Defusing Radicalisation through bottom-up Counter-Narratives Coming from Complex Organisations: Insights from an EU Comparative Research Project[1]

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Abstract

Radicalisation is a complex phenomenon that cannot be counterbalanced with a single measure. It is a process that arises from extreme values and opinions, leading to the violent display of a political agenda. Drawing upon an extensive mixed-method research project carried out in five European countries, the aim of this work is to present the research design and the core insights thanks to which it was possible to develop radicalisation prevention recommendations, triangulating data coming from educational and religious organisations. As a conclusion, the key to understanding radicalisation lies in a complex system of daily-life interactions and social relationships that connects subject and agency in a multifaceted phenomenology; the analytical angle proposed in our work considers radicalisation as a socially constructed dynamic/process through which active actors (such as complex organisations) co-create integrated strategies to "defuse" the social attractiveness of extreme experiences.

Keywords: radicalisation, mixed-methods, religious organisations, educational institutions, violence

Riassunto. *Disinnescare la radicalizzazione attraverso contro-narrazioni* bottom up *provenienti da organizzazioni complesse: approfondimenti da un progetto di ricerca comparativa dell'UE*

La radicalizzazione è un fenomeno complesso che non può essere controbilanciato da una singola misura. È un processo che nasce da opinioni e valori estremi, che porta alla manifestazione violenta di un'agenda politica. A partire da queste premesse lo scopo di questo lavoro è presentare il disegno della ricerca e le risultanze fondamentali di un articolato progetto di ricerca, condotto in cinque paesi europei, che si avvale dell'approccio mixed methods. Tale analisi si focalizzerà sull'elaborazione finale di raccomandazioni per la prevenzione della radicalizzazione, ultimo output del progetto, emergenti dalla triangolazione dei dati provenienti da organizzazioni educative e religiose. In conclusione, la chiave per comprendere la radicalizzazione risiede in un complesso sistema di interazioni e relazioni della vita quotidiana che collega soggetto e agenzie in una fenomenologia multiforme; la prospettiva analitica proposta nel nostro lavoro considera la radicalizzazione come una dinamica/processo socialmente costruito attraverso il quale soggetti attivi (come le organizzazioni complesse) co-creano strategie integrate per "disinnescare" l'attrattiva sociale di esperienze estreme.

Parole chiave: radicalizzazione, mixed-methods, organizzazioni religiose, istituzioni educative, violenza

1. Introduction

The term *radicalisation* refers to a complex phenomenon and is used to denote different

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[1] Although this article is the result of a common reflection among the authors, Liana M. Daher wrote the *Introduction*, Anna Maria Leonora wrote the section *Methods and Research design*, Giorgia Mavica wrote *Data Analysis* and Augusto Gamuzza wrote *Discussion and Conclusion*.

meanings in different contexts (Kundnani, 2012). The concept of radicalisation does not have a univocal definition; among social scientists, radicalisation has an ambiguous meaning, referring to both cognitive radicalisation and behavioural radicalisation (Neuman, 2013). Moreover, the term is used in at least three different contexts: security, integration, and foreign-policy, evidently with a different focus in each (Sedgwick, 2010).

Radicalisation cannot be reduced to a security and "State-centric" approach and should be analysed within a multidimensional perspective focused on society and its members; it should be seen as a fundamental issue in sociological knowledge, questioning the different factors and contexts in which the process of radicalisation emerges (Khosrokhavar, 2014). It is a process that arises from extreme values and opinions, and it concerns people who believe in radical ideas and want to fight for them, leading to the violent display of a social and political agenda. Several theories and models aim at explaining radicalisation as a process whereby actors are embedded in a complex and multi-step system of daily-life interactions and social relations (e.g. Borum, 2004; Moghaddam, 2005; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Sageman 2008; King and Taylor, 2011; Doosje *et al.*, 2012; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017; McDonald, 2018). Several issues have emerged from the review of the above-mentioned models that need to be addressed in developing prevention strategies (see, for example, Beelmann 2012; 2020).

Engagement in the radicalisation process depends on different factors that can be explored at various levels linked to each other in diverse and sometimes unique combinations (Chabrol *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, radicalisation processes should be considered as a complex outcome coming from a multifactorial interaction between risk factors and access routes, and triggering events involving the individual, group and societal dimensions (Ayanian, Böckler and Zick, 2018). Radicalisation is not a straightforward linear process; it depends on specific environments and the people whom the subject encounters in the course of his or her everyday life (Barrett *et al*., 2018, p. 105). The counter-radicalisation narratives have to take place in this socially constructed process – or even better, before the process begins – and engage active actors in the creation and implementation of integrated strategies to defuse the social attractiveness of this extreme

experience.

Prevention goes in the direction of improving "tolerance of ambiguity" to build resilience, in order to prevent the engagement of young people in radicalisation processes. Prevention measures focus on strengthening positive personality traits and reducing vulnerability to radicalisation. Specific actions work to strengthen tolerance of that which is different or foreign (tolerance of ambiguity) and to illustrate the appeal of «democracy and diversity» (Korn, 2016, p. 183).

The first step in the construction of a prevention plan is to identify the triggering factors, the reasons for the extreme engagement and the possible roles of social organisations and institutions.

Looking in particular at religious extremism, and possible routes to prevent it, the importance of elements such as belonging, identity, group dynamics and values in the radicalization transformation process should be noted. Waldman (2008) introduces the term "radical milieu" to identify the relational environment of extremists. Focusing on religious extremism, the radical milieu can be seen as a community, a subculture or a movement; it can also be a social network. The radical milieu is not a mere sum of individuals who subscribe to the same faith: it is based on a social structure and it can be observed through the group cohesion and collective attitudes and aims. It is the place where the radicalised young person constructs and reinforces his/her new identity by having regular relationships with groups and people who recognise him/her as a member of the group: a group in opposition to other groups and communities. Prevention can only start from this point.

Young people are particularly susceptible to displays of radicalisation, such as those of foreign fighters, that are increasingly being spread by the mass media; they are also very deeply involved in peer groups, sharing beliefs and identity factors. It is extremely important for young people to belong to a group, even one that does not share positive values.

This is why the counter-radicalisation narratives should be placed at the second step of the socialisation process played out in schools. The school must be considered as a place for a constructive dialogue on the positive value of diversity. It has to strengthen students'

resilience to radicalisation, offering a safe environment and time to discuss and examine controversial and complex issues, especially during adolescence/pre-adolescence. This is necessary in order to communicate positive values in the understanding of diversity, or foster cognitive change in beliefs and values that a process of de-radicalisation requires (RAN, 2019, p. 130).

This is precisely the goal of the Noradica Erasmus Project[2]; this article aims to present the social implications of the project and its impacts on the school, considered as one of the key actors/institutions in the prevention of youth radicalisation. The project set out to launch a dialogue focused on a better reciprocal understanding, aiming at preventing religious radicalisation, and designing and implementing an integrated set of activities and Open Educational Resources (OER) to promote interreligious dialogue at school in cooperation with relevant stakeholders and religious communities in the partner Countries. The project consisted of several steps and provided a mixed strategy of advancing knowledge on the risk factors for youth radicalisation and implementing experimental educational activities and workshops in some leading schools, in order to provide teachers with useful tools for their classroom work[3].

The principal aim was to provide channels of dialogue for cooperation between schools and religious communities in the construction of a shared vision for training EU teachers in spreading religious dialogue among students in an anti-radicalisation sense. Moving from the hypothesis that this condition of instability often arises from the lack of knowledge of the Other, especially among the youth, the project aimed to provide tools for the construction of interreligious dialogue, starting from schools and the actors involved in them.

Following the goal to connect youths with the heterogeneous religious groups interacting with their daily-life contexts, the project put at its heart the process of understanding

2   NORADICA - Inter-Religious dialogue Against Radicalisation of Youth through Innovative Learning Practices at School Erasmus+, Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, Strategic Partnerships for school education. 2017-1-IT02-KA201-037002; www.noradicalism.eu. The project concluded its activities on December 31, 2019.

3   The project was specifically addressed to religion and citizenship teachers or teachers who spend most of their work time in the classes involved because of the subjects they teach; students between the ages of 12 and 16 enrolled in the schools of the NORADICA network were also involved.

(religious) diversity as a value instead of a barrier to peaceful coexistence, in order to construct, at the European level, a common socialisation approach to dealing with this pressing issue.

Several useful tools for extremism and radicalisation prevention were developed from the action research of the project, and they were implemented in schools with the cooperation of religious leaders[4], communities and social stakeholders. Even if the project outputs were mainly carried out in schools, the approach involved the construction of a network based upon sharing information, good practices and research-based knowledge. Therefore, in the project, the school is considered the place where a positive radical milieu should be constructed, based on counter-radicalisation narratives emerging from knowledge of the Other. Moreover, secondary socialisation is seen as the process to work on in order to reinforce positive individual attitudes and tolerance with the aim of preventing future involvement of young people in radical collective groups and identities.

As will be shown in the following sections, the project aimed first at achieving in-depth knowledge on religious milieu – particularly in the partner Countries – by mixed methods research, the results of which represented the foundation of all the outputs of the project[5]. The research took into account the various settings and places in which radicalisation can take root and can be prevented, including religious contexts and peer groups. The results of the mixed method analysis highlighted the presence of several social actors who were strongly inclined towards the work on radicalisation prevention through the interreligious dialogue key tool, that had to be considered as the core issue of the project.

The project worked on the strong links among the different outputs, particularly with the

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4   The social category "religious leader" will be used several times in this article. The religious leader is the reference person of each community under analysis, i.e. the bishop in Catholic communities, the imam in Muslim communities, etc. Among the reasons underlying the decision to interview first religious leaders and then religious communities was the idea that they usually coordinate the group activities, in particular those aimed to open religious dialogue with other communities, so they can be considered persons of interest and significant witnesses of the processes investigated.

5   The project included four intellectual outputs: Set of Educational Info graphics, Learning for Teaching Tools-Interactive ebook app for teachers, Learning eduCartoons, and Recommendatory Highlights for Schools and Communities. Only the first output was based on an intense mixed method research process that will be explained in the next section, the results of which will be analysed as the foundation of the fourth output. This last output was particularly directed to social organisations and communities of the partner Countries and several EU countries (the Recommendatory Highlights were translated into 12 additional EU languages, as outlined in note 9 below).

mixed methods research output, the results of which were systematized in a set of infographics, and the other intellectual outputs (see note 5). In this article, we will discuss the relationship between the research results and the last output, the Recommendatory Highlights, the aim of which is to spread the "lessons learnt" from the project research-action to wider communities, in order to create an "exit programme" for direct EU beneficiaries and policy makers that will contain key aspects, such as the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue at school, the rise in the awareness of radicalisation in religious groups, and the role of local communities in de-radicalisation processes. This last step could be considered as "the closure of the circle" of the entire action research and activities of the project, and will be at the centre of the following analysis.

It clearly emerges from the empirical research step that dialogue and deeper knowledge of the Other can be a successful tool in defeating the radicalisation before it takes place. This represents the *fil rouge* among the outputs and the core suggestion for the implementation of the activities of the project.

Particularly regarding religious radicalisation, ignorance about the culture of religions whose diversities are often perceived in a negative sense could be a justification for radicalisation and extreme forms of behaviour. The Noradica project starts and closes on this latter point, providing knowledge on religious and interreligious issues and diversity; it aims to defuse radicalisation and extremism by promoting new forms of communication based on intercultural and interreligious debate. In this way, it embraces the proposal to transform the school into a "lab for democracy" where conflicts and controversies are addressed through dialogue and the acquisition of knowledge, where students can achieve awareness of religious traditions, diversity and interreligious education, and where teachers are empowered in facing the above challenges and beyond (RAN, 2018).

2. Methods and Research design

From a methodological point of view, the research activity was a mixed-method

participatory action-research (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2010; Gibson, Gibson and Macaulay, 2001). The participatory perspective of the research implementation[6] involved the social units with the purpose of designing original research-based tools, such as Open Educational Resources (OER), to raise awareness among the youth to prevent the risks of radicalisation. More in depth, the research question was about how to implement a relational process to prevent radicalisation through innovative co-created tools based upon a dialogic exchange between the educational context, local communities and religious institutions. The necessity to provide operative insights for the recommendatory highlights led to merging the contribution of a plurality of actors (and research tools). In other words, in order to achieve a more complete picture of the case, qualitative and quantitative data were combined. This was unavoidable in order to provide a more in-depth interpretive path (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Amaturo and Punziano, 2016).

As a result of this, the research design was based on an analytical sequence that directly questioned the main social actors involved. The qualitative and quantitative steps were used "simultaneously" and "consequently" (Teddlie and Yu, 2007), albeit with a qualitative weighting. This mixed-method approach worked as a flexible analytical option to obtain more in-depth knowledge of the inter-relations between the two organisational contexts (educational and religious), drawing a complex image of the social units crossing and moving from qualitative to quantitative and vice-versa (Daher, Gamuzza and Leonora, 2019).

As shown below (Fig. 1), the first analytical step consisted of comparative desk research organised to frame two strategic elements for our purposes: the religious presence in the five partner Countries, with a specific focus concerning the most relevant religious groups, and the legal frameworks regulating religious matters within the educational environment in the partner Countries. The project consortium offered an added value from the point of view of the religious homogeneity of the contexts: from the very homogeneous Poland, Italy and Romania (PEW, 2017) to the less homogeneous France and Belgium (PEW, 2018). The case of Romania with a significant presence of the Christian-Orthodox component was useful to

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6 Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be considered as an umbrella conceptual frame that involves researchers and participants working together to deal with a problematic situation and changing it for the better.

better understand this community. The Italian case was informative because of the presence of the Catholic church and the related multi-religious milieu of the country. Moreover, even if Italy has not been directly involved in terrorist attacks in Europe, this country is a strategic "transition context" for radicalisation networks (Rink and Sharma, 2018; Groppi, 2017).

After this phase, the second and third steps consisted of a combination of a quantitative survey and three qualitative tools: a) narrative interviews with teachers about their needs concerning interreligious dialogue at school; b) a survey investigating teachers' competences on interreligious issues; c) narrative interviews with religious leaders in order to discover their networks of collaboration with educational institutions; and d) focus groups with religious communities aimed at obtaining feedback, impressions and useful information derived from the daily-life experience.
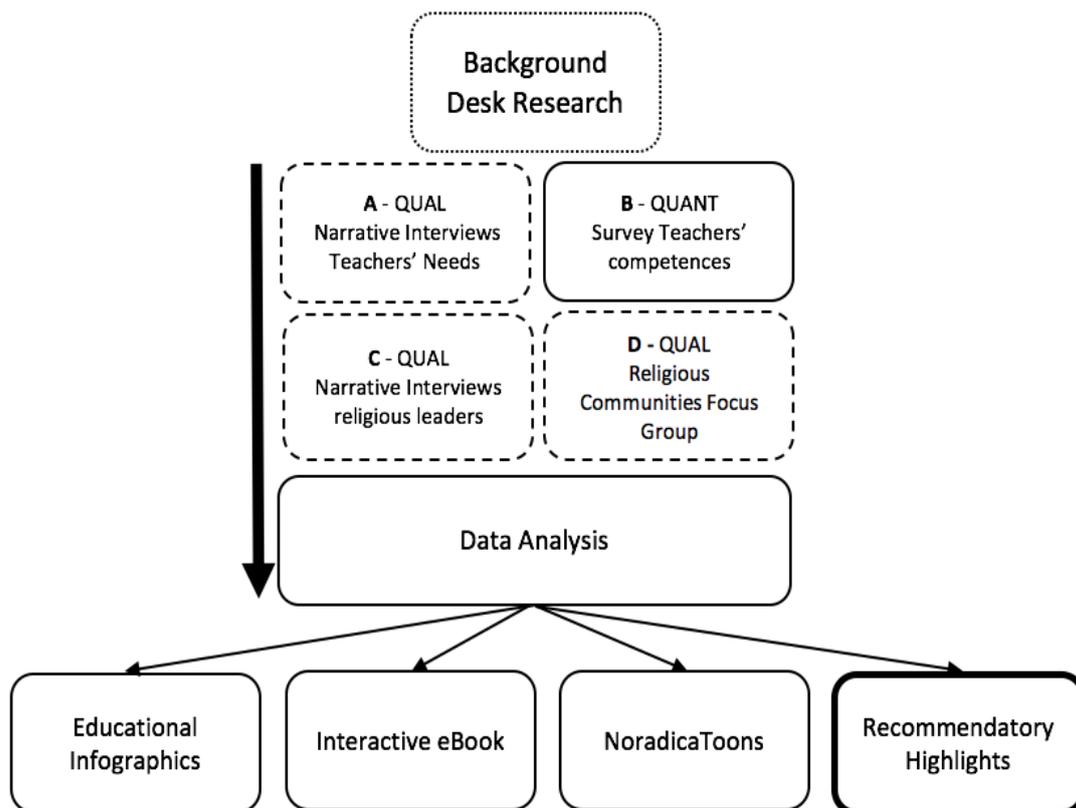
Fig. 1 –The research design of the action-research

The sampling strategy was adapted to the different phases of the research. The first step consisted of online narrative interviews (N=100) carried out in schools and a quantitative survey (N=325) focusing on the needs of teachers in the domain of interreligious dialogue in class. The survey was administered to a purposive sample of teachers selected in the network of schools already established in the partner Countries. The quantitative survey enabled researchers to observe and compare the declared interreligious competences expressed by the teachers in the five partner Countries, implementing a full integration of different perspectives.

The rationale behind the decision to use a non-probability sampling method (Wolf *et. al.*, 2016) took into account the different religious groups in partner Countries. Moreover, the survey was the best way to obtain the opinions of the teachers from the five Countries, and to obtain information from a good sized sample, even if the sample was purpose-oriented. The survey was administered through a centralized web-platform in order to maximize the cost-benefit ratio in terms of time, implementing different linguistic versions that were pre-tested and culturally refined.

The same recruitment strategy was also applied in qualitative steps for the same reasons because of the choice of the method and its adequacy as regards the objectives of the research design. The religious participants were selected on the basis of different religious presence in the contexts of reference covering the major religious groups and religious minorities. More in detail, the second step consisted of 15 narrative interviews with religious leaders (3 Muslim imams; 2 Catholic bishops; 2 Catholic priests; 2 Protestants; 1 Jew; 1 Bahai; 1 Hindu; 1 Buddhist; 1 Orthodox bishop) and 9 focus groups with the representatives of the different religious communities (2 Catholics, 2 Orthodox, 1 Protestant and 2 Muslims). All the interviews with religious leaders focused on the issues of interreligious dialogue, connection strategies and practices of the educational organisations and their relationships with the religious groups within the wider context of reference (Newman and Benz, 1998). The focus groups with religious communities constituted a real heuristic added value and an effective tool when investigating in-depth shared opinions, motivations and expectations that were not so evident from the quantitative section of the

research plan. In fact, during the focus group the interactive debate was triggered by the first evidence coming from the teachers' survey, and participants could express hidden orientation and positions (Carey, 1994). Hence, the two waves of narrative interviews (with religious leaders and teachers) combined with narrative outputs coming from the focus groups with the representatives of religious communities were compared with each other, and the results of this comparison were analysed in parallel with data from the quantitative survey. Moreover, the empathic relationship characterising qualitative steps gives the interviewer the opportunity to discover more than what the respondent wants to reveal, particularly in an institutional framework. The above issues were central also in focus groups with representative members of religious communities, and in particular concerning the good and best experiences and practices within the educational environment, as well as the direct relationships with pupils' parents.

In the next section, the main insights of these steps will be presented in a more structured way. Even if they are based on the views and experience of individuals, the qualitative results give us an articulate interpretation, revealing information which cannot be accessed by quantitative methods (Reiter, Stewart and Bruce, 2010).

3. Data Analysis

As outlined in the methodological paragraph above, after deeper desk research, the project moved forward with two research steps in order to analyse, through the mixed method approach, in the first step the narrative interviews on teachers' needs and the survey on teachers' competences, and in the second step the narrative interviews with religious leaders and the focus groups with the members of different religious communities in the different countries.

We will show below the analytical evidence that is highlighted by the data, starting from the research questions mentioned above concerning the following: the innovative tools to raise awareness among the young generation about the risks of radicalisation; the

transformation of educational organisations that is required to tackle radicalisation phenomena; and the possibility to introduce interreligious dialogue as a daily-life practice at school.

Through triangulation, the key points that will characterise the structure of the recommendations—the last step of the action-research—are highlighted. Moreover, the triangulation highlights how the three social units above focus on some crucial shared issues related to the following areas of intervention:

1) how to promote intercultural and inter religious dialogue at school;
2) how to raise awareness about radicalisation in religious groups through the active involvement of religious leaders;
3) suitable counter-narratives against radicalisation in collaboration with families; and
4) the role of local communities in de-radicalisation processes.

Based on these four areas, the most important questions that have led to the understanding of the issue will be presented, trying to bring the analytical evidence back to the three social actors considered in the Recommendatory Highlights.

As already stated in the introduction, education has a crucial role in preventing radicalisation, so teachers should be equipped with the competences and skills useful to strengthen social ties and construct dialogue (Nordbruch, 2016). In fact, with regard to the first area, most of the teachers reported special attention to students with different cultural backgrounds (Fig. 2). This result highlights the positive consideration that teachers have towards students of different races, cultures, religions, etc., and the care they put in these relationships.
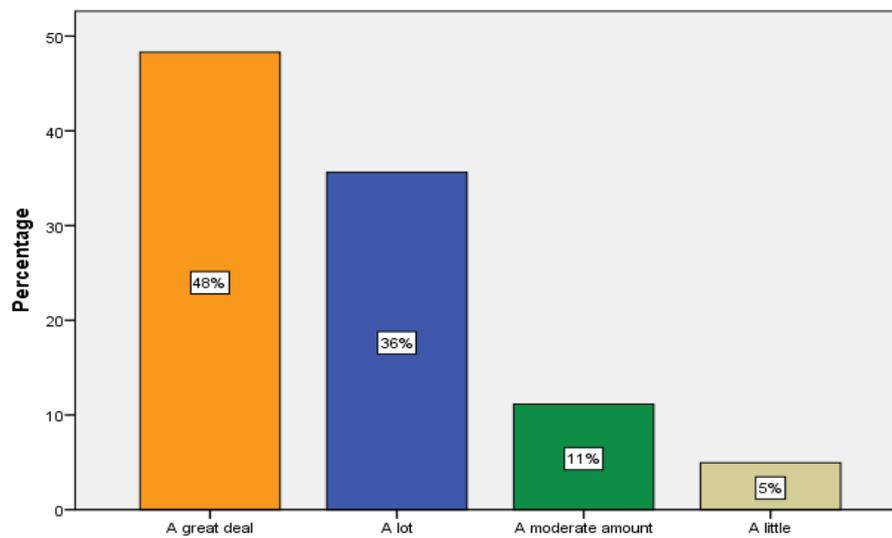
Fig. 2 – The amount of respect that the school has for students of different backgrounds, according to the teachers

When teachers were asked how they would describe their experience dealing with different religious backgrounds in their classes, many teachers reported that it was slightly positive (Fig. 3); they considered their experience to be a vital factor in enhancing their skills for teaching in a multicultural class. By increasing their skills, they are able to cope with any difficulties or particular needs that such classes may show (RAN, 2018).

In line with the attitudes expressed above, most teachers fully disagree or disagree with the statement "students with different religious backgrounds constitute an obstacle to the learning process of the class"; moreover, from some statements of the narrative interviews, their perception of religious diversity clearly appears as an added value. It appears that when teachers increase their skills, they also increase their ability to promote dialogue, cooperation and collaboration among both immigrant and native students, and promote knowledge on the different religious cultures.
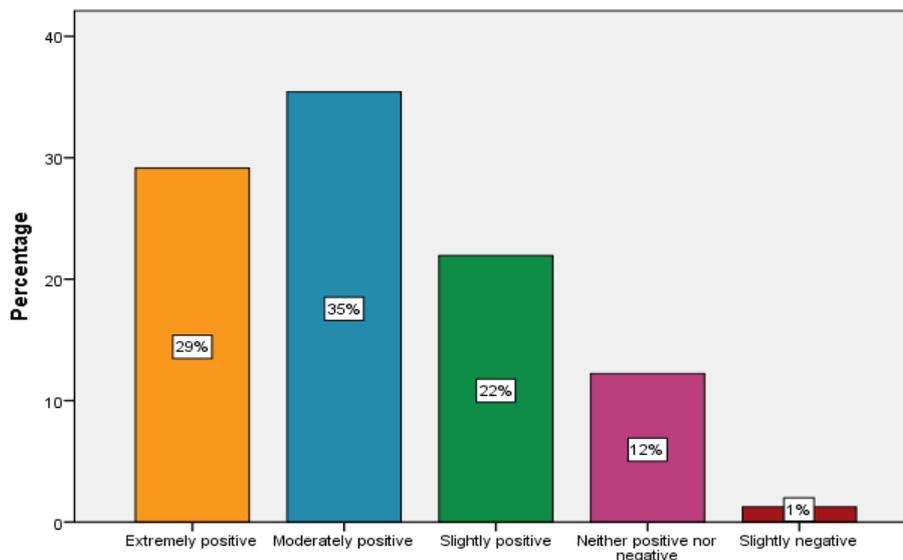
Fig. 3 – Experience of teachers with different religious backgrounds in classrooms

The biggest problems that teachers encounter in managing multi-religious classes are related to the following: lack of time for the introduction of intercultural and interreligious issues in class; prejudice and cultural taboos among different religions; the lack of materials on the subject; and the limited information about different religious habits and practices. Most of the teachers said that they encounter these problems in their classroom daily-life, but they try to overcome them with the help of all the teaching staff.

Teachers totally agree with some strategies to be used within the class that aim to overcome some issues concerning different languages and cultures. Among these, the most effective in their opinion are: forming teams of interreligious experts; planning educational workshops promoting interreligious dialogue; organising more class meetings in out-of-school times; and strengthening cooperation among teachers of different classes. They also agree on the use of some support tools for teaching in multi-religious classes, such as cultural mediators and books, movies and games which promote interreligious dialogue etc. They think that these support tools can improve the quality of the teaching and facilitate relationships among students of different origins and religions (Cuciniello, 2019).

The survey results also show that "managing and promoting diversity adaptability" is the most important skill for teaching and managing multi-religious classes, and promoting integration and interreligious dialogue. As regards the important competences required for teaching these classes, the majority of teachers state that the most important is the "acceptance of diversity"; only by welcoming those who are different from us can we prevent them from feeling different. This opinion is confirmed by the teachers' narrative interviews: **«**the students must be able to acquire and use information, develop their skills, promote European values, accept perspectives of different cultures in the world, relying on cooperation and respect no matter the religion; all of this comes from accepting diversity» (C., RO). «Relational, establishing a relaxed environment for discussion» is chosen as a second option, highlighting how constructive debate leads to mutual knowledge and clears up controversies and conflicts (Fig. 4).

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Other (please specify)	12	4	4	4
	Acceptance of diversity	**103**	**32**	**33**	**37**
	Relational, establishing a relaxed environment for confrontation	**98**	**16**	**31**	**53**
	Language/correct communication	12	4	4	56
	Curiosity, the will to discover the other	23	7	7	64
	Knowledge of the history of religions	30	9	9	73
	Having a spiritual life	9	3	3	76
	Openness and empathy	28	9	9	100
	Total	315	97	100	
Missing	System missing	10	4		
Total		325	100		

Fig. 4 – Important competences required for teaching in multi-religious classes

The cross-reading of the narrative interviews with teachers and religious leaders highlights a "meeting of minds". In addition, regarding their proposals about prevention strategies at schools, religious groups and local communities reveal the same unity of thought. The triangulation highlights the fact that both teachers and religious leaders aim to

understand young people and listen to their experiences and needs. These two social units share some important points relating to the radicalisation issue, such as *how* and *where* – inside and outside the school – to promote interreligious activities and dialogue (Timmerman *et al*., 2017). As a first point, the teachers highlight the importance of their role and claim that there is a need to improve their interreligious competences and skills. The most significant statements expressed by teachers about the features of their role and the skills they need to work in multi-religious classes are categorised below (Fig. 5).

Therefore, it appears that teachers must lead the dialogue on religious issues in class without taking a position. His/her neutral role emerges in the quotes below as well as his/her function of facilitator in the talks. Knowledge is indeed the most important requirement. It is vital to know more about how the different religions support teachers in managing multi-religious schools; the capacity to listen is also an important skill, as is understanding diversities directly from the students.

Teacher's role	Interreligious skills
I encourage students through an open attitude, based on a continuous conversation, to express their opinions, their fears and their preoccupations but mostly to manifest their experiences through practical actions (V., RO).	*The key skills are openness and empathy. These are not competences implemented systemically or with the help of some tools (L., PL).*
I emancipate every minority during the class with the admiration I express. My authority strengthens such pupils. They feel recognised in this way as members of a multicultural school community (C., PL).	*I always ask my students to put the emphasis on tolerance and honesty, but also on deepening knowledge and a good check of the information sources, in order to hold a useful, open inter-confessional dialogue (B., RO).*
In my course, I often broaden the scope to the different religious traditions and beliefs; they express and share what they are and what they experience (J., BE)	*We have to make students aware of their own values and their potential. Through our themes, we also teach them self-esteem and perseverance. Feeling confident allows them to be open-minded to God's kindness and not to be afraid to express their faith. (J., FR).*
In managing religious diversity […] I try to deal with topics common to all religions, such as peace in the world. (S., IT).	*We need to revive the awareness of democratic values for which the basis of everything is mutual respect (C., IT).*
I try to be neutral. I talk to them [the students] about it [interreligious dialogue] only when they feel like it (M. - PL).	*Knowing the history of religions. Having a spiritual life […]. One needs to read a lot, have interest in those topics (F., FR).*

Fig. 5 – Teachers' comments on interreligious matters

According to the interviews with religious leaders, cooperation between religious leaders and local communities is useful to improve interreligious recognition and knowledge. They think it could be implemented by creating an interreligious network, where students can ask religious leaders questions and organise conferences, workshops and summer schools with different interreligious themes. It clearly emerges that in order to implement this aim, close cooperation among schools (teachers and students), religious communities and families is required.

Religious leaders stress the importance of dialogue to create counter-radicalisation narratives and, like the teachers, they believe that they must listen to young people's needs and suggestions in order to prevent radicalisation processes of the young. Knowledge is indeed the most important requirement, and dialogue appears to be an indispensable tool for preventing radicalisation but, according to the leaders, it is not always used by teachers.

The following information also came to light from the results of the focus groups: according to some members of the religious communities, the teachers no longer care about religion: this is a problem for making connections between schools and religious communities. Some teachers hold the view that religion is not part of the schools' agenda (FG, Belgium, Protestant). According to some members of the religious communities, teachers can have an impact on students and could therefore have a positive role if they addressed religions (FG, France, Catholics; FG, Romania, Orthodox). They also think that «the school is becoming secularised, like society (end of religion courses, headscarf banned in an increasing number of schools)» and, in particular, that «teachers are not trained for this, they have too much work» (FG, Belgium, Muslim); this latter evidence corresponds with the claims about "lack of time" resulting from the teachers' survey reported above.

Ideally, the dialogue among religious groups and the common need to work together to promote a multi-faith society, community cohesion and religious harmony is the first evidence of the strategies of teachers and leaders that have been implemented in order to improve interreligious dialogue, recognition, and knowledge at school, as supported by some of the most significant quotes from the narrative interviews with religious leaders categorised below (Fig. 6).

Religious leaders, representative members of communities and teachers place dialogue at the core of the radicalisation prevention strategy, but stress that each religious position must be respected: *it is right to speak of dialogue, but considering the traditions, avoiding the possibility of offending another faith* (FG, Italy, Catholics). According to religious leaders, dialogue can take place at school with believers who express their faith and act as witnesses to it, listening to others and promoting religious freedom. Indeed, they all (teachers, religious leaders and community members) agree that knowledge must the first step to recognising and accepting the Other as an equal.

Promotion of interreligious dialogue	**Promotion of interreligious knowledge and recognition**	**Youth and radicalisation**
An open, constructive dialogue is able to build the bridge between different men and cultures, to make them meet for the good of the community (Imam, IT). *In my opinion we are not the only rightful ones […]. I think it has nothing to do with not accepting the ideas of another religion, this is just xenophobia (Evangelical Reformed, PL).*	*Local Muslim community leaders and church leaders, along with local authorities have organised multicultural friendship festivities: conferences and cultural, festive and sports activities (Iman, BE)* *Our slogan was "an open-door Mosque" (Imam, IT).* *I think we have to learn to listen, avoid judging too fast, present our faith in a relatable manner and discuss issues in vertical relationships (Catholic, FR).*	*My message for the young people about radicalisation is: "You can see yourself only in relation to others" (Orthodox, RO).* *We must […] distinguish between a radicalisation that leads to terrorism and radicalisation in the sense of the search for an autonomous life within a different society. These are very different issues (Catholic, FR).*

Fig. 6 – The main narrative outputs of religious leaders

These common suggestions and aims, coming from the actors of the implementation of religious dialogue to defuse youth radicalisation, lie at the heart of the Recommendatory Highlights, the last output of the project, as mentioned above.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The protean nature of radicalisation shows its ability to adapt to social change and contextual conditions. Radicalisation attracts different ideologies, both religious and

political; in general, intolerance to diversity is the breeding ground where new forms of radicalisation take place: more unpredictable than in the past but territorialised in its scope (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p.145). Remembering this, the interpretive key proposed in this work lies, as already pointed out above, in considering radicalisation as a complex system of daily-life interactions and social relationships (McDonald, 2018) that connects subject and agency in a multifaceted phenomenology. Under this light, radicalisation needs to be re-framed in a broader and more comprehensive way (Ragazzi, 2017) connecting micro, meso and macro factors, despite the enduring tendency that has traditionally defined radicalisation as a matter for law-enforcement agencies and security.

Counteracting radicalisation processes can be seen as a socially constructed process through which active actors (such as complex organisations) co-create integrated strategies to counterbalance these disruptive tendencies (Ragazzi *et al.*, 2019). As indicated by both the teachers' needs survey and the religious community focus groups, in order to counterbalance these tendencies it is necessary to involve both 'dialogic' religious leaders and engaged religious communities. In addition to this, the teachers highlighted that the acquisition of cultural and linguistic competences for school staff is another strategic means for this purpose (Fettes and Karamouzian, 2018; Nordbruch and Sieckelinck, 2018). The quali-quantitative analysis conducted showed that interreligious dialogue practices should be placed in connection with the social representation that young people living in European secular societies (Roy, 2004) have of the religious milieu around them recognising the structural diversity of EU society as a value instead of a barrier to peaceful coexistence. Indeed, the gathered data provides interesting insights into the relationship between educational organisations and local religious communities (including the religious leaders) that acts as a bridge between what is "inside" and what is "outside" the educational environment (Aiello, Puigvert and Schubert, 2018).

As highlighted in the literature, many young people reject a large part of their parents' (and their religious leaders') understanding of religious issues as irrelevant local culture (Gürlesin, 2019). In the more extreme cases, they are in search of a "pure" experience and the positive "heroic" representation of a radicalised identity (Khosrokhavar, 2017). The

religious leaders are in charge of translating the dialogue stimuli into practice, thanks to their vision of the future and their precise ability to cope with the religious diversity around them; they feel they are an integrated part of this diversity (Roach, 2015). Nevertheless, the narrative outputs coming from the focus group shed a light on the importance of supporting initiatives from religious communities and fostering cooperation between the public bodies (i.e. local councils) and the communities active in the territory with a series of bottom-up initiatives that can link these actors (Aiello, Puigvert and Schubert, 2018). The main limitations related to this issue can be seen in the generalisability of the gathered data that are limited to the partner Countries and the connected geographical sub-areas that constituted the empirical basis for the analysis that is influenced by the contextual situation of the regions involved (religious homogeneity, socio-political conditions, previous experiences of cooperation). Moreover, the generalisability of the data is impacted by the limited number of members of the religious communities that participated in the study and, on the other, the selective ratio that favoured the groups that were more inclined than others to get involved in the focus groups.

The coordination between the qualitative and quantitative tools during the development of the Recommendatory Highlights confirmed the importance of participatory social practices like interreligious dialogue as a counter-narrative ingredient for preventing radicalisation dynamics within the educational environment (Vidino, 2018). In this sense, the Recommendatory Highlights showed "one" pathway to reduce the social attractiveness of radicalisation indicating the relevance of a structural cooperation between different social organisations in the triangle formed by educational institutions, religious leaders and religious communities (Duyvesteyn and Shuurman, 2019). The added value of the triangulation between different data coming from different religious communities (in the partner Countries that were both homogeneous and non-homogenous regarding religion) highlighted the role of the families that are at the same time the incubators and accelerators of the radicalisation paths (Ferret and Khosrokhavar, 2022).

The NORADICA project Recommendatory Highlights confirm the need for a re-inclusion of macrosocial and macropolitical dimensions in understanding new paths to

extreme violence from the perspective of complexity (Antonelli, 2020). Prevention of radicalisation implies a neutral and participatory arena of interaction without falling into the temptation of finding straight and easy solutions to a multifaceted phenomenon that is one of the most common tactics used by violent extremists to fuel polarisation and violence (Bailey and Edwards, 2017). Drawing on collected data, the structural relationships among macro, meso and micro factors should be placed at the very core of any effort to create a positive dialogic mechanism to counterbalance radicalisation processes. Further research is needed to establish a solid body of data to explore this very important domain that connects and favours the establishing of dialogue as a key element that involves communities and organisations following a multi-layered perspective.

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