

Danish Preventive Measures and De-radicalization Strategies: The Aarhus Model

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The Danish anti- and de-radicalization strategy involves three interwoven elements: (a) an early prevention and exit programme, (b) prosecution of radicalized persons who have committed violent crimes (in Denmark or in a foreign country), including measures such as confiscation of passport, and (c) prevention and countering of threats to national security, by the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET). The last two elements are in line with measures adopted by the international community. The element (a) is well known in some countries; however, the Danish programme and in particular the so-called Aarhus Model is quite unique. Thus, the Aarhus Model and its underpinning theory are presented below.

THE AARHUS MODEL: PRINCIPLES AND ORGANIZATION

The Aarhus Model comprises programmes for both early prevention and exit processes. The prevention programme aims to prevent further violent radicalization of youngsters who do not yet represent any danger or security risk but may become dangerous if their radicalization process continues in a violent direction (and who may then perpetrate acts of terrorism). The exit programme is directed at already radicalized people who have intentions and capabilities of committing politically and/or religiously motivated violent crimes and terrorism.

The purpose of the above anti- and de-radicalization measures is to stop or redirect the processes of violent radicalization. A main concern in this regard is to ensure constitutional rights and freedom of expression while at the same time acknowledging the democratic necessity of political and religious activities, and eventually, to guide the political and religious opinions, critiques and activities into legal modes of operation within the framework of democracy. So, the Aarhus Model's programmes of early prevention and exit have nothing to do with political or religious policing, nor do they have anything to do with being naive or not taking hard measures if necessary, which is made clear in the following official quotes:

The Mayor of Aarhus, Jacob Bundsgaard: "Taking our starting point in the Danish democratic traditions about openness and dialogue, we wish to create a safe

and good city for all by working long-term and intensively with crime prevention, while at the same time clamping down on offences and tendencies towards harassment, racism and discrimination [in relation to Syria volunteers]. We wish to offer these people a chance of rehabilitation and return to an ordinary Danish everyday life characterized by security for themselves and the people who surround them.” (Information package 2014)

The Section Chief, Toke Agerschou: “The goal ... is to help youths and adults move away from the radical environments, which may involve crime and violence or helping to radicalize others so that they are channelled onto a different life trajectory.” (Information package 2014)

The quotes are in accordance with the theoretical grounding of the Aarhus Model, i.e., the Life Psychological theory of approaching the targeted young people by basically regarding them as individuals striving for agency in their own and common life (which will be elaborated below).

The Aarhus Model has three main characteristics: (1) close and flexible cooperation among several already existing institutions and authorities working with exposed and vulnerable young people, (2) inclusion, and (3) scientific foundation.

The Aarhus measure is not about ideology, right-wing/left-wing politics, or Islam as such, and certainly not about stigmatizing groups of citizens. It is about criminal conduct and activism outside the law. Therefore the anti-radicalization project is organized as an SSP initiative (the SSP is an interdisciplinary collaboration between Schools, Social authorities, and Police aimed at crime prevention). The SSP interdisciplinary collaboration exists in all municipalities in Denmark, and has existed for almost 40 years; so, the Aarhus Model project is rooted in solid experience and know-how. The SSP organization provides a formal platform embracing exactly those institutions, resource networks and employees who are able to meet the particular needs of young people.

The Aarhus Model works in close cooperation with the anti- and de-radicalization research project at the Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, as well as with experts in the fields of politics, sociology, psychology, acculturation and religion, at Aarhus University. Furthermore, the Aarhus Model team works with the social services, several ministries, and PET (the Danish Security and Intelligence Service). Furthermore, the project is based on close collaboration with similar approaches in Denmark and Europe as well as the European network RAN (Radicalization Awareness Network).

The approach of the Aarhus Model builds on the principle of inclusion, which can be defined as meaningful participation in common cultural, social, and societal life. The central idea of modern democracy is based on the legal participation of many different interest groups in an ongoing quest for the best possible solutions to emerging challenges. Therefore, the aim of the interventions of the early prevention and exit

programme of the Aarhus Model is to transform the personal, social, cultural and political motivations into legal modes of participation and citizenship.

Furthermore, the Aarhus Model is based on the discipline of Life Psychology (developed at the Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, AU), which is a research project and an interdisciplinary approach integrating personality psychology, social psychology and societal psychology with social sciences (politics, sociology, jurisprudence) and humanities (culture, religion, ethics) in the understanding of radicalization processes, risk factors and resilience.

THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE AARHUS MODEL

The main initiatives of the Aarhus Model project are presented below.

The InfoHouse

The first piece of information about an individual stepping onto the path of violent extremism often comes from parents, teachers, youth club workers, outreach workers, social workers, and/or the police. The information is handed over to the InfoHouse, staffed by the East Jutland Police. The police staff initiates further inquiry and investigation and then (possibly) draws on a consulting interdisciplinary workgroup. An assessment based on the available information decides whether it is a case of violent radicalization, or just a case of “false positive”, i.e., a relatively harmless case of legal radicalization, or sometimes a “youth rebellion”. It may also be a case of social and/or psychological problems. If no real danger of violent radicalization is found, alternative adequate measures of social services or counselling may be suggested.

On the other hand, specific anti-radicalization measures will be taken in cases where risk factors of violent radicalization are identified. The InfoHouse will initiate contact to brief the person on the reports and the assessment, and to explain about the concerns concerning the dangerous developmental trajectory and mindset. In addition, parts of the person’s network (family, peers, school, clubs) will – if available as resources – be mobilized in the process of helping the person to acknowledge and seek alternative, legal, ways to find answers to questions of life, as well as alternative ways to resolve resentment and offence (personal as well as social or cultural) and hopefully to make a legal difference to the community, society or the world as such.

Mentoring

Currently the Aarhus team has at its disposal a group of ten well-educated mentors employed by the Municipality of Aarhus and guided by a group of four mentoring coordinators. In order to form a broadly composed group who can meet the often different individual profiles and specific needs of the targeted persons, these mentors have been recruited with regard to age, gender, ethnic background, formal education and experi-

ence, first-hand knowledge of different cultural and social milieus, as well as political and religious knowledge.

Without doubt mentoring constitutes an essential element in the Aarhus Model. First, the mentor plays a significant role in the specific de-radicalization process by pointing to the pitfalls, the personal and societal dangers, the illegality as well as the mis-directedness of the particular activism. Second, the mentor helps to find paths of inclusion regarding the activities and tasks in the daily life of the mentee (family, work, education, leisure time). Third, the role of the mentor is to be a well-informed, interested and empathic sparring partner, with whom the mentee can discuss questions and challenges of daily life as well as the ultimate concerns of existential, political and religious questions of life.

Workshops

An important initiative with regard to early prevention is a series of two-hour workshops held in primary schools as well as high schools. The purpose of the workshops is to introduce young pupils and students to the threats of terrorism and violent radicalization through short presentations, dialogues/discussions, exercises, games and role-play. The basic aim is to help pupils and teachers recognize risk factors and markers of possible radicalization processes among their peers in order to be able to spot lurking radicalizing influence from recruiting groups. Furthermore the workshops aim to develop the young pupils' and students' awareness of digital behaviour, prejudice, exclusion, citizenship and participation in social life, community and society – and subsequently to develop resilience to the risk factors of violent radicalization by way of acknowledgement of good alternatives regarding political and religious interests and activism.

Parents Network

A parents network has been established for parents of right wing radicalized youth and Muslim jihadists. The network is led by process facilitators from the staff of the Aarhus Method team, and its purpose is to empower the parents with parental skills regarding the specific challenges of having a violently radicalized child, as well as to empower parents to be resource persons in a united anti- and de-radicalization effort.

Dialogues, especially with the Muslim communities

The Aarhus team is in continuous open dialogue with different Muslim communities, organizations and mosques in Aarhus about cooperation with the Aarhus Municipality with regard to preventing violent radicalization of their young members, including recruitment as violent jihadists from hole-and-corner agencies operating in the peripheries of the Muslim communities.

Exit Programme

A special exit programme for foreign fighters was initiated in 2013, aimed at de-radicalizing homecoming foreign fighters. The purpose of the exit programme is to help men and women who wish to abandon the violent trajectories and find their way back into society and be included in daily social life. If an exit programme is approved as feasible, the case is passed on to a task force who will then assess which specific services should be offered to the homecoming person as well as to the resource persons in his or her social network (family, peers, school, work etc.). Subsequently, a written exit-process cooperation agreement is made in collaboration with the homecoming person, who will then be offered help as regards employment/education, housing, psychological counselling/therapy and medical care, with a view to a successful exit process and inclusion in society.

Certainly, the exit programme is based on the precondition that the homecoming foreign fighter has done nothing criminal (if so, he or she will be prosecuted according to Danish law) and that the person is screened and assessed as not posing any security risk. The exit programme is established for those who are genuinely motivated to successfully complete an exit process, and strong measures are taken to prevent the exit programme from being used as some sort of hiding place for people intending to commit terrorist acts.

Education and Supervision of Staff

The staff of the Aarhus anti- and de-radicalization project, especially the mentors, workshop instructors and network facilitators, have received comprehensive training, comprising courses on radicalization processes, risk factors, conflict management and coaching, and, last but not least, Life Psychology (especially to help to train mentees in the development of fundamental life skills, including topics of group processes, identity formation in youth, and cultural psychology). Furthermore, by means of monthly meetings and ad hoc appointments with their coordinator mentors, and workshops, facilitators receive intensive supervision, also strongly inspired by Life Psychology.

LIFE PSYCHOLOGY – THE THEORETICAL GROUNDING FOR THE AARHUS MODEL

As stated above, Life Psychology provides the theoretical grounding for the Aarhus Model. Life Psychology is a scientific discipline rooted in psychology, social sciences and humanities, and was developed at the Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, Aarhus University. This article only allows for a very brief introduction. However, a thorough presentation can be found in Bertelsen (2015), including proper references to contemporary research on radicalization and terrorism as well as the root disciplines mentioned above.

The primary presumption in Life Psychology is that everybody aspires to a good-enough life. “Good enough” because life is seldom (never) perfect in terms of avoiding various challenges, obstacles and setbacks in regard to one’s aspirations and life projects.

The second presumption is that having a good-enough grip on life means coping sufficiently successfully with the tasks life offers, which depends on having the necessary skills to handle them. The tasks may be concrete daily-life tasks regarding one’s social life, work or leisure, as well as making important choices, or perhaps a wish to make a difference in life.

A third presumption in Life Psychology is that every human being regardless of gender, cultural background, abilities and disabilities, life history as well as social situation is confronted with exactly the same fundamental life tasks. Having a good-enough life therefore implies having general generic human life skills by which one can handle the fundamental human life tasks. *General* because everybody must develop and form the same fundamental life skills matching the fundamental life tasks. *Generic* because every fundamental life task will surface in endless individual, social, cultural, and societal variations (implying that the specific handling of a specific variation of a fundamental life task must be generated from the corresponding fundamental life skill).

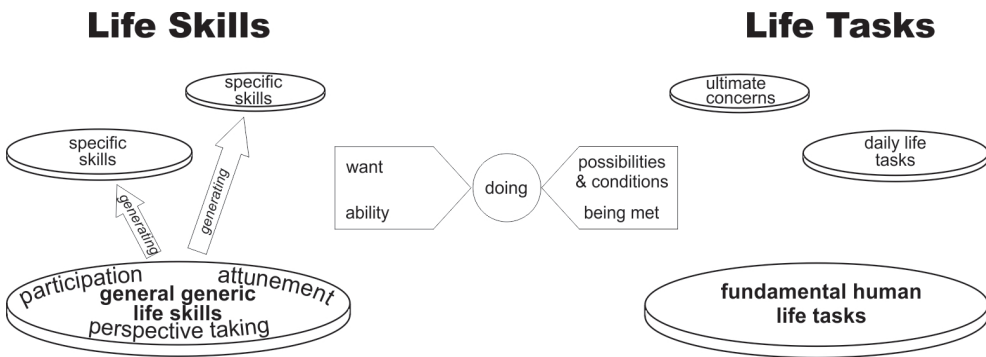


Figure 1. The connection between life skills and life task on different levels.

According to Life Psychology – and as illustrated in Figure 1 – the fundamental life tasks are about taking part in the formation of own and common life and about being pragmatically and morally attuned to the reality and morality of the surrounding world, as well as being able to navigate among different (sometimes conflicting) life discourses and life projects. More precisely, to have a good-enough grip on life is about (1) having and taking a personal position from where one can participate in constructing and maintaining one’s own and common life, (2) attuning one’s way of handling daily-life tasks as well as ultimate concerns to reality, pragmatically as well as morally, and (3) seeing oneself from one’s own perspective (that is, reflecting on one’s own life aspirations), from others’ perspective (that is, empathic understanding of the life

aspirations of others'), and from the perspective of culture and society (cultural and societal discourses). In short, the general generic life skills are about *participation*, *realistic attunement* and *perspective taking* (which can be divided into specified sub-skills; please see Bertelsen 2015).

On the one hand, to develop and form a good-enough grip on life implies that one (from the psychological point of view) *will* and *can* realize one's life skills in regard to the life tasks one is confronted with. Just as the fundamental generic life skills are global categories for countless specifically generated skills, "will" – or "want" – is the global motivational category for psychological phenomena such as wishing, aspiring, intending etc., that is, motivational processes. Likewise, "can" – or "ability" – is the global cognitive category for the phenomena of knowing, thinking, reflecting etc. On the other hand (from a social, cultural, societal point of view), no matter what one will and can do, it has to be aligned with the *external possibility and conditions* as well as how one is *met by others* in order to succeed in having a good-enough grip on life. "External possibilities and conditions" are about the natural and political reality as conditions that determine which form of life can be lived and which cannot (at least not without further development of these possibilities and conditions). Even if the external possibilities and conditions are such that one can realize the life one aims at for oneself and others, this striving – for the vast majority – only succeeds when one is met by others, that is, acknowledged, supported and helped by others. Therefore, similar to what was pointed out above, "external possibilities and conditions" and "being met" are global phenomena comprising manifold specific external material, political and social life conditions. In other words, termed as life skills, one must be able to actually see or look for existing possibilities and expressions of being met. Or, alternatively, if these conditions do not exist in the proper forms and extents, one must as far as possible be able to take part in giving rise to them.

Finally, nothing happens if one *does* nothing to realize what one can and will according to possibilities and being met. All in all: The development of a good-enough grip on own and common life by means of general generic life skills must be based on an interplay between "want" plus "ability" and "external possibilities and conditions", and "being met by others", resulting in "doing". As can be seen in Figure 1, the specific realization forms – and ultimately *doing* – are the mutual results of, on the one hand, motivational and cognitive capacities and, on the other hand, reality conditions and social conditions connected to one's life tasks.

THE RADICALIZATION PROCESS IN TERMS OF LIFE PSYCHOLOGY – BASED ON THE NOTION OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN LIFE EMBEDDEDNESS

The above notions constitute the basic Life Psychological model of agency and having a good-enough grip on own and common life in general. As such the model provides the basis for a deeper understanding of human radicalization processes.

The model takes its point of departure in the main presumption that the well-being of human beings depends on having a good-enough grip on life. We all strive for a life embedded in a meaningful, safe and secure world for our loved ones and ourselves. In short: People strive for a good-enough fundamental *life embeddedness*.

As proposed by the basic Life Psychological model, people thrive and prosper when they are able to *do something* regarding own and common life tasks, that is, when they experience the good-enough grip on life and their life embeddedness are marked by *agency*. Moreover, one has a good-enough grip on life when the developmental and educational states of one's life skills are aligned with the tasks at hand. If this is the case, then one's effort to construct, maintain and personally shape and develop own and common life embeddedness is *in flow* (as defined by Csikszentmihalyi [1990]). One is *in flow* when the challenge level of one's tasks is aligned with one's skills. In comparison, one's grip on life is in a state of non-flow, when either the challenge level is too high compared to the skill level (ultimately the inability to handle one's life embeddedness) or too low (boring and non-challenging opportunities in regard to active and creative participation in own and common life embeddedness).

Therefore, one has a good-enough grip on life when one's fundamental life embeddedness thrives and prospers by means of *agency* and *flow* in realizing one's fundamental human life skills of participation, realistic attunement and perspective taking.

At times, however, it may become difficult, or even impossible, to be *in flow* as an agent in own and common life; for instance when one is confronted with – and one's life tasks are determined by – for example war, economic crisis, natural disaster, anomy or personal loss. All such phenomena form fundamental threats to one's fundamental life embeddedness (safety, security, agency and flow in realizing one's life skills). Perhaps the single most significant threat to decent human life embeddedness is living a life marked by social, cultural and/or societal exclusion, for example, threats (real or imagined) of exclusion from taking part in significant aspects of life. In such a situation the task (or impossibility) of social, cultural and societal participation is not aligned with the personal and general human urge to realize one's participatory skills, which represents a severe threat to the quality of agency and *participatory* flow in one's fundamental life embeddedness. Similarly, exclusion can take on the shape of non-acknowledgement or rejection of one's pragmatic ways of living one's life and/or one's attempt to align one's ethics and moral standards with the surrounding world,

which may be a severe threat to one's urge to realize one's realistic *attunement* skills and therefore a serious threat to the agency and flow quality of one's fundamental life embeddedness. Finally, exclusion can form a severe threat to the quality of agency and flow in life embeddedness when one's *perspective taking* skills are blocked; that is, when one's ability to take into perspective own and others' perspective on life, according to the discourses of culture and society, is disturbed due to exclusion. That may happen when one has a lifelong experience of negative rhetoric, racism, severe ridiculing and not being taken seriously, perhaps starting already in primary school due to one's ethnicity, skin colour or religion.

It is a fundamental human urge to take care of one's fundamental life embeddedness, not least when it is threatened. Facing such threats, most people will attempt – if possible, with legal means – to restore the quality of agency and flow in life embeddedness, as illustrated in Figure 2.

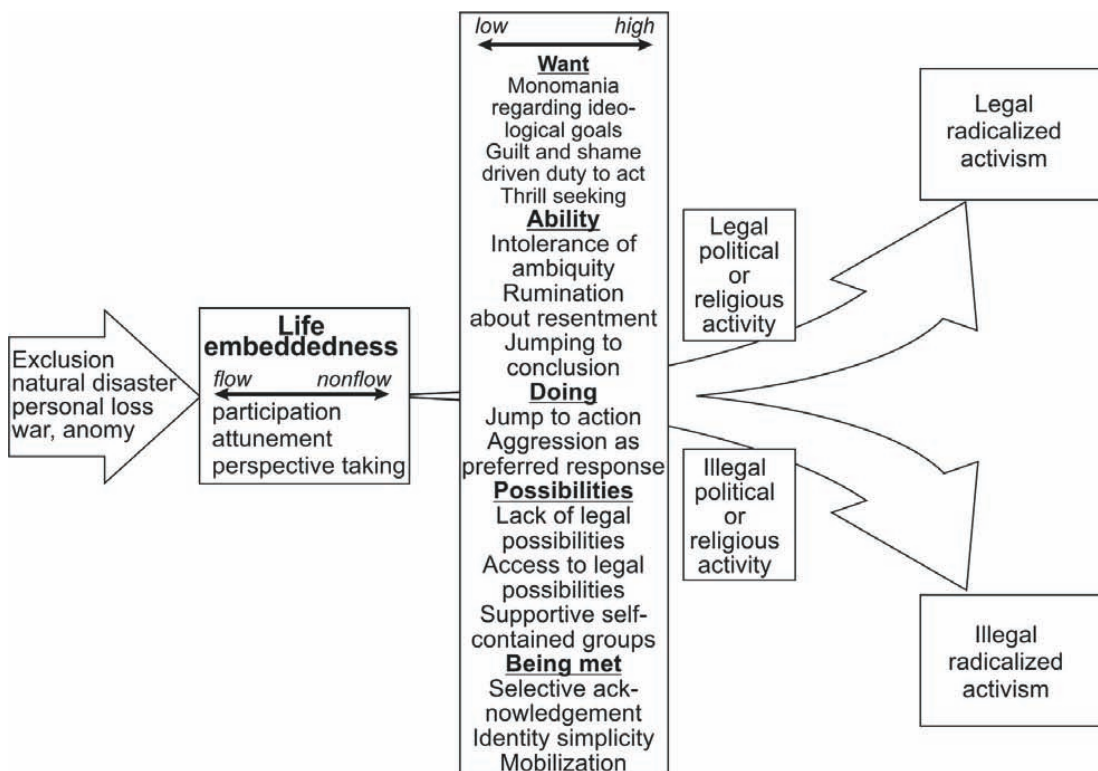


Figure 2. The Life Psychological model of radicalization, triggered by the root causes of threats to fundamental life embeddedness and moderated by socio-cognitive people striving for (re-)construction of life by means of political or religious activities, which in some cases can escalate into extreme radicalized activism. Whether the activities or activism will develop into the legal or illegal forms depends on the states of the risk factors (flow/non-flow and high-/low-risk).

In terms of Life Psychology, radicalized activism – whether political and/or religious – may be defined as a reaction triggered by real or much-feared threats to fundamental life embeddedness resulting in a growing heart-felt wish for and attempt to change the world and general life conditions – the overall goal being a good-enough or better form of life and a meaningful life embeddedness, including safety, security, and agency and flow in general generic life skills.

If for some reason – whether internal (psychological) and/or external (social, cultural, societal) – the possibility of *legal* (re-)constructive activities and activism is blocked or otherwise not an option, *some* people will strive for (re-)constructing life embeddedness by *illegal* means. Therefore, *illegal radicalized activism* can be defined as a reaction triggered by real or much-feared threats to fundamental life embeddedness resulting in a growing heart-felt wish for and attempt to change the world and general life conditions in order to achieve a good-enough or better life embeddedness by illegal means (violence, acts of terrorism).

The above definitions distinguish between legal and illegal radicalization as two different trajectories. The Aarhus Model therefore consequently rejects the so-called conveyor belt model, which is built on the assumption that there is a continuum going from legal to illegal radicalized activism, that is, the assumption that the path of radicalized trajectory, once someone has embarked on it, will – if not prohibited – inevitably lead to illegal activism and ultimately terrorism. It has been documented that this is not the case (Moskalenko and McCauley 2009). Legal and illegal activism are two different pathways, and the former does not necessarily lead to the latter. This is of utmost importance as the conveyor belt metaphor runs the risk of identifying so-called “false positives”, that is, mis-identifying people fighting their political and religious battles for decent human life embeddedness without ever initiating any illegal or violent actions. False accusation of illegality and dangerousness *may* result in frustration and resentment, which are risk factors for changing to criminal activities.

Of course, legal *radicalized* activism can cause severe trouble and problems on its own both for society and for individuals (for example, for involuntary members, such as children and young people from fundamentalist sects and political groups), but that is another discussion. Here we are concerned with the risk factors of violent radicalization.

As indicated above, only a very few people who experience threats to fundamental life embeddedness will resort to illegal activism. The presumption of the radicalization process presented here is that *the ones who* will reach for illegal activism on grounds of the urge to (re-)construct a desired fundamental life embeddedness *triggered* by these fundamental threats are the ones with a mindset and a skill set that are determined by an additional set of *moderating* risk factors. The risk factors can be further categorized under the headings of the above five skill formatting factors, namely the factors of “want”, “ability”, “external possibility and conditions”, “being met”, and “doing”. As

previously mentioned, the specific operationalization of these risk factors can be found in Bertelsen (2015). Please also see Figure 2.

It must be underlined that as moderators the above risk factors can be in a state of high-level risk (e.g., experiencing no external possibilities for legal [re-]construction of a preferred form of life embeddedness), or in a state of low-level risk (knowledge of and utilizing existing legal possibilities, or alternatively, taking measures to construct such powers) as well as any state in between.

Thus, the Aarhus model proposes that when the triggering risk factors of threatened fundamental life embeddedness are combined with certain combinations (or risk profiles) of the cognitive and social formation of life skills being in a high-risk state then the risk arises of moving into violently radicalized trajectories. A word of caution may be in place here: Nothing whatsoever can excuse acts of terrorism, but *explaining is not excusing*. We need to develop our explanatory model of risk factors to make early prevention as well as exit strategies even more effective.

RISK FACTORS, INTERVENTION STRATEGIES AND RESILIENCE IN TERMS OF LIFE PSYCHOLOGY

As demonstrated, the Life Psychological model of violent radicalization offers a theoretical taxonomy of risk factors, in contrast to the well-known randomly composed list of “signs” (“growing a beard”, “talking a lot of politics or religion”, “wearing political uniforms or traditional clothes” etc.).

The Aarhus Model operates with two sets of risk factors. The first set is the trigger factors of threats to life embeddedness, with the consequence of non-flow in the realization of one’s fundamental human life skills – participation, realistic attunement, and perspective taking – regarding (re-)construction of meaningful forms of worthy, safe and secure life embeddedness. The second set comprises high-risk variations of social cognitive, social and societal moderators by which one’s life skills and ultimately by which one’s fundamental life embeddedness are sought to be (re-)constructed.

Exactly the same model can be used to guide anti-radicalization interventions and programmes, because it identifies important risk factors in regard to building resiliency to the risk of violent radicalization. Resilience-building programmes should, in terms of the Life Psychological model, focus on the *triggering* threats (first and foremost resiliency toward social, cultural and societal exclusion) by empowering the mentee with fundamental life skills towards flow in utilizing the mentee’s fundamental generic life skills directed at tolerant and mutual inclusion of different forms of life. Of course, in a wider societal perspective, it is not only about empowering the threatened individual. In the long run it is important to address the factors of exclusion and other threats to fundamental life embeddedness, that is, to focus not only on *agency* but also on (cultural and societal) *structure*.

Furthermore, anti-radicalization programmes and exit programmes should focus on building resilience regarding the second set of *moderating* risk factors, that is, trying by means of education, dialogues, counselling or, in a few cases, also therapy to reform these factors of social cognition and social relationships from high-risk states to low-risk states.

Finally, in the Aarhus Model, the Life Psychological model guides mentor training as well as the supervision of mentors working with specific cases, e.g., how to identify risk factors and promote empowerment and resiliency according to the specific risk factors in the given case.

Thus Life Psychology is at least one way to theoretically and empirically underpin the idea of empowering individuals with fundamental human life skills, with particular reference to inclusion and legal participation in democratic processes and citizenship.

POLICY, POLICING, COUNSELLING AND SCIENCE

As is well known, “ought implies can” (a paraphrase of a Kantian notion). It makes no sense to *morally demand* of a person that he or she ought to do something that he or she *cannot do* either because his or her life skills have not yet been developed to a mature state or because of external restraints to freedom of action. Following on from this, it would be futile to even consider a policy, and hence a policing strategy as well as mentoring and counselling, based on inclusion and empowerment of legal life skills, if the targeted mentees basically are not able to develop, educate and form basic human life skills directed at inclusion activities and activism. But, in fact, any mentee *can* – simply because they are human beings striving for a decent life and a good-enough life embeddedness no matter how corrupted, inhuman, and dangerous their activism appears on the surface.

Anti- and de-radicalization efforts should aim at decisively putting an end to any corrupted violent form and search back to the general human being striving for agency and flow in handling fundamental life embeddedness as well as legal forms of activity and activism. The scientific discipline of Life Psychology demonstrates that this *can* be done and therefore it provides a solid scientific grounding for the Aarhus Model of anti-radicalization under the heading of inclusion.

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References

(For more references and a thorough discussion of Life Psychology as well as risk factors based on contemporary literature, please see Bertelsen [2015].)

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