

***Applying quality standards in countering violent extremism
and deradicalization. The case of Baden-Württemberg.***

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Abstract

Germany is one of the few Western countries with a long and diverse tradition of countering violent extremism (CVE) programs, both governmental and civil-society based. This program diversity together with the unique federalism structure of Germany has at times posed a challenge for innovation and ensuring the best possible quality in this complex and partially highly risky field. Quality standards and evaluations of existing programs are debated and sometimes heatedly contested, especially between governmental and non-governmental actors in the CVE sphere. The following article draws on the experiences of the German state of Baden-Württemberg to show a potential way forward in this debate. Specifically, the Baden-Württemberg model of “structural integrity standards” as an alternative to impact and process evaluations will be introduced. Furthermore, it will be presented how these structural quality standards are used to build a new deradicalization for right-wing extremists from scratch and how a new (and so far unique) CVE training center operates to create a shared knowledge base for the practical counter-radicalization work.

Introduction

Germany is one of the few Western countries with a long and diverse history of countering violent extremism (CVE) and deradicalization programs. While the first widely recognized deradicalization programs aimed at jihadist prisoners in the Middle East were set up after the 9/11 attacks for example in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Singapore or Sudan^{1,2} and subsequently caught the attention of international research³, Germany had made practical steps countering juvenile involvement in extreme-right wing groups and violence for almost a decade at that point. Most of Germany's CVE efforts remained focused on the Far-Right up until 2012, when a nationwide counselling network addressing the needs of family members of Islamic extremists were initiated.

While Germany can rightly be called the world's most active country in CVE practices, theoretical and scientific accounts of these programs are still scarce. As a result of this lack of systematic research and analyses, not much is known about the uniquely varied field of German CVE activities internationally. In many Western countries CVE and deradicalization programs have entered the counterterrorism debate and are treated as security focused tools with a strong involvement of police and intelligence services; in turn, this sparked heated debates and rejection from communities and the civil society. In Germany, police and intelligence agencies have engaged in CVE and deradicalization programs since at least 2001, when the first nationwide exit hotline was initiated for neo-Nazis run by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV – Germany's domestic intelligence service).

According to one of the few attempts to map this domain, the German Federal Criminal Police (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) counted 721 CVE programs of all types⁴ and directed at all forms of violent extremism currently (as of 2016, the date of the study) being active in the country⁵. Of these, 336 programs (i.e. about 47%) are carried out by governmental agencies⁶. Germany's policy of wide scale funding for civil society CVE programs, in addition to CVE governmental initiatives, has been the key factor in this unique diversity of programs,

¹ El-Said, 2015.

² e.g. Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010.

³ Bjørge & Horgan, 2009.

⁴ for a typology see: Koehler, 2016b.

⁵ Lützing, Gruber, & Kemmesis, 2016.

⁶ Lützing et al., 2016, p. 9.

which came with benefits as well as with costs. German authorities have been struggling to even understand the scope and number of programs being active in this field in an attempt to better coordinate federal funding and to avoid parallel structures, as well as to identify gaps in the current program landscape. In addition, many different types and forms of CVE measures as well as form of categorization exist, for example using the public health model from Caplan⁷, differentiating in primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention, or, alternatively, Gordon's model⁸ with universal, selective, and indicated prevention. However, as determined by the BKA study, German programs are often not distinguishable according to any basic typology or model⁹. This indicates that the practical field seems to be more geared toward catch-all approaches, rather than specializing in particular forms of CVE and deradicalization.

The Gordic knot of quality standards and CVE

It is clear among experts and policy makers that one of the most severe problems faced by all CVE and deradicalization programs is the question of how to show and ensure a positive impact according to the programs' goals. The previously cited BKA study for example concludes that with regard to the evaluation of these projects the authors found that: "the available information about evaluation measures for the projects surveyed here must be described as extremely threadbare, both concerning the amount and the quality (depth) (...) With the exception of those local action plans that have been thoroughly examined, the findings of evaluations were only available in isolated cases, if at all (...) Overall it remained unclear in the vast majority of cases what had been specifically considered during the evaluation"¹⁰. Another study conducted by the National Centre for Crime Prevention (Nationales Zentrum für Kriminalprävention, NZK) similarly found that the level of existing evaluations in this field is "low" and that knowledge about the effectiveness of such programs "barely exists"¹¹.

Many additional aspects connected to this issue – e.g. if there should be common working standards, how to evaluate deradicalization programs' performance, and how to effectively structure or design these programs – have been briefly touched upon in the existing literature

⁷ Caplan, 1964.

⁸ Gordon, 1983.

⁹ Lützing et al., 2016, p. 13.

¹⁰ Lützing et al., 2016, p. 19, translation by authors.

¹¹ Kober, 2017, p. 219, translations by authors.

so far. However, attempts to suggest comprehensive evaluation tools for deradicalization programs coming from the academia^{12,13,14} have almost completely failed to take root in practice.

Nevertheless, without the development of methods to evaluate deradicalization and terrorist rehabilitation programs, comprehensive ethical and professional standards, or widely accepted norms regarding operational aspects of these initiatives, the field is inevitably bound to remain fragmented, confronted with suspected inefficiencies, failure, or misconduct. Akin to any other complex social problem, terrorism and counter-radicalization must be subjected to scrutiny to avoid backlash or waste of resources. Governments, practitioners, and researchers need to be able to compare and differentiate programs according to their type, goals, and methods, but also on their impact, proficiency, and skills, in order to develop true ‘best practices’, develop and build new programs based on well-established principles, and improve existing programs regarding identified mistakes or insufficiencies.

Of course, it would be naïve to propose that a ‘one size fits all’ solution could be developed for every country, target group, and context. Differences in political cultures, ideologies, structure of terrorist groups, legal frameworks, religion, and available resources need to be incorporated into every program design. Nevertheless, several metrics to measure CVE programs’ effectiveness are generally used, for example recidivism rates or case numbers¹⁵, but have all been scrutinized and found insufficient to provide actual knowledge about each program’s quality¹⁶. It is rather the *structural integrity* of CVE and deradicalization programs which can be effectively assessed. Translating empirically well-established structural factors associated with effectivity and efficiency of rehabilitation programs for ‘ordinary’ offenders from criminology to the field of deradicalization, structural integrity is associated with a maximized chance of impact (as defined by the program’s goals) and the basis for future evaluations and assessments of effect and processes. A first step towards structural integrity evaluations of CVE and deradicalization measures can be achieved through adapted integrity checklists comparable to the Correctional Program

¹² Horgan & Braddock, 2010.

¹³ Romaniuk & Fink, 2012.

¹⁴ Williams & Kleinman, 2013.

¹⁵ Mastroe & Szmania, 2016.

¹⁶ Koehler, 2016b, 2017a.

Checklist CPC¹⁷ as suggested by Koehler¹⁸. This CVE program integrity checklist, which is currently the only available one, includes 64 structural indicators from six categories (running and developing a program; organization; participant classification; care and advisory services; quality assurance; transparency) and was created to achieve an optimal balance between the interest of the program and relevant stakeholders, simply by not judging an initiative for lack of measured impact (e.g. in terms of recidivism or case numbers) and by also not dictating specific content and methods. Structural integrity allows for a basic quality standard to be observed by including determined key procedures and elements. However, how these components are filled with content can be left to the programs. Stakeholders can be assured that a program is designed according to the highest structural standards, which does not impede plurality of methods and approaches in any way.

For the following discussion, two very important key structural indicators and their practical application in the State of Baden-Württemberg will be discussed in detail: developing a program from scratch and training expert staff for deradicalization work.

Developing a new deradicalization program from scratch

Since the turn of the millennium it became obvious that the modernization and pluralization of the extreme right-wing scene led to weaker ties between activists and the right-wing group structures. Particularly the “New Right” (Neue Rechte) initiated a cultural turn within right-wing extremism. This placed emphasis on the intellectual movement behind the violence on the streets. New forms of action appealing to youth evolved (“Autonome Nationalisten”, “Die Unsterblichen”, “Hard Bass” etc.) and diversified the (visual) appearance of the scene. Nowadays recognizing specific “styles and codes” is only possible for experts in this field. Recently and as a reaction to the migration flow in the years 2015/16 the scene broadened. “Concerned citizens” labelling themselves as “protective association” for “traditional values” merge with those who fight against an apparent dictatorship of “political correctness” in public discourses. The open and aggressive rhetoric against individuals, groups, and “the system” turned in many cases into an ironic-sarcastic language with misanthropy shining through. But the change from the openly revealed right-wing manifestation to

¹⁷ Latessa, 2013.

¹⁸ Koehler, 2017b.

more subtle forms did not result in a decline in violence and relevant criminal offences. Especially in 2016, many socially well-integrated “concerned citizens” with no prior criminal record became active with criminal offences against refugees and their shelters¹⁹. This poses a problem for deradicalization programs due to the degree of attempted camouflage with traditional values. The formal and informal pressure on deviant youth subcultures was easier to apply for CVE programs. Nowadays, deradicalization programs are well-advised to increase their awareness for persons who traditionally did not attract much attention before²⁰.

Governmental deradicalization programs in Germany

Starting in the 1990’s, most German CVE programs treated right-wing extremism as a youth-related problem and focused on social work as approach to prevention. Most of the programs aimed at a preventive impact on youngsters (already or not yet) involved in right-wing groups. Since 2000 specialized programs for those who want to quit the scene emerged²¹. The new secondary and tertiary prevention programs were either installed by public administration bodies or through civil society programs. The NGO-based programs benefited from their innovative spirit whereas the governmental programs took advantage of their resource stability. Cooperation between both fields was not without tensions and resulted in occasionally substantial rifts²². The governmental programs were not accessible to the general and academic audience, only the civil society based ones were. In many cases they were regarded with suspicion and their effectiveness was doubted²³. However, due to their confidential and bureaucratic nature, governmental programs rarely defended themselves against such criticism.

In 2001, the Conference of the Ministers of the Interior (Innenminister Konferenz, IMK) established a working-group led by the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg with the aim to write a synopsis of the emerging deradicalization programs and to provide recommendations for their future development. In 2003, the IMK tasked the governmental programs to hold specifically structured workshops on a regular basis (“Bund-Länder Arbeitstagung Aussteigerprogramme Rechtsextremis-

¹⁹ Quent, 2016.

²⁰ Hohnstein & Greuel, 2015.

²¹ Glaser, Hohnstein, & Greuel, 2014.

²² Glaser et al., 2014.

²³ Staud, 2001.

mus”). These workshops progressed and published a mutually shared “standards-paper”, based on data collected between 2010 and 2013²⁴, which was designed to be applicable to all governmental contexts.

The weak cooperation between the German governmental deradicalization programs and European associations (e.g. the Radicalization Awareness Network RAN) as well as the academic discourse are key factors that have not been widely addressed. Evaluation and transparency of governmental programs were significantly improved with the first published inside reports^{25,26,27} and evaluation studies²⁸ but still need further development.

The Baden-Württemberg deradicalization programs for right wing extremists

In 2001, the program “Ausstiegshilfen Rechtsextremismus” (Exit-Assistance for Right-Wing Extremism) was started by the Ministry of the Interior in Baden-Württemberg. The focal point of the program was the Consultation and Intervention Group against Right-Wing Extremism (“Beratungs- und Interventionsgruppe gegen Rechtsextremismus”) situated at the State Office for Criminal Investigation. The program had a pro-active contact approach: members of the right-wing scene were surprisingly confronted at home with an “Exit-option”. In cooperation with regional police forces, this approach was carried out bulk-wise in only a few of days per region. The “fight against crime” policy was also represented in the aims of the program: participants were to be “talked out” of the extreme right-wing scene. In 2003, a feasibility study showed that there was a good chance for the program to reach the targeted group. The program worked well within the given structures and personnel (mainly police officers). But the right-wing scene adapted and therefore the requirements for a new deradicalization programs changed as well. In addition, some problematic parts in the program had become more and more obvious. After 16 years of running the program the time had come to attempt a restart.

Based on recently formulated “Structural Quality Standards” in CVE²⁹ in combination with the “standards-paper” (Buchheit, 2014), sever-

²⁴ Buchheit, 2014.

²⁵ Buchheit & Maier, 2010.

²⁶ Korstian & Ochs, 2013.

²⁷ Wesche, 2014.

²⁸ Möller, Küpper, Buchheit, & Neuscheler, 2015.

²⁹ Koehler, 2017b.

al areas for development pointed out by the German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut, DJI) were included³⁰: presence and activities on the internet, reaching out to women and more clandestine members of the targeted groups. Due to the changes within the targeted groups, it was essential for the program to be operating with low contact threshold.

Taking into account these developments, a new state run deradicalization program was strategically designed by making use of all available academic and practical knowledge. Key aspects such as sound risk-assessment, monitoring and criminal prognosis instruments as well as defined procedures were discussed from the early stages onward. It is well-known that the counseling process should not be highly formalized but flexible and dynamic to be able to address the client's actual demands and needs. There is no ethically justifiable way of changing the client's mindset from an outside position. Hence, the counseling should gain trust and foster the motivation of the client to *co-produce* an ideological disassociation. A concentration on disengagement and a reduction of the likelihood of recidivism appear to be the only required conditions for a sustainable exit. However, the final goal should be a change of mind, although this is hard to measure³¹ under the given conditions of a voluntary counseling service.

This new program is built on the experience in this field and follows the "logic model of a deradicalization program"^{32,33}. After the first contact with a client and initial procedures consisting of a comprehensive (social) anamnesis and risk-assessment, three following stages can be described: first, finding solutions for everyday but essential problems (home, education/profession, legal issues, social environment, etc.). Second, the counselors help to find solutions to problems related to the right-wing scene (disengagement/social isolation, aggression, dependency to substances, debts, etc.). The third step is about deradicalization and to assist the client to change their mindset. This goes hand in hand with a reflection of the biography and the individual ideology in search of functional equivalents for right-wing offers within individual trajectories.³⁴ Acting professionally in the field of deradicalization means to base the work on latest research findings and to adapt to the

³⁰ Hohnstein & Greuel, 2015, p. 193.

³¹ Buchheit, F., 2018b.

³² Buchheit, 2013.

³³ Möller et al., 2015.

³⁴ Buchheit, F., 2018a.

specific situation of an individual. The push toward a re-pluralization³⁵ should not be carried out with force but rather in the form of little nudges embedded in a pragmatic and solution-oriented assistance and counseling process. Guiding former right-wing extremists on their way out of the movement is always an open-ended and highly individual process.

Such high standards for a newly designed deradicalization program require equally high demands with regard to the staff selection, which aimed to include a broad variety of academic and practical skills and experiences (e.g. psychology, pedagogy, social work, security authorities, political science, therapy and counseling). Considering the latest research findings in the field, a training course for the counseling team lasting about ten weeks will be designed and conducted in addition to the program concept development. This course will include short internships with future cooperation partners (police, intelligence agencies, judiciary and corrections, social work, prevention and promotion of democracy programs). In order to establish a positive learning culture and a creative self-improvement policy, a formative self-evaluation will be implemented. Built on a theoretical and empirical base, the program will be ready for an external summative evaluation after one year of practical work. In the field of CVE and deradicalization, knowledge is a crucial factor for success. It is essential to benefit from latest research, especially for secondary and tertiary prevention programs. Simultaneously, it is a vital interest of researchers to stay in contact with the changing field of extremism. The Baden-Württemberg Counter Extremism Network Coordination Unit (Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus in Baden Württemberg, **konex**) is hosting both: the new deradicalization program and the State Training Center for Deradicalization (Landesbildungszentrum Deradikalisierung, LBZ Derad), which provides an excellent opportunity for an active knowledge exchange.

Creating a training centre for CVE experts and building a professional team of counsellors

Need for comprehensive approaches

There are multiple reasons why individuals become violent extremists or are attracted to radical ideas. In order to develop effective strategies and programs for early intervention and prevention of violent radica-

³⁵ Koehler, 2016a.

lization processes as well as to empower communities and families to counter this threat, there is a need for a better and detailed understanding of the complex nature of this phenomenon. In addition, various different professions (e.g. prison staff, teachers, psychologists, social workers) need to be trained to identify violent radicalization and to know what their responsibilities and options for countering these tendencies are. In order to achieve this objective a well-coordinated cooperation between experts from many fields across the society and governmental and provision of evidence-based solutions which are “built on strong quality standards”³⁶ are required.

One of the key pillars of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programs is specific and profound staff training and, therefore, there is a strong need for a professional network of counsellors in multiple professions. This aspect was noted by the *Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders*, one of the few international guidelines for essential elements of effective P/CVE work³⁷. The *Rome Memorandum* states as *Good Practice Number 9*:

As the personnel in most frequent contact with the inmates, it is important that prison officers understand and are carefully attuned to the rehabilitation process, even if they are not directly responsible for its delivery.[...] Officers could receive the necessary training on professional conduct, prisoner rights, inmate rules and responsibilities, and how to supervise prisoners by employing firm, fair and consistent techniques.

Another handbook on structural integrity standards for P/CVE programs explains the importance of staff training connected to the program’s aims and goals³⁸: “The broader the aims and tasks of an intervention project, the broader and substantively more complex the staff training must be.” Specifically mentioned are for example training in risk assessment, ethical procedures, client intake processes, classification, and method selection³⁹.

To build and deliver adequate training for professionals with different backgrounds requires the participation of civil society actors, practitioners, academics, and a wide range of experts. They can play a key role in helping to understand the dynamics involved in radicalization

³⁶ Koehler, 2016b.

³⁷ GCTE, 2013.

³⁸ Koehler, 2017b, p. 29.

³⁹ *ibid.*

and ways to counter it as well as support governmental efforts to implement community-focused CVE efforts.

Examples of existing CVE training courses

Various organizations and networks worldwide have engaged in building international, national or local networks of different stakeholders in the P/CVE field. But only few have developed specialised staff training courses. Two examples are Hedayah and the EU's Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN).

*Hedayah*⁴⁰

The first international center of excellence for CVE was opened December 2012 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, as an initiative of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF). Hedayah has developed various CVE training courses and workshops for partners in the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as well as for national governments and international organizations around the world. As one of the few networks looking into CVE staff training, Hedayah has also, for example, designed specific training courses for family counsellors.

*Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)*⁴¹

RAN was founded 2011 by the European Commission as an EU-wide network for connecting first-line practitioners such as teachers, social workers, community police officers, etc. The RAN Centre of Excellence (CoE) guides and coordinates different working groups organized within RAN and allows exchange of experiences, good practices, and knowledge between experts in the wide field of P/CVE. The CoE is also tasked with delivering:

“the ambitious objectives of tackling the most pressing challenges such as implementing deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes (including in prisons), developing approaches for handling returning foreign terrorist fighters, equipping teachers and youth workers in addressing the root causes of radicalisation and strengthening resilience of in particular young people.”⁴²

⁴⁰ <http://www.hedayah.ae/>.

⁴¹ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en.

⁴² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-and-member-states_en (accessed December 3, 2017).

RAN member states are supported by hand-tailored train-the-trainer courses, specific issue workshops, or deployments of RAN advisory teams. Member states can request such assistance with their P/CVE policies and RAN aims to use its collected expertise across the EU to deliver it.

The new “LBZ Derad”

The State Training Center for Deradicalization (LBZ Derad) was created under the umbrella of the Counter Extremism Network Coordination Unit (**konex**) in the Ministry of the Interior of the State of Baden-Württemberg as a state-wide provider of specialized training courses in the field of P/CVE. The core task of the training center is to develop content for training courses tailored to specific target groups’ needs. In order to identify those needs of potential participants and to create educational contents, the LBZ Derad works in close collaboration with existing external and internal professional partners (scientific experts and experienced practitioners) of the **konex** (see figure 1).

The qualification of the specialists can take many different forms, for example train-the-trainer programs with the aim of forming an interdisciplinary pool of experts or specific e-learning platforms. To achieve success in this endeavor, it is crucial that the training concepts are based on nationally (here: State of Baden-Württemberg) coherent standards and basic knowledge in P/CVE. This will ensure that tasks and responsibilities of the different stakeholders are known, the use of available resources is maximized, and unnecessary duplication of effort is avoided.

The main tasks of LBZ Derad according to its mission are:

- Coordinating and carrying out education and trainings in the field of P/CVE (with a main focus on secondary and tertiary prevention).
- Offering individually tailored training concepts in the area of P/CVE aimed at specific target groups such as teachers, social workers, probation officers, law enforcement personnel, prison staff, and voluntary workers in refugee arrival centers.
- Enhancing the quality standards of the education of disseminators in collaboration with existing partners of the **konex** (among others: State Criminal Office, State Office for the Protection of the Constitution, advisory board of the KPEBW).
- Creating scientific publications and handouts for practitioners.

Structure and contents of the LBZ Derad P/CVE programs are:

- Teaching basic skills in understanding the processes of radicalization.
- Enabling staff to identify signs of violent extremist radicalization and situation assessment.
- Teaching a set of operational skills specific to each professional target group.
- Teaching basic knowledge on existing support structures and professional responsibilities.

A further interest of the LBZ Derad is to promote and establish unified quality standards in the broad field of P/CVE.

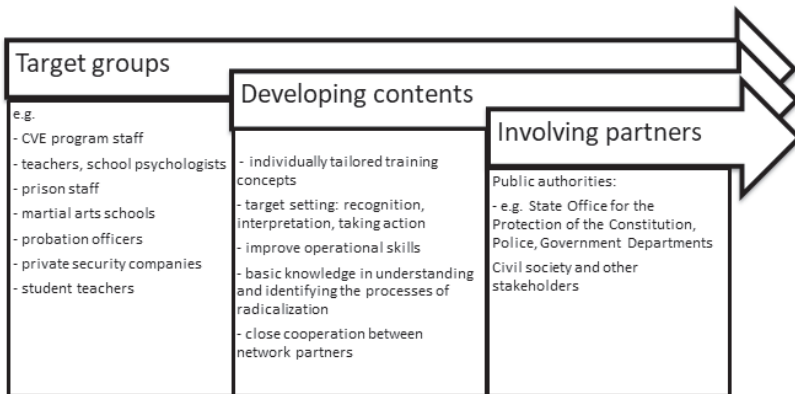


Figure 1. Overview of target groups, developing contents and involved partners.

Conclusion

This short report about recent CVE developments in the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg demonstrates the necessity for close interaction between high quality standards, state-of-the-art research, and practitioner experience. With continuously growing demands, CVE programs face unparalleled complexities and a potentially exceptionally dangerous clientele. Only with a solid evidence base and comprehensive quality standards is a sustainable development in this field possible, while minimizing risks of failure at the same time.

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