Prevention of violent extremism: The role of the Norwegian municipalities

Global challenges – Local solutions

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This presentation is prepared by Yngve Carlsson, Special Adviser on crime prevention and prevention of extremism at the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS). The paper presents his professional and academic experience and views. His comments on the role of the KS are well anchored within the organization.

Violent extremism is a global phenomenon that also affects the otherwise peaceful Scandinavian countries. This paper discusses primarily the role of the Norwegian municipalities in coping with violent extremism in general and especially jihadism and the challenge posed by foreign fighters travelling to Syria. The role of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities is also viewed briefly. It is the intention of this paper to also show the complexity of this issue. Unless this complexity is understood, it may be difficult to find ways and strategies that can reduce the problem. It is unrealistic to believe that this problem can be completely prevented.

The background in the Norwegian context: July 22, 2011

With a ratio of 16 foreign fighters per million inhabitants in Norway (and a total of 80 known foreign fighters) there are countries in Europe with relatively higher ratios of foreign fighters such as Sweden, France, Denmark and Belgium (with from 20-40 per million inhabitants). Nevertheless, there has been a strong focus on the foreign fighters returning to Norway – with the possible intention and capacity to carry out a terrorist attack. But there is also a fear of home-grown terrorists who have no foreign-fighter experience. The threat scenario seems fairly similar to that of other Western European countries.

The number of extremists within the general population of a country is not a reliable gauge of the likelihood of a terrorist attack. The July 22, 2011 terrorist attack in Oslo and on Utøya occurred while the right wing movement was weak in Norway compared with the strength it had in most other European countries¹. The current challenges and how they are perceived, are highly influenced by the 2011 terrorist events, which show how much suffering and

¹ K. Fangen and Y. Carlsson 2013: 327. We began an article about prevention of right wing extremism in Norway with approximately these words – in a German report on Right Wing Extremism in Europe (R. Melzer and S. Serafin (ed). Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin).
damage one single terrorist can cause. The whole nation was affected\textsuperscript{2}. A consequence of this is the strong desire to prevent and avoid extremism and terrorism.

In July 2014, the Norwegian Security Police were warned by cooperating foreign security services of a planned attack in the near future in Norway by terrorists belonging to the ISIL/IS. This resulted in a national alarm with control measures and police presence at airports, traffic junctions, parliament and some governmental buildings. The otherwise unarmed police force was temporarily armed – an armament that has now lasted for more than a year. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in winter 2015 kept the issue of extremism at the forefront of public attention and political debate. In addition, one of the four terrorists that executed 63 innocent persons and wounded an additional 175 at the Westgate mall in Nairobi in March 20013, was a young man of Somalian origin from Larvik, a small town in Norway. Furthermore, a suicide bomber who killed 8 persons in Somalia in spring 2014 was a Norwegian-Somalian man from Halden, another small town in Norway.

It is difficult to say whether extremism and terrorism is higher on the political agenda in Norway than in other Western European countries, but it is fair to say that it has been at the top of the agenda for the past four years. The present government (a coalition between the Conservative Party and the Progress Party which took seat after Parliament elections in 2013) made prevention and fighting extremism one of its main objectives. A detailed action plan to prevent radicalization and violent extremism was released in summer 2014. In mid-October 2014, Prime Minister Erna Solberg sent a letter to the mayors of 23 large cities and towns in Norway in which she asked for more municipal assistance in preventing violent extremism. In that connection she expressed that ... “radicalization to extreme Islam and the increasing number of Norwegian foreign fighters, is one of the most serious challenges we

\textsuperscript{2} A reminder about the extent of these terrorist acts: the bomb in front of the government buildings killed 8 people and another 82 people were wounded – some severely. Approximately 325 people were in immediate mortal peril when the bomb was triggered. With respect to the atrocities carried out at Utøya – during the summer camp of the Labour Party’s youth organization – 69 people were killed, a majority of them in their teens. 58 people were wounded – many with life-threatening wounds. \url{https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorangrepene_i_Norge_2011#Ofre}. In addition 427 young people experienced the ordeal, but managed to survive by finding hiding places on the island or by swimming in the cold waters towards the mainland 500 meters away. A large number of the young survivors saw and heard their friends being killed. In addition, the victims and those directly affected have parents, siblings, relatives and friends. Hundreds of people were involved in the rescue operation; civilians in their small boats who risked their lives to rescue more than 200 survivors from the cold waters around Utøya, ambulance personnel, doctors and nurses at nearby hospitals who treated the large numbers of wounded. With so many people affected, there were very many Norwegians who knew someone who was involved personally. The effects of the terrorist acts are closer to citizens in a small country compared to a more populous country. The bombed government buildings still stand as empty ruins in the city center of Oslo as a reminder of what happened. It will probably still take several years until a new government quarter can be rebuilt.
Five months later, the President of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, Gunn Marit Helgesen (at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, March 22, 2015) expressed that “Combating terrorism is not only a national task, it also involves action at local and regional levels and it has to be supported and facilitated by means of international co-operation among governments and institutions.”

Given the prominent position of the municipalities within the Scandinavian welfare state, where a large part of the welfare services are produced⁴, and given the role the municipalities play in developing vivid, attractive and safe communities, it is not surprising that local authorities are expected to deal with this issue. The issue is important and the municipalities play an obvious role in preventing radicalization that could lead to extremism, in order to avoid terrorist acts and to reintegrate former extremists back into the local community.

Handling an utterly complex issue

What do the Norwegian municipalities do to handle this challenge of radicalization, extremism and terrorism? Are they active, passive, puzzled? Do they rely primarily on the preventive work that is already being done within the local welfare services – and do little else? Are they engaged in ‘blame-games’ with the police, Police Security Service, prisons and the state run specialist health service – attempting to pass the responsibility on? Are they waiting for financial help from the central government, which has so strongly stressed the importance of this issue? Or do they try hard, expending much energy to find ways to meet this challenge with the resources already at hand?

The answers to such questions are that no one really knows. The Norwegian municipalities do not report on this issue. Nor, in the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)’s view, should they. Since the prevention of radicalization and extremism is integrated in many other ongoing preventive activities, a compilation of preventive activities from 428 municipalities will be of little value.

On the other hand, it is important to know what is going on in the municipalities with regard to this issue. KS has initiated a research project which describes and analyzes work in five large municipalities on this issue – where extremism has a special topicality and relevance. The research report is expected in July 2016. Until then, the answers to these questions must

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⁴ Primary health care, child care, social relief, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, leisure and cultural activities, health care for the disabled and elderly
be based on unsystematic impressions and reflections from persons who for some years have been in regular contact with the large cities and towns in Norway about this matter.

Extremism – and especially Jihadism – may be approached from different angles. The phenomenon is related to several causes. Some causes are global – and certainly out of the reach of Scandinavian municipalities. It is related to conflicts and wars in Asia and Africa which have resulted in large numbers of refugees heading for Europe – and which just now seem to trigger violent acts from right wing extremists in different European countries. It is connected to the Israel – Palestine conflict, but also to conflicts between Shia and Sunni Muslims. It is related to the interference of the US and its European allies in civil wars within Muslim states. It is related to the rise of Salafism and Conservative Islam and their dissemination throughout Europe. It is related to the Internet, YouTube, blogs and other social media where extremist organizations of various kinds (right wing, left wing, jihadist, etc.) disseminate their propaganda, which often is of a high technical quality, where violent extremism is legitimated and hatred and the dehumanization of other groups flourish. It is related to the extent to which hatred and insults are to be tolerated within the framework of freedom of expression, and to the kind of insults one must reckon with living in a society where this freedom is a fundamental value. On the national and local levels, the question of extremism is probably related to social exclusion, unemployment, poverty, and limited opportunities for social mobility; especially for young men who do not succeed within the school system. For many it is related to a feeling of not belonging to the society in which they live.

Violent extremism is thus connected to problems that are out of the reach of the local municipalities. And it is connected to problems that are unsolvable, but which may be reduced.

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5 I have been part of a network consisting of the crime-preventive coordinators from the five largest cities in Norway (Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger and Kristiansand) and the director of the Norwegian Crime Prevention Council since it was established in 2009. This network meets biannually for a day-long meeting. Radicalization and extremism have been on the agenda in each of these meetings – and increasingly so in the last couple of years. In addition, I have been in contact with other large towns with significant minority populations and with foreign fighters in Syria (Drammen, Fredrikstad, Moss, and Sarpsborg) as a consultant and ‘sparring partner’.

6 I have used the word ‘probably’. We have no Norwegian research on this - yet. Researchers from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) are engaged in a research project where they will establish an overview of the social background of Norwegian foreign fighters in Syria and gather information on the individual processes of radicalization they have undergone. The project has had a slow start due to the lack of a concession from the Data Protection Authority. An overview made by the Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation on the background of 45 foreign fighters from Norway confirms this picture of young men from a marginalized position in society. Source: [http://www.nrk.no/norge/terrorforskere-om-fremmedkrigere__mange-har-misllykes-i-livet-1.12066062](http://www.nrk.no/norge/terrorforskere-om-fremmedkrigere__mange-har-misllykes-i-livet-1.12066062)
The problem-reducing process involves numerous actors – from the Government of the United States which is now trying to take a world-leading role in community prevention\(^7\), the EU with the RAN program, the Council of Europe and the Nordic Council of Ministers. On the national level we find the Police Security Service, ordinary police, prisons, universities and research institutions, at least nine of the Norwegian ministries, and most state welfare services from employment agencies to hospitals. It involves municipal services such as kindergartens, schools, the child protection service, youth-clubs, out-reach workers, the social service, the municipal health service, urban planning and all the way to the municipal council as a democratic body and conveyer of attitudes and values. And it involves the local community with mosques, churches, youth organizations, sport organizations, local political parties, social entrepreneurs and local businesses.

Not all actions need to be coordinated, but for some actions it is a must – especially preventive and ameliorative action aimed at individual extremists themselves, their families and also victims of extremism. Some efforts must be implemented in a fixed order in time and space. There are considerable challenges with regard to coordination – especially on the local level.

In addition to this, there is great uncertainty regarding which measures have intended and positive effects and which may have undesired effects. The history of crime prevention and prevention of extremism is paved with examples of action with undesired effects. There is considerable disagreement among researchers, professionals in the services and among political parties on how these challenges are perceived and how they should be handled. Since the issue also involves strong ideological or religious convictions, frustration and anger – it may be unpleasant for professionals to address it within both state and municipal services. It is thus understandable why responsibility regarding the issue is passed on.

There are good arguments calling mobilization against radicalization and violent extremism “one of the most complex issues in Europe today” – referring to its connectedness to other unsolvable problems, the large numbers of actors involved and the uncertainty related to the impact of different preventive measures. Extremism is a problem that can be endlessly discussed from different angles and perspectives. Violent extremism is indeed a ‘wicked issue’ in the political-scientific meaning of the word.

If we do not understand this complexity, there is a risk that we may go astray and end in helplessness and the inability to act, never ending blame games, or superficial symbolic actions which say much but do little – or even worse, with measures that will have an adverse and negative effect.

\(^7\) The White House arranged a summit on countering violent extremism in February 2015. This summit has been followed up by regional conferences on each continent. The European conference was held in Oslo in June.
What are then the roads through this wilderness, which lead to the desired goal: a reduction in the numbers of extremists and a reduction in extremist violence? I do not have an answer to this; but I can try to illustrate it by presenting what seem to be the most common actions from the municipalities that have been confronted with this issue. In doing this, I choose to include policies and strategies that have justifications other than preventing extremism, but which most likely have a positive effect on preventing extremism and reintegrating extremists back into the community. This makes prevention of extremism wide and indistinct, but reflects the complexity of the issue. There is no single magic bullet to solve such a problem.

I. Prevention of social exclusion/promotion of social inclusion

Not all extremists have been socially and economically excluded in their local community. Some are well educated and come from middle class families. But there is little doubt that many come from a marginalized and disadvantaged position in society. There seems to be a considerable overlap between criminal networks and extremism in Norway. This means that if the municipalities succeed in reducing social exclusion and furthering inclusion and participation within the most important arenas in society, one probably will simultaneously reduce the number of recruits to extremist groups and organizations. What prevents crime in general, will probably have a good effect on preventing extremism.

It is fair to assert that that the Norwegian municipalities use a lot of both political and professional energy and economic resources to prevent social exclusion and promote inclusion. This is one of the core values of the welfare society in which municipalities play a major role. A large part of the municipal services deal with social exclusion/inclusion. Not all services deal with this as their main issue, but most services have social inclusion as one of their goals: Kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, the primary health care, social service, child protection service, service centers for refugees and immigrants. Many municipalities have systems of interagency-cooperation ‘around’ vulnerable children, youth, and their families. They run more targeted programs to handle deviant behavior, bullying at school, conflicts within the family and schemes for reducing the effects of poverty. The municipal services play an important role in relieving inequality, social exclusion and social problems created in other sectors within a modern and complex society.

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8 In the absence of research, the source for this allegation is journalistic: http://www.nrk.no/norge/terrorforskere-om-fremmedkrigere_-_mange-har-mislyktes-i-livet-1.12066062
9 Norwegian prevention of extremism since the early 1990s has been based on this assumption. Source: Bjørgo, T. and Carlsson Y. (1999) Vold, rasisme og ungdomsgjenger. [In Norwegian: Violence, racism and youth gangs] Oslo: Aschehoug.
The role of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) in preventing social exclusion

Social exclusion is unsolvable since the problem persists despite all the efforts made to eradicate it. But it is possible to reduce both the numbers of those excluded and the degree to which they are excluded in various spheres of life. The statement that more should be done is thus always valid, and new approaches should be considered to promote social inclusion. This is also recognized by the board of KS. Municipalities should do better than is actually the case. KS has therefore selected social exclusion as the main issue for ‘the member dialogue’ involving all Norwegian municipalities during autumn 2015.

The main question for the member dialogue is: which preconditions and possibilities do the municipalities have to achieve better results in preventing social exclusion and promoting inclusion? The ‘member dialogue’ will take place in KS fora from August 2015 to February 2016. The process will start with a discussion among professionals – supported by assistance from the most prominent researchers on these issues. It will then transition to a more political discussion in the regional KS fora, ending with political conclusions at the KS Congress in February 2016.

This process may increase the quality of the forthcoming debates among professionals within municipal services, among the various municipal services, within the municipal administrations and in each municipal council – thus better equipping them to make sound political decisions on how to prevent social exclusion and promote inclusion. Doing so – they may also prevent extremism.

II. Develop and strengthen local democracy

Because of the violence committed by extremists, there has been a strong focus on preventing violence. In our eagerness to prevent violence we may have forgotten that extremism – Islamist, right wing, and left wing – implies contempt for democracy and democratic procedures.

The Scandinavian municipalities – representing a third to a half of public expenditure, are built on a strong democratic foundation. They enjoy confidence and legitimacy – but not in equal measures among all groups; especially not among marginalized groups. This means that an important goal should be to increase participation from marginalized groups including refugees and immigrants, not only as voters in the local elections, but also in local decision-making processes and establishing new channels for dialogue and participation. This may increase trust in democracy. The pioneer municipality in Norway in this regard is probably the municipality of Øvre Eiker – which experienced a neo-Nazi mobilization twenty years ago. The answer to this was: more democracy – more local democracy. Since then it
has continuously developed local democracy by establishing new fora and modes of participation for different groups within the society\textsuperscript{10}.

Most Norwegian municipalities have established representative and democratic youth councils. Many of these youth councils play an important role as a conveyor of the interests of youth to the municipal political processes. Some youth councils consist of workshops where important local issues are discussed – such as tolerance and prevention of extremism. At the same time it is fair to say that not all youth councils function particularly well. In the worst case, if they do not have any clear purpose, tasks and good working procedures, they may be counterproductive and stimulate political passivity or even contempt for democracy.

To improve and extend local democracy is an end in itself. The municipalities and KS have continuously placed the quality of local democracy on the agenda. Since a strong local democracy is also a bulwark against extremism, this is an argument for an even stronger effort to develop more well-functioning local democracy.

III. The foundation: An established system of cooperation between the municipality and the police

The Norwegian approach to handling extremism is built on an established system of cooperation between the municipal agencies and the local police. Approximately 170 out of the 428 municipalities have established local youth-crime-prevention councils – many of them from the early 1990s. Key persons from the municipal services (secondary schools, child protection, primary health work, out-reach work, youth club leaders, etc.) regularly meet with key persons from the police and especially police officers with a defined preventive task. They monitor the local youth-crime situation, discuss appropriate measures and coordinate these. This includes coordination of help and assistance measures on an individual level\textsuperscript{11}. A majority of municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants have such councils and also a crime-prevention coordinator\textsuperscript{12} that serves them. In smaller municipalities cooperation and coordination between the municipal services and the local police is more informal and ad-hoc. In addition, in nearly all the municipalities so-called ‘police councils’ have been established, which are a regular meeting point on a more


\textsuperscript{11} Individual cases are not discussed in all these councils. Many have established subgroups with few participants to deal with this. This is justified by the rules of confidentiality.

\textsuperscript{12} In medium size municipalities (10,000 – 40,000 inhabitants) such coordinators are usually employed on a part-time basis. Many combine this with a part-time position as a coordinator of public health measures or as a youth worker. In larger municipalities, the job of crime-prevention coordinator is predominately a full-time job. Oslo, with its 650,000 inhabitants, has 17 full-time crime-prevention coordinators.
strategic level among the political and administrative leadership from the municipality and heads of the local police. Neither the youth-crime-preventive councils nor the police councils are mandatory for the municipalities.

The cooperation between municipal services and the local police has greatly improved over the last 20-25 years. A major reason for this is that the police have changed their attitude in favor of prevention. Large police stations have established preventive units, and many small police stations have a dedicated prevention officer. In addition, all police officers educated during the last 15 years have a bachelor degree from the police university college. They are not only educated in how to chase criminals and in law-enforcement, but also in sociology and criminology. There is today better agreement between professionals from the municipalities and the police on what causes crime and what needs to be done to reduce it. There are seldom major ideological controversies between the police and key persons from the municipality. Evaluations of the police councils show that leaders from both the police and the municipality express general satisfaction with this cooperation. Through this cooperation a lot of innovative practice has emerged.

Both Denmark and Sweden have similar systems for cooperation between the police and the municipalities. While some other countries dealing with extremism have to build up such a system, in addition to a cooperative spirit and trust, the Scandinavian countries already have a solid basis on which to build this work.

During a previous wave of extremism in Norway from 1990-2005, when right wing extremism was the major challenge, this cooperation between the municipal agencies, the local police and also local NGOs, resulted in a lot of innovation in how to approach local extremist groups. During this period, about 20 municipalities experienced violent activity from local right wing extremist groups. Some of the most hard-hit municipalities together with local police and local NGOs made a considerable effort to dissolve such local groups and to

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13 The basis of this allegation is the author’s 32 years of experience from interaction between municipal agencies and the police – first three years as a community consultant in Drammen, then 20 years as a researcher on municipal problem solving and crime prevention, and finally, the last nine years as an adviser on prevention of crime/extremism within the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities.

14 https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/lov-og-rett/kriminalitet-og-politi/innsikt/politirad/ld2343430/

15 To give an example of innovative practice originating from this cooperation:

The Oslo police have developed a gentler method of managing demonstrations – in cooperation with the municipality. Demonstrations – for example against Israel or drawings of the Prophet - may easily devolve into riots. Riots often attract extremists who wish to fuel the fire and who make use of the occasion for recruitment purposes. Nowadays, demonstrators in Oslo rarely see any police along the route, but they will probably see youth workers and teachers from the districts where most of the protestors live. The youth workers and teachers are mobilized through the crime-prevention coordination system in Oslo. Protestors/demonstrators see civilians they know, and these civilians thus exert a soft and non-provocative social control. This is in contrast to demonstrations in other parts of Europe where demonstrators are often met by a police force dressed and equipped for a fight. In addition, the police enter into a close dialogue with the initiators of the demonstration in advance in order to make them aware of their responsibility and ability to prevent violence – a form of self-policing. Over the last five to six years such a strategy has proved to be successful.
reintegrate young extremists back into society. The right wing extremist scene was reduced from probably 300 to below 100 in 2005, and activity was low.\textsuperscript{16}

The challenge of extremism and terrorism today is different than that of the nineties when the challenge was very local. Its global nature and the role of the Internet and social media make it much more complicated to handle locally. This means that the methods and tools for prevention, intervention and rehabilitation must be developed and adapted to the current challenge. But the strategy must be built on the same pillars – a close cooperation between the police, the municipal agencies and civil society (including youth organizations and initiatives, mosques and religious leaders).

A new agency has now entered the field; The Norwegian Police Security Service. This service has until recently operated in secret and been very invisible for the municipal agencies. During the last couple of years this ‘secret’ branch of the police has become more visible, and it has been more generous in sharing its knowledge of extremism as a phenomenon and on the current situation internationally and nationally with the municipalities. However, some municipalities claim that the service is too restrictive when reporting on the local situation. If the municipal agencies are to establish measures to integrate foreign fighters and assist their families (including their siblings), they need to know who these fighters are. The Police Security Service obviously has its reasons for not revealing everything it knows, but it has even been reluctant to tell specific municipalities how many known foreign fighters from the municipality are engaged in Syria. For the municipality, it is of great importance to know whether there are one or two or eight or ten foreign fighters when it allocates resources for prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.

The exchange of information and cooperation between the municipality, the ‘ordinary’ police and the ‘secret’ security police will be examined in the above-mentioned research project.

IV. What do the municipalities do which is solely directed at preventing extremism?

Raising the awareness of first line practitioners

Larger municipalities such as Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger, Trondheim, Kristiansand, Fredrikstad, Asker, Bærum, Hamar (to mention some) have prepared local guidelines for first line practitioners based on a national model worked out by the Ministry of Justice. The guidelines present the most important concepts (such as radicalization and extremism), the most active extremist groups, and describe a path of action for how to handle worries. This

includes signs of worries, who to contact to confer about the worries, guidelines for how to go into a dialogue with a person being radicalized and how to follow up persons who are more deeply rooted in extremism. Some of the guidelines also clarify the rules of confidentiality when exchanging information between agencies, and how these rules apply to the public servant’s duty to avert serious criminal acts.

Some of the municipalities have also established guidelines on how to handle persons who are about to be recruited as foreign fighters and how to follow up persons coming back after having served as a foreign fighter.

Several large municipalities have run seminars for first line practitioners working with groups at risk of radicalization and ‘extremization’. Lecturers at such seminars have usually been the most prominent researchers or most experienced practitioners in this field in Norway – including specialists from the Police Security Service\textsuperscript{17}.

That some of the larger municipalities have run seminars and established rules and routines for handling worries and even handling returned foreign fighters, says nothing about what they actually do. But this means that some efforts have been made to be prepared for action. An open question is how much energy small municipalities - those with populations of one thousand or two and very few refugees or immigrants - shall put into these preparations when the probability of extremism is very low.

**Dialogue and cooperation with Muslim communities and mosques**

My impression is that municipalities with a large Muslim population have established a dialogue with the Muslim communities and mosques, at least with moderate Muslim communities, to discuss how to coexist and cooperate within a multicultural and multi-religious community. In addition, religious leaders are probably better mentors for young people on religious questions than a municipal professional. Besides - both radicalization and the recruitment of extremists occasionally seems to happen in the periphery of the Muslim communities. It is important that Muslim leaders are aware of this and that they are prepared to handle it. How this dialogue functions, how deep it goes, and what issues are discussed, the author does not know.

A challenge for some municipalities is whether they shall cooperate with conservative Muslim communities and groups that dissociate themselves from the use of violence, but promote values that are in deep conflict with democratic and liberal values? Are such groups a firewall against violent extremism or a conveyor belt into extremism? And can cooperation with such groups give them a legitimacy they should not have? There are no simple answers

\textsuperscript{17} The twin towns of Fredrikstad and Sarpsborg even managed to obtain Haras Rafiq, a Managing Director of the Quilliam Foundation in London, as a keynote speaker in a seminar for 250 first line practitioners from the two municipalities.
to such questions, but the municipalities cannot ignore them. They must nonetheless relate to them.

Strengthen resilience to hate rhetoric, anti-democratic propaganda, conspiracy theories, etc.

Extremism is not only associated with social exclusion. It is also related to the conveyance of hatred, myths, conspiracy theories, etc. – through blogs, social media, and YouTube videos. A pressing challenge is how to promote tolerance and democratic values and build resilience to intolerance and hatred – within the school system. How can we stimulate critical thinking among students so that they are not that easily affected by hatred and extreme ideas. And what kind of education and training do teachers need - to be able to meet extreme views in the classroom – without overrunning students who express such ideas?

The Norwegian Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities has developed a program – in close cooperation with schools from Oslo, Bærum and Sørum – to strengthen activities in schools to increase the students’ resilience to racism, anti-Semitism and undemocratic attitudes. This program seems to have much in common with the Swedish Kungalv program to foster tolerance\(^1\). Its model for tolerance work has spread to many other Swedish municipalities and now also to the municipality of Sarpsborg in Norway.

Such programs can be very demanding and time-consuming for the schools. If we take into consideration that we deal with one of our nation’s and Europe’s most severe challenges, there are at least good reasons to consider applying such programs.

Exit from extremism

During the previous wave of right wing extremism from 1990 to 2005, several Norwegian municipalities succeeded in reintegrating extreme youth into the community using a variety of measures – in cooperation with both local police and local NGOs\(^2\). Whether the extremists were deradicalized, we do not exactly know. Some of them probably continued to have racist views, but they were detached from the violent groups and they stopped using violence. One reason for this success was probably that many of these participants were fairly young – under 18 – so that they could be reached through services run by the municipality. In addition, parent groups were established to strengthen their ability to help their own children. Today, the participants in extreme groups are older, and those returning

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\(^1\) [http://toleransprojektet.se/the-tolerance-project-2/](http://toleransprojektet.se/the-tolerance-project-2/)

from Syria may have psychosomatic problems that obviously are out of reach of the municipal services. This makes reintegration and the exit process more demanding.

Aarhus in Denmark has established a municipal exit project, based on a widespread use of mentors, which is developed in close cooperation with the institute of psychology at the University of Aarhus. In Sweden, during the past 17 years a national exit program for neo-Nazis and gang members has been run with ‘formers’ in some of the leading roles within the program. Both these programs seem to place more weight on detachment than on deradicalization.

KS asserts that it should be a state responsibility to establish and run a national exit project for adults in Norway. We need a project with very special competence – perhaps supplemented by ‘formers’ as in the Swedish project. It will be very demanding for almost all Norwegian municipalities to find the relevant competence to work with adult extremists returning from IS and Syria. And if they find such competence locally, it will be difficult to preserve this competence because such local exit projects must be staffed up and down according to rather random recruitment.

The municipality of Fredrikstad (75,000 inhabitants) has obtained state grants to establish a local exit project. There are probably 10 foreign fighters from Fredrikstad in Syria. State grants are of course better than financing exit work from ordinary municipal budget. A possible solution is to develop this local project into a national project.

It is the viewpoint of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Government that the national strategy to prevent extremism should have two more pillars:

**VI. Make the bridge between research and local communities as short and wide as possible**

The efforts to prevent and counter extremism in the three communities which were hardest affected by right wing extremism between 1991 and 2004 were described and analyzed in several research reports. Brumunddal, Oslo south and Kristiansand became important learning arenas for how to handle such extremism. The local strategies were developed in a close cooperation between key actors in the local community and researchers. The other 15 communities that were affected, very quickly received counseling from these researchers and practitioners that were at the forefront. The bridge between research and local community was made short and wide. The research and exchange of knowledge were supported by project grants from a generous state.

A precondition for successful actions to prevent and reduce a complex and wicked problem, is that the actors involved work in the same direction, share necessary information and
knowledge, and often that they contribute with their resources in some orderly and coordinated way. This means that there is an urgent need for systematic learning and evaluations. In fall 2014, the Norwegian Association of Local Governments (KS), with financial support from the Ministry of Justice, launched an action-oriented research project in five cities/towns to study how the problem of extremism is defined and perceived, how the actors involved interact to reduce the problem and how local innovation and good practice is promoted. What are the keys to success and which dilemmas and obstacles arise in such work? How can one steer clear of such dilemmas and reduce these obstacles?

Knowledge is developed through interaction between local actors and researchers – in a formative process. In addition to the five involved cities/towns (Oslo, Fredrikstad, Sarpsborg, Larvik and Kristiansand), 25 cities or towns were invited to three seminars during the 18 month research process to obtain immediate access to the knowledge that was developed in the five ‘core’ municipalities.

This research project is no in-depth evaluation, but probably a forerunner for such evaluations later on. In Scandinavia, there seems to be a large overlap between participation in criminal gangs and extremist groups. Two of the United States’ leading criminologists, Scott Decker and David Pyrooz, have recently published an interesting article on twelve lessons learned – regarding both mistakes and successes – from the study of gangs that have relevance to the study of extremist groups. One lesson is: evaluate your programs and action.

On the other hand – as is emphasized by Bjørgo and Gjelsvik (2015) – it is important that policymakers on both the national and local level do not expect evaluations that produce results clearly demonstrating the types of measures that work (and those that do not work) in preventing radicalization and extremism. It is nearly impossible to carry out controlled experiments with a matched control group where one is object for an intervention and the other not. Referring to Pawson and Tilley, 1997, the effect of a measure is dependent on the social context and circumstances in which it is implemented. What has an intended effect in one context, will not necessarily work in a different local community or with a different target group. In the affluent Scandinavian welfare states and municipalities, most extremists will not be affected by only one measure, but often a combination of many. This means that it is impossible to evaluate the effort of an isolated measure. One can only

21 If we don’t, we risk ending up with hundreds of ‘promising programs or approaches’. Many of them can in fact be counterproductive.
measure whether the combination of measures has had the desired effect or not; measuring the effect of a single measure is not possible. In depth evaluations of local action/programs may make us wiser, but there will still be considerable uncertainty about what works and what does not.

VIII. The need for a generous government

Due to the uncertainty surrounding which programs and activities work and which do not, and because the challenge is utterly complex and ‘wicked’, local actors often have to try, perhaps fail, learn, and then try again. To develop effectively targeted action for extremism probably requires some economic leeway. Even for the Norwegian municipalities that may seem affluent, it is challenging funding social intervention and experimentation in this field. This is because municipal funding of local experimental action will mean a subsequent reduction in some other municipal services. This means that there will be a cautious hesitation in spending money on efforts where the effect is uncertain and implementation is complicated due to the many actors involved.

The prevention of right wing extremism between 1992 and 2004 was supported by a generous state funding local innovation and action – in prevention, intervention and rehabilitation. The current Norwegian government has been reluctant to do this, although lately there has been some progress.

One of the roles of the KS is to constantly remind the government that this problem is so complex that it needs generous state funding of local action, innovation, and research-based evaluations. Project grants from the state are not a prerequisite for local action, but will certainly encourage it and the subsequent innovation that is necessary for developing wise and effectively targeted measures.