

Recognising and Responding to Radicalisation

Considerations for policy and practice through the eyes of street level workers



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Municipalities of Amsterdam, Birmingham, Essen, the Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht

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The Message

The project Recognising and Responding to Radicalisation set out to explore the question: what would assist front line professionals, and community activists, develop an enhanced understanding of the process of radicalisation? The project was specifically concerned with the process of radicalisation leading to support for or engagement in acts of terror inspired by a violent Islamist ideology. This ideology has increasingly been communicated as a “single narrative” using an abusive interpretation of Islam and a distorted view of the history of the relationship between Muslims and the so called “West” in order to exploit local and national grievances and the apparent search for meaning and identity amongst sections of Muslims communities in European Cities.

Over a ten month period, across six European Cities, clusters of workers who directly interface with local Muslim communities were engaged in a range of learning and assessment processes. These activities were designed to reflect on the training and development needs of these key influencers, and to develop a tool for matching adequate training programmes which could enhance their ability to both recognise and respond to the radicalisation of individuals. Relevant training programmes were therefore tested and assessed as part of these processes.

The project was not concerned with adding to the body of research related to the definitions of radicalisation or terrorism or indeed to enter into a dialogue regarding the validity or not of a specific focus on this form of extremism relative to other forms of extremism. Rather it posed the question that within the context of national and local policy that sought to prevent violent Islamist inspired extremism, how front line professionals were being supported to both recognise and respond to this form of radicalisation.

There were marked differences in terms of each city’s assessment of the nature of the risk that this process of radicalisation posed. This was reflected in differences in the level of activity at a policy and practice level being delivered to counter this threat. The Cities contact with and understanding of Muslim communities also differed, as did the history of migration and sources of migration.

The nature of who were engaged in this exercise and how the engagement took place varied but included the following processes:

- Formal evaluation of training approaches designed to enhance participants understanding or recognition of radicalisation.
- Formal meetings to assess specific interventions as a method of responding to radicalisation
- Testing specific approaches on targeted groups
- Sample juries to comment on the contents of materials or the pedagogy of a particular intervention
- Workshops within the context of conferences or other events.

The following groups were engaged, although not universally across all cities:

- Teachers
- Neighbourhood police officers
- Youth Workers
- Elected Officials
- Policy makers and senior managers
- Muslim women activists
- Muslim young people
- Imams as well as teachers in Islamic schools
- Muslim community activists

This activity was undertaken over a 10 month period across the following cities: Amsterdam, Utrecht, The Hague, Rotterdam, Essen and Birmingham. Each City allocated an expert

whose role was to coordinate and evaluate the in-city activity and evaluate the common findings across all cities. It is interesting to note that the cities' participants hailed from different departments. The Dutch cities have organised radicalisation issues in their Security and Public Order departments, whereas Birmingham has positioned it within the Equality and Diversity Division and Essen has placed the topic within the Integration and Intercultural Bureau.

A project Steering Group involving experts from each city was also engaged to assess the information: highlighting the key finding that emerged from this work and to make recommendations concerning future policy. The final report was written by Yousiff Meah and Colin Mellis from the Cities of Birmingham and Amsterdam respectively.

Initial findings were presented at the project's final conference in Amsterdam, where local partners were invited to exchange their experiences with policy makers. The conference introduced the six cities and their programs. There were panel discussions on the different roles and needs that professionals may have in countering radicalisation. To make the issue of radicalisation more real a few personal stories were shared and finally this was tied together by the presentation of the project's findings. The recommendations in this final report are based on that presentation and include the feedback from the final conference.

Why this work is significant

The findings from this project may be of particular significance for policy makers for a number of reasons principally because they have been based on primary research with findings derived from a view "looking through the eyes of street level workers". These findings have been tested across a number of cities and with a number of different types of street level workers yet report on shared understandings and concerns. The findings are therefore likely to have a significant degree of transferability. Around 1,000 people have been involved in contributing to the findings which when tested across cities contained a high degree of assessed face validity for street level workers as well as policy makers and managers in public administrations.

The project has been designed, delivered and assessed not through an academic framework or discipline but rather from policy makers who are active in designing and delivering interventions; and in conclusion the report:

- Provides an analysis of the factors that may inhibit front line professionals and key community influencers playing an effective role in preventing young people's path to violent extremism,

And,

- Suggests a number of key policy and practice initiatives that would enhance the level of preventive activity at a local level

Naturally there are limitations. The project could not claim to have been designed with specific standards of validity applied to academic research. Nor has it been possible to identify the degree of difference across types of professions - due to the fact that each city engaged with a different combination of professionals and utilised different methodologies.

Nonetheless, the main strength of this work is derived from the direct focus on a practice-based perspective, with the data being generated directly from those engaging or impacting on Muslim young people; and the analysis being assessed by senior policy makers and managers of services, assisted by technical or professional experts.

A summary of approaches evaluated as significant as part of this project are highlighted as case studies within the body of the report. The report concludes with a number of key findings which includes a proposed "solution matrix"

Key messages from front-line staff

Key messages from front-line staff and community activists concerning the policy and practice designed to prevent violent extremism were not a core objective of the project, yet the nature of discussions with a number of front line professionals highlighted a degree of similarity in terms of the emerging key discourses that would be useful for policy makers concerned with widening the engagement of street level workers in countering the terrorist threat through a focus on preventative activity. These are outlined below:

- There is a need to shift both policy and practice from a perceived focus on encouraging front line staff to “spot radicals” to one that promotes their willingness to “signal concerns”

“a real problem is that it feels like we are being asked to identify terrorists...we have a role in ensuring that our young people can explore ideas and debate these ...I certainly would be concerned that providing names of young people, particularly to so called counter terrorist officers would end up criminalising these young people who need support to explore their ideas and question their validity.” {Youth worker, Birmingham}

“naturally, if there was a process where I could simply tell someone that I am not sure but I am a bit worried about myand I was convinced that the City would sensitively approach and support then of course this would mean I would positively work to make sure these young people, who I care about , get the care they need” {Community activist, Birmingham}

“at first I was sceptical...like they want me to spy on my kids or something, but the training was useful and now I know who I can call if I’m concerned” {Teacher, Amsterdam}

- Associated with the above is a recurring discourse concerning the need to ensure that prevent policy and practice have to be based on care-based interventions and are distinctively differentiated from activities concerned with pursuing terrorists.

“I can’t imagine that we are in the business of identifying terrorists” {Teacher, The Hague}

“The perception is that prevent and counter terrorism is exactly the same which then creates a misinformed view that prevent is only about seeking out and imprisoning criminals...also that this is what counter terrorism is also about. We need to make sure that the aspect of prevent which we need front line professionals - who engage with young people on...everyday matters – to be involved in seeks to build an understanding that their role in countering terrorism is to prevent young people from being exposed to risks that will cause them harm or to be able to reject attempts to engage them in criminal activity. For that to happen we need a policy and a clear message that promotes “care” based interventions.” {A Trustee of a Mosque in Birmingham}

There were two particular discourses which were exclusively raised by Muslim front line professionals or community activists:

- The need to shift language which becomes interpreted as the State wishes to promote a particular form of Islam which “they” describe as Moderate.

“The separation of Church and State only seems to apply when governments want to avoid helping Muslims, but everyone is fine with the head of the labour party saying that the government should support a ‘liberal’ Islam. What does he mean with liberal Islam? Imagine him speaking out in favour of Protestants over Catholics, or liberal Jews over orthodox Jews. How can you work with a government that only accepts ‘liberal’ Muslims? They apparently want to decide how I should practice my religion.” {Civil servant, The Hague}

- To engage with Muslim women as activist within the community rather than restrict the focus of activity around a discourse that views Muslim women as “mothers who need educating in spotting signs of their sons being terrorist”

“It appears that the government views Muslim women as oppressed house wives who need liberating rather than active agents for change who have a direct political and educational role in challenging extremist ideology” {Women Community Worker, The Hague}

“As mothers we are unlikely to be inspired to work with the police if in their discussions they imply that we must spy on our own children, rather the focus should be on developing our strengths as community builders and educators” {Muslim women Rotterdam}

There was also one specific issue that was most relevant to the Dutch context but which might have significance beyond this specific context:

- There is a need to shift policy debates away from merely a discussion about the separation between church and state into a search for developing models for positive and productive partnerships with Muslim communities to counter radicalising mindsets within young people.

“Although there is recognition in the Netherlands that the Muslim community is a key partner in countering radicalisation, there is a hesitancy to actually carry out any activities that may deal with religion in any way. There is a perception that any such activity would be a breach in the principle of the separation between ‘church and state’. This institutional principle of neutrality is often misunderstood as constituting a strict non-engagement policy with religion based in law. The conclusion is that it is not so much a legal issue, but that is a political issue.” {Policy Advisor, Amsterdam}

“For example, Birmingham has taken the view that engaging at-risk-youth in faith-oriented mentoring is worth trying, with impressive results. Moreover, Birmingham has assisted mosques in improving their governance practices. Both of these policies are currently considered politically unrealistic in the Netherlands.” {Local Politician, Amsterdam}

Finally, a very central message concerned the degree of confidence relating to the ability to provide support to young people.

- The need to enhance an understanding of what works and in particular to move away from a focus on risk factors to a focus on building knowledge around protective factors.

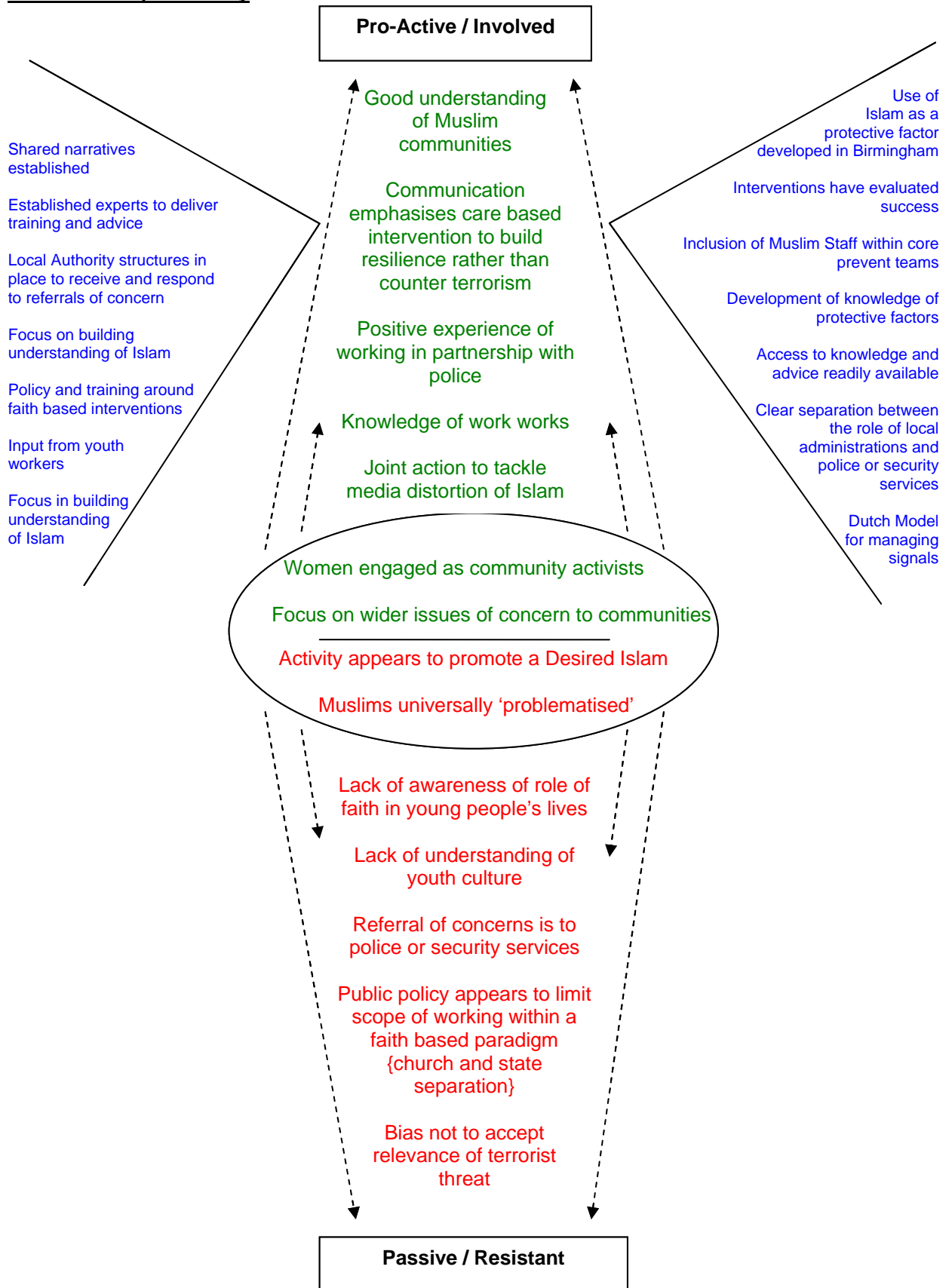
“Once I get to the point of recognising that there is a need to intervene, then what? What resources or responses can I make” {Child protection worker, Amsterdam}

“This is an unbounded problem where we are as yet not sure what the boundaries are in respect to the radicalisation process.....what makes someone blow them selves up? There remains absence of knowledge related to the de radicalisation process – what works and why. And it is perhaps true to say that the emerging suggestion that Islam itself is a protective factor is for some a step too far.” {Policy maker, Birmingham}

These discourses are presented as a model in figure 1 (see below).

The model identifies factors {red} that discourage front line staff to cooperate on the agenda or to report concerns about an individual or group; and factors {green} that encourage professionals to be pro active and involved. The inner circle suggests factors that might be of particular relevance to front line professionals or activists who are Muslim. The {blue} wings of input-text represent policies that can either assist in removing prohibiting factors or heightening pro-active factors.

Figure 1: front-line staff resistance vs pro-activity



Key finding 1

There appears to remain a significant need to enable key front line professionals to recognise the need to be proactive in responding to radicalisation in order to address the terrorist threat

Of course, the threat levels differ from city to city and country to country, but in each case front line professionals can play a positive role. Perhaps one of the key issues of concern to emerge from this work is the extent to which some front line professionals do not accept that they have a potentially significant role in respect to countering the terrorist threat.

This manifests itself on three possible levels

1. An absence of awareness of the nature of the issues and a tendency therefore to pay little attention to the potential for a contribution to be made.
2. A rejection or disbelief of the level of threat posed to young people.
3. A lack of trust in the motivation of police and security services preventing close engagement

Activity that enables front line staff to both accept the nature of risk and understand that their institution and profession can make a difference is vital to enhance the contribution that those directly interacting with young people make to protecting young people from harm. It is clear that an absolute denial of risk would cause potential signals to go unnoticed; however, there is also a significant lack of knowledge related to what would constitute a cause for concern that might trigger a response.

Just as enabling front line staff to become pro active in the face of violent extremism does not mean that they must spy on their clients, it also does not mean they must be made experts on radicalisation. Distinguishing between conservatism, orthodoxy, rebelliousness and extremism is very difficult and requires substantial knowledge and experience. It is unrealistic to expect this from all front line staff. It is however important that they are aware of the risks to their clients, informed of what may be a matter of concern, and know where they can seek expert advice.

Case study 1

This is the approach of the trainings offered by the city of Amsterdam (and Rotterdam). In Amsterdam the centre that provides advice and support for front line professionals is known as the information house. As far as training and advice goes, this unit has offered training programs to nearly 400 professionals in the city. A member of the information house unit visits each training. There we explain the city's policies on radicalisation give case examples and share our contact information with the participants. This face-to-face meeting increases the confidence and trust in the municipality's expertise and intentions.

For further information contact: pslooten@bda.amsterdam.nl

There exist in some sectors suspicions regarding the motivation of police and security services in relation to this agenda. These potentially reflect long establish views or suspicions and different levels of contact with young people. The perception of counter terrorist approaches combined with media portrayal of "Muslims" and their relationship to terrorism significantly hinders front line staff's willingness to refer concerns about an individual or groups.

At the RecoRa Conference in Amsterdam Yousiff Meah told a story inspired by Imam Ghazali to emphasise the shared outcomes we are seeking to achieve.

This involved three companions who despite coming from different regions, journeyed together in order to address moments of conflict. These companions were represented at the conference as being The Police, A Policy Maker, and a Muslim Community Activist.

On one particular journey the three companions are overcome with difficulties, losing their provisions and facing a number of calamities [which they endure together]. When all seems forlorn, by the grace of Allah they stumble across a gold coin and then a market stall. The three companions discuss what to do with their good fortune. One advises that they should buy 'druiven' [which is Dutch for grapes] the other suggest that they buy 'Trauben' [which is German for grapes]. The third disagrees and suggests that they purchase grapes. Their disagreements become such that they no longer become concerned with promoting peace but they become a focus from dispute.

Imam Ghazali merely asks the question what would have happened had the three had the benefits of an interpreter. Yousiff Meah went on to suggest that perhaps in regard to this agenda there is also an opportunity to argue whether we should buy green grapes or red grapes or black grapes.

And whilst through ignorance two of the group may suggest that the grapes are used to make wine, ultimately however it is important that we focus on recognising that we are working to achieve the same goal and this needs us to work at building empathy and understanding and a willingness to compromise and listen to one another

Where action has been taken to directly address these perceptions positive evaluations of the impact on partnership working has been demonstrated.

Case study 2 : Operation Nicole and Act Now

Developed and delivered by the Police Service in the United Kingdom, Operation Nicole is a desk top exercise which involves members of the Muslim Communities working with police officers on a counter terrorism scenario. Act Now is a specific version designed for use with young people.

Community Members [young people] adopt the role of police officer and counter terrorism officers and are gradually presented with information and intelligence designed to increase awareness of how and why police decide to act in order to avoid a threat to the public being realised. The exercise also involves neighbourhood police officers exploring the exercise from the view point of members of the public.

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A significant barrier in some professional settings was the poor level of understanding of Islam and youth culture. Where front line staff interact with young Muslims on a daily basis this knowledge gap [in terms of understanding your client] limits the ability to signal, let alone, positively affect processes of radicalisation. Recognising the deviation requires definition of the mean. One can only identify an extreme if one knows what is normal.

Case study 3: Building on trust (Rotterdam's awareness training)

In day to day practice it is not easy to recognise signs or signals of possible radicalisation. It is important to be careful, as ill informed conclusions may lead to counterproductive decisions.

Rotterdam has developed an 'integrated awareness training' for front-line professionals who predominantly work with youth. In this training they are made aware of the risks of radicalisation, yet they also learn which behaviour should not be considered radicalisation [e.g. what is 'normal' for youth]. In the group sessions there is time for debate and discussion regarding case examples. In this way they learn some basics to recognise radicalisation and ways to deal with it.

The awareness training also opens up the portal to the advisory point of the information switch point (ISPR). Professionals and members on the public may contact the advisory point with a wide variety of questions or concerns on the topic of radicalisation.

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An associated issue related to this was the significant gap in some front line professional's basic understanding or awareness of Islam as a factor that shaped identity in Muslim communities. The conference heard three personal stories which outlined how individuals had progressed towards accepting the ideology of division and violence. Noticeable amongst these was a Dutch Moroccan born young man who described how the lack of understanding of who he was as a Muslim in his school both increased his sense of dissociation from his school friends – ignorance of his difference had the impact of accelerating this feeling of being different – and also ensured that when he was searching for a Muslim identity the school were unaware of any signs that he was becoming more and more aggressive in his ideology.

“one of the key issue here is that providers of public services need to know who there clients are, not to be experts in another persons religious belief but to understand enough to make them feel valued and accepted.”

“It is difficult to enable front line professionals to begin to recognise what may be abnormal, if they are unaware of what is usual”

Case study 4: Know Your Client in Birmingham

Know your client is a series of workshops designed to enable policy makers and front line professionals to explore how they might assess and respond to the needs of Muslim communities through their particular service as well as the contribution that can be made by Muslims in the area being focussed on.

Workshops have been designed for the business sector, education, health and youth services and addresses the following topics: an understanding of Islam, the history and demography of Muslim communities in Birmingham; relevant data on need and best practice relative to each specific sector. These workshops are designed to enable policy makers and service deliverers to know their Muslim communities both as clients and positive resources.

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Key Finding 2

The analysis of the radicalisation process developed in Amsterdam has a significant explanatory power that assist front line professionals understand the nature of the problem

During the course of the project training the Analysis used extensively in Amsterdam was tested across other cities. This model builds a description of the radicalisation process using three interlocking spheres relating to Demand, Supply and Breeding Ground (see appendix 1). This model originally designed by Colin Mellis, and developed with Yousiff Meah, builds on the analysis by the Dutch Government which suggested that three aspects play an important role in the process of “radicalisation” – the individual process, the interpersonal dynamic and the effect of circumstance.

The model as an awareness raising training aide has been intensively tested across Dutch Cities and during the course of this project was tested in Essen and Birmingham. Birmingham in particular engaged Colin Mellis directly in delivering this package to a range of different stakeholders: Muslim Women’s Group, Youth Workers, Policy Makers, and Muslim young people. Each time the model opened new ways of not only understanding the process of radicalisation but also opening new possibilities of directly contributing to the agenda for preventing violent extremism.

“other explanatory models appear to emphasise in a discreet way the interplay between ideology, grievances and identity. Colin provides a simple yet detailed analysis of the interplay between these forces. More importantly, he does not promote an over simplistic view of a distinct ideology being the cause of radicalisation but rather describes how seductive a simple narrative can be in exploiting the environment at a micro and macro level.”

{Policy Maker, Birmingham}

The assessed value of this model relates to the extent to which front line staff and community activists were able to identify both the dynamic nature and the potential to impact positively in addressing the problem. Moreover, when presented with a model that rings true or resonates, the confidence in partnership with the municipality increased.

“Expertise builds confidence and knowledgeable understanding builds trust.”

{Policy advisor, Amsterdam}

Key Finding 3

The model for prompting signals and planning interventions developed and tested in the Dutch Cities is significant and should be replicated across the E.U.

Case study 5

Amsterdam's 'information house' takes calls from concerned professionals or key figures and seeks to either allay these concerns or support and advise the professional in order to affect positive change. In some cases the information house will refer the concerned caller to other professionals or key figures who may be in a better position to positively affect an individual who is at risk or in the process of radicalisation.

Of course there is a relationship with the police, yet there is a clear division of labour. As long as the concern is limited to ideology, the municipality is responsible. The moment there are any indications that one might act on this ideological development the police take over.

The goal is not to arrest, the goal is to turn the process of radicalisation, to reintegrate radicalising youth back into the societal fold.

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The application of this model was assessed through a field work assessment involving the expert from Birmingham visiting Amsterdam and exploring the process through the perspective of different actors in the process. The model was also presented to key influencers within the Muslim community in Birmingham as well as front line youth workers and managers.

These are the key elements that have been highlighted as making this intervention significant:

1. The focus of the process concerns ensuring that young people as individuals or groups are provided the opportunity to receive support to prevent them from progressing towards acting on their radical views.
2. The interventions build on relationships that already exists {with a youth worker or teacher for example} and supplementing these with additional skills [particularly around the spiritual dimension] when necessary
3. The referral in the first instance is to public servants in the local administration and not police or security services.
4. The ability to respond is enabled through a focus on building strong neighbourhood and religious networks that are able to provide the targeted support. This requires strong networks, relationship management and confidence building
5. There is a focus on providing both material and immaterial support, advice, challenge and mentoring
6. The resources are available to provide interventions quickly.
7. There is an establish communication protocol between the public administration and the police and security services.
8. Confidence increases where successful interventions are promoted and marketed, especially if other professionals share their positive experiences with advice or intervention.

Key finding 4

The supply of Islam to young people “at risk” may be a significant protective factor and the approach in Birmingham is significant and should be further assessed in order to inform practice in other E.U. states

This field work study has emphasised the barriers that prevent front line professionals from actively engaging in preventing violent extremism. These barriers range from an absence of understanding of why and how, to suspicions concerning the need to be involved, to concerns about whether they would be actively involved in criminalising young people rather than enabling support to be provided to them.

Of course there exists across a number of professional also significant community activists and front line professional who *are* actively engaged in preventing violent extremism, and we should be careful to nuance this finding.

In addition to the need for front line professionals to understand the issues, was also the associated concern of being able to get it right – knowing what to do if a concern was identified. Confidence in signalling concern also increased when front line professionals felt there was something available to support young people at risk.

The City of Birmingham during the course of this project had designed and was implementing a pathfinder project for preventing violent extremism. This enable them to design and test, on a small scale, a number of specific interventions aimed specially at groups of young people who had displayed radicalising tendencies or where at risk because of their profile or associations. The approach specifically sought to counter the supply of extremist ideology through enabling young people to explore Islam and its association with citizenship. Two particular approaches were assessed as having had a remarkable impact both on the criminogenic profile of these young people and the engagement of these young people in positive citizenship work: The Journey of the Soul and Success Clubs are outlined as case studies below:

Case study 6 Journey of the Soul

The original Journey of the Soul in Birmingham saw 12 young Muslim men, assessed as at significant risk of causing harm to themselves and their communities, being supported to change their lives through a process of support that included a journey to *Umrah* {a pilgrimage to Mecca}. This process had a profound impact on the lives of these young people and some two years on these young people are no longer involved in criminality and some of them are active agents for change in their communities.

Whilst this particular journey caused some controversy and the trip to Saudi Arabia was not repeated, Birmingham City Council embedded the process of the journey of the Soul into to their activity designed to prevent young people supporting or engaging in violent extremism.

Each Journey engages young people in a process of reflection on the choices they have made in the past and will confront in the future through the guidance provided in Islam. This involves a number of study circles, before an intensive spiritual journey is undertaken, which is followed by mentoring support.

This approach has had a significant impact on young people's participation in community activity and a remarkable decrease in the level of assessed risk that they would become involved in crime.

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Case study 7 Birmingham Success clubs

Birmingham's Success Clubs were designed to support young people make a change in their community through the provision of an organisational mentor. The mentor supported young people to reflect on how their projects were progressing and to develop an understanding of "success criteria" associated with notions of choices one makes, responsibility, commitment to others, the company one keeps, and the relationships one develops.

These reflections were also used to enhance young people's understanding of Islam and Citizenship through an exploration of Islamic Manners and Etiquette.

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These are the key elements that have been highlighted as making these interventions significant:

1. The engagement of at risk Muslim young people was supported by existing relationships that staff within Birmingham Youth Inclusion Project, or Community Group had with these young people and their parents.
2. The front line professionals directly delivering the programme had confidence in the team within Birmingham who were commissioning the young people's programme. These managers and front line professionals were Muslim.
3. Training was provided focussed on both textual and contextual issues – Islam and youth culture, ideology and politics, faith based mentoring.
4. The approaches were designed into the existing framework of delivery for both the community work and the youth inclusion work.
5. Additional resources in the form of Scholars and Muslim community mentors were used.

Key Finding 5

There is a need to develop understanding of the protective factors that would build resilience in young people's ability to reject violent extremism.

One of the associated issues which emerge from this aspect of the project report is the extent to which there is insufficient knowledge concerning protective factors for young people promoted in this subject topic.

Much of the funded work to date has concerned an exploration of risk factors; what and if profiles can be discerned, knowledge of ideological discourses and how to counter these.

Further work on risk factors is important but it is clear from this project that whilst there are good examples of training interventions addressing aspects of the radicalisation process, there is a need to research and promote what works.

The Birmingham approach to the use of Islam as a protective factor also highlights the potential for new and focussed research around building up a body of knowledge on protective factors specific to this topic.

Research into resilience concerning other criminal behaviour has emphasised factors associated with family and school bonding. Moreover, there is a tendency within EU cities to focus on building shared identities or ties with the Cities that young people are living. These types of approaches require investigating in order to build a body of knowledge on resilience.

Case study 8: Youth Dialog Groups

In response to the threat of violent extremism the city of Essen has developed the concept of Dialog Groups, specifically for young Muslims. Using the dialogical method and run by a specialized Dialog Initiator a constructivist approach to learning is applied in order to increase resilience (or protective factors) by strengthening education in democracy, law and citizenship.

Young people welcome the dialog groups. Depending on the location, there are either homogeneous or heterogeneous groups. Participants have the impression that, for the first time, they get the chance to discuss topics like integration, democracy, coexistence. Also, they state that the dialog session support them in their personal development, a fact which has also been noticed by professionals who are engaged in the project. They observed that participants are more willing to listen to each other. They show the same attitude towards teachers and social workers. The professionals observed that participating youth were able to present and defend their opinions. Youth observed democratic rules throughout the dialog sessions and experienced an exchange of ideas and opinions on democratic grounds. In order to increase positive skills (as protective factors) the dialog sessions should be continued and further developed.

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Key Finding 6

Policy makers concerns regarding the separation between State and religion may itself hinder the delivery of interventions that work in preventing violent extremism.

As discussed above, this is a debate that continues to play out in the Netherlands. There is however a concern that due to the sensitivity and aversion regarding religion (and particularly Islam) the principle of separation of church and state can be easily used to block policy and interventions that seem to have a religious element.

Whilst each Member State will have to debate the issue as it sees fit, the finding from an assessment of the Amsterdam approach by Yousiff Meah indicates that “there are potentially a range of fears being expressed in this debate ranging from a fear that the long held tradition of separation of church and state is going to be eroded, to one which is concerned about the growing influence of a community who “unlike the Dutch” have a strong belief in God. Yet it is important not to seek to resolve these fears by hiding behind this principle.” He further comments that over emphasising this principal can be an attractive option for policy makers. Sometimes, this is due to a valid political interpretation of the separation of church and state, yet often it is simply due to a misunderstanding of the constitutional principle as a strict non-engagement policy.

Whilst the resolution of these is a matter of national political debate the lessons might need to be learnt from approaches in different EU Member States;

Case Study 9 Birmingham Mosque Governance Project

Birmingham City Council invested in a management consultant to support the trustees of Mosque's improve their governance arrangements, This involved a confidential diagnostic against standards for good governance, training and development support to address targets for improvements, as well as practical support in using new technology to improve the management of information.

Ten Mosques had within six months improved their rating against governance standards, had developed new mechanisms for engaging young people and women in the management process, and had worked together to devise new polices related to managing the media, and extremism.

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Case study 10 Building Leadership in Islamic Student Societies [BLISS]

BLISS through faith involved a leadership development programme for current leaders and activists within Islamic Student Societies. Through a series of workshops and lectures Students were supported to explore their leadership skills, and enhance their ability to tackle and address extremist ideology. The course delivered over ten weeks used Islam as the foundation to build both an understanding of leadership skills and a rejection of the abusive interpretation of Islam utilised by violent extremists.

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Key Finding 7

Policy makers concerned with promoting partnership working with Muslim communities need to consider the extent to which they are addressing those factors specific to Muslim activists which hinder or alternatively promote their active engagement.

The model in figure 1 presents pictorially the expressed views of front line staff highlighting factors that both hinder and enhance front line staff's predisposition to work in partnership in recognising and responding to radicalisation.

With respect to factors that restrict participation there has already been work across the E.U. to counter the potential negative effect of problematising all Muslims when dealing with Islamist inspired radicalisation. Policy makers should equally be aware of the concerns about the extent to which a particular desired form of Islam is perceived by some as being promoted by Governments – and indeed the potential for this to be integrated into the Islamist narrative.

This report, however, wishes to emphasise factors that are more likely to encourage Muslim activists to become proactive, and in particular a need to focus on women as activists and to address wider issues of concerns that impact on Muslim communities.

Case study 11

The Hague women's groups highlight both the engagement of women as activists and the focus on wider community issues. Projects like "Steunpunt Sabr" and "Mother and Daughter" in The Hague are managed and executed by strongly motivated women from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds and are aimed at signaling and solving psychological and social problems of women and girls in the The Hague region. In addition to offering support for families who have been confronted by extremism first hand, they offer consultation, meetings, mentoring, support in application procedures, social and multicultural activities, information and support regarding education, knowledge of Islam, language learning (Arabic and Dutch), sports, working on self-confidence, Moslima-empowerment, legal advice, debating activities, etc.

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Key Finding 8

The active involvement of community activists may be significantly contingent on the nature of relationships with key individuals working within municipalities and not necessarily the organisation itself.

A common factor across all cities related to the extent to which the engagement of front-line community activists working within Muslim communities was predicated upon relationships with key individuals.

Muslim community activists in particular were most likely to express the reason for their involvement with authorities was due to the level of trust or respect they had for an individual policy maker rather than the employing authority itself.

These individuals identified in all of the participating Cities not only have established credible relationships with activists, but they also have an ability to work at a range of levels [organisationally, community and individual] resulting in activity that resonates more directly with how they perceive the communities needs and aspirations.

There was also a sense that these individuals established opportunities for innovative activity to take place prior to the organisation's policy catching up and sanctioning such activity. At one level this appeared to be about "pushing the boundaries" whilst at another it directly delivered activity that was contrary to existing policy.

There are some examples of relationships being proactively managed within core teams leading on the work of responding to radicalisation; what was also apparent was the extent to which the maintenance of these relationships and the knowledge developed through them was rarely acknowledged explicitly within municipal plans or policies.

Case study 11

In Amsterdam, the municipality invested in a network of 'key figures' within the Muslim communities. These young Muslim activists were brought together through earlier consultations with existing municipal relations. The network of 20 key figures took part in empowerment trainings and will be offered further trainings in debating, public speaking and media relations. Much time and energy is invested in the maintenance of these relationships. The network can be accessed in times of crisis, but is also involved in recruitment for municipal positions, especially regarding the counter-radicalisation agenda.

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Conclusion: The Development of a Solution Matrix

The initial focus of the project was to explore across a number of municipalities the training needs of front line professionals and to assess the extent to which training solutions were available to meet these needs. Through the process of exploring this question with individuals and groups who could directly influence individuals vulnerable to the radicalisation process it became clear that this approach was overly simplistic.

The project did uncover a range of similar training and development needs. It also examined a number of approaches aimed at meeting these needs. Some of these were significant in that they appeared to be developing evidence of a positive impact on either the ability of front-line professionals to understand the potential of their role [e.g. Amsterdam's model of the radicalisation process] or because they demonstrated evidence of positively enabling a shift in attitudes and behaviour that decreased vulnerability [e.g. the City of Birmingham's use of Islam as a protective factor]. Overall however, the project identified a much more complex situation, one that could not be expressed simply in terms of matching training needs to training solutions.

The start of a shift from a simplistic approach originally anticipated was the recognition of a process we have termed "from getting it to getting it right". This term was used in our conference to explain the extent of a need for front-line professionals to appreciate firstly the nature of the risk to communities, and secondly the contribution that could be made to reduce this risk through their contact with communities. These are pictured in full above [see figure 1], outlined below in figure 2 and explained within the body of this report.

Figure 2: from getting it to getting it right

The need to shift from:

- Radical spotting → Signalling concerns
- Counterterrorism → Care-based prevention.
- Risk factors → Protective factors
- A "desired" Islam → Understanding Islam
- Church & State → Partnership & Collaboration

What also emerged as the project progressed was the absence of body of evidence related to the most appropriate interventions to make. Individual training approaches had evaluated statements related to the perception of how relevant or enjoyable the participants felt about the training; this did not equate significantly to a body of evidence that could be promoted as an effective guide to getting it right. Again, the work in Birmingham has perhaps come closest to this but would require further testing before it was elevated from being significant to recommended practice.

What did emerge was evidence to suggest that a number of related factors would impact on the question of getting it right. The importance of relationships has been highlighted as critical and much of the emerging practice in each of the municipalities were to a significant extent dependent on the relationships which key individuals had with communities and front line professionals. The nature of the role of police and security services also had an impact on the level of trust and therefore engagement of front line professionals

It is apparent that municipalities need to develop effective processes to enable front-line staff and members from the community to refer information about concerned individuals. It is also apparent that this is likely to be effective if it is focussed on providing care-based interventions

and not as a means to pursue terrorists. However approached, this is likely to be initially met with scepticism and accusations of municipalities being complicit in a process of “terrorist spotting” that criminalises Muslims per se.

This is not dissimilar to when front-line professionals were confronting the issue for child abuse, which saw initial concerns related to getting the ‘diagnosis’ wrong and placing children in the hands of social workers intent on taking children away from their families. It took a process of awareness raising training, of demonstrating that social workers were concerned with protecting children from harm; and of convincing professionals that it was not their role to assess the level or nature of risk, but rather to refer concerns to enable an appropriate assessment and intervention to be made before it became too late.

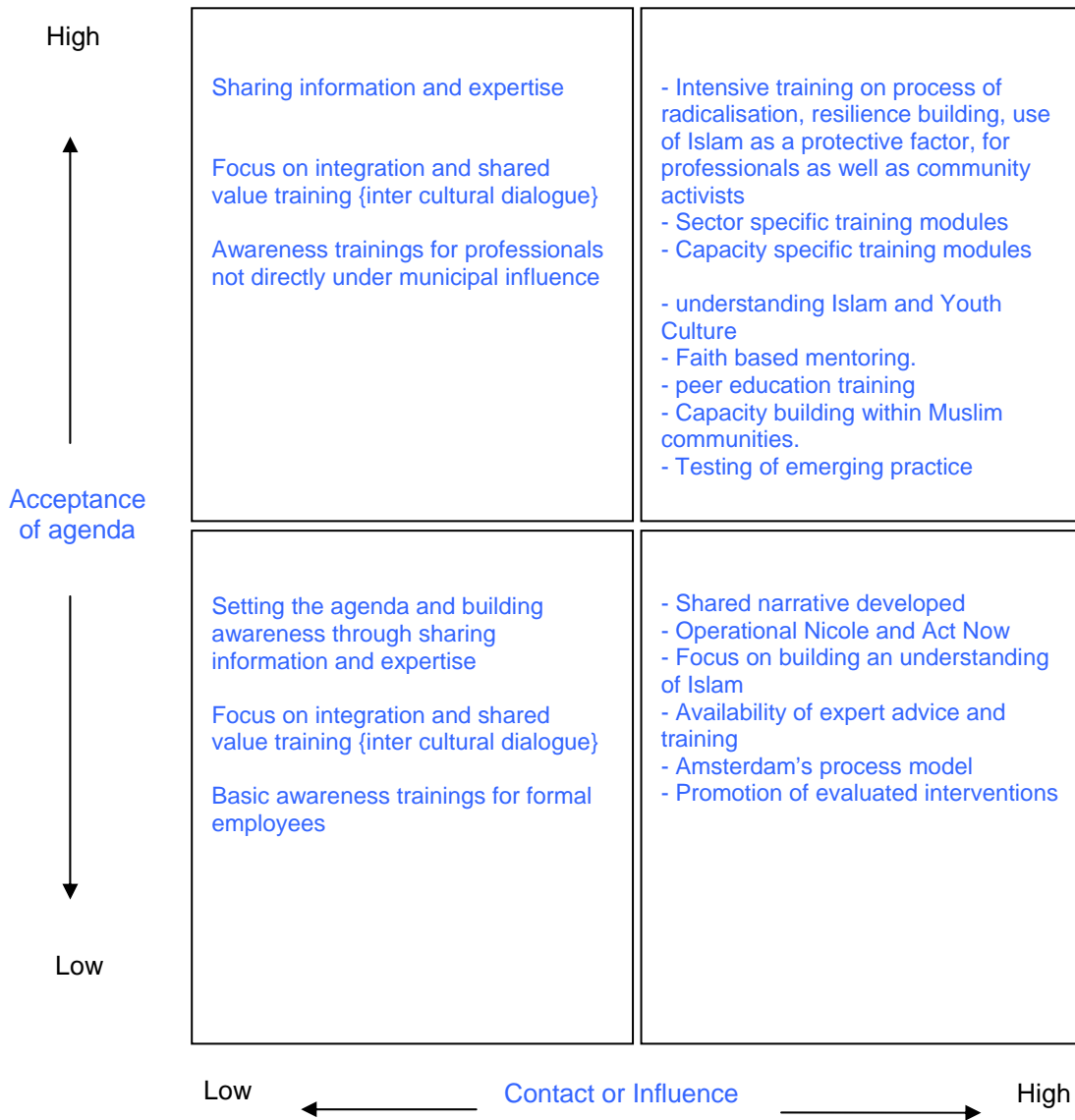
The model of signalling developed across Dutch Cities appears to have developed an effective balance in this respect and is having a positive impact on reducing vulnerabilities. At the time of undertaking this work the United Kingdom was adopting an approach called The Channel Project which has a higher level of direct involvement of police and security services, the emerging findings from this approach were not available at the time of writing this report and it may be appropriate to undertake some comparative work comparing and contrasting the Dutch model of receiving referrals and the approach being developed in the U.K.

Taken together these findings have been used to develop the “solution matrix” below which highlights potential training and development approaches for front-line professionals against two related axis: the level of acceptance of the risk, and the degree of direct contact with vulnerable communities. This is presented in four quadrants: Low levels of both contact and acceptance; High level of acceptance but low level of contact or influence; low level of acceptance but high level of contact; high level of both acceptance and influence.

Whilst each of these require specific activity, overlaying all conditions are a number of policy considerations designed to established a productive environment to deliver the interventions

Policy Considerations for the Solution Matrix
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There needs to be an established process for front line professionals to refer concerns about individuals and groups which enable appropriate interventions to be designed and delivered in response to assessed risks. 2. Municipalities need to recognise that the right persons are often more important than the right roles and invest significantly in building relationships with communities and professionals who have high levels of contact/influence with vulnerable individuals or groups. 3. Knowledge is developing in these field and municipalities need to develop expertise and invest in maintaining and developing knowledge relating to both risks and protective factors. 4. There should be a defined separation between activity designed to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism, and activity related to pursuing terrorist. Whilst these are related, municipalities should note the potential negative impact if the relationships between the municipality and security services is unclear. 5. Municipalities should develop shared narratives concerning the level of threat and opportunities for action in order to build partnerships with professionals and communities 6. In light of the emerging practice municipalities should consider the degree of separation between church and state and ensure that polices do not restrict the use of emerging evidence based practice.

Figure 3: The Solution Matrix



The solution matrix suggests that local approaches should prioritise interventions according to the level of contact and potential influence that front line professionals and community activists have in respect to vulnerable individuals or groups.

Where there is a low level of contact or influence it remains important to consider delivering development activity both due to the unbounded nature of the current threat with radicalisation occurring amongst converts, and the explicit opportunity for right wing extremist to exploit the situation in order to promote Islamophobia. In low levels of acceptance it is important to maintain awareness through information sharing and to focus explicitly on ensuring that front-line staff is equipped to respond to any negative feelings or perceptions of Muslims through either an exposure to negative press or targeting by racist organisations.

The priority should however remain on those who have a high level of contact or influence. The activity highlighted is differentiated to move those with a high level of contact but low level of acceptance into the quadrant above. There is a mixture of process and specific training activities.

Where there is a high level of contact and acceptance the model highlights both practice that has been referred to in the report but further recognises two specific training approaches that require development. These are the first three in the top right quadrant.

1. The development of a “master class” designed to embed expertise within key institutions.
2. The development of specific training programmes designed to embed knowledge within targeted professions.
3. The development of different levels of training for different levels of knowledge, such as beginner awareness courses for a majority, intermediate for those with experience and those more likely to engage radicalising youth and advanced for those few with substantial specific knowledge (such as trained imams, theologians, etc)

Both the U.K. and the Netherlands would welcome the opportunity to discuss submitting proposals to the E.U. in order to address these gaps in provision.

There is a clear and pressing need to ensure that front-line professionals and community activists, who have the potential to contribute effectively towards building cohesive communities and resilience to the messages of violent extremism, require to be equipped with

1. Cultural awareness and knowledge of Islam to facilitate integration and promote shared values.
2. The capacity to be able to confidently and effectively facilitate discussions and debate around issue of identity, citizenship and diversity which include ethnicity, faith and belief in order to challenge extremist narratives.
3. The confidence and understanding to engage in sensitive and controversial topics often experienced as grievances
4. An understanding of what they would do if they had a concern about vulnerable individuals as part of a wider safeguarding responsibility [and who they would involve to assist].

Recommendations

1. Regarding the policy context: If controversial or sensitive, promote a debate on the principle of separation of Church and State and seek a political consensus for a working definition of this democratic principle.
 - In light of the finding, municipalities should consider the degree of separation between church and state and ensure that polices do not restrict the use of emerging evidence based practice.
2. Regarding initiation of policy: Member states need to consider how to establish effective processes for enabling signals about concerned individual and groups and coordinate effective “care based” interventions.
 - There needs to be an established process for front line professionals to refer concerns about individuals and groups which enable appropriate interventions to be designed and delivered in response to assessed risks
 - There should be a defined separation between activity designed to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism, and activity related to pursuing terrorist. Whilst these are related, municipalities should note the potential negative impact if there the relationships between the municipality and security services is unclear.
 - Evaluative work to compare and contrast the approaches in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom should be considered.
3. Regarding knowledge: seek, initiate or support research that focuses on protective factors against violent extremism rather than only on risk factors. This will also improve the willingness of front line staff to cooperate.
 - Knowledge is developing in this field and municipalities need to develop expertise and invest in maintaining and developing knowledge relating to both risks and protective factors, and to what works in reversing the radicalisation process
 - Municipalities should work to develop their understanding of the factors that restrict the engagement of front line professionals as identified in the ‘pro-activity vs resistance model’ in figure 1 of this report
4. Regarding confidence in expertise: Consider the Supply-Demand model developed in Amsterdam as a useful explanatory tool to inform policy and gain confidence from necessary partners, such as front line staff and community activists (key figures)
5. Regarding partnerships: be serious about relationships. Identify existing networks and tap into them. Make sure to employ networkers who are ‘connectors’, those who can build networks of trust and confidence and who can connect with the relevant communities. The policy stands or falls with your own human resource decisions.
 - Municipalities need to recognise that the right persons are often more important than the right roles and invest significantly in building relationships with communities and professionals who have high levels of contact/influence with vulnerable individuals or groups.
 - Municipalities should develop shared narratives concerning the level of threat and opportunities for action in order to build partnerships with professionals and communities
6. Regarding the continuation of RecoRa: Consider developing the emerging findings from this project for Europe wide sharing of best practices
 - Birmingham’s examples of controversial, yet successful programs such as journey of the soul should be tested in other EU countries to see to what extent they are transferable.
 - Further work needs to be commissioned to develop a body of knowledge related to protective factors and
 - Consideration should be given to funding further work through the U.K. and Dutch Cities in order to develop and test an intensive training programme to embed knowledge and expertise within Municipalities across Europe; and to establish sector specific and capacity specific trainings to embed expertise within professional disciplines.

Appendix 1: The Supply and Demand Model

Amsterdam and Radicalization

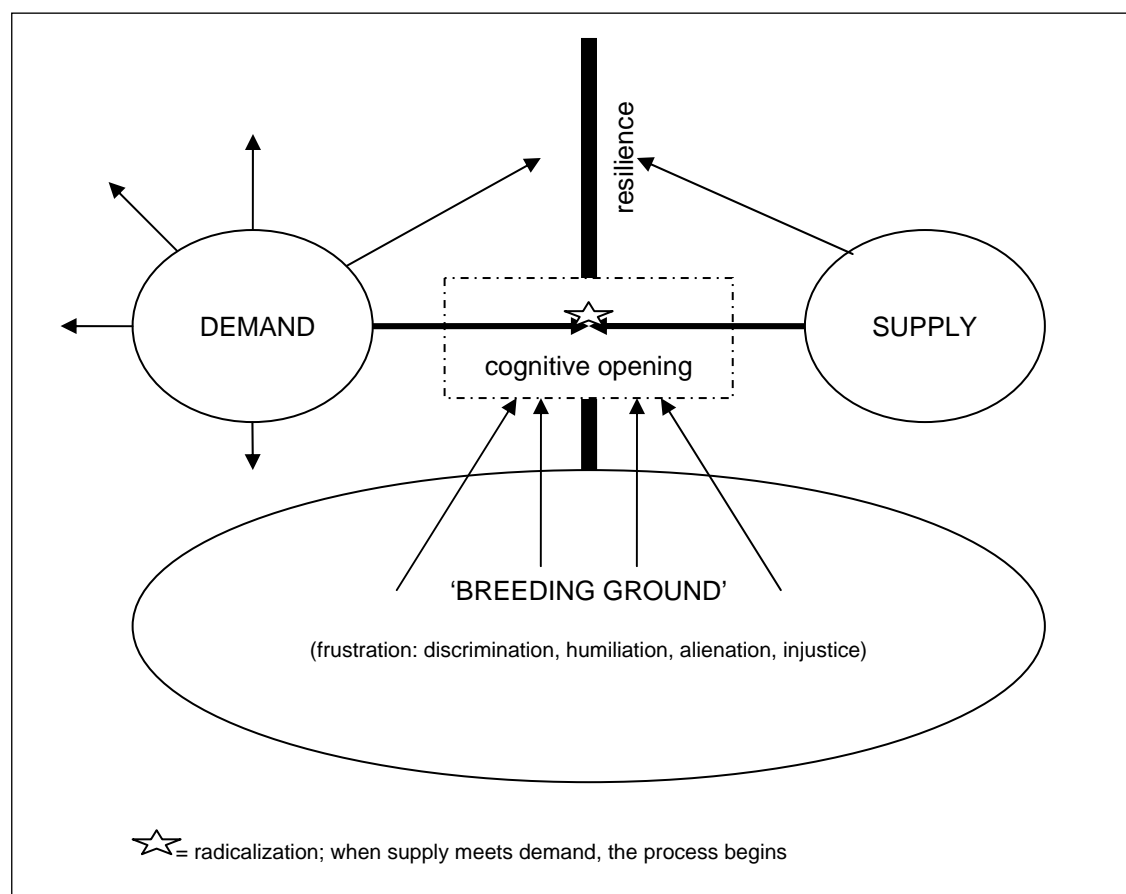
The Municipal Approach

This article will focus on the basics of the Amsterdam strategy on countering radicalization, as is laid out in the "Beleidskader Informatiehuishouding"¹. Whereas it is known that there are many other forms of radicalism, the focus here is on radical Islamism. Extensive definitions, theories and analyses are beyond the scope of this article. Still, in order to explain Amsterdam's choice in strategies a short analysis must be shared. Thereafter the article will address the three elements of the municipal counter-radicalization strategy: general prevention, specific prevention and tackling actual radicalization.

Analysis

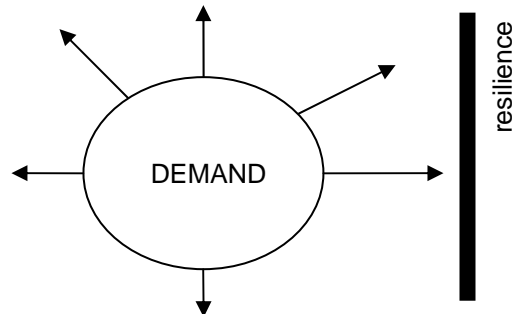
The scheme in figure 1 is intended to be a simple tool in understanding the situation and the process leading to radicalization. This 'supply and demand scheme' helps us direct our counter-radicalization strategy. The three circles are (relatively) independent phenomena, yet when supply meets demand, radicalization ensues. The independent circles - which will be explained below - are not entirely new phenomena, yet all three seem to have increased in intensity in the past five years.

Figure 1: Explaining Radicalization



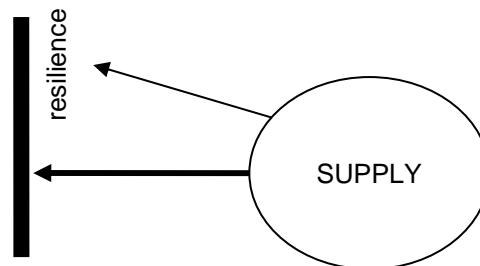
¹ Policy Framework of the Information House. Published by the Municipality in August 2006.

Figure 1a



It is a clearly noticeable trend that there is a growing demand (see figure 1a) for answers among young Muslims concerning their identity and their religion. They seek answers everywhere (hence the multiple arrows), yet due to issues of generation and migration the answers are not found at home or in the traditional mosques. Young Muslims in the West seem not to be accepting traditional, culturally bound Islam. The deterritorialization of Islam² and the centrality of Islam in the public debate has pushed young Muslims to ask themselves what it means to be a Muslim, and often more specifically: What does it mean to be a Muslim in this Western society? There are socio-cultural and political aspects to this question, yet there seems to be increasing demand for answers within a specifically Islamic framework.

Figure 1b



At the same time there is an active supply (see figure 1b) of radical ideas. This supply is predominantly active through internet and other media and to a lesser extent through literature and travelling preachers. There is also a supply of other non-radical answers, but here supply refers to the ideologies of violent jihad, enmity and takfir. There are differences in these and other radical ideologies, but here we will group them as 'jihadi'. The supply is actively seeking the seekers; seeking to convince them of the necessity and individual duty of violent and global jihad³, rejecting democracy as idolatry⁴, proclaiming other Muslims as unbelievers (takfir) and showing hatred to all unbelievers⁵.

² See Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, Columbia University Press 2004

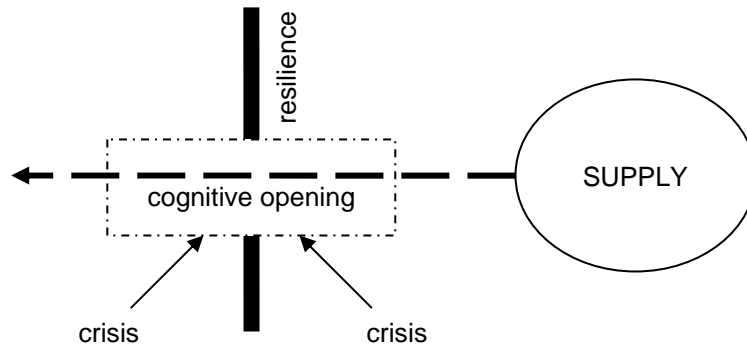
³ This refers to the concept of jihad as being *fard 'ayn*, rather than *fard kifayya*; i.e. the traditional restrictions on jihad are refused or ignored.

⁴ This stems from the concept of *tawheed al-haakimiyya*, which means that God is the only Lawgiver. Essentially this means that by making laws men are placing themselves next to God. This is idolatry, the worst form of *kufr* (unbelief). The state (including its representatives) is thus *taghut* (idol), which must be rejected.

⁵ This is based on an interpretation of the concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'* (alliance and enmity), where enmity must be shown to unbelievers.

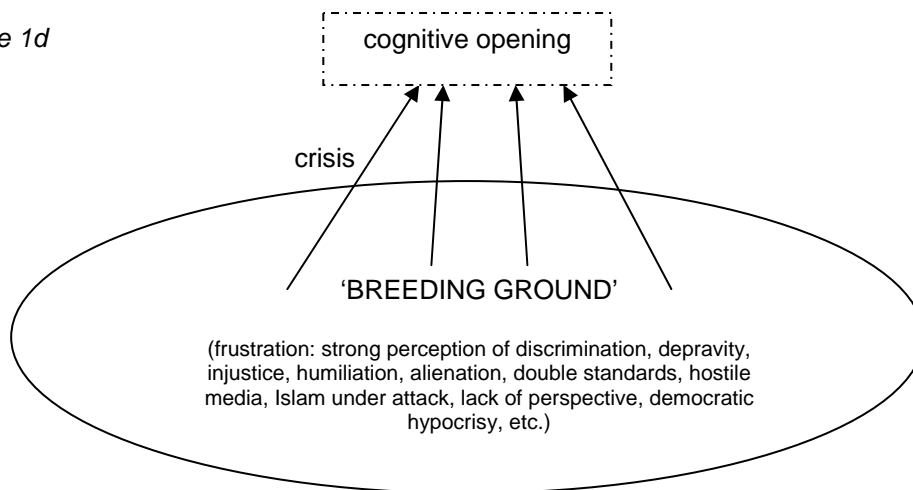
Although variations of jihadi ideology originated mid-century within or on the fringes of the Muslim Brotherhood⁶, the conceptualization and propagation of modern global jihad developed in the mid 1990's in Afghanistan⁷ and only began to make serious inroads among Western Muslim youth after (the armed reaction to) the September 11th attacks in 2001. Since then online propaganda, indoctrination and recruitment seem to have replaced the more traditional modes of jihadi recruitment.⁸

Figure 1c



The jihadi ideology seems to be gaining ground. How is it that the demand is receptive to this particular supply of ideology? Why is extremist thought attractive to such a diverse group of (predominantly young) Muslims? According to one author, most would reject radical movements outright as irrational and extreme. In order to seriously expose oneself to the radical message there must be a 'cognitive opening' to entertain views previously considered extreme. This essential 'cognitive opening' is prompted by experiencing some form of crisis that shakes the certainty of previously held beliefs and renders individuals receptive to alternative perspectives.⁹ In other words the crisis breaks through the wall of resilience and leaves a cognitive opening where the radical supply can penetrate (see figure 1c).

Figure 1d



This is where the breeding ground comes in. The breeding ground consists of frustrations, which represent possible crises that could prompt cognitive openings. At present, breeding ground frustrations such as those mentioned in figure 1d are shared broadly in the Muslim communities. Particularly important is the perception that Muslims are broadly discriminated

⁶ For an in-depth discussion on Sayyid Qutb, the Muslim Brothers, the Al-Jihad Group and Takfir wal Hijra, see Gilles Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islamism*, Saqi Books 2005 (originally published as *Le Prophète et Pharaon* in 1984).

⁷ For an excellent description of the development of the global jihadi ideology see Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press 2005

⁸ See among others the article "A world wide web of terror", *The Economist*, July 12th 2007

⁹ For a discussion on an individual's "cognitive opening" for extremist ideology see Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Rowman and Littlefield 2005 (especially pp. 20-24)

against and that there are double standards when it comes to Muslims. An oft-mentioned example: "When an imam says something despicable about homosexuals, politicians threaten to close the mosque or strip him of his citizenship. When a politician says despicable things about Muslims and even calls for a ban on the Qur'an, it is freedom of speech!" A variety of economic, socio-cultural, political (and personal) frustrations can accumulate and break down natural barriers of resilience. It cannot be overstated that frustrations over the position and treatment of Muslims nationally and internationally are pervasive and broadly shared in the Muslim communities in Amsterdam. The perception of discrimination, injustice and insecurity is not new within these communities, yet it seems to have increased in intensity since 9-11.

Thus, the increased frustrations in the breeding ground spark receptiveness of those seeking answers (demand) to the more actively outreaching supply of radical Islamism.

Consequences of Analysis for Prevention

The above scheme provides us three areas of focus for our prevention strategy, namely the demand of the seekers, the supply of radical ideology and the breeding ground of frustration and injustice.

Focusing on diminishing the demand for answers concerning identity and religion is an unlikely and unattractive approach. One could argue, however, that strengthening alternative identities over the Islamic one might diminish this particular demand. Theoretically this may be plausible - and efforts are being made to emphasize the shared Amsterdam (and perhaps Dutch) identity -, yet the perception that initiatives are being taken to undermine Islamic identity or diminish the value thereof would be counterproductive. The preferred option is to emphasize the acceptance of multiple complementary identities; being Dutch and Muslim need not be mutually exclusive.

What is possible within the demand circle is the bridging of the generation and migration gap. If young Muslims seeking answers were more satisfied by local, parental and 'pastoral' guidance perhaps the need to seek answers beyond the pale would diminish. With this possibility in mind and mindful of strengthening integration, the City has encouraged mosques to accept younger members onto the governing boards. In addition, Dutch universities and colleges have begun programs to train Dutch imams. The expectation is that these younger leaders are more in touch with the needs and attitudes of the present generation, which is focused predominantly on its situation in *this* country. These developments may in the long term have some effect, yet it will be some time before these leaders are (fully) accepted.

Tackling the supply is unlikely as shutting out media such as internet is unattainable and individual sites cannot be combated effectively. We should - as a municipality - accept the growing interest in Islam and the presence of radical ideology as independent variables. We simply must strive to ensure that this supply does not fit the needs of the demand. This essentially means three things:

1. Resilience: the seekers (the demand) must become resilient to the supply of radical ideologies;
2. Alternative supply: the supply of answers provided by radical ideology must be competed with by diverse and more active alternative ideas and answers;
3. Breeding ground: those factors enhancing frustration and anger must be diminished. Specifically, the perception of injustice, alienation, discrimination and double standards need to decrease.

The local government cannot be held responsible for all three, but must recognize the need to do its part and stimulate other to do theirs. The local government cannot produce an alternative supply of theological and political-philosophical answers. It can - and Amsterdam does - stimulate its partners in the Muslim communities to do so. Depending on the political

will, governments can support this process in varying degrees of assistance; from stimulation to financing production thereof.¹⁰

Enhancing resilience demands action from all those involved in the lives of seekers. It is thus important that the dangers of radicalization are recognized within the wider Muslim community as well as among ‘first-line professionals’¹¹. Building confidence in an inclusive democratic narrative and emphasizing potential and empowerment despite substantial obstacles are key to increasing resilience. If young Dutch Muslims see potential and perspective in this society and are supported in the pursuit of these things by their environment through role models, parental, educational and peer coaching the attraction of radical thought may diminish. The (local) government shares a role in this.

The (local) government should take the lead in tackling the breeding ground of perceptions of injustice, alienation, discrimination and double standards, which -when effective in convincing Muslims of their equal and respected place in society- enhances resilience against the radical supply of ideas.

Amsterdam recognizes this and initiated the program “Wij Amsterdammers”¹², which seeks to enhance the social cohesion, bridge ethnic gaps, and strengthen the common identity of all Amsterdammers. Specific steps have been taken to combat discrimination, provide more opportunities for ethnic minorities, counter negative imagery through management by speech and improve ethnic relations through various bridging and binding activities. This is, in essence, Amsterdam’s long term investment in social cohesion and the general preventative strategy against radicalization.

Specific Prevention Strategy: Information House

Formulating a broad and general preventative strategy that focuses on diminishing the breeding ground and strengthening social cohesion and ‘inclusivity’ is absolutely essential, yet it is only a first step. There is, of course, also the need for a more specific approach. This requires some demarcation between broadly preventative and repressive measures.

First, there is a difference between the municipal strategy in countering radicalization and the approach and responsibilities of the police. In Amsterdam a distinction has been made between ‘thinking’ and ‘acting’. The moment there are indications of preparatory action(s), even those that are not illegal¹³, the case becomes the responsibility of the police, who represent the repressive measures. Until that point, when it is merely a question of ideological radicalization, the municipality is responsible.

Having demarcated the responsibilities of municipality and police, the municipal policy then distinguishes between a broad prevention strategy and a more specific one. Where “Wij Amsterdammers” is focused on the general population of Amsterdam, it is recognized that specific action is also needed. Therefore a small unit was created within the department of Public Order, Safety and Security to gather early warning signals of radicalization in the city and find ways to prevent and counter the process. This pioneer group was called the “informatiehuishouding”, which can be approximately translated as the information house. This unit forms the heart of Amsterdam’s counter-radicalization strategy.

Together with the coordinating office of the Wij Amsterdammers program¹⁴, the information house develops and advises policy on more specific prevention strategies and activities. The main goals of the specific prevention strategy are increasing resilience and stimulating

¹⁰ See for example the plans funded by the Birmingham municipality to ‘reclaim Islam’ as part of the “Preventing Violent Extremism Together” project.

¹¹ Think of teachers, youth workers, social workers, community police, parole officers, etc.

¹² “We, the people of Amsterdam”

¹³ Such as recording a video testament, purchasing potentially explosive substances, obtaining blueprints, etc.

¹⁴ A new position has been created for the director of social cohesion. This director’s office is named Platform Amsterdam Samen (Platform Amsterdam Together)

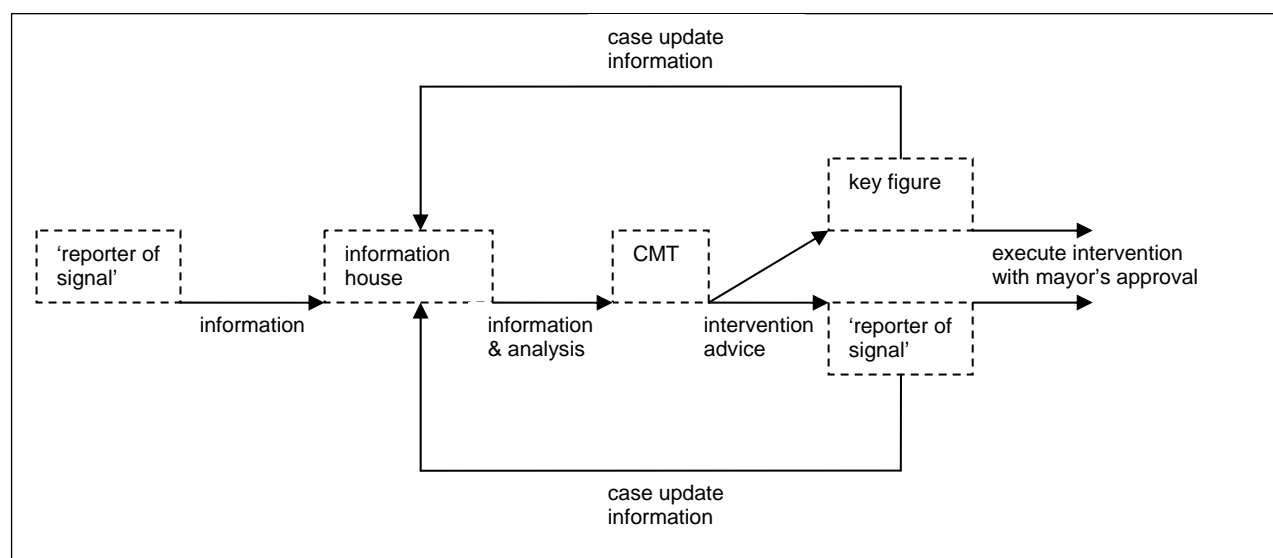
alternative supply. The focus hereof is directed at the broader Muslim community, first-line professionals and susceptible youth in particular. In addition, and as mentioned above, Amsterdam is investing in training professionals in recognizing and dealing with radicalizing youth. Moreover, in order to contribute to resilience and alternative supply, Islamic organizations are being stimulated to initiate programs to increase awareness of the dangers of radicalization. Most importantly, the information house, as well as the coordinator of Wij Amsterdammers, is investing in relationships throughout the city. These relationships, both formal and informal, are essential for the final part of the counter-radicalization strategy, which is the tackling of actual radicalization in Amsterdam at case level.

The choice for a case-level, municipal early warning system was informed by the gap in coverage between general prevention activities such as intercultural dialogue and the like and the case-level counter-terrorism monitoring and policing measures. Radicalizing youth, flirting with jihadi ideology, are beyond being affected by intercultural understanding meetings, yet at the same time they do not (yet) pose a serious enough security risk to merit attention from the security services. This void between prevention and repression is what the information house seeks to fill.

Tackling Actual Radicalization: Identifying and Intervening

Having discussed the general and specific prevention strategies it is now time to direct our attention to the issue of actual radicalization. The supply and demand scheme (figure 1) is intended to explain the dynamics of the phenomenon and inform specific and general preventative policy. The scheme does not account for activities and policy in the case of actual detected radicalization. Though much work is done to contribute to specific prevention policy, the information house's core business and main focus is detecting and intervening in actual cases of radicalization (see figure 2 for the process).

Figure 2: The Case Process



Three functions have been set out in order to tackle actual radicalization:

1) knowledge and expertise (analysis), 2) information and signal gathering (early detection) and 3) advice and support (intervention).

1) In order to be able to recognize and analyze information and be able to give sound policy and intervention advice, the unit must be a point of expertise. This is reflected in the hiring of personnel, monitoring press and internet, investing in a literature library, visiting conferences and organizing expert-meetings. By now the unit can verily be described as a centre of expertise, where questions can be posed and advice requested regarding radicalization. In the event of actual radicalization this knowledge and experience is used to evaluate the level or stage of radicalization in individual cases.

2) The next step is gathering those cases from the ground level. This requires a deep investment in relationships and networking across the city. Besides formalizing contact with counter-terrorism officials (national and local), much effort has been placed in connecting existing hotlines, crime prevention networks, social service networks, neighbourhood organizations and city district administrations. These official networks are now being augmented with (informal) network building within the Muslim communities, among youth and social workers and teachers. Because these relationships are not hierarchical, much knowledge and sensitivity is needed to gain trust. Specific people have been hired in order to invest in the building and maintaining of networks. The goal is to cover all fields and link the formal and informal networks in order to gather early warning signals of radicalization.

When the information house receives a case from the field, it provides an initial evaluation and analysis. It then brings the case to the 'case management team' (CMT). This team consists of the information house unit, as well as a number of other municipal experts from a variety of relevant fields. During the bi-weekly CMT meetings the gathered cases are discussed in a multi-disciplinary fashion with the intention of developing case specific interventions.

3) After gathering as much information as possible the CMT produces an analysis, based on the knowledge gained from literature, research and experience, and gives advice to the 'reporter'¹⁵ of the case. The rule of thumb is that the information house (as executor of the CMT) supports the reporter of the case in his or her guidance of the individual (or group) in question. In the event that the reporter of the case is not able to continue guidance, the information house links people in its network to assist in or take over the case. These interventions seek to increase the resilience to radical ideas of the individual and focus on bringing him or her back into society.

So far, there is not enough experience to claim effective best-practices when it comes to interventions. In Amsterdam I advise a basic two-pronged approach to intervening in cases of radicalization. If Islamist radicalization is the gradual internalization of the jihadi ideology, then challenging and undermining this ideology through practice (material) and thought (ideological) is the key to de-radicalization

The first part is the material –or societal- intervention, which is aimed at 'binding' the individual to society through guidance to work, apprenticeship, education, or other means of strengthening the connection with society and creating a structural association with 'others'. The information house utilizes and initiates agreements with its formal network in order to place individuals in existing or new guidance programs. Providing prospective for real participation and acceptance can in early stages of radicalization be effective in undermining the persuasiveness of the radical narrative. In later stages, when the radical ideology has been more internalized, simply providing material prospective would be insufficient.

Secondly, and preferably at the same time, an ideological intervention should be attempted. Utilizing its informal network, the information house seeks key-figures who can be linked to individual cases and who are capable of challenging the radical narrative. The challenging of radical narrative consists of a societal and a religious element. The radical narrative uses both political/societal as theological arguments, though in later stages the theological legitimization comes to dominate. Those intervening can be effective by challenging both jihadi socio-political criticism as jihadi theology. Key figures working with early radicalization will need some knowledge of Islamic theology and democratic society, but those intervening in later stages of radicalization will need to be theological experts of some stature.

There are many challenges to this approach, such as issues of privacy and separation of church and state, yet the real challenge is in finding these key figures and forging lasting alliances with them.

Conclusion

In short, Amsterdam has chosen to augment the efforts of the police and other counter-terrorism agencies in creating a three-part counter-radicalization strategy: first, by focusing on the long term sustainability of the inclusive, pluralist society in which Islam has an accepted place; second, by building resilience among and with the Muslim communities so that an alternative can be provided to radical ideologies through specific prevention; and third, by investing in formal and informal networks that can report early warning signals as well as intervene as early as possible in individual cases of actual radicalization.

¹⁵ Reporters can be any type professional, official or key figure from within the information house's formal and informal networks. Typically cases originate from youth workers, teachers, police and parole officers, or local key figures.