general and the SSP structure in particular is key to the way the strategy has been implemented. In other words; the effort was built in to already existing crime prevention and social cohesion structures. Key persons from the existing structures were given a seminar to enhance their understanding of the nature of militant extremism, their ability to deal with the mindsets of violence-condoning extremists and their tools to work with youths in a radicalisation process.

The prevention pyramid – in the context of violent extremism

Danish crime prevention is world famous for its success in reducing youth crime. Since the beginning of the 1980’s youth crime has been measured and crime rates have increasingly dropped. The SSP has been around since the 1980’s as a collaborative between schools, social services and police. The focus for SSP is on the safeguarding of young people. Consequently the law was passed in 1989 that made it possible to share information about citizens between authorities (§115), but solely for preventive purposes and never as part of an ongoing investigation. This demands trust and this trust between the SSP and the public as well as between the SSP and its professional network has been solidified through many years making it an ideal platform for crime prevention efforts that involve civil society, families, groups of people and individuals. The concept of crime prevention is scaled in three arenas as shown below.
Starting from the left, the two arrows are meant to show the level of concern based on the normal criminogenic risk factors – and in this case to some extent the ideological (or motivational) factors. Then starting from the bottom, the primary arena is where most of the effort is put – building capacity and resilience in the community. The societal predispositions vary and with it the risk of violent extremism or a “breeding ground”.

The secondary arena holds the specific effort, which is a broader, but targeted prevention of risk behaviour in a risk-willing group.

The tertiary arena is the individual-oriented effort. In the following chapter, each arena will be covered in depth.

The Danish prevention perspective

Should extremism be prevented or not? It depends on the level of concern and the actions entailed in the individual’s radicalization. From the rise of a concern to a possible intervention a number of steps are taken. It is important to underline the difference
between ideology and crime, since Danish legislation allows for freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of organisation.

Firstly, a clarification or risk assessment is needed. Is there a risk that criminal incidents will occur?

The assessment may show a decrease in the level of concern or, more seldom, an increased concern that something criminal may occur in a near future.

Secondly, an inspection is done from the “minimal agent principle” – collecting objective, social and subjective data and describing the nature of the threat and possible intensity of a criminal act.

**The arena of PRIMARY PREVENTION**

The preventive measures in this arena focus on society, social capital, assumptions and resilience.

The prerequisites are – in a sociological discourse these are not new – the hotbed of frustrations or push factors: Social problems, poverty, disintegration and anomie.

It is important to minimize push factors and strengthen resilience through:

- Maternity, health and day care with home visits
- Normative and network-based approach in primary
- Democratic formation, integration and citizenship
- Inclusive social capital - macro and meso
- Trust in government (social service institutions, police, etc.).
- Parent programs

**The arena of SECONDARY PREVENTION**

The arena consists of group dynamics, ideology and what is called the risk zone.

The front employee's observations are at-risk groups (social discourse) and indications.
The indications are seen as situational risk factors such as circumstantial evidence, brands, symbolism and the radicalization of subjects. The staff looks at individual attractions and pull-factors, the subject’s functionality level and the context on several levels – both in the community and in the group’s infrastructure (core / periphery).

There are more tactics to be employed in relation to countering group-based violent extremism: One being the *de-capitation* of the group (not meant literally, though) by targeting the intervention at the perceived leader of the group.

Another effort is to *peal the group* – breaking it up into individuals. This can be done as push or pull (carrot or stick) by either an *alternative supply* or by putting up *barriers* – obstructing the group dynamics. The risk being that the group may split up, but form new, smaller units.

The arena is divided between groups and individuals in the framework. The tools in terms of individuals at risk are from educational psychology, but also observation of the individual, knowledge about ideology and risk zones.

**The front employee's observations are at-risk individuals (empirical discourse) and indications.**

**Indications (Situational risk factors):**

- Radicalization object / ideology
- Change of character
- Surroundings / network response

**Confessions (Partly situational)**

- Isolated and alienated in society
- Disgraced, humiliated or treated unfairly
- Need for identity and the desire to belong
- Disillusionment - Clarity by absolute solutions
- Martyrs, role models, heroes and mythology
- Personal revenge or hatred
- Extreme positions - "us / them" "good / evil"
- Acceptance of the violence used instrumentally

If the basis of concern or suspicion is maintained, a personalized inspection may come into play.

**The arena of TERTIARY PREVENTION**

In the arena of tertiary prevention, the front employee is personally committed in an *individual intervention*. It may be exit, case management and so forth.

**Firstly**, a personalized inspection and risk assessment is done – looking at motivation and (mental) capability:

Ideological factors and their consistency, for example:

- Positioning (typology)
  - Ideologues / follower / risk
  - Counterculture context (indignation driver)
  - Personally committed and responsible
- Implications (price and reward)
  - Personally
  - Family and primary social networks
  - Local Environment and Society

**Secondly**, attention is given to the general risk and protective factors, such as:

- Attachment to family
- Attachment to primary network and community
- Intelligence, reasoning and problem solving abilities
• Proneness to influence, mental resilience or health

**Thirdly,** if concern is maintained, a personalized effort through professional social work is in action based on the cross-sectoral § 115 – enabling a holistic approach:

• Identifying the nearest professional to the subject
• Work with push and pull factors:

  **Ideologists**
  → discouraged by the lack of correlation between resources, objectives and performance.
  → motivated by intellectual challenge that provides meaning and status.

  **Follower**
  → discouraged by the disloyalty of the group, or competing considerations (e.g. family).
  → motivated by the Community and the accessories.

  **Risk willing**
  → discouraged by long discussions and wait.
  → motivated by action and taking risks

Prevention is done through the strengthening of social skills and attachment to the community.

It is important to stress, that the approach is “Soft on ideology - tough on crime” and allows the subject to speak freely in a safe space with for instance a mentor. The action and mentoring programs are well structured, long and intensive, besides being multi-disciplinary, holistic and coherent.

The mentor / Significant Other helps against barriers (stuck / stay), push factors (living conditions), but also in enhancing existence competencies, the mobilisation of resources (systemic). Other areas of effort from the mentor could be:

- Alternative supply (attractions / pull factors)
- Cognitive de-construction/re-structuring (the self and the outside world)
- Challenging narratives (competent opponent)
- Motivation / Empowerment

When dealing with the individual, there is also the factor of life/system transitions to be taken into consideration. Life changing events such as deaths, births, love or disability along with structural changes (job, school etc.) have the potential for a huge impact on a person’s life. A lot of crime and terror is the individual’s attempt to create moments of controlling supremacy – in other words; finding ways to power and control in a situation where power and control has been taken from the individual.

Info house – the common entry point for expressing concerns

The info house is modelled on a Dutch scheme and comprises an information and counselling service that offers youth workers, parents, individual citizens and other relevant players the opportunity to contact the info house if young people in their family or circle of acquaintances give rise to concerns about radicalisation and extremism. The info house was first established in connection with the broad anti-radicalisation effort “Prevention of discrimination and radicalisation in Aarhus”. Since then, the info house model has come to play a central organisational role throughout the country.

Organisation of info houses

Organisationally, the Info house is placed under the police, and ad-hoc part-time has been allocated for professionals, who have a police or SSP background and special insight into youth radicalisation processes and extremism. Info house is not a physical office, but rather a virtual function comprising a hotline where youth workers or other citizens can seek written or telephone counselling if they need a risk assessment of worrying behaviour among young people and further advice.

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5 Like the effort in Copenhagen Municipality, the joint effort in Aarhus Municipality has been inspired by the “Wij Amsterdammers” programme, which is a similar effort against radicalisation and extremism in the Municipality of Amsterdam.
The info house carries out an initial assessment of the young person’s current situation, identifying resources and concerns - for instance the existence of pending cases concerning the young person and his/her family, such as reports on worrying absence from school, vandalism, special issues regarding parents’ illnesses, etc. Following the preliminary assessment, the professional will hand over the case in the “section 115 meetings” of the interdisciplinary working group, who will then make an overall assessment of risks and needs based on the young person’s general life situation and most urgent needs for support. In some cases, the interdisciplinary risk assessment will result in the young person being offered mentoring, but it is generally the case, that counselling is given to empower local social workers or parents in order to aid and safeguard the young person.

The model below is an overview of the structure of the Danish infohouse model.

To the left are the levels of execution and their authority. The capacity to detect concerns and act accordingly is local and hands-on with the possibility of assistance from the info
house. This means that the level of operations can be kept in accordance with the level of concern, so as not to draw in unnecessary measures.

The district council consists of mayors from the municipalities within the police district and the respective police director. They handle matters from a strategic level. Each municipality has a local council made up of city administration officials including the SSP, 1 or 2 politicians and local police. They are the authority on the tactical level.

The SSP secretariat is of different shapes and sizes across Denmark, since each of the 98 municipalities decide autonomously how to implement crime prevention. Most often it consists of SSP advisers and SSP street workers and sometimes a policeman from the crime preventive department of the local police. There are local network groups where the different institutions (e.g. schools, youth clubs) are represented. The SSP and the local network groups coordinate efforts and empower a locally based preventive unit (e.g. a social worker, teacher, mentor, role model) to deliver an intervention of proportionate equity with the level of concern – the operational level of the diagram.

The info house is, as mentioned, a counselling service provided by an (or more) SSP adviser(-s) and/or policeman with in-depth knowledge about the mechanisms of radicalisation towards violent extremism. The police have got a reporting system called PMT, where they report extremist events (violence, hate crimes, vandalism, slander etc.) to PET.

The following model shows the overall chronology of the Danish prevention model. The green end to the left is the primary arena, where police and municipalities cooperate to build capacity and awareness along with positive measures (teaching citizenship, democracy, critical thinking etc.).

The yellow zone to the left is the secondary arena, where the SSP is doing work with at-risk groups and individuals. The red zone is the tertiary arena, where individualized efforts are done (mentoring, exit talks, exits). The white zone is investigation, indictment and

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6 The Prisons and Probations Services have a similar reporting system called KMT.
prosecution (white oval says “conviction”). After conviction, exits will be attempted again to prevent further incidents/recidivity.

Prevention model - chronological

**Perspective**

The long term perspective of this prevention model is hard to foresee, since it is, after all, a product of politics. However, it looks like the model has found its place alongside preventive schemes dealing with other types of risk behaviour. To view violent extremism as such is also to have the upper hand in an ethical understanding of the matter. Society is not cracking down on “wrong thoughts”, but on criminal acts – which severs it from the nightmare vision of a Big Brother society, a police state or a dictatorship. This in turn diminishes the arguments against society from many of the known extremist groups.

So far Denmark has not had serious (in terms of multiple fatalities and the breakdown of the state) terrorist attacks on its own soil. Being in the top three of likely countries to be attacked by large scale terrorist attacks for a number of years has not been a situation to be taken lightly – and the success of the preventive measures should never become a pillow to rest on. The threat fluctuates and so must the effort in prevention. All we can foresee is that we will not be able to foresee the next threat.