

Local initiatives to counter violence-promoting political extremism

A COLLECTION OF EXAMPLES

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Foreword

In September 1995, 400 right-wing extremists gathered in Deje, in the Swedish county of Värmland, for a white supremacy concert. The presence of right-wing extremists brought about a dramatic rise in violence and criminality in this small community and in reaction prompted the formation of the Brottsförebyggande Centrum i Värmland (Crime Prevention Centre in Värmland). The focus of the centre included preventive initiatives targeting people in the white supremacy environment and individuals at risk of being drawn into these destructive groups. Värmland improved the efficiency of its crime prevention work through a long-term approach, clearly defined objectives and coordination of society's every resource.

In the late 1990s, a group of right-wing extremists in Jönköping also attracted the attention of young anti-fascists, creating extensive problems associated with political extremism. Schools, recreation facilities and social services quickly established a close partnership to tackle the challenges they faced. Group activities for young people and their parents, study days and visiting work are just some of the measures taken within the municipality.

In recent years, we have also seen the recruitment of young people to extremist Islamist groups and increased radicalisation, not least in the suburbs of Rinkeby in Stockholm and Rosengård in Malmö. In order to establish exactly what the problems are, the Government commissioned the Swedish Security Service to investigate the extent of violence-promoting Islamist extremism in Sweden. A report was published in December 2010. There are currently no measures specifically aimed at tackling or dealing with violence-promoting Islamist extremism, with work instead focused on preventive work and success factors such as networks and relationship building.

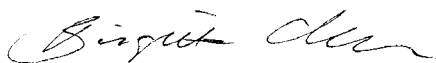
The municipalities have all met different challenges, but the success factors have proven to be the same: dialogue, collaboration and an inclusive approach. In a vibrant democracy, with respect for the human rights of individuals and their opportunities for influence, there is no justification for the use of violence – or the threat of violence – to prevent or restrict another individual's opportunities to participate in an open democratic society. That is a threat to democracy, a threat to human rights, and something we want to help counter.

In 2009, on behalf of the Government, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention and the Swedish Security Service produced a report on violent extremism in Sweden within the context of the right-wing white supremacy movement and left-wing autonomists. The report stated that municipalities and local partners have launched several successful local initiatives to counter violence and political extremism, but such measures have never been collated.

In the document that you have before you, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions has been funded by the Government to pull together illustrative examples from Sweden and other countries in Europe of local work to prevent and counter political extremism that promotes and advocates violence for political purposes, or that constitutes a threat to the rights and freedoms of the individual. Municipalities, county councils, regions and public agencies in this field who need to take preventive action against extremism are hereby given the opportunity to share local experiences of such measures.

The collection of examples is based on interviews conducted by Agneta Blom, Josefine Dos Santos, Anna-Lena Lodenius, Lena Norberg and Kenneth Ritzén. The steering committee for the project comprised Gunilla Glasare of the Growth and Community Development Division at the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, and Marcus Brix-skiöld of the Division for Democracy at the Government Offices.

Stockholm i oktober 2011



Birgitta Ohlsson
Minister for Democracy



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Introduction and background

While all municipalities are unique, they have a great deal in common. The aim of this collection is to provide support for municipalities, regions, organisations and other bodies who wish to strengthen their work to counter violence-promoting political extremism. The initiatives described here can form the basis for discussions and exchange of experience, and provide tips on what local work against political extremism might look like.

Background

In recent years, the Government has intensified its work to counter violence-promoting political extremism. A concerted build-up of knowledge has been required in order to take targeted measures against groups and individuals who use threats and violence to achieve political objectives, and to promote preventive initiatives.

Last year, for example, saw publication of the report ‘Våldsamt politisk extremism’ (*Violent Political Extremism*) from the Swedish Security Service (SÄPO) and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), and the Swedish National Defence College report ‘Hot mot demokrati och värdegrund’ (*Threats to democracy and social values*). These show the challenges in Sweden associated with violence-promoting political extremism from the white supremacy movement, autonomous groups and extremist Islamist groups, as well as highlighting continued development needs and gaps in our knowledge.

As a result of the conclusions in SÄPO and Brå's report, the Government commissioned the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs to investigate the existence of and need for exit programmes that support people who want to leave or have left groups that promote threats and violence to achieve political objectives.¹ The Government also asked the Security Services to compile a report on violence-promoting Islamist extremism in Sweden.²

Another area in need of greater knowledge and robust exchange of experience has also been identified: establishing which local measures are effective in countering violent political extremism. To this end, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (SKL) has been granted funds to identify examples of how extremism can be tackled at local level.³ The following collection of examples is the result of this work.

Contents of the collection

The document opens with a general presentation of the terms and definitions associated with violence-promoting political extremism and work to counter such extremism. This introductory chapter also has a short section on the growth, extent and organisation of various groups who promote threats and violence as a means to achieve political objectives. There then follows a chapter on how we hope that this document will provide support for those working at a local and regional level or within a public agency. It also outlines the choices we have made concerning our selection of examples and initiatives. The chapter thereafter presents eleven Swedish and international examples of how local bodies have tackled political extremism. A few examples of initiatives and operations aimed at strengthening social cohesion in the local community are then briefly sketched out in the next chapter. In the final chapter, we highlight general conclusions and success factors that can be drawn from local initiatives to counter political extremism. The document concludes with some recommended reading for those who wish to delve deeper into this field.

Terms and definitions

Violence-promoting political extremism is an umbrella term for non-democratic expression, where violence and threats are used or advocated as a

1. Government Decision IJ2009/2331/DEM. Commissioning the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs to investigate activities that help young people to leave groups that promote threats and violence to achieve political objectives. 17.12.2009
2. Government Decision IJ2010/262/DEM. Commissioning the Swedish Security Service to compile a report on violence-promoting Islamist extremism. 11.02.2010
3. Government Decision IJ2009/2136/DEM. Funding for the Swedish Association of Local Authorities to identify examples of how extremism is being tackled at local level. 26.11.2009

means of achieving political objectives. Both in Sweden and internationally, work to counter political extremism focuses primarily on three different types of grouping: white supremacy movements, left-wing autonomists and Islamist extremists.

Radicalisation is also a term that crops up regularly in Swedish and international debates on political extremism and is perhaps most readily associated with the discourse on Islamist extremism. The Security Service describes radicalisation as the processes that lead to an ideological or religious activism aimed at implementing far-reaching change in society. In the long term, radicalisation may lead to an individual or group using, supporting or advocating violence for political purposes.⁴

The terms used in the general debate on political extremism can often be perceived as politically charged and the meaning of the terms is much debated in the arenas of research, politics and the mass media. This applies not least to issues surrounding violence-promoting Islamist extremism.

Whatever the movement being discussed and the terms being used, the key factor is the difference between violent and non-violent political engagement and expression. Freedom of opinion and freedom of expression are rights enshrined in the constitution. It is only when the means used to achieve political objectives impinge on the ability of other individuals or groups to exert their influence in society that political opposition turns into violence-promoting political extremism and a threat to democracy.

Another term used and concept examined in this collection of examples is social cohesion. The term social cohesion means different things in different contexts. According to the Swedish Government's paper 'Dialog om samhällets värdegrund' (Dialogue on society's values) social cohesion has the following features:

- › There is a generally shared view that all individuals and groups contribute to and are important to society.
- › People have the same rights, obligations and opportunities, irrespective of gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnic background, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.
- › There is general knowledge and awareness of the individual's rights, obligations and responsibilities in relationship to society and fellow citizens.
- › The public has confidence in society and the authorities and their ability to treat individuals fairly and within the rule of law.
- › People feel that they belong to, and are part of society, and have trust in their fellow citizens.⁵

4. <http://www.sakerhetspolisen.se/omsakerhetspolisen/radikaliseringochavradikalisering.4.5bf42a90120f330faf80002008.html>. 04.11.2010

5. Government paper 2009/10:106. Dialog om samhällets värdegrund (Dialogue on society's values)

In the long run, initiatives aimed at strong social cohesion will create a more democratic, respectful and considerate local community. The link between social cohesion and initiatives to counter violence-promoting political extremism will be examined in more detail in the chapter *Focusing on common ground – initiatives to encourage local dialogue and social cohesion*.

Violence-promoting political extremism in Sweden

It was during the 1980s that violence-promoting political extremism from the right-wing extremist and the left-wing autonomous groups became established in Sweden.⁶

The growth of the white supremacy movement in Sweden was inspired by white power in the USA and skin-heads in the UK. Their political agenda has links to National Socialism, but is generally xenophobic and against a multicultural and heterogeneous society. An enlightened dictatorship is seen as the ideal. Islam and homosexual, bisexual and transsexual people are highlighted as a threat to society and the traditional nuclear family.

The left-wing autonomous movement in Sweden developed partly as a counter movement to the white supremacists, but their anarchistic attitudes also manifested themselves in a wave of house occupations. They stand against the exploitation of people, animals and the environment that they feel capitalist society has caused. The goal of the left-wing autonomous groups is a classless society with no capitalist interests or authoritarian leaders.

White supremacist groups currently include the Swedish Resistance Movement and a political party called the Party of the Swedes. Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) and the Revolutionary Front are examples of left-wing autonomous networks. Within both the white supremacist and left-wing autonomous movements, more temporary campaigns and targeted actions also occur. Svensk ungdom, Sveriges framtid (*Swedish Youth, Sweden's Future*), which spreads its message partly through festivals and concerts, is one example of a campaign within the white supremacist movement. The far left has action groups such as the Animal Liberation Front and Reclaim the Streets.

When it comes to violence-promoting Islamist extremism, it is the job of SÄPO to analyse the situation in Sweden. Its report was due to be presented to the Government in December 2010.

6. The Brå and SÄPO report 'Våldsamt politisk extremism' (*Violent political extremism*) gives a relatively detailed description of the growth of violence-promoting political extremism among the white supremacist and anarchist movements in Sweden.

Groups who advocate threats and violence to achieve political objectives

It is difficult to produce any absolute facts on the existence or organisation of the various groups or individuals in Sweden who advocate threats and violence to achieve political objectives.

In terms of extent, analyses have focused primarily on white supremacist and left-wing autonomous groups. According to the report by SÄPO and Brå, over 1,400 people have been convicted or accused of politically motivated crime. Problems have arisen across practically the whole of Sweden, both in metropolitan areas and rural areas, but the north of Sweden has been slightly more affected than other regions. As mentioned before, the results of SÄPO's Government inquiry are awaited with regard to the extent of violence-promoting Islamist extremism.

In its report from 2009, Brå and SÄPO state that the level of political extremism, at least within the white supremacist and left-wing autonomous environment, remains relatively constant nationwide. However, problems can be fluid locally, quickly escalating or receding. Challenges can arise and disappear due to a leading figure or driving force within a politically extremist group moving into or leaving a particular location. Certain groups may also consciously try to establish a presence in places or regions where they believe they may find support or where their opponents already have a presence. Recruitment, which to a large degree focuses on young people, often takes place at secondary and upper secondary schools. The internet has also become an increasingly important communication channel for these groups.

The white supremacist movement is usually described as more organised and hierarchical, while the left-wing autonomists are more loosely associated and network-based. Within the discourse on violence-promoting political extremism, various groups of supporters, with different degrees of association, commitment and influence, are often discussed. The leadership or core adherents are the individuals who drive the group's activities. Supporters or sympathisers can be said to be members of the group or movement, but the term describes a broad spectrum of individuals with different levels of commitment and involvement. They agree to a varying extent with the group's strategies and are often present at its rallies and events. 'Hangers-on' are those individuals who have started moving towards politically extremist groups but who are not yet active members. The difference between these various levels of association is important in adapting initiatives to the circumstances and needs of the various target groups.

For more details, see the recommended reading list at the end of this document.



Learning from and being challenged and inspired by others

Allowing yourself to learn from and be challenged and inspired by others in a constructive way can be easier said than done. Few initiatives can be transferred or copied wholesale between municipalities. However, we are convinced that methods, initiatives, perspectives and results in one municipality can encourage new thinking and ways of working in another. It is possible that new contacts will be created between the municipalities whose work is described here and other players who want to drive their work forward. It is our hope, at least, that this collection of examples will provide concrete ideas, suggestions and thoughts that may help strengthen local work to counter political extremism.

Local initiatives to counter violence-promoting political extremism

Local initiatives to counter violence-promoting political extremism can cover a multitude of things, based on differing circumstances and purposes. The approaches in this collection of examples vary widely. The common thread running through the local examples presented here is their aim to strengthen society's resistance to and ability to deal with political extremism.

The initiatives that we have selected may focus on promotion, prevention and counteraction. The aim of a promotional initiative is to strengthen and stimulate the democratic forces for good in society. The aim of preventive work is to try and prevent a problem associated with political extremism from occurring in the first place. Counteractive initiatives are specific measures initiated as a consequence of a concrete problem in the local town or region. Many of the examples highlighted in this document cannot be said to apply an exclusively promotional, preventive or counteractive approach, instead often presenting elements of each.

The local initiatives presented also address a broad field of actions and activities. Some are time-limited projects, while other initiatives are part of ongoing activities. A number of the initiatives are run exclusively by public sector bodies, while others are run by, or in collaboration with, stakeholders in the private or civil sector. Overall, this collection highlights the diversity of the activities that the local community can take to counter and counteract political extremism.

About the local examples in this document

The municipalities and other stakeholders whose work we describe here have all launched initiatives that at least partly aim to tackle and prevent violence-promoting political extremism. Some municipalities have needed to tackle concrete problems of political extremism, while others work on a broader front to counter a spectrum of destructive and criminal phenomena. The problems and interventions of some municipalities have attracted coverage in the media, while others have maintained a low profile.

The selection of local examples is in no way scientific and makes no claim to be presenting best practice in the field. It also does not give a complete picture of work being conducted locally to counter and counteract violence-promoting political extremism. The examples are simply a random selection of local initiatives that we hope will be able to inspire other local stakeholders to take a strong stance against political extremism.

Local initiatives to counter violence-promoting political extremism – eleven examples

Värmland – collaboration without unnecessary bureaucracy

Challenge

In September 1995, around 400 neo-Nazis from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands gathered in Deje in Värmland for a concert of white supremacist music. The event was an eye-opener for the region, where it was clear that the white supremacist movement had established itself, bringing with it violence and criminality.

Initiatives

As a response to the problems, that same year saw the formation of the *Brottsförebyggande Centrum i Värmland* (BFC – *Crime Prevention Centre in Värmland*), whose primary purpose is to counter all forms of racism, intolerance and politically motivated violence. The operation is run as a non-profit organisation and is funded by both public and private stakeholders in Värmland.

The BFC brings together schools, police, the Social Insurance Agency, the Public Employment Service, social services and recreation facilities to counter political extremism based on the roles and responsibilities of each organisation. The starting point for all BFC activities is a careful analysis of the situation in the locality or region. Different interventions are required to tackle the elite, sympathisers and hangers-on within the white supremacist

environment. Rather than acting on a broad front, the BFC has chosen to focus its initiatives on people within the white supremacist environment and individuals at risk of being drawn to these destructive groups. Below are a few examples of BFC's activities:

- › Constant communication and joint analysis of the situation in the region and of individuals or groups who may be at risk of being drawn to political extremist groups or of committing crime with a political motive. These individuals are kept under scrutiny. Focus on ongoing contacts instead of working groups.
- › Encouraging potential venues to be observant regarding certain dates when neo-Nazis like to arrange festivals and events.
- › Tolerance trips, for example to the Norwegian border, to link up history and the present and to stimulate discussion and reflection.
- › Exchanging knowledge with Exit Fryshuset, which helps people wanting to leave the neo-Nazi movement. The main focus of cooperation is currently the exchange of knowledge and experience, but some attempts have been made by Exit Fryshuset and BFC to jointly go in and support other municipalities with problems.

Other initiatives include class grandpas or class grandmas for many of the region's schools, and the Democracy Centre, which is a break-time and recreational activity focused on value-related issues. *Gnistan* (The Spark) is an activity aimed at imminent school-leavers who run a major risk of adopting a destructive lifestyle that may come to affect their later adult life. BFC also supports local initiatives such as youth programmes in Sunne and Torsby aimed at early intervention in identifying and dealing with pupils who may be about to embark on a life of crime. *Nätverket Värmland mot rasism* (The Network Värmland Against Racism) was formerly run by BFC, but is now under the auspices of the Workers' Educational Association (ABF), which works to maintain regular contact between everyone in the region involved in countering different forms of political extremism and racism.

Results and continued work

BFC remains an active operation. Many of BFC's initiatives are not directly linked to countering criminal activity with *political motives*. Instead they should be seen as broader crime prevention initiatives, but with a continued focus on young people in the danger zone.

Karlskrona – with committed politicians in the vanguard

Challenge

During the 1990s, Karlskrona became a stronghold for Swedish neo-Nazism. For instance, a local neo-Nazi group with around 50 members appeared in the early 90s and went on to form the National Socialist Front (NSF) in 1994.

Initiatives

A broad spectrum of measures were taken to counter the demonstrations, criminality and violence that the white supremacist movement had brought to the municipality. From the outset, the influx of right-wing extremists was met by cross-party and cross-sectoral appeals, networks and action plans against anti-democratic activities.

A municipal network against racism and anti-Semitism comprising the political parties, churches, NGOs, sports movements, unions and a host of other organisations was soon formed. The network was able to mobilise joint demonstrations against right-wing extremism and support themed weeks in schools about racism and anti-Semitism. The Municipal Executive Board also allocated special funds to support activities to counter anti-democratic forces. The grants were made available to associations, organisations, authorities or individuals within the municipality. The focus was on long-term initiatives targeting children and young people.

The Children and Young People's Committee also adopted a policy against anti-democratic activities, requiring active prevention of and intervention against actions that violate people's self-worth. All the school management areas in the municipality drew up local action plans against racism and neo-Nazism.

Towards the end of the 1990s, Karlskrona's strategies against the neo-Nazis hardened. With the municipal commissioner and municipal lawyer leading the way, efforts were made to close down neo-Nazi websites and bank accounts, for example. A couple of politicians and officials also built up personal relations with some neo-Nazis, which led to at least one person leaving the movement in a move that gained mass media attention. In addition, the municipality focused on getting local neo-Nazis out of the benefits system and into work.

Results and continued work

Karlskrona's challenges related to finding the balance between freedom of expression and the Local Government Act's requirement to treat all municipal citizens equally, and using existing legislation in the battle against neo-Nazism. In hindsight, Karlskrona may be self-critical about the documen-

tation of their strategies and activities. The focus lay instead on concrete interventions in the moment.

The work of countering the white supremacy movement continued from the mid-1990s and some way into the 2000s, when the problems gradually disappeared as the central figures of right-wing extremism moved away from Karlskrona.

Trollhättan – collaboration against gang conflict

Challenge

In the early 1990s, Trollhättan experienced major problems of threats and violence, with overtones of political extremism. The issue was rooted in conflict between gangs with an immigrant background and gangs with right-wing extremist links. During the spring and summer of 1993, both gangs of youths were involved in several cases of assault and a mosque was set on fire.

Initiatives

Immediately after the mosque fire, the municipal executive called a crisis meeting with police leaders and others. Having previously toned down the xenophobic dimension of the gang problems, the focus was now placed squarely on tackling the politically motivated violence. The strategy of the municipal executive was not to enter into political confrontation with the right-wing extremists, but instead to bring up issues of political values, integrated with other issues, at all meetings with local young people and adults.

The Security Service also met representatives of the municipality and informed them about local instances of neo-Nazism and right-wing extremism, and close contact was later developed between the police and the Security Service and between the police and municipal representatives. Below are further examples of Trollhättan's interventions:

- ▶ In the project *Klara brott i samverkan* (Clearing up crime in partnership), the police set up a partnership with recreation leaders and others. The project involved five contacts being appointed at each of the two youth centres where the gangs in conflict had their bases. The police also held meetings to talk about recent incidents and clashes. The central heads of the municipality and the police also met on a regular basis.
- ▶ In the *Vernerprojektet* (Verner Project), the municipality's departments for health, children and culture and education worked together on targeted interventions that gradually came to include both gangs. The project received a grant from the Government to take a few of the leading figures in the skin-head gang on a trip to Auschwitz.

- › Trollhättan's recreation centres and schools initiated various types of value-related work with a focus on positive messages rather than preaching against xenophobic ideologies.
- › Various kinds of information campaign were also carried out.

Results and continued work

Trollhättan concentrated much of its energy on mobilising the positive forces in society against political extremism and xenophobia through collaboration, value-related work and information. While some value-related and information initiatives were criticised for having caused further polarisation between the gangs, there was praise for the partnership that Trollhättan managed to establish between the different agencies and groups. As an example, several of the young people who joined the trip to Auschwitz later worked actively in the fight against xenophobia. The whole of the Verner Project (of which the Auschwitz trips were part) ran for seven years, and its systematic multidisciplinary collaboration is cited as the main factor in its success.

Trollhättan now judges violence-promoting political extremism to be only a minor problem.

Jönköping – urgent field work with a low profile

Challenge

Jönköping has seen violence and conflicts with political overtones since the early 1990s. In the late 1990s, a more organised group of right-wing extremists gained a foothold in the municipality, which also attracted young people from Anti-Fascist Action (AFA). During 1999–2000, the clashes and violence between the different groups were particularly serious in Huskvarna.

Initiatives

Jönköping quickly established a strong partnership between schools, recreation facilities and social services to tackle the problems linked with political extremism. Group activities for young people, initiatives to engage parents, study days and visiting work are just some of the measures taken within the municipality.

Jönköping's strategy was based to a large extent on working within the municipality's existing structures and operations. The municipality's field-workers played a key role, working in close collaboration with school staff, recreation leaders and the police.

In 2001, social services appointed a project manager to identify long-term solutions to the conflicts between different gangs in the municipality. The

project, which came to be called Återupprättelsen (Rehabilitation), ran until 2006, with its work organised according to carefully worked-out themes and processes. Building up relations and surveying the situation were particularly important in the preliminary phase. The fieldworkers were able to explain how good contacts within the groups enabled disturbances and conflicts to be stopped on various occasions. The conflicts were followed up and contact was made with parents and other relevant parties.

Results and continued work

Jönköping stood out for its focus on conflict resolution. Tolerance trips and group discussions laid the foundation for establishing relations between individuals in different enemy camps. Rather than being general, the measures were targeted at vulnerable risk groups and individuals who were deemed to be particularly receptive to being drawn into politically extremist circles and destructive gangs.

In its work, Jönköping also stressed the importance of good student welfare services. Those schools that already had successful systems of rules, anti-bullying teams and programmes to handle truancy and conflicts were better placed to tackle the politically motivated violence.

Another core success factor was a clear division of work between social services and the police, and a clear focus on the target group. The police concentrated on the criminal-minded individuals, while social services focused on the hangers-on.

Overall, Jönköping's strategy is characterised by its long-term work through existing channels and structures.

Lund – focusing on greater influence for young people

Challenge

Lund has been a stronghold for left-wing extremists for many decades. Mainly democratic, but also non-democratic methods involving threats and violence have been used. In the early 1990s, for example, there were violent demonstrations and clashes between right-wing extremists and left-wing autonomous groups on 30 November, a day of marches marking the death of King Karl XII.

The problem ebbed away after 1993, but the 2006 election marked a new start for the unrest, when the far right Sweden Democrats won seats on the City Council. During 2006–2007, left-wing activists conducted a campaign of threatening behaviour against certain local politicians and officials, and pilloried them on various internet forums. The City Council was disrupted

and some meetings had to be held under police guard. On 30 November 2008, there were new clashes between right-wing extremists from Helsingborg, who sought a permit to demonstrate in Lund, and left-wing activists. Some buildings were also occupied.

Initiatives

In the early 1990s, Lund tackled the problem in part by only granting permits to demonstrate outside the city centre and trying to keep both groups apart. The City also started arranging its own activities in central Lund on 30 November, reclaiming the streets for peaceful activities instead of political violence. Lund did not initiate any specific strategy or project to counter, prevent, or counter violent political activism in the city. Instead, functions and activities were set up to give young people greater influence over politics. From 2001–2008, this included a political programme for young people focused on finding better ways to get their views heard within the city. The Youth Council of Lund was established as a result, built on dialogue, influence and conducting its own activities. The council takes the form of a parliament attended by up to 150 people. Everyone is welcome, but only young people aged 12–24 are entitled to vote.

Results and continued work

The Youth Council is popular and is felt to have influence over local politics.

Another important pillar of the work in Lund has been, and continues to be, close collaboration and a coordinated information and communication strategy between the City and the police. This was felt to be a great success, not least in handling the building occupations.

Malmö and Stockholm – preventive partnerships in vulnerable urban districts

Challenge

There is some debate about the incidence of violence-promoting Islamist extremism and tendencies towards increased radicalisation in certain parts of Malmö and Stockholm⁷. Over recent years, alarmist articles, media features and reports have painted a picture of rising recruitment of young people to extremist Islamist groups and increased radicalisation in areas such as Rinkeby and Tensta in Stockholm and Fosie, and not least Rosengård, in

7. As mentioned above, the Security Service has been commissioned to investigate the incidence of violence-promoting Islamist extremism in Sweden. The final report was due to be submitted to the Government in December 2010.

Malmö. The reports have been rebuffed by commentators who believe that the picture is exaggerated, instead expressing a desire to misunderstand and smear Islam, and make it more difficult for Muslims to integrate and gain a sense of belonging within society.

The debate has been intense and the question of what local measures have been taken to counter or deal with any expression of violence-supporting Islamist extremism has been put to some of the districts in the media spotlight. Below is a presentation of their responses.

Initiatives

In summary, no activities were initiated in either Stockholm's Rinkeby and Tensta or Malmö's Rosengård and Fosie with a specific focus on tackling violence-promoting Islamist extremism. Work was instead aimed at preventing young people from being drawn into any conceivable destructive and non-democratic environments. The priority is to work on a broad front to promote security and prevent crime, with success factors including networking, relationship-building dialogues and collaboration.

A range of security-promoting initiatives and targeted projects such as Trygg i Tensta (Safe in Tensta) and Tensta Against Crime have involved field-workers, youth leaders and parents.

Both Malmö and Stockholm emphasise the importance of working with Muslim or other ethnic associations and congregations, where there are suspected problems associated with Islamic extremism in the local community. Leaders such as imams can often have strong legitimacy, knowledge and experience in countering young people's more extremist thoughts with concrete arguments and support.

Collaboration between schools, social services and the police (SSP) occurs in some form in all the districts mentioned. One example is the collaborative group Ungdomsprevention Rinkeby-Kista (Youth Prevention Rinkeby-Kista), whose steering committee includes local police chiefs for Kista and Södra Järva, and representatives of the District Administration, the schools and social services. Fosie has a similar steering committee that can be convened if problems arise, whether or not they are of a political or religious nature.

Results and continued work

The work to promote security and encourage dialogue in the districts is constantly under development. Both Malmö and Stockholm feel that the established collaboration now in place makes them well-placed and well-prepared to handle a broad spectrum of violent and criminal elements, whether or not they have political motives.

Øvre Eiker – strong local engagement leads the way

Challenge

Øvre Eiker is a Norwegian municipality with around 16,000 inhabitants, located 60 km outside Oslo. In July 1995, Øvre Eiker's main town of Hokkesund was the venue for the first concert of white supremacist music in Norway's history. In addition to a large number of journalists, the concert attracted 300 counter-demonstrators from extreme left-wing autonomous groups. The situation became threatening and dramatic, with the police focusing on keeping the right-wing extremists and the left-wing autonomous groups apart.

Initiatives

A couple of days after the concert, many of Øvre Eiker's residents gathered for a protest march under the banner *Spontanaksjon – Øvre Eiker visar ansiktet* (Spontaneous Action – Øvre Eiker Shows Its Face). This proved to be the birth of the citizen-run organisation *Folkbevegelsen Øvre Eiker visar ansiktet* (The Øvre Eiker Shows Its Face Popular Movement), whose aim was to focus on issues and initiatives that promote peoples' equal value and rights. In this way, civil society took considerable responsibility for erasing the negative image of the municipality and creating new visions for the old industrial community.

In 1995, the citizen-driven organisation drew up a manifesto for greater tolerance and democracy which was signed by 2,000 local residents. The manifesto is now proudly displayed on the wall in the Municipal Council chamber in Hokkesund Town Hall. Since then, the municipality has developed further strategies and action plans for Øvre Eiker's democracy work. A strategy document from 2003, for example, clarifies the division of responsibility between politicians and local residents, and this in turn has formed the basis for a new municipal plan.

Success is put down to active municipal leadership and the mobilisation of civil society. Work that was really sparked by the white supremacist concert has now become a much broader drive to promote democracy and incorporate social values into all municipal work. Below are a few examples of how this has manifested itself in practice.

- › Induction training for all new municipal employees, with a focus on the common democratic manifesto.
- › *Toleransbanken* (The Tolerance Bank) – school material on issues of tolerance that is intended to help educational staff incorporate issues of human rights into everyday schoolwork.
- › In 2006, *Folkbevegelsen Øvre Eiker visar ansiktet* was the driving force behind a dialogue forum between Christians and Muslims.

Results and continued work

Øvre Eiker has received attention and prizes for its democracy work. Today, its initiatives span a broad spectrum of work to promote democracy, having become more than an initiative to counter violence-promoting political extremism.

Winschoten – personal intervention against young people in right-wing extremists circles

Challenge

Winschoten is a town in East Gröningen in the Netherlands with just over 20,000 inhabitants and a relatively large Jewish population. In the early 2000s, the right-wing extremist group Blood and Honour set itself up in the town and started to attract young people through meetings, festivals and concerts. The years 2005–2007 saw an increase in neo-Nazi demonstrations, which led to threats, assaults and other problems.

Initiatives

Due to the problems that it was experiencing, in 2007 Winschoten was asked by Forum, an institute for multicultural issues in the Netherlands, to take part in a pilot project on deradicalisation. The aim of the project was to counter further radicalisation and social isolation of young people and thus prevent and counter participation in and support for unacceptable social behaviour such as vandalism, threats and violence. The project's target group was individuals who showed signs of being drawn to right-wing extremist circles or who had already joined such groups. However, the focus was not on the right-wing extremist organisation's inner core of leaders.

Within the framework of the project, young people were offered active support in withdrawing from right-wing extremist circles, for example through help in returning to school, getting a job and finding housing. The goal was not to directly push them to give up right-wing extremist views, but to distance themselves from vandalism, threats and violence, i.e. non-democratic means of expression.

The local authorities and the Government each put up half of the funding for the project in Winschoten. A steering committee was set up, comprising centrally-based figures from the police, social services, youth workers, the schools administration, Opmaat (a Dutch foundation involved in youth unemployment projects) and the local council's committee for youth issues. The steering committee was chaired by the Mayor of Winschoten.

All the practical coordination between the various stakeholders was dealt with by the project's managing body, made up of a contact person for the

youth workers, a police officer who worked with youth crime and two council officials. Their tasks were:

- › to identify the young people who would make up the project's target group,
- › to make contact with each of these young people and
- › to intervene in the young people's lives to try and persuade them to end their involvement in right-wing extremist groups and activities.

Results and continued work

The project, which ran in 2007–2008, produced good outcomes. Fifteen of the 22 people on whom the project focused achieved their set goals to a large extent. By the time the project ended, active right-wing extremism had also chiefly abated in Winschoten.

The work of intervening with young people drawn to right-wing extremist circles has also been continued at regional level. One particular service has been set up by the *Centre for Social Development in Gröningen* to establish contact with representatives of all the local councils in the region, to conduct a survey of right-wing extremist activities among young people in the region and to create new intervention projects. The initiative is supported at the highest political level in the region, which has lent it the legitimacy it needs to continue.

Berlin – mobile advisory teams for help with self-help

Challenge

Germany differs in many ways from Sweden and the Swedish context when it comes to violence-promoting political extremism. One fundamental difference is that neo-Nazi parties are illegal in Germany. Due to its history and relatively active right-wing extremism, there are numerous local, regional and national initiatives and activities aimed at countering right-wing extremism in particular, and political, violence-promoting extremism in general.

Initiatives

Mobile Beratung Gegen Rechtsextremismus (MBR) in Berlin is an organisation that sends out mobile teams to help various organisations develop strategies in their work against political extremism and racism. The focus is very much on the problems associated with right-wing extremism. MBR is part of a network of anti-racist organisations in Berlin, including Reach Out, which documents racist attacks and *Exit*, which supports people who want to leave the neo-Nazi movement. Both MBR and Exit have Scandinavian roots. MBR is based on a Norwegian idea, while Exit is another Norwegian initiative that

only existed for a short time in Norway, but has been around in Sweden since the end of the 1990s⁸.

The MBR team is available to operations such as a youth club, a pub or school that is experiencing problems with political extremism and racism, or that wants to take preventive action on these issues. In its advisory capacity, MBR brings together all the relevant stakeholders within a particular activity or area, analyses the situation and sets up strategies to counter violence and extremism. The idea is that, in the long term, this will strengthen civil society in its ability to get to grips with these problems. It is not the place of MBR to intervene directly in the problems. Their role is to help other stakeholders to do so.

Half of MBR's budget comes from Central Government, while the other half comes from the local council.

Results and continued work

MBR has been set up as a more or less permanent activity that is locally based. This provides various benefits, not least sound knowledge of local circumstances. It has also made it possible to establish networks of stakeholders whose various contributions can complement and support their work.

Copenhagen – precursor to a national action plan against political extremism

Challenge

When Jyllandsposten published the Mohammed cartoons in 2005, parts of the Muslim world unleashed a storm of fury aimed at Denmark. The newspaper was threatened, mass protests broke out in countries such as Pakistan and Syria, Danish companies were boycotted in numerous places and some embassies were attacked. A heated internal debate, military involvement in Afghanistan and ongoing terrorist trials further highlighted the need to prioritise initiatives aimed at preventing and countering expressions of political extremism.

Initiatives

In conjunction with the cartoons of Mohammed, the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) contacted the City of Copenhagen to discuss what it could do to complement PET's obligations and responsibilities concerning political extremism. Based on its competencies and mandate, Copenhagen thus began preventive and security-promoting work in order to deal with young people who risked being attracted to violence-promoting extremist groups.

8. <http://www.acodewear.se/> 04.11.2010

A new plan involving a whole range of different initiatives was drawn up. VINK (Knowledge-Inclusion-Copenhagen), VI KBH'R' (We Copenhageners), anti-discrimination projects and collaborations between schools, social services and the police (SSP) are just some of the programmes that were launched. The aim of VINK was to create an advisory and knowledge forum to which staff in the field, such as social workers, recreation leaders and teachers, could turn when problems linked to political extremism arose.

Examples of VINK's work include telephone advice, support in coordinating problem management, mentoring programmes to provide guidance, and the publication of brochures and additional information on the internet.

The purpose of the campaign *VI KBH'R'*, inspired by the City of Amsterdam's mass campaign *Wij Amsterdammers* (see next section), was to strengthen perceptions of inclusion, community and equal human value, irrespective of religious, ethnic or national background. In partnership with mosques and various clubs and societies, forums were organised to promote dialogue and an exchange of views.

Copenhagen is also involved in international collaborations, one example of which is its partnership with *The RecoRA Institut*, a network that trains European local authorities in how to deal with political extremism and radicalisation. The City is also part of an EU project that the Danish Integration Ministry has developed, based on mentoring programmes.

Results and continued work

Copenhagen's initiatives laid the foundation for Denmark's national action plan *A Common and Safe Future*, which was approved in January 2010 and aims to prevent all forms of violence-promoting political extremism. The action plan comprises seven focus areas, with proposals for 22 targeted initiatives and 40 concrete measures. The plan focuses to a large degree on how stakeholders at local level can work strategically to counter undemocratic manifestations and polarisation of society.

Amsterdam – target group analysis paves the way for local initiatives

Challenge

The murder of Islam critic Theo van Gogh in 2004 prompted an increase in social conflict and more incidences of violence-promoting Islamist extremism in the Netherlands. Together with active xenophobic politicians at national level, the murder provoked increased tensions on the issue of immigration. The Netherlands was now forced to confront and tackle increasingly

violent expressions of political extremism, as well as increased polarisation and social unrest in society.

Initiatives

Amsterdam, which has long wrestled with the issue of segregated local communities, was quick to launch a number of measures to counter the rising trend for radicalisation in society, and several other cities soon followed suit. In the year of van Gogh's murder, Amsterdam unveiled its initiative *Wij Amsterdammers* (We Amsterdammers). The programme initially took a broad approach over three areas, from the repressive and concrete to the preventive and more all-embracing:

- › to counter terrorism and prevent new attacks,
- › to counter radicalisation that could lead to violence-promoting political extremism and
- › to counter polarisation and mobilise positive forces for good.

In addition to a range of concrete measures in each area, the programme included initiatives to improve knowledge regarding extremism, its breeding grounds and the current situation in Amsterdam. The *Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies* (IMES) was commissioned to investigate radicalisation among young people in Amsterdam. The key recommendations presented in the research report were to focus on methods of establishing contact with radical young people so as to avoid 'losing' them, to bolster their faith in society and social cohesion (including an understanding of the nation's politics) and to strengthen the ability of religious bodies to resist the forces of radicalisation.

The strategy has continued to be developed and adapted, based on the results of the study and the experience of people who have been monitoring the work. 2007 saw an intensified action plan, *Amsterdam Against Radicalisation*, which contains measures aimed at three target groups, with targeted intervention packages for each group:

1. Individuals who are already in the process of being radicalised and/or express extremist ideas. Here, efforts are focused on deradicalisation, and on tackling examples of political extremism.
2. Individuals searching for something, who might be receptive to radicalisation. The focus here is on increasing young people's powers of resistance.
3. All residents, including those struggling with poor social conditions, whose development might affect their integration into society. Initiatives in this area focus on improving social cohesion.

The District Administrations have also developed their own individually

tailored action plans. In addition, there is a close collaboration between the City, the police and the *Dutch* General Intelligence and *Security Service*, aimed at dealing better with expressions of violence-promoting political extremism.

Results and continued work

As in Denmark, the Netherlands has a national action plan against political extremism, which was adopted in 2007 and has contributed to further coordination and integration of interventions at all levels. All the initiatives and action plans in the Netherlands take a general approach that encompasses the whole spectrum from right-wing and left-wing extremism to Islamist and religious extremism.

Summary

The eleven examples briefly described above show a wide variety of local initiatives to counter violence-promoting political extremism. The underlying problems vary greatly, and the initiatives differ in terms of scope, the bodies involved, timeframes and methods. However, there remain many similarities between the local initiatives. Collaboration, dialogue and local analysis are some of the elements seen in practically every example. In the final chapter, we will consider what further conclusions and common success factors can be identified from the experiences of the local stakeholders.



Focusing on common ground – initiatives to encourage local dialogue and social cohesion

The previous chapter contains examples of various initiatives and activities that were launched or strengthened in order to counter some form of violence-supporting political extremism. In practically all the municipalities and regions, there are also broader projects and activities with a longer-term focus on preventing citizens from resorting to undemocratic means of expression and methods to get their views across. The primary purpose of such initiatives is not specifically to counter political extremism, but to engender increased mutual understanding and stronger social cohesion among local citizens. The meaning of the term social cohesion is described in more detail in the opening chapter *Introduction and background*.

Initiatives for stronger social cohesion and inclusion

The following chapter outlines examples of initiatives and activities whose aim, at an overarching level, is to promote a greater sense of belonging, trust and cohesion within the local community, and in so doing to prevent crime.

The existence of groups and individuals who promote threats and violence in order to achieve specifically political objectives is one of several undemocratic, criminal phenomena that need to be countered.

The examples below vary in their character, but all have a shared ambition to improve the sense of mutual acceptance and understanding among citizens, and the sense of belonging to and pride in the local community in which we live. The first couple of examples come from the Stockholm region and Malmö, where the focus has been on using community planning, enterprise, measures to promote a sense of security and greater influence for citizens as a means to strengthen the attractiveness of the local area and its social cohesion. The subsequent examples turn the spotlight on initiatives where religion has formed the starting point for work on establishing a broader dialogue and greater mutual understanding within society.

Vision for Järva and a Järva spirit – new identity and pride

The Järva area north-west of Stockholm brings together the districts of Akalla, Husby, Rinkeby and Tensta/Hjulsta. The area has a high proportion of people with a foreign background, high unemployment and some housing estates that are in need of refurbishment. In order to improve living conditions in Järva, in 2009 Stockholm City Council agreed the *Vision for Järva 2030* – a long-term initiative aimed at giving the area more vitality and making it more attractive across a number of factors.

A key aspect of the Vision for Järva has been to create a ‘Järva spirit’ – a mobilisation of positive forces and networks that will help create a safe and secure area. Their slogan is ‘Järva spirit, YES! Consideration and pride. We look out for each other’, and stakeholders such as property companies, local businesses, schools and voluntary organisations have proudly signed up to it.

Other initiatives include a focus on residential caretakers and volunteers who can patrol the area and engage with local youngsters, with a view to preventing disturbances and vandalism. In 2009, 50 clubs and societies joined in a litter collection drive as part of the campaign *Järva rent och snyggt* (Clean and Tidy Järva). Successful citizen dialogues have also been held, with the forum attracting many constructive suggestions for improvements from the residents of Järva.

Major investment is also being made in refurbishing 5,000 apartments in the area over a ten-year period and increasing the sense of Järva being a community in its own right, by creating new meeting places for local people in galleries, libraries and new assembly rooms. Projects to assist with homework and mentoring programmes are further examples of work that forms part of the Vision for Järva.

Much of the funding for this work is to be met within the existing budget, but SEK 200 million has been allocated to allow certain trials to be run. The public housing associations are responsible for the most costly measures. An initial evaluation suggests that the Vision for Järva is driving local change in the right direction.

Botkyrka – strength in diversity

Botkyrka, the municipality south of Stockholm that declares itself to be ‘Far from ordinary’, has for many years focused its energies on being one of Sweden’s most multicultural municipalities. In June 2010, the Municipal Council adopted an intercultural strategy aimed at promoting open, flexible and sensitive attitudes to expressions of cultural identity. The key lies in meeting places, inclusion and interaction – not integration.

Botkyrka has also invested a great deal of effort in creating a strong identity – a brand – that local residents can be proud of.

However, the municipality is not turning a blind eye to incidences of social unrest that have occurred in places such as Alby and Fittja. In a move to tackle the problems, Botkyrka has increasingly come to focus on what they have chosen to call security promotion rather than crime prevention initiatives. The initiatives are led and coordinated by a broad municipal strategy team. Analyses of risks and protective factors are an important part of the work to promote security, and the citizens in the local networks have to be fully behind the initiatives, not least the various neighbourhood watch projects that have been launched.

Supporting the local area’s cultural life and membership of clubs and societies is another important pillar of Botkyrka’s work to ensure strong social cohesion and pride in the municipality. *Kulturhuset Subtopia*, a cultural centre that houses Cirkus Cirkör, the multicultural centre *Mångkulturellt centrum* and the mentoring programme *Kultursken* aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship in the cultural sphere, are just some examples of this work. Botkyrka’s implementation of specialist schools has also attracted attention for its documented improvement in grades, as well as its innovation and creative approach.

Botkyrka has also initiated projects and activities whose stated aim is to strengthen the influence of the area's young people. One such project is a youth council, through which young people can influence politics in a formalised way. Every summer, the municipality also puts together a young editorial team to produce the magazine *Shoo*. Over four weeks, the young people involved get to learn all about the profession of journalism, while at the same time producing a magazine that is then distributed throughout Sweden.

Malmö – the action programme Welfare for All

From 2004–2008, the City of Malmö implemented its action programme *Välfärd för alla* (Welfare for All), which endeavoured to promote welfare, integration and economic growth. The subsequent evaluation concluded that the City had been extremely successful in cutting criminality and creating more jobs, but that it had failed to increase the proportion of students qualifying for upper secondary school. Work conducted as part of the action plan led to many lasting partnerships and activities, including a successful collaboration between schools, social services and the police (SSP). However, challenges still remain with regard to integration and participation for people who stand on the fringes of society.

In March 2010, four districts were commissioned by the City Executive Board to draw up an area programme for stronger integration and social sustainability. The ownership, the backing and the driving forces were all supposed to be local, with the initiatives focused on issues relating to the environment, the economy, urban planning and social issues.

Rosengård – one of the areas covered by the area programmes – has chosen to invest in an ecologically sustainable refurbishment of apartments in close dialogue with the residents. Several meeting places have also been created, with one example being the premises at Bennets Bazar that local people can rent for their business close to where they live. Another is *Vänskapsparken* – a new information centre for local residents. There are also plans to build a multicultural high-rise called *Törnrosen Tower* and open up central Rosengård.

The area of Seved in the southern inner city suffers greater insecurity and social problems than the average in Malmö. The area programme *Turning Seved* brings together a number of activities aimed at shaping a safer, more inclusive and more attractive Seved. Key networking bodies include *MKB* (municipal property owner) and *Glokala folkhögskolan* (The Glocal Folk High School) which runs folk high school activities out in the various local residential areas. *Garaget* is a large venue for clubs that also houses a library, while *Föreningen bryggeriet* runs a skatepark and an upper secondary school.

Since 2004, Seved and Rosengård have both had district patrols whose task is to prevent crime and offer everyday assistance to local residents. There are also youth coaches and youth communicators who work to increase young people's influence and self-esteem and to help them find rewarding employment.

Intercultural and interreligious council in Örebro

In 2006, the Municipal Council in Örebro decided to create an intercultural and interreligious council whose main purpose was to bring together local religious leaders on a regular basis to discuss current issues and needs, and to jointly find solutions to problems, for example in childcare, schooling and care of older people.

The council has also invited local officials and politicians to attend, not least those responsible for the social emergency service, schools or police activities in the area. There are also hopes of strengthening the partnership between the municipality and the voluntary sector. However, this work is not just focused 'inwards' on the municipality's activities, but also 'outwards' on local residents. The council's members have visited each other's premises and planned guest lectures, in conjunction with the exhibition *God has 99 names*, for example.

Örebro has also created a template for establishing an agreement between a school and a religious community aimed at ensuring equality.

God's House – a shared meeting place for Muslims and Christians

Guds Hus (God's House) is an interreligious project in Fisksätra (Nacka) whose approach is to use religion as a unifying force in a multicultural community. The project is a joint venture by the Church of Sweden, St Konrad's Catholic Church and the Association of Muslims in Nacka.

The goal is to create a meeting place in Fisksätra's church hall for Christians and Muslims, where each religious community can conduct its religious activities in its own premises, but where there are also shared spaces for other cultural and social activities. The existing advice and support centre *Källan* will also be housed in Guds Hus.

The Bureau for Equal Rights – free anti-discrimination advice

Byrån för lika rättigheter (The Bureau for Equal Rights) in Kista focuses its work on achieving equality for everyone in practice, not just on paper. The bureau provides advice and support for individuals, although it is often contacted by various organisations on behalf of individuals. It also has two other tasks of offering training and information, and helping to shape public opinion.

The bureau is located in Kista, but has a nationwide catchment area. Run by the non-profit Islamic Information Forum, the office is part of the national network of anti-discrimination bureaus (ADB) supported by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. The majority of the interventions and advice concerns religion and/or ethnic origin.

The bureau has its own newspaper, *Amicus*, works with several other bodies, not least the anti-racism foundation Expo, and teaches at Kista Folk High School on discrimination and human rights issues.

Kista Folk High School – support for a Swedish Muslim identity

Kista Folk High School is the first folk high school in the Nordic region with a Muslim background. Independent since 2010, the folk high school is targeted at Muslims and others who need support in finding their identity and way in society. The school wishes to help develop the local community in a way that counters any tendencies towards segregation and exclusion. There is a strong focus on showing that there are no conflicts between religiosity and secularism. The school seeks to show in concrete terms just what opportunities and resources are available to each citizen and to steer its students onto positive and sustainable paths.

Ibn Rushd – for greater knowledge of Islam

Formed in 2008, Ibn Rushd is a national educational association with a focus on supporting Muslims in Sweden and giving non-Muslims a better understanding of Islam. Its activities take the form of study circles alongside special courses and cultural programmes. The educational association works with most of Sweden's other Muslim associations.

Ibn Rushd has run and participated in the majority of projects aimed at promoting dialogue and knowledge, for example educating police officers and other public officials about Islam. An initiative by Muslim organisations saw the formation of *Forix – Förorternas riksdag* (The Suburban Parliament) as a

channel for the political drive among young people in Sweden's suburbs. Ibn Rushd also trains what are referred to as 'agents for peace', giving them the knowledge and tools to promote a cross-religious culture of peace.

Summary

There are considerable similarities between the various initiatives described above. Stockholm (Järva), Botkyrka and Malmö see their work as a long-term commitment rather than a project. The work involves practically all the municipal committees and administrations, and has a clear mandate from the Municipal/City Executive Board.

The watchwords dialogue and inclusion are common to all the examples described above. Further commonalities and success factors are examined in the next chapter.



General lessons and success factors

Working on this collection of examples has provided a unique opportunity to gather together knowledge and lessons from municipalities and organisations with experience of countering and preventing violence-promoting political extremism. It has enabled us to identify certain success factors and areas in need of development when it comes to local initiatives aimed at countering political extremism.

One lesson to be learned is the importance of documenting, following up and evaluating initiatives carried out. Clearly formulated objectives and ongoing analyses of the initiatives make it possible to reassess and correct the work in order to get closer to achieving the objectives. In some of the examples it is clear that such analyses were carried out, but there is a need for documentation if the lessons are to be learned and more easily passed on to other municipalities and organisations. Another result is that we have mainly found concrete examples of measures to counter political extremism that have arisen out of problems with right-wing extremist groups. There is a distinct lack of experience to draw on from municipalities or bodies that have launched specific interventions against other politically extremist groups. This may be due to such problems being perceived to be, or actually being, less prevalent.

However, work on this collection of examples has resulted in a number of general conclusions on what characterises successful local initiatives to

counter violent political extremism. This collection therefore closes by highlighting identifiable success factors:

Collaborate at all times – not just when absolutely necessary

The importance of collaboration cannot be emphasised enough in the context of countering political extremism. Collaboration is a common thread that runs through all the success factors that we have identified. Without it, it is difficult to make correct analyses of the local situation or to know what expertise, mandate and resources your colleagues or other stakeholders have. Collaboration is often an obvious move once problems have arisen, but it is during the periods between problems that the benefits of successful collaboration can be built up. When the problems then come, the collaboration is ready to be put to the test.

All the examples presented display highly functional and well-established collaborative structures. This is true within the municipality (for example between schools, social services and the recreation sector), but also between the municipality, the police and the Security Service. Several also describe successful collaborations between the municipality and players in the civil sector such as associations and religious communities.

Keep up to date on the local situation

It is crucial to conduct local analyses of the groups and tendencies that exist locally and any potential problems that may arise, as this provides the foundation for carefully targeted prevention and countering of political extremism. Building up this knowledge requires collaboration. Problems can start to germinate at a school or recreation centre or be uncovered by a fieldworker during a conversation outside the library. The police are uniquely placed to gain an overview of the sources of conflict that exist locally, and can help to map out the current situation for the municipality. Knowledge is also about being able to identify individuals who risk being drawn to political extremist groups or who are already members. What happens, for example, with the young people who are struggling at school? What different degrees of commitment to political extremism do the various groups in the municipality display? Have activist leaders established themselves locally? With the help of such analyses, it is possible to create a state of readiness and a clearly defined distribution of roles and responsibilities among the players involved.

Draw on all the local commitment, expertise and strengths

When it comes to the build-up of knowledge and actual initiatives, the key is to make the best possible use of local commitment, expertise and strengths. The examples have shown several instances where local residents have played

an active role in countering political extremism through demonstrations and networks. A couple of municipalities also established a close partnership with local associations and religious communities that might find it easier to access the target groups at which the work is aimed. The conclusion is that effective work against political extremism requires the capacity to mobilise the strengths of various players and create space for them to do what they are best at and what falls within their sphere of influence. This applies both to building up knowledge and actually implementing initiatives. The police may, for example, be best placed to focus on the core of the political groups, where the most active extremists can be found. Fieldworkers, school staff and recreation workers can in turn focus on preventing individuals from being attracted to such groups.

Build on the activities already in place

Many of the initiatives presented in this collection are not ‘new’ in the sense that they were organised as specific projects or have required a reorganisation of existing activities. Instead, they represent a strengthening of an activity or work already being carried out within the municipality or draw on the core activities of other players. In line with the previous point, one of the greatest challenges, but also a leading success factor, is the capacity to use existing expertise and carefully established relationships effectively. Setting up initiatives to counter political extremism can seem like an insurmountable task, but by starting small, the needs and contours of the ensuing work may gradually crystallise out. A first step can be to incorporate the objective of countering and preventing political extremism into the steering documents of various operations. A value-related project in a school or a visit or lecture to a Muslim community in the municipality might also have a ripple effect and set in motion the desired drive to fight political extremism. Starting on a small scale is better than waiting for the resources and commitment to launch some major new activity aimed at countering and preventing political extremism.

Work on many fronts – focus on promotion, prevention and counteraction

It is clear from accounts by many of the municipalities and organisations that they work on many fronts at the same time. One distinct determiner of success is the ability to work through several channels and from different perspectives simultaneously. This supports the view that the work benefits from being run within existing operations. It is often hard to say whether an initiative is focused on promotion, prevention or counteraction. In many cases, it will be all three. A number, perhaps a majority, of the examples highligh-

ted here also do not have a specific goal of countering political extremism, but aim instead to tackle a whole spectrum of non-democratic and criminal activities by young people. The point is that many initiatives strengthen each other. In the short term, it can be absolutely necessary to tackle, i.e. actively counter, the problems that have flared up in the municipality. However, in the long term, the most successful work focuses on promotion- and prevention-oriented work on a broad front.

Focus on the individual, not the ideology

A salutogenic perspective features strongly in many of the local initiatives. This basically involves focusing on an individual's qualities and need for context in working to help them find their place in society. Whatever there is in the way of collaboration and knowledge and whoever is involved in the fight against political extremism, in the end it all boils down to influencing the individual. Successful work in this field requires people who are able to form a bond with, and find employment for, individuals who are in politically extremist groups or risk being drawn to such groups.

A sense of belonging and of being needed can go a long way in countering political extremism. The young people drawn to violence-promoting factions of political groups are often just trying to fulfil this need in themselves. If we can meet that need and create a sense of belonging and connection within the democratic framework of society, then we have come a long way in the fight against political extremism.

May the work continue and achieve success!

Recommended reading

Suggested additional reading on a few local examples:

Värmland

<http://www.bfciv.se/>

Karlskrona

Rundqvist, M. (1999) *Demokratins muskler. Kommunpolitikerna och lokala myndighetspersoners åtgärder mot nationalsocialismen i Karlskrona* (Democracy's muscles. Measures by municipal politicians and local officials against National Socialism in Karlskrona). CEIFO, Stockholm.

Trollhättan

Blomgren, A. (1999) *Vad gör samhället? Offentlig politik mot rasistiskt och främlingsfientligt våld i Vänersborg, Trollhättan och Uddevalla* (What is society doing? Public policy against racism and xenophobia in Vänersborg, Trollhättan and Uddevalla). Stockholm University: Centre for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations, CEIFO. CEIFO's publication series no. 80.

Jönköping

www.jonkoping.se/toppmeny/trygghetochsakerhet/brottsforebyggandearbete.4.78a363881192da98f8c80001514.html

Lund

www.lund.se/Fritid--kultur/Ungdomspolitik/Ungdomstinget/

Stockholm

www.stockholm.se/tac

Winschoten (evaluation of the project):

prev.annefrank.org/upload/Downloads/Deradicalisation_ebook.pdf

Berlin

Mobile Beratung Gegen Rechtsextremismus (MBR): www.mbr-berlin.de/

Malmö

www.malmo.se/Arkiv/Nyhetsarkiv/Mellansida/Centrala-nyheter/4-8-2009-Slutrapport-fran-Valfard-for-alla-klar.html and www.malmo.se/Kommun--politik/Sa-arbetar-vi-med.../Omradesprogram.html/Omradesprogram.html

Stockholm

www.stockholm.se/jarvalyftet

Botkyrka

www.botkyrka.se

Guds Hus

www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=650712

Byrån för lika rättigheter

www.likarattigheter.nu

Kista Folkhögskola

www.kistafolkhogskola.se

Ibn Rushd

www.ibnrushd.se

Other recommended reading

- Avhopparverksamhet – Ungdomsstyrelsens analys och förslag på hur samhället kan stödja unga avhoppare* (Exit programmes – the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs’ analysis and proposals for how society can help young people to exit extremist groups). The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs’ report to the Government under Decision IJ2009/2331/DEM. Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2010.
- Dialog som samhällets värdegrund* (Dialogue on society’s values). Government Paper 2009/10:106.
- Hot mot demokrati och värdegrund – en lägesbild från Malmö* (Threats to democracy and social values – the status in Malmö). Swedish National Defence College, Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), 2009.
- Lodén, A. (2006) *Gatans parlament* (The Street Parliament). Ordfront.
- Lahti Edmark, H. (2002) *Förort i fokus – intervention för miljoner. Nordisk forskning om interventioner i ”utsatta” bostadsområden – en kunskapsöversikt* (Suburb in focus – intervention for millions. Nordic research into interventions on ‘vulnerable’ housing estates – a knowledge overview). Swedish Integration Board report series 2002:1.
- Löw, H (1998). *Nazismen i Sverige 1980–1997* (Nazism in Sweden 1980–1997). Ordfront.
- Government Decision IJ2009/2331/DEM. *Uppdrag till Ungdomsstyrelsen att undersöka verksamhet som hjälper unga personer att lämna grupper som främjar hot och våld för att uppnå politiska mål* (Commissioning the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs to investigate activities that help young people to leave groups that promote threats and violence to achieve political objectives). 17.12.2009.
- Government Decision IJ2010/262/DEM. *Uppdrag till Säkerhetspolisen att sammanställa en rapport om våldsbejakande islamistisk extremism* (Commissioning the Swedish Security Service to compile a report on violent Islamic extremism). 11.02.2010
- Government Decision IJ2009/2136/DEM. *Medel till Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting för att åskådliggöra exempel på hur extremism i lokalsamhället motverkas och bemöts* (Funding for the Swedish Association of Local Authorities to identify examples of how extremism is being tackled at local level). 26.11.2009
- Våldsamt politisk extremism – Antidemokratiska grupperingar på yttersta höger- och vänsterkanten* (Violent political extremism – Anti-democratic groups on the far right- and left-wing) (BRÅ report 2009:15). Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention and Swedish Security Service, 2009

