Dissecting Deradicalization: Challenges for Theory and Practice in Germany

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Vol. 14/2020

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Compared to the topic of radicalization, *de*radicalization was long treated as secondary in research, at least until recently. This article outlines the most important findings from theory and practice in three steps by: (1) discuss-ing and reviewing existing classifications and typologies, (2) suggesting a conceptualization of the term "deradi-calization" while considering discourses about the roles of ideology, identity and risk, and, based on this, (3) providing an overview of the empirical case of practical work in Germany. It turns out that central actors from practice, academia, (security) authorities and politics not only use different definitions, but there is also little agreement on what deradicalization (practically) means. The German case shows that the landscape of deradi-calization, differentiated into four fields of action, is highly diverse. However, the existing hybrid model of state and civic competences as well as the variety of approaches and actors should – with proper accentuation – be seen as an opportunity.

Keywords: deradicalization, extremism, prevention, fields of action, Germany

While the idea of deradicalization was given little thought during past periods marked by extremist vio-lence, approaches and projects that advance deradi-calization (and see an imperative to engage in deradi-calization efforts) have become widely accepted prac-tice today. The sheer number of crimes and increasing "quality" of acts of violence motivated by extremism on the far right, and other disquieting statistics, such as the about 350 fighters who have returned to Ger-many alone from war-torn areas in Syria and Iraq, have also contributed to rising public awareness of the need for deradicalization (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat 2018, 189). Therefore, even in light of widespread politicization (political ex-ploitation) of this topic, the reality of "homegrown" extremism of various orientations is forcing Germany and Europe to look beyond securitization and towards more sustainable modes of long-term prevention and deradicalization.

Similarly, compared to the rather marginal academic consideration of the issue of deradicalization in the past, growing interest in this area has led to a notable increase in theory-focused publications in recent years (Horgan et al. 2017, 63; For an overview of the literature see Köhler and Fiebig 2019; Grip and Kota-joki 2019; Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2019). The majority of these studies rely on qualitative inter-views with relevant professionals from the fields of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and, in some cases, with those at risk of radicalization as their primary sources. Quantitative studies have so far tended to be the exception in this area.

Recently, and mostly because of its complexity, sev-eral authors have concentrated on descriptive studies

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of the German landscape of practical work, without addressing the work fields themselves in further detail. Overviews of this kind are provided by Köhler (2017), as well as by various publications by the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) (for example Abay Gaspar et al. 2020; Pisoiu et al. 2020; Meiering, Dziri, and Foroutan 2020; Herschinger et al. 2020) or the Terrorism/Extremist Research Unit (FTE) of the German Federal Criminal Police Office (Eilers, Gruber, and Kemmesies 2015; El-Mafaalani et al. 2016; Gruber and Lützinger 2017a, 2017b). In addition, several authors have published on international practical developments which need to be watched closely (Mattsson and Johansson 2018; Chernov Hwang 2017; Windisch, Scott Ligon, and Simi 2017).

In Germany, and northern Europe as a whole, the theoretical conceptualizations of deradicalization in circulation today mostly draw on "classic" literature dealing with far-right extremism (Möller 2000; Rommelspacher 2006; Wahl 2003; Willems et al. 1993). Internationally, research on radicalization, disengagement, and deradicalization is often more varied, spanning far-right extremism, historical anarchism, Islamism and left-wing extremism of different forms, among others (Ribetti 2008; Boucek 2008; Alonso 2008; Bjørgo and Horgan 2008; McCauley and Moskalenko 2011; Bjørgo 1997, 2011; Altier et al. 2014). Researchers are also currently focusing on so-called right-wing populism and its polarizing effects on various European societies (Mudde 2016, 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Caiani and Cisar 2018; Salzborn 2017; Häusler and Virchow 2016) as well as the use of the internet by far-right extremists (Müller and Schwarz 2018).

Other contributions look into the specific thematic fields of deradicalization work for the area of Islamism, such as family and social environment counseling (Gruber and Lützinger 2017a, 2017b; Hohnstein et al. 2015; Trautmann and Zick 2016), deradicalization in the context of correctional facilities (Global Center on Cooperative Security and International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 2017; Illgner et al. 2017; Ionescu et al. 2017; RAN Prison and Probation Working Group 2016; Silke 2011; Trautmann and Zick 2016; Cherney 2018a; Cherney 2018b), risk assessment and reduction (Dhami and Murray

2016; Innes et al. 2017; Sarma 2017; Silke 2014; BMJ Task Force "De-Radikalisierung im Strafvollzug" 2016), ideology (Kruglanski et al. 2014; Mythen et al. 2017; Olsen 2009; Rabasa et al. 2010; Selim 2016), and evaluations (Dechesne 2011; Gielen 2015; Kober 2017; Köhler 2017; Schuurman and Bakker 2016; Cherney 2018b). Overlap also exists with neighboring fields, such as research on cults or sects and work with gangs (Rabasa et al. 2010; RAN 2017b; Schmid 2013; Selim 2016; Stern 2010). We see plenty of (hitherto underutilized) opportunities here for researchers to learn from one another (see also RAN 2017b).

Despite the growing volume of literature in this area, several problems remain. In many cases, research findings are only transferred into practice long after the respective challenge should have been addressed "in the field". Approaches that combine practical insights with theoretical conceptualizations continue to be neglected (Köhler and Fiebig 2019). Additionally, there seem to be no relevant longitudinal studies on the development of individuals who have passed through deradicalization or exit programs, which would be capable of proposing definitive statements as to the effectiveness of certain approaches.

Based on these assessments, this article aims to address these gaps while suggesting a conceptualization of deradicalization taking into account current discourses as well as areas of implementation and structures of deradicalization work in Germany.

1 Method

A structured literature review was conducted: Based on the authors' expertise several university libraries as well as the web of science databases were searched using relevant key words (in English and German, for example deradicalisation, desistance, tertiary prevention). Relevant references within the texts were also added. Following this, a database with approximately 560 entries was set up for the team of writers and relevant literature was then reviewed.

Additionally, interviews were conducted with twelve experts from the field in order to ensure that this article provides findings and recommendations relevant for practical P/CVE work (Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism). Based on these exploratory and problem-centered interviews (Witzel and Reiter

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2012) with German and European experts, gaps and challenges were defined. The experts were identified through the extensive international network of Violence Prevention Network (VPN) and the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). All of the interviewees had to have multiple years of practical experience in their fields and be familiar with current academic debates. Interviews were then conducted in German or English and transcribed, coded and analyzed using MAXQDA. The interviews were conducted between October 2017 and April 2018. To ensure that experts felt comfortable addressing both positive and negative developments and aspects of their work and to prevent conclusions regarding their affiliations being drawn, all interviews were anonymized. Based on the findings of these interviews, we defined criteria for practical relevance that guided the rest of the process: literature review, conceptualization, and, finally, analysis.

2 What is Deradicalization?

P/CVE practice, research, policy-making and wider debates surrounding the topic suffer from a deeply counterproductive conflation of terms and definitions (Abay Gaspar et al. 2020). Even though some progress has been made in recent years, this still holds true for research and especially for P/CVE practice, which, as a result, very often lacks clear definitions of objectives and conflates concepts. As Ceylan and Kiefer (2017, 64) found, however, there is little purpose in seeking a unified classification in the absence of a minimal consensus in relation to the terms in use. Yet, without a system of classification in place, hopes of developing and testing effective quality standards, which could ultimately enhance comparability and professionalization, will remain unattainable. This is why the following chapter, as a first step, provides an overview of existing classifications and typologies.

2.1 Classifications and Typologies: Delineating Prevention and Deradicalization

Even if there appears to be a broad diversity of approaches for determining classifications, typologies and termini, classification models originally borrowed from the area of health and medicine have become predominant in the fields of violence, extremism, and radicalization prevention, especially in Germany (Ceylan and Kiefer 2017, 64–65).

Despite occasional opposition to this understanding of prevention (Köhler 2017, 114), the leading models in the ongoing debate are 1) the differentiation of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention in line with Caplan (1964) and 2) universal, selective and indicated prevention in line with Gordon (1983; Ceylan and Kiefer 2017, 65; El-Mafaalani et al. 2016, 4). These two models are often combined by way of the creation of hybrid forms and are sometimes even used interchangeably. One approach attempting to systematize the German prevention landscape based on such a three-tier understanding is the framework proposed by Trautmann and Zick. For the area of primary and universal prevention, they identify the fields of (1) protection from harmful media, (2) school-based and extracurricular educational work, and (3) institutional network building (Trautmann and Zick 2016, 5–9). The subsequent work of target-group-specific network building marks the transition from primary to secondary prevention. Youth-work-oriented support is categorized within secondary prevention, while holistic counseling work forms part of either tertiary prevention or, depending on the conceptual understanding, intervention and/or deradicalization work (Trautmann and Zick 2016, 9–13).

A brief look at the services described within the framework of primary prevention uncovers a very broad understanding of prevention by Trautmann and Zick. It includes projects such as the Young Islam Conference in Germany, an initiative that does not specifically aim to prevent Islamist radicalization, but rather seeks to promote the participation of younger and more diverse voices in German pluralist society and political decision-making (Junge Islam Konferenz, n.d.).

An even broader definition of what comprises prevention in the context of P/CVE was introduced by Hedayah's Cristina Mattei (2019). Under the banner of "General Prevention", she includes measures aiming to reduce push and pull factors as macro as unemployment, which are not necessarily designed for P/CVE purposes, but may entail positive results for P/CVE nonetheless (Mattei 2019, 3–4). Thus, both Mattei as well as Trautmann and Zick seem to conceptualize

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their classifications in a results- or outcome-oriented manner, rather than a focus on the stated objectives.

In contrast, Ceylan and Kiefer (drawing from Lüders and Holthusen 2008, 3) believe that measures and services should only be classified as forms of primary prevention if they actually directly or indirectly aim to hinder radicalization (Ceylan and Kiefer 2017, 62–63). Their understanding of primary prevention is therefore based on the intended objectives but not specific to a certain target group (Ceylan and Kiefer 2017, 66–67).

Starting at the level of secondary and selective prevention, Ceylan and Kiefer's typology becomes more ambiguous in terms of the conceptual bounds between the higher levels of prevention: deradicalization and intervention. They argue that the threshold to deradicalization work is only crossed within the level of tertiary or indicated prevention. The differentiation between secondary and tertiary prevention is met by way of two theoretical levels of radicalization they propose: Secondary prevention measures are for individuals exhibiting a high probability of (further) radicalization (which has not yet become manifest) and tertiary prevention measures target persons who are already exhibiting manifest signs of radicalization and who may have already committed crimes (Ceylan and Kiefer 2017, 68, 72).

Therefore, depending on the individual's respective issues, measures on the third prevention level aim to either demobilize and prevent crimes (for persons who have not yet become criminal), facilitate an exit and comprehensive socio-spatial reorientation (for persons active in milieus with affinities for violence, but who are willing to leave), or to prevent new crimes and promote social and vocational reintegration (for persons already engaged in crime) (Ceylan and Kiefer 2017, 72–73).

While this concept does not require an individual to actively engage in crime or violence in order to qualify for deradicalization, others take a different stance. For example, Stern (2010, 1) and Mattei (2019, 7) both understand deradicalization measures as aimed only at persons or groups who have already committed or actively supported crimes and/or violence related to extremism or terrorism. Such differences in understanding deradicalization are likely to arise when the con-

cepts of what defines radicalization and extremism are unclear (for example engagement in violence or activism vs. internal beliefs and worldviews).

Notwithstanding this, some authors cast doubt on the feasibility of deradicalization (understood as "authentic" abandonment of extremist views and related behavior) and, instead, propose "demobilization" or "disengagement" as more realistic alternatives (Ceylan and Kiefer 2017, 73; Silke 2011, 18–20).

The terms "disengagement" and "demobilization" are mostly used in the context of changes in behavior, without the individuals in question having necessarily renounced extremist views – a process that can also be described as "behavioral distancing" (Bjørgo and Horgan 2008; Dechesne 2011; Horgan 2009; Horgan and Braddock 2010, 280; Altier et al. 2014; Feddes 2015, 2). It is also important to realize that people who have cognitively and/or emotionally distanced themselves from extremist ideologies may continue to participate in extremist groups and engage in related activities (Köhler 2017, 3; Horgan and Altier 2012, 88). A complex interplay of push and pull factors can explain such seemingly paradoxical behaviors. One example of this would be processes within which personal and emotional ties to other group members outweigh either the *disadvantages of staying in or the advantages of leaving* the group – or both. In this case, remaining active in the group may be deemed more "rational" by the individual than leaving ("in-group love"; Sageman 2004, 135). Such group dynamics significantly undermine the ability of deradicalization programs to focus purely on the behavioral aspects of disengagement or demobilization work – at least if sustainable societal integration is the desired outcome.

Depending on the understanding and definition used, there seem to be two main ways to view disengagement or behavioral distancing, also in relation to deradicalization and in the context of P/CVE: (1) as part of a comprehensive program of deradicalization, in which disengagement constitutes one step in a process towards the ideal behavioral *and* cognitive distancing (deradicalization); or (2) as an independent program objective that aims to prevent (violent) behavior related to extremist views, without necessarily engaging with the ideology.

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3 Conceptualizing Deradicalization?

The previous section illustrated that there seems to be a certain degree of consensus regarding terms and concepts related to the prevention of extremism. Nonetheless, a lack of clear differentiation persists, partially due to conflicting notions of the concepts of extremism and/or radicalization. Still, without a common understanding of what "radical" or "extremist" mean, the term "deradicalization" cannot be defined adequately, nor the individual factors that comprise it. As the basis for this article, and with relevance for the context of European societies, we understand extremist radicalization as follows:

Radicalization pertains to the cognitive process in which an individual gradually appropriates extremist views. The appropriation of individual elements of extremist ideologies is sufficient to label an individual as "radical". As such, in the context of the EU, radical or radicalized individuals are those who expressly reject and/or seek to eliminate (including, but not necessarily by violent means) the liberal democratic order, its underlying values and norms, and the associated pluralistic model of society. A completely closed-off extremist worldview is not necessarily required in order to classify an individual as "radical."[1]

Consequently, we can view "deradicalization" as a process through which a radicalized individual gradually (re)processes and eventually discards their extremist views, resulting in a "deradicalized" person who at least no longer rejects the model of a democratic society and is ultimately even proactively willing, and most importantly, able to seek their own inclusion once again. Deradicalization in this sense includes demobilization or disengagement from activities related to extremist groups and/or beliefs. A person who does not adhere to extremist worldviews (any longer), but continues to engage in activities inspired by extremist views, regardless whether these views are indeed their own or merely those of a group to which they still belong (see above), cannot be considered deradicalized.

This process should *not*, however, be regarded as a mere inversion of the original process of radicaliza-

tion, as the person would simply end up back at their entry point to radicalization without having come to terms with the individual problems that created a cognitive and emotional opening for, and inclination towards, extremist views in the first place. Such a reversal would also fail to account for the personal development individuals might experience in the course of their radicalization and/or membership of extremist groups.

Once a person has finally accounted for and come to terms with all or at least the majority of factors that made them susceptible to radicalization they can be considered deradicalized for the respective social context, and on a provisional basis. This must, however, be followed up by long-term support aimed at maintaining their inclusion in many aspects of social, cultural, economic, and spiritual life and society in order to prevent any potential personal crises from leading to recidivism.

Based on the literature review and the interviews conducted by the authors, three topics emerged as recurring elements of contemporary discourses on the practice of deradicalization and should therefore be explored in more detail: ideology, identity, and risk.

3.1 On the Role of Ideologies

The role ideologies play in individual processes of radicalization is contentious. When considering Islamist radicalization, Gilles Kepel identifies causes for radicalization within dysfunctional social relations and in the role assumed by Islam. Olivier Roy, in contrast, believes that individual behavior and psychological aspects (fantasies of violence) play a more significant role than religion or ideology (see interview statements from Roy and Kepel in Nossiter 2016; Putz 2016; Wittenbrink 2018). The ensuing debate between these two points of view reflects the question of whether "Islam" is radicalizing itself or if an "Islamization of radicalism" has taken place.

In the scope of their research on far-right extremism, Heitmeyer et al. proposed the instrumentalization hypothesis in 1993, which suggests that ideologies of inequality and violence mainly assume a functional character and could be positioned within this larger debate (Heitmeyer et al. 1993, 595–96). Ideologies of inequality and violence can be used to imple-

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[1] Deitelhoff and Junk (2018) and Dziri (2018) serve as a good basis for future discussions about the understanding of the concepts of "radicalization" and "radical". Also see Abay Gaspar et al. 2020.

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ment individual strategies for coping with life and controlling reality in response to the need for self-assertion (Heitmeyer et al. 1993, 595). In this sense, ideologies can be better understood as a "means to an end" rather than an original cause of radicalization – a view that is similar to Olivier Roy's.

When discussing "religiously motivated" extremism, it is vital to distinguish between the terms "religion" and "ideology". In a recent study, Michael Kiefer et al. (2018) assert that ideology, rather than religion, plays the predominant role in radicalization of individuals. In the course of a study focusing on a group of young people with Islamist views, Dziri and Kiefer (2018, 56) describe them as religiously illiterate and only possessing a rudimentary knowledge of Islam, if any at all. The authors observe that the group utilizes an ideology that they refer to as "Lego Islam," through which they occupy a number of Islamist extremist political positions irrespective of schools of thought or consistency (Dziri and Kiefer 2018, 23).

Despite this observation, Kiefer asserts that ideologies are likely to adopt various roles. He highlights the different personalities found within ideological groups: On the one hand, we find individuals from precarious living situations with a very low level of religious or ideological knowledge while, at the same time, there are also many "cadres" who boast a flawless ideological and theological education (cited in Wittenbrink 2018; RAN 2017a; Baaken and Schlegel 2017).

In our interviews with P/CVE-practitioners working in the field of religiously motivated extremism, it became clear that religion, as a topic (of conversation), can offer a very good initial entry point, even though most of the individuals they work with are not religiously well versed (EXP01, EXP03, EXP08, EXP09, EXP11). In practical P/CVE work, those who are at risk of radicalizing are therefore often made to reflect on and scrutinize religious matters and their own beliefs by practitioners who, in turn, are often highly educated in religious topics. The same applies to the area of far-right extremism: Individuals at risk of radicalizing often merely repeat slogans and hold dichotomous worldviews, yet they are mostly unable to offer concrete arguments or substantiate their positions

when challenged (EXP01, EXP03, EXP08, EXP09, EXP11).

3.2 On the Role of Identity

Individuals typically foster and maintain multiple roles and identities (for example European, Muslim, student, and husband). Some people at risk of radicalizing experience problems in developing and maintaining multiple identities, often due to difficult – and sometimes traumatic – experiences in their youth (Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018, 94). This applies particularly to individuals of diverse ancestry who often fail to find acceptance in either society (country of [ancestors'] origin or country of settlement) and can therefore develop a sense of "double non-belonging" (El-Mafaalani and Toprak 2011, 18). By nature, people look for ways out of identity crises (cognitive opening caused by crisis/crises) (Kruglanski et al. 2014; Wiktorowicz 2004). They seek to assume a new identity with fewer inherent tensions, for example one offered by an extremist group and/or ideology, to which they then completely reduce their worldview (Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018, 94). Radicalization therefore initiates a process of "identity reduction" through which individuals abandon attempts to construct complex (multiple) identities and begin to reduce their sense of themselves to a singular "nationalist," "jihadist," or similar brand of identity (Davis and Cragin 2009, 35; Mücke 2016, 64–68).

Depending on the respective personality structure, this identity reduction may be amplified by various mechanisms of ideology and/or group processes. In the scope of the typologies proposed by Nesser (2006a, 2006b, 2010) and Bjørgo (2011), we are repeatedly brought back to an ideal-type representation: The identity of an ideological activist can, for example, be strengthened or constructed through the ideology, while followers often tend to compensate their lacking sense of identity through the group. As such, these various types satisfy their need for identity via different identification characteristics. In reality, a spectrum of components is often at play (Neumann 2016).

This begs the question of *where* an individual can or should be deradicalized to. In an ever-more complex and, at the same time polarizing society, the aim

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should not be to persuade them to seek a supposedly ideal position in the middle of the political spectrum, but rather to foster subjects' ability to tolerate ambiguities within themselves as well as within society. This demands individualized conditions that help them to cope with contradictory expectations regarding identity and role. In order to effectively deradicalize under such conditions, it is imperative to focus on strengthening social safety nets as well as elevating those aspects of an individual's identity that have been suppressed and marginalized as a result of the exclusive focus on the identity central to the extremist group and their ideology (Mücke 2016).

3.3 Risk and Risk Assessment Tools

Looking at the bulk of models that aim to describe and explain processes of radicalization, one can often observe an underlying ontological assumption, that different and clearly ordered degrees of radicalization exist and could be generalized (Borum 2011a; Borum 2011b). This kind of flawed understanding of the contingency and complexity of individual processes of radicalization is worthy of critique. Radicalization processes do not proceed linearly and hence should not be perceived in degrees (Illgner et al. 2017, 89). At the same time, the use of "risk assessment tools" that often rely on degree-based models of radicalization is a widespread phenomenon. A practical and, even more, a political need for the use of risk assessment tools (like VERA2R, TRAP-18 or others) is understandable. Yet, one of the most striking points of criticism of such tools is that the factors and categories that these tools are based on all lack substantial empirical validation (Logvinov 2019, 79; RTI International 2018, 30; Knudsen 2018, 12; Desmarais et al. 2017, 180). This fact creates a certain tension with the frequently divergent objectives pursued by researchers, practitioners, and security agencies. The argument has been made that the development of risk assessment tools and the definition of risk factors have become a market where it seems to be more important to sell a product than to focus on empirical validation (Logvinov 2019, 39–47; Lloyd 2019, 8–11).

Such "risk factors" become especially problematic when they lead to high rates of false positives (or false negatives) due to assessments being carried out with

a lack of topical expertise (Harris et al. 2015). Additionally, numerous expert interviews confirm that criteria such as "changes in behavior with regard to the opposite sex" or a "deep preoccupation with life after death and/or with hell," (European Foundation for Democracy 2017, 25) do not necessarily correlate with a definitive tendency towards radicalization (EXP01, EXP02, EXP03, EXP04, EXP08). The resulting potentially high error rates from the use of such criteria can be more damaging than helpful as the young people being addressed may feel subject to discrimination and, if they are addressed directly may provide occasion for their peers to exclude and stigmatize them (Pettinger 2017, 37). The same is true for other social contexts, such as the penal system.

Nonetheless, security agencies do utilize risk assessment tools to assess the risk potential for society posed by certain individuals. Deradicalization practitioners, on the other hand, seek to assess their target group(s) with regard to the risks *they face* and which might warrant pedagogical or psychological intervention, thus providing a starting point for potential deradicalization. *As such, the focus of deradicalization practitioners rests on the problems that the clients face and not on those that they create.* Risk assessment tools are therefore, in general, of little use for the practical work of deradicalization. Assessments of "how radicalized" an individual is can only be helpful as a very first starting point of a clearing process in order to determine the context, the needs, and the kind of steps that can and should subsequently be taken.

In the context of state (security) authorities assessing the individual risks of acts of extremist violence, we must keep in mind the individual nature of radicalization processes. Given the abundance of so-called risk factors that can be identified, only a fraction of potentially at-risk individuals actually radicalizes and engages in extremism-related behavior (see also Bouhana 2019, 3ff.). Peter Neumann offers a building blocks principle, where increased likelihood of radicalization requires a number of factors to be active. Even so, the risk of radicalization still remains nominal (Neumann 2016).

Additionally, in the last five years governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) have published

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more and more "checklists" and handouts for "identifying radicalization" with the intention of providing tools for use in the field (European Foundation for Democracy 2017; HM Government 2012; Ionescu et al. 2017). These publications are meant to serve as guidelines for actors such as teachers and prison officers.

The availability of standardized tools for (supposedly) capturing *individual* attitudinal patterns and development processes could lead security services and policy-makers to regard assessments completed by practitioners with long-standing professional expertise to be superfluous. In addition, the use of such tools is often accompanied by a shirking of responsibilities as to the final assessment: A numeric output generated by risk assessment tools is believed by some to provide a more reliable determination of the "degree" of risk than the individual professional assessment offered by experienced practitioners. Operating under this assumption, there is a high risk that the tool itself will ultimately be blamed for a (perhaps misguided) decision, while the individual or affiliated institution who applied the tool will be cleared of responsibility for whichever conclusion was reached (see Walkenhorst and Ruf 2018).

After having offered first suggestions for a conceptualization of deradicalization and discussing three recurring topics in current debates around P/CVE and deradicalisation – ideology, identity, and risk – the following section shifts the focus towards the practical field by offering an overview of different fields of action and structures of deradicalization work in Germany that are essentially in line with our proposed conceptualization of deradicalization.

4 Fields of Action and Structures of Deradicalization Work in Germany

Germany is a unique case, especially considering its governing structures and the country's particular history during the last century. To provide some clarification: Germany is a federal republic with sixteen federal states, the *Länder* (states). The Federal Republic of Germany is deeply rooted in the organizational principle of subsidiarity. Consequently, the federal government has only a supporting role to play, if any at all, in the design and implementation of many *Länder* policies. The level of *Länder* influence on even fundamental policies and, as a result, the immense differences between some German states are astonishing. Even the most basic issues of public policy, such as education and academia, but also, for example, the penal system, and therefore many policies and work fields related to P/CVE work, lie within the core sphere of decision-making of the *Länder*. Consequently, prevention policies across Germany are largely driven by the respective political setting in the state and differ, at times, substantially.

Due to the country's history, all matters related to restricting freedom of speech and expression in general, but particularly in combination with the fight against supposedly dangerous or extremist ideologies, are highly sensitive. In the post–World War II era, and subsequently in reunified Germany, state actors did not want to be seen as engaged in ideologically driven work. As a result, many aspects of what is now commonly known as P/CVE work have traditionally been designed and implemented by CSOs.

This forms part of the reason why, in the debate surrounding actors and fields of action for deradicalization, Germany is often viewed as an exceptional case due to the relatively dominant role taken by civil society organizations in P/CVE work, when compared to other countries in Europe or around the globe. However, even if German civil society has certainly historically assumed a prominent position, it would be false to assume that civil society was the most influential actor today.

4.1 Roles and Relations between State and Civil Society

Due to the diversity of the statewide, regional, and communal measures distributed across the German federal structures, arriving at any definitive, generalized assessment of how the respective relations between state(s) and civil society are shaped is extremely difficult. Even though civil society actors are far from being the only players in the field (Gruber and Lützinger 2017a, 7), comparisons with France or the United Kingdom show that Germany's "softer" and more varied approach, including a large share of civil society responsibility, is particularly noteworthy (Foley 2013, 316; République Française, Premier Ministre 2016). Despite the fact that the current situation

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and the diversity of approaches in Germany certainly include many aspects worthy of criticism,[2] they may, at the same time, open up many opportunities, especially with regard to Islamist extremism. The diverse German P/CVE structure including its large share of civil society involvement allows for more flexible and less security-oriented solutions on the ground. The mistakes and failed approaches, as well as the cases of observed (and, unfortunately, limited) successes[3] achieved by other nations – which have been confronted with Islamist extremism much longer and to a greater degree (Crowell 2017) – can serve as lessons for Germany, which is newer to the phenomenon of Islamist extremism, with its particular federal structure. This is especially relevant to the issue of respectful (multi-agency) cooperation among all actors on equal terms (see Walkenhorst and Ruf 2018).

Insights gained from the frequently cited negative example of France (and elsewhere) stand in opposition to demands currently being voiced in some public debates in Germany, but also the wider EU, that call for a "strong" state to apply stricter security measures in response to growing extremist threats. In France, the state of emergency that was declared (and repeatedly extended) following the terror attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, ultimately led to the adoption of a new anti-terror law. This law, which now includes numerous mechanisms of the state of emergency, is a prime example of the problematic results when the debate surrounding P/CVE policies is increasingly appropriated by the realm of mere security policy (United Nations News Centre 2017). A seeming confirmation of extremist narratives by an anti-liberal, security-policy-focused and, at worst, discriminatory overreaction of the state, and the resultant undermining of its own supposed moral superiority, may endanger the stated goal of effective P/CVE work.

In Germany, neither a purely state-centered nor a purely civil society–focused approach has prevailed

fully, due to the country's complex federal (funding) structure. Germany is, and remains for the moment, a hybrid model with varying areas of focus and success rates dependent on the respective federal state – even if a tendency towards increased securitization of this policy area has been coming to the fore. This coincides with the perception of CSOs being pushed out of the P/CVE work field in favor of an increased focus on security (EXP01, EXP02, EXP03, EXP04, EXP06, EXP08, EXP10, EXP12).

4.2 Working Areas and Settings

Based on our interviews with practitioners as well as existing surveys and our own conceptualization of the term deradicalization, we differentiate between four categories of deradicalization work in Germany, on which we will subsequently provide further detail and analysis.[4] At the outset, we should mention that there are currently no notable examples of P/CVE work targeting the area of far-left extremism in Germany, apart from the exit program run by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), Germany's federal domestic intelligence service. This program, which focuses only on violent forms of far-left extremism, is still in place but is not very successful due to insufficient demand and an inadequate design (Deutscher Bundestag 2017, 2–3).

4.2.1 Social Environment Support
Specific support cases
Within the public debate, counseling options for prevention work are often discussed as family support or counselling (for example RAN Collection 2019). In reality, the group who make use of counseling extends far beyond the family members of supposedly radicalized individuals or those at risk of radicalizing (EXP01, EXP02, EXP03, EXP04, EXP06, EXP08, EXP10, EXP12). In Germany, turning to such options for support has now become an established practice for many communities, especially in schools and youth work institutions. This widespread acknowledgement and acceptance of the approach is likely due to the fact that

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[2] Including the delayed response to the development of extremist currents in Germany that were influenced by international politics instead of pursuing a forceful and concentrated approach in the form of a comprehensive strategy pursued by the government.

[3] Such as the prominent Danish Aarhus model, which demonstrates how effective cooperation among numerous state and non-state actors can function with mutually beneficial results (see Agerschou 2014).

[4] Due to the different functional logic of far-left extremism (compared to far-right or Islamist extremism) and the limited offers of prevention and deradicalization work, we do not address this issue any further within our article (see Teune 2018).

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from 2012 onwards, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has dedicated an entire Advice Centre on Radicalisation to this task (Beratungsstelle "Radikalisierung" 2018, 3). The Advice Centre offers a first consultation by telephone and subsequently, if deemed necessary, refers those seeking help to one of the thirteen regional advice centers, run by eight different CSOs and two government authorities. BAMF, like the interviewed experts, now refers to the target groups of their and their partners' advice services as "relatives, friends, reference persons from school, institutions of child- and youth-care, social assistance, leisure organizations, etc." (Beratungsstelle "Radikalisierung" 2018, 3). The center and its network are only active in connection with Islamist extremism. For the area of far-right extremism, the services provided by the Mobile Counseling Teams have been well established for years. Since 2015, many of these regional organizations have joined together in the form of a national association (Bundesverband Mobile Beratung e.V., n.d.). In line with this, it makes sense to replace the term "family support" with the broader, and more accurate, term of "social environment support".

Theoretically, social environment support can be placed in the category of systemic counseling and differs from outreach work on account of its indirect interactions with radicalized individuals or those who are (potentially) at risk of radicalization via their social environment (El-Mafaalani et al. 2016, 17). Its ultimate objective is deradicalization and/or eliminating the threat of (further) radicalization (El-Mafaalani et al. 2016, 17). As illustrated by expert interviews with practitioners working in Germany and other EU member states, as well as by the publicly accessible activity descriptions provided by prominent actors,[5] support work is in reality often far more diverse than mere counseling (EXP01, EXP02, EXP03, EXP04, EXP05, EXP06, EXP07, EXP08, EXP09, EXP10, EXP11). Current deradicalization practices cannot easily be subdivided into the categories of systemic and outreach counseling. Instead, support work involves advice centers that, depending on the individual needs of those seeking help, conduct their activities based on the specific case at hand; this may include social environment

support but may easily comprise outreach work for potentially radicalized individuals as well.

Awareness-raising and empowering the social environment

A second – and essential – task performed in the context of social environment support involves educational, awareness raising, and empowerment work focusing on the private and professional environments within which individuals at risk of radicalization find themselves. The mobile counseling teams also play a prominent role in this work for the area of far-right extremism.

The experiences of counselors and other practitioners working in the area of Islamist extremism have shown that there is a tendency towards overreaction on the part of people who have professional contact with young people (EXP01, EXP03, EXP10). Many young religious Muslims, or those curious and learning about the religion, find themselves in serious situations of confrontation with their teachers and/or school administrators. According to practitioners, educators often appear to be unprepared to comprehend and/or deal with the real lives of young people with diverse cultural backgrounds (EXP01, EXP03, EXP10). In many European countries, societal insecurities in the face of public expressions of Islamic religious practices have proliferated even among educational professionals in schools. Counseling centers can be helpful in this context: they can classify and contextualize statements and behaviors, give the "all clear" when needed, or, if and where necessary, take on a proactive deradicalizing role without directly addressing and potentially scaring and stigmatizing the potentially radicalized target group. Counselors have also found disseminator or train-the-trainer programs useful for individuals who have regular professional contact with children and young people (EXP01, EXP03). Interestingly, there seem to be fewer reports about social overreactions with regard to far-left or far-right extremism. In these two contexts in particular, statements and/or actions that appear to be extremist in nature often appear to be dismissed or tolerated as expressions of "adolescent rebellion" – a dimension that is often not "granted" when it comes to Muslim youth (EXP03, EXP06, EXP08). When young

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[5] Such as Legato (Hamburg), HAYAT (Berlin), or Violence Prevention Network (Berlin, Hesse, Bavaria).

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people turn towards the ideological offerings provided by right or left-wing extremist spectra, they seem to enjoy a greater degree of tolerance within German society than those who turn to the relatively new phenomenon of Islamist extremism.

4.2.2 Counseling and Support for Those at Risk of Radicalization and (Partially) Radicalized Individuals

The work of social environment support described above can serve as a precursor for direct work with those at risk of radicalization. Awareness-raising measures executed in the framework of social environment support, such as targeting educators, is one possibility for establishing direct contact between the counseling offices and young people who may be at risk of radicalizing. This does of course depend on the willingness of the affected individuals to enter into dialog and to participate – as is the case for most approaches to prevention and deradicalization. In this sense, the disseminators include not only teachers at schools, but also facilities and institutions such as child and family advice and counseling centers, the police, etc. (Hohnstein, Greuel, and Glaser 2015, 25). These "multiplier-mediated" counseling sessions are firmly established within prevention and deradicalization work for both far-right extremism and Islamist extremism. Within both areas, the work suffers from a lack of coordination, sustainability, and human resources for providing these services, which are limited in duration and financed almost exclusively by fixed-term project funding (EXP01, EXP02, EXP03, EXP04, EXP05, EXP08, EXP10; Hohnstein, Greuel, and Glaser 2015, 25).

The street work programs originating from the late 1980s offer another option for initiating outreach work (Hohnstein, Greuel, and Glaser 2015, 22). This approach, which stems from work with hard-to-reach target groups who often fall outside of regular social work structures (such as hooligans, prostitutes, addicts), was adapted and has been used in the area of far-right extremism in Germany for years. It is classically oriented on the principles of acceptance-based youth work and makes use of socio-pedagogical approaches to prevent individuals from slipping (further) into extremist social circles. However, street work pro-

grams specifically tailored to extremism have continuously diminished in importance and are all but extinct today (EXP12). Services targeting far-right extremism have diminished in numbers as well, which, according to Hohnstein, Greuel, and Glaser (2015, 57), is in large part due to a decline in the visibility of classic cliques within the non-virtual, public realm.

The same rule generally applies to both street work projects and individual counseling: The design of any promising programs must be based on the individual personality structures and needs of the individual. Counseling processes can never be fully standardized (EXP01, EXP02, EXP03, EXP04, EXP05, EXP06, EXP07, EXP08, EXP09, EXP10, EXP11). Accepting this reality is an essential prerequisite for initiating voluntary contact with the respective individuals and ensuring that outcomes persist. The experiences of actors in this field show that the personal and professional backgrounds of the counselors may play a significant role. Different experiences and varied approaches to P/CVE work can therefore be seen as opportunities and not necessarily as signs of deficient standards or quality control.

Including formers in P/CVE and deradicalization work

Involving former extremists in P/CVE work following a successful process of deradicalization and social reintegration remains a contested strategy across international debates (Global Center on Cooperative Security and International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 2017, 27; Hohnstein, Greuel, and Glaser 2015, 53–54). We also witnessed a degree of disagreement on this subject among experts working as practitioners (EXP02, EXP03, EXP04, EXP05, EXP06, EXP08). The experts we interviewed in the area of Islamist extremism tended to consider the deployment of former extremists as rather insignificant. This finding comes as no surprise in light of the fact that we have not to date observed many cases of former Islamists actually deployed in such a practical capacity beyond media campaigns. Even in the area of far-right extremism – with the highest portion of formers, some of whom actually (co-)founded exit programs themselves (EXIT-Deutschland, n.d.; EXIT Fryshuset,

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n.d.) – their involvement tends to be met with acceptance rather than endorsement (EXP04, EXP05).

The issue of whether formers are professionally and pedagogically suited to perform such work is often neglected. All counseling staff working in the area of prevention and deradicalization should be required to possess the necessary skills and experience (RAN 2017a, 5). Personal first-hand experience of extremism alone is simply not a sufficient qualification. As such, besides questions of ethical acceptability and willingness on the part of the formers-turned-P/CVE-practitioners, we must also take their professional suitability into consideration.

In sum, we may conclude that the range of services on offer – including in the area of exit counseling and support – has developed organically rather than having been designed through the support of academic research and advice. Analogous to research on this subject, practical work draws largely from earlier professional experience in other areas of youth social work, such as youth work with right wing extremists in the 1980s and 1990s (Hohnstein, Greuel and Glaser 2015, 22–23). Those reinterpreted approaches for the context of exit support for far-right extremists were eventually transferred and adapted to the area of Islamist extremism (EXP12). This is underlined by the fact that organizations originally concerned with far-right extremists later also began working with Islamist extremists (for example Violence Prevention Network e.V., see Handle, Korn, and Mücke 2019 or ZDK Gesellschaft Demokratische Kultur gGmbH, see Hayat-Deutschland Beratungsstelle Deradikalisierung n.d.). This is why the underlying practice of deradicalization work proves to exhibit only nuanced differences between the areas of far-right extremism and Islamist extremism. There are also close similarities with work with religious sects, cults, gangs etc. (such as the area-specific cultural, religious, and ideological knowledge held by the practitioners).

4.2.4 Deradicalization in the Penal System

The practice of deradicalization work in penal institutions is faced with a particular challenge: On the one hand, prisons are often considered "breeding grounds" for radicalization, as inmates are particularly vulnerable due to extraordinary high levels of stress and their

(physical as well as psychological) separation from their social environment (Silke and Veldhuis 2017). Fellow inmates and recruiters are able to leverage these vulnerabilities in order to radicalize and/or recruit other inmates. On the other hand, prisons also house radicalized individuals, who may undergo a positive process of cognitive and/or emotional opening on account of the state of vulnerability in which they find themselves and might be more likely to be interested in or convinced to participate in disengagement or deradicalization programs (Neumann 2017, 42).[6]

As the design and implementation of deradicalization measures in the penal system is dependent on the respective country's approach to justice and the characteristics of its penal system as well as the configuration of its P/CVE strategies, presenting a comprehensive overview and analysis of such measures is beyond the scope of this article. This holds true even for our case study of Germany alone. To date, contributions dedicated to providing an overview of the P/CVE landscape in Germany have tended to work on systemizing projects and actors rather than aiming at understanding specific measures or approaches. Currently, the project MAPEX ("Mapping and Analysis of Prevention and Deradicalization Projects dealing with Islamist Radicalization"; 12/2017 to 11/2020) is the only wider effort aiming at delivering both a comprehensive overview and analysis of the German P/CVE landscape dealing with Islamist extremism. This sheds light on one of the central issues confronting this field: a lack of empirical analysis of the topic across all phenomena.

The most complete investigations into extremism and P/CVE within the German penal system at the time of writing were published by the Centre for Criminology in 2017. Intervention services offered within the penal system may comprise educational possibilities, career advice and vocational training opportunities, belief-based intervention, psychological and cognitive intervention, creative and cultural activities, sports, and the involvement of families, mentors and "listeners" (Illgner et al. 2017, 45–48). The aim of these interventions is to strengthen processes of de-

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[6] For a current overview of the international research debate, see Silke and Veldhuis 2017 as well as Council of Europe 2016.

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radicalization and distancing. Particularly in the scope of belief-based intervention, such measures are subject to the tension between religious freedom and security considerations (Illgner et al. 2017, 99).

Measures in the context of the penal system can be further differentiated based on the target group. In this context, work is either carried out directly with radicalized inmates, those at risk of radicalization, their social environment, or prison staff and other penal system personnel (for example awareness-raising and disseminator trainings).

5 Conclusion

This article's aim was to discuss the concept of deradicalization in relation to existing debates and systematizations of prevention work, using these insights to synthesize a first suggestion for a more coherent conceptualization of deradicalization.

To ensure practical relevance, a systematic analysis of the existing broader German P/CVE landscape was conducted, combining a review of existing literature with insights from exploratory interviews with practitioners. This led to the subsequent exclusion of all work fields that do not match the proposed definition of deradicalization. Four fields of work were classified as being directly linked to deradicalization processes: social environment support, counseling and support for those at risk of radicalization and (partially) radicalized individuals, exit support and stabilization, and deradicalization in prisons. These fields were then described in more detail in order to provide a focused overview of the practical field of deradicalization in Germany.

Through this process a number of challenges were identified, which should be taken into account when discussing, designing, and/or implementing deradicalization:

Firstly, practitioners, researchers, (security) agency staff, and policy-makers remain in disagreement as to the definition and the understanding of deradicalization. This has led to rather inconsistent and even contradictory approaches being deployed at various societal, governmental, and regional levels. Literature discussing deradicalization often seems to fail to provide a satisfying mode of transfer for practical application in the field. This is partly due to the predominant divi-

sion between theory and practice or, respectively, between those who *do research* and those *who are objects of research*.

Secondly, most of the literature, as well as interviewed experts from the field, show agreement on at least one matter: Processes of radicalization always develop individually and are heavily dependent on the respective biography and societal context of the person in question. As such, some of the most effective means to overcome the dichotomous thinking patterns and worldviews held by radicalized individuals include measures aimed at promoting tolerance of ambiguity, while also strengthening personal resilience and creating positive experiences of self-efficacy. In most cases, long-term and sustainable deradicalization only proves successful when established on this basis.

Thirdly, experiences of social environment support show that further professional training and awareness raising for staff members of institutions like kindergartens, schools, youth welfare, penal establishments, probationary services, etc. can help to promote confidence when dealing with processes of radicalization and with individuals potentially at risk of radicalizing. Accordingly, capacities in terms of time and financing should be provided for professional training courses that are adapted to current developments and target the staff members who perform educational work in this area (socio-pedagogical, psychological, etc.).

Finally, the existing hybrid model of shared responsibility between CSOs and state actors has led to the formation of a diverse and regionally differentiated landscape of deradicalization work in Germany. While problem areas such as dysfunctional multi-agency cooperation (often caused by an increasing focus on securitization and resulting conflicts between security and civil actors) undoubtedly continue to exist, the diversity of projects, approaches, and professional disciplines within the four fields of action promises to account for the complexity of radicalization and deradicalization more adequately than any centralized, "one-size-fits-all" solution.

However, in order to develop its full potential, consistent and collaborative exchanges between all involved actors must be improved. In light of the various opportunities for benefiting from knowledge of

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others, as well as the fact that various actors are active within the same systems (for example, youth work, schools, prisons), it seems crucial to ensure that conditions are in place for systematic exchange on points of access to the target groups, methods, obstacles, and success factors. The fact that such conditions have not been created by now is surprising, if not troubling, in light of the seriousness of the issue.

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EXP02: Experienced P/CVE practitioner and case manager (counselling for at-risk and partially radicalized individuals, exit work, and multiplier trainings in- and outside of prisons) in the area of right-wing extremism. Interview with Till Baaken, Berlin, Oct. 13, 2017.

EXP03: Experienced P/CVE practitioner and case manager (social environment support, counselling for at-risk and partially radicalized individuals, and exit work) in the area of Islamist extremism. Interview with Maximilian Ruf, Berlin, Oct. 18, 2017.

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