# Participation

*Developing a model for understanding the pathways of extremism and radicalisation*

## Deliverable D2.6

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# Version history

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# Summary of the Project

The overarching objective of **PARTICIPATION** is to identify future perspectives and trends of polarisation, extremism and radicalisation as well as the social composition of the group at risk in Europe by a participatory and provisional methodological strategy, that permits to co-create with social actors, stakeholders and policy-makers effective strategies for prevention. So, the specific objectives of **PARTICIPATION** are:

1. **Multidimensional modeling to understand current and future trends of extremism, polarisation and radicalisation**: to develop a holistic multidimensional model based on participatory fieldwork and mixed-method approaches, in order to better understand the different drivers of violent radical ideologies, how these are organized in different pathways and, complementary to that, which mechanisms, factors and strategies contribute to support non-radical attitudes and behaviours, nowadays and in the future.

Sub-objective (a): targets: analysing and discussing, using a strategy based on the principles of action research involving young people in different parts of Europe, the socio-psychological mechanisms, such as social marginalization, alienation and polarization, that lead to radicalisation, with a special focus on gender, sexuality and regional differences.

These objectives will be achieved by milestones M2 ("requirement of analysis and methodologies") [month 6], and by M6 ("Models on radicalisation and extremism") [month 35].

2. **Communication dynamics**: to develop an analysis of extremism, polarisation and radicalisation on-line dynamics by ICT tools (as semantic analysis) and to co-create with the involvement of civil society strategies to counter and prevent these phenomena. This goal will be achieved by milestone M3 ("Communication analysis") [month 9] and D.4.5. (" Analysing different communication strategies against extremism and radicalisation") [month 25], D.4.6. ("Projecting counter-narrative campaigns involving young people") [month 33], and D.4.7 ("Methodological tools for evaluating counter-narrative campaigns and validation") [month 35].

3. **Co-creation:** field-work to analyse and to generate with the involvement of the social actors in different social spheres, strategies of contrasting polarisation, extremism and radicalisation. Thus, the research processes support the achievement of the following sub-objectives:

Sub-objective (b): Resilience: developing communicative tools, education approaches and community-based strategies, with the involvement and cooperation of practitioners, stakeholders and young people (with particular attention to gender balance), in order to improve the resilience of the communities and people at risk.

Sub-objective (c): Empowerment: to improve the awareness of young people and communities as well as the society at a whole, toward the risks of extremism, hate discourses and radical ideologies, contrasting the processes of marginalization, self-marginalization and alienation of ethnic, religious, gender and sexualities minorities.

4. **Tools:** to develop methodologies and policies recommendations for improving the action of policy-makers also on the basis of the previous field-work.

Sub-objective (d): Methodologies for supporting decision-makers: to create databases and a systematic set of indexes and early-warnings, based on previous holistic multidimensional models and fieldworks as well as a testing phase on its practical usability involving decision-makers, in order to support them in decisions, improving effectiveness and social acceptability.

Sub-objective (e): Policies recommendations: developing a set of policy recommendations with the participation of stakeholders, policy-makers and targets, in order to optimize strategies and interventions against extremism, hate cultures and radicalisation, at micro, meso and macro-level of the governance process.

# Table of Contents

# List of abbreviations

| Acronym | Description |
|---|---|
| **WP** | Work Package |
| **P/CVE** | Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism |

# Executive summary

The purpose of deliverable 2.6. has been to develop conceptual tools in a general theoretical approach, in order to understand contemporary violent radicalisation pathways in different context and circumstances rather than a rigid model.

On the basis of findings of Work Package Two as well as other suggestions and results of the PARTICIPATION Project, we have developed a set of tools and perspectives called "ecology of extremism". The starting point of such work will be Touraine's sociology of Subject enriching with a new vision of the relationship between different sociopolitical and culture spheres (defined as enabling environments) and the social subjects.

Radicalisation that leads to different kind of extremism must be viewed as a complex process in which subjectivation and politicisation, conformism and anti-conformism, inner circles and distant contests, are differently intertwined.

In the first part, the whole deliverable is introduced, and the main definitions discussed. In the second part, the main models in the field of radicalisation and terrorism studies are analysed. Finally, in the third part, also on the basis of a critical discussion of such models, we present the PARTICIPATION approach.

# 1. Introduction

In this report, after having presented and critically discussing, at the theoretical-methodological level, some of main models in the study of radicalisation, we will present the PARTICIPATION standpoint on radicalisation and violent extremism, based on re-elaborate version of the main findings of WP2 and other findings of the project: in fact, the elaboration of a general view on such phenomena requests an effort of reconceptualization and abstraction, based on a more general theory of society as well as social actor. As we discuss in the following parts, the starting point of such work will be **Touraine's sociology of Subject** enriching with a new vision of the relationship between different sociopolitical and culture spheres (defined as **enabling environments**) and the social subjects. For these reasons we will define the proposed approach **ecology of the subject**.

Before beginning, it is necessary to clarify some fundamental definitions and distinctions utilised in this report: at this starting point, such definitions are only operational and several of them will be enriched in the development of the discourse.

## 1.1. Main definitions

Very important is the distinction between **radicalisation and extremism**: the first one is the process that leads to extremism (via socialisation, recruitment and subjectivation) and the second one it is the "effect" of such a process. In this respect, as extremism we mean:

- a polarised vision of the world based on the radical distinction between friend and enemy,
- an attitude that supports radical political practice and solution, refusing every kind of mediation, to the limit including violence,
- a political practice that can include the use of violence.

If we limited our definition only to these considerations, it would be a little and useless thing. On the contrary, it is necessary to recognise **different levels of radicalisation and extremism**: the main criterion of analytic distinction is the degree of which an extremism counterculture engages the personal life, defining more or less totally the social identity. The first kind of radicalisation introduces an extremism vision just at level of common sense without or with a limited involvement of the actor in a political action – least of all violent: for example, institutionalised far-right political parties are often a vector of such a kind of **unstructured extremism**. This is also the ground of the spread of extremism perspective about the world via "pop culture" like videogames, memes and so forth. The use of political violence is generally absent, but it is present a certain degree of support to it. The second type of extremism leads the social actor toward a political involvement on behalf an extremism sub-culture and he\she has awareness of it: such an extremism may be defined as **politically structured extremism,** and it involve a smaller number of people than the first type. At this level, political violence is supported and, in certain circumstances, actively practiced – for example, during street protests. If in this form of extremism, the process of radicalisation leaves intact the separation between personal sphere and political sphere, the third kind of its cancels this

distinction: a process of "radicalisation of radicalisation" transform extremism in a lifestyle and any other aspect in the life of a person is reabsorbed within extremism engagement. Such a kind of **totalising extremism** involves even fewer people than the second one: at this level, violence may be practiced also in terrorism forms. As it should clear at this point of our discourse, every type of radicalisation brings into play the concepts of subject and subjectivation.

**Subject** is meant as a social actor that utilises its agency and its reflexivity to distance oneself from a set of social values and social roles by joining to others. Such a character or ideal-type allows to identify the "mixed dimension" where different socialisation processes and individuation clash and selectively recombine each other, generating personal and social identities. The **subjectivation** is the process that leads to this. During the lifetime of a person and, at large, in a particular population, the subjectivation is uncommon: more often social actor tends to reproduce social routines and the assigned social roles. Generally speaking, social theory as well as terrorism and radical studies have provided two main explanations for subjectivation as meant here: collective effervescence and personal or social traumas. We will argue that is a third way for this: utilising the normative theory of social action, a particular kind of subjectivation that generates radical subject is based on a particular contrast between rebellion and anti-conformism toward general society, the establishment and so forth, and a hyper-conformism toward a counter-cultural or deviant environment. For hypothesis, more increase this contrast more totalising is the process of radicalisation. Finally, for **enabling environment,** we mean just such a kind of environment. It may be made up of narratives, imaginaries, social groups and so forth, systematically or not systematically structured or organised.

# 2. The main models for understanding the processes of radicalization and violent extremism: an overview

## 2.1. The staircase metaphor

After the 11 September 2001, the need to understand the process by which individuals and groups move to terrorism has grown and radicalization came to be the word used to refer to «the human developments that precede terrorist attack» (McCauley, Moskalenko 2017, p.1).
The growing attention to the study and understanding of radicalisation and terrorism has produced an impressive corpus of studies and models aimed at facilitating the analysis of these phenomena. Among these, some have become real "milestones". Two of these milestones are certainly the

models elaborated respectively by Moghaddam and Horgan, based on a analytic approach that tends to represent radicalisation as a process made up of different steps.
The famous model of the *Staircase to Terrorism* developed by Fathali M. Moghaddam (2005). It offered an early metaphor of radicalisation as a six-floor ever-narrowing stairway to terrorism. Specifically:

1. the ground floor is perception of injustice and relative deprivation;
2. the first floor is search for options;
3. the second floor is anger at the perceived perpetrators of injustice;
4. the third floor is a moral engagement that justifies terrorism;
5. the fourth floor is joining a terrorist group;
6. the fifth and last floor is dehumanizing enemy civilians to make them legitimate targets of violence.

The staircase metaphor is a stage model set at the individual level: each floor must be traversed to get to the next higher floor and the order of floors is fixed. As Mc Cauley and Moskalenko argue about the Moghaddam's model, «the difference between justifying terrorism (third floor) and joining a terrorist group (fourth floor) is the difference between radical opinion and radical action» (McCauley, Moskalenko 2017, p. 2). Unlike Moghaddam, John Horgan (2005) focuses on the different stages through which a social actor develops his career within a terrorist area with which he has come into contact: in this case the focus is centered not so much on the individual in himself as on his interaction with the group. His model analyzes three processes:

- involvement in the organization (Involvement);
- development of commitment (Engagement);
- eventual disengagement (Disengagement).

Hence the acronym IED to designate the model itself. The IED model is important because it gives the opportunity to clarify the difference between disengagement and de-radicalization. In fact, someone can abandon their terrorist organization while remaining radicalized, or someone can remain a member of a terrorist organization without being radicalized (Orsini 2023).

## 2.2 Another version of the staircase metaphor: the stage/phase models of radicalisation

Another version of the staircase metaphor is represented from the chronological description of the different phases people go through in the process of radicalisation. Starting from the idea that once we understand every next step towards radicalism, we can find ways to prevent this next step from occurring, these efforts have resulted in process models that aim to capture the beginning and end state of a radicalisation process, and every state in between. One of the best-known examples is the model developed by Randy Borum (2004) that observed four phases in the process of ideological development. According to this scholar, the radicalisation process starts by a group or individual defining a particular event or circumstance as undesirable. In the next stage, the undesirable

condition is not only framed as unfair, but also attributed to the responsibility of a particular person or group, which is subsequently deemed as bad, so that aggression towards that target is more easily justified.

Among the most used phase models are the top-down model used by the Danish intelligence services (PET, 2009) and the bottom-up model used by the New York Police Department (NYPD) (Silber, Bhatt, 2007). Specifically, the PET phase model (Fig. 1) distinguishes different degrees or stages of the radicalisation process, where the person becomes more and more radicalised as it goes through the various phases. In particular, the process starts by being "susceptible" to radical ideas and meeting a "radicaliser", and advances on to new religious practices and changed behaviour. Subsequently, the process involves a narrowing of the person's circle of friends and family and results in the so-called "hardening phase", which includes reviewing of and interest in very violent videos' displaying terrorists in battle and the killing of hostages (Veldhuis, Staun 2009).

***Fig. 1 – PET phase model. Sources: Veldhuis and Staun, 2009.***

| ***Phase 1*** | ***Phase 2*** | ***Phase 3*** | ***Phase 4*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Contact between 'radicalisator' and a person open to radical ideas | Gradual change of behaviour – change in religious behaviour, new communication habits (internet) | Narrowing of social life to include only like-minded individuals – social bonds with family and former friends are cut off or restricted | The radical often goes through a process of (moral) hardening – by watching very violent videos and combat scenes |

A second model has been developed by the NYPD (Silber & Bhatt, 2007), which has distinguished four distinct phases that compose the radicalisation process of radical Muslims in the West. The NYPD model (Fig. 2) is a so-called bottom-up model, which focuses on radicalisation as a bottom-up process.

***Fig. 2 – NYPD phase model. Sources: Veldhuis and Staun, 2009.***

| *Pre-radicalisation* | *Self-identification* | *Indoctrination* | *Jihadization* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Point of departure: Mostly 'unremarkable', 'ordinary jobs', 'little, if any criminal history' | Individuals 'begin to explore Salafi Islam, gradually gravitate away from their old identity and begin to associate themselves with like-minded individuals'. Catalyst: cognitive opening or crisis. Triggers: economic, social (discrimination), political, personal | The individual 'progressively intensifies his beliefs, wholly adopts Jihadi-Salafi ideology' and concludes that militant 'action is Required' | Group members 'accept their individual duty to participate in jihad'. The group begins 'operational Planning' |

According to Tinka Veldhuis and Jørgen Staun (2009), although both models aim to capture the chronology of radicalisation in successive phases, the models differ considerably concerning several aspects. First, in the NYPD model, the radicalisation process is longer than the one in PET's model, since it starts before people have become radical. Second, the models differ in perceiving radicalisation as a top-down process (PET) or a bottom-up process (NYPD): PET's model emphasises the role of a "radicaliser" (an outside person, e.g. a radical imam or a person from an existing terrorist network) as a top-down force who influences the individual towards radicalisation. Another difference between the models is the emphasis in the NYPD model on «the shift between phases three and four from generality (somebody should do something) to specificity (I should do something), as well as the focus on operational planning, which is also included in the model's final phase» (Veldhuis, Staun, 2009, p. 16).

In 2009, Alessandro Orsini developed the DRIA model that, unlike those terrorism scholars who view ideology as an after-the-fact rationalization, considers ideology as «the necessary, albeit inadequate, condition for accepting the idea of killing and being killed» (Orsini 2023, p.87). DRIA is an acronym that stands for: Disintegration of Social Identity; Reconstruction of Social Identity through a Radical Ideology; Integration in a Revolutionary Sect; Alienation from the Surrounding World. The first two stages concern the individual's personality with reference to their creative abilities, and deal with the so called "cognitive radicalization." The remaining two stages - integration in a revolutionary sect and alienation from the surrounding world - concern the relationship between the radicalized individual and the revolutionary sect and has to do with the so called "violent radicalization."

In 2011, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko used case histories ranging from 19th century Russian anti-tsarist terrorism to 21st century al-Qaeda terrorism to identify mechanisms of radicalization operating at individual, group, and mass levels. Specifically, individual level mechanisms of radicalisation include «anger and revenge for harm to self or loved ones (*Personal*

*Grievance*), outrage for injustice to a larger group or cause the individual cares about (*Group Grievance*), participation in progressively more radical acts that culminate in terrorism (*Slippery Slope*), helping a friend or loved one already radicalized (*Love*), risk and power seeking, especially by young males (*Status Seeking*), and escape from personal problems (*Escape*). Finally, Unfreezing is a loss of social connection that opens an individual to new people and new ideas; it is a multiplier of the power of the other mechanisms» (McCauley, Moskalenko 2017, p. 11). Group-level mechanisms of radicalisation to action include «extremity shift in likeminded groups (*Group Polarization*) and three kinds of radicalising intergroup conflict: competition with state power as less committed members of the group fall away (*Condensation*), competition for the same base of support (*Outbidding*), and within-group competition (*Fissioning*)» (McCauley, Moskalenko 2017, p. 11). Finally, mass-level mechanisms of radicalization include «broad public acceptance of a view of the enemy as inherently bad and threatening (*Hate*), mobilization of opinion and action by a martyr's self-sacrifice (*Martyrdom*), and mobilization of new support for terrorism by state over-reaction to terrorist attack (*Jujitsu Politics*) » (McCauley, Moskalenko 2017, p. 11). The two scholars clarify that the three levels of mechanisms are not a stage model because mass level mechanisms can affect individuals and groups, and individual level mechanisms can affect groups and mass opinion. A few years after the proposal of the aforementioned model, in 2017, McCauley and Moskalenko propose a new model for understanding political radicalization: the "two pyramids model". The two pyramids referred to by the two scholars are: "Opinion Pyramid" and "Action Pyramid". At the base of the "opinion pyramid" are individuals «who do not care about a political cause (neutral); higher in the pyramid are those who believe in the cause but do not justify violence (sympathizers); higher yet those who justify violence in defense of the cause (justifiers); and at the apex of the pyramid those who feel a personal moral obligation to take up violence in defense of the cause» (McCauley, Moskalenko 2017, p. 17). At the base of the other pyramid, the "action pyramid", are individuals «doing nothing for a political group or cause (inert), higher in the pyramid are those who are engaged in legal political action for the cause (activists), higher yet those engaged in illegal action for the cause (radicals), and at the apex of the pyramid those engaged in illegal action that targets civilians (terrorists)» (McCauley, Moskalenko 2017, p. 18). In the case of this specific model, the two scholars specify that it is not a stairway model because, in both pyramids, individuals can skip levels in moving up and down in the pyramid.

## 2.3 The causal factors models of radicalisation

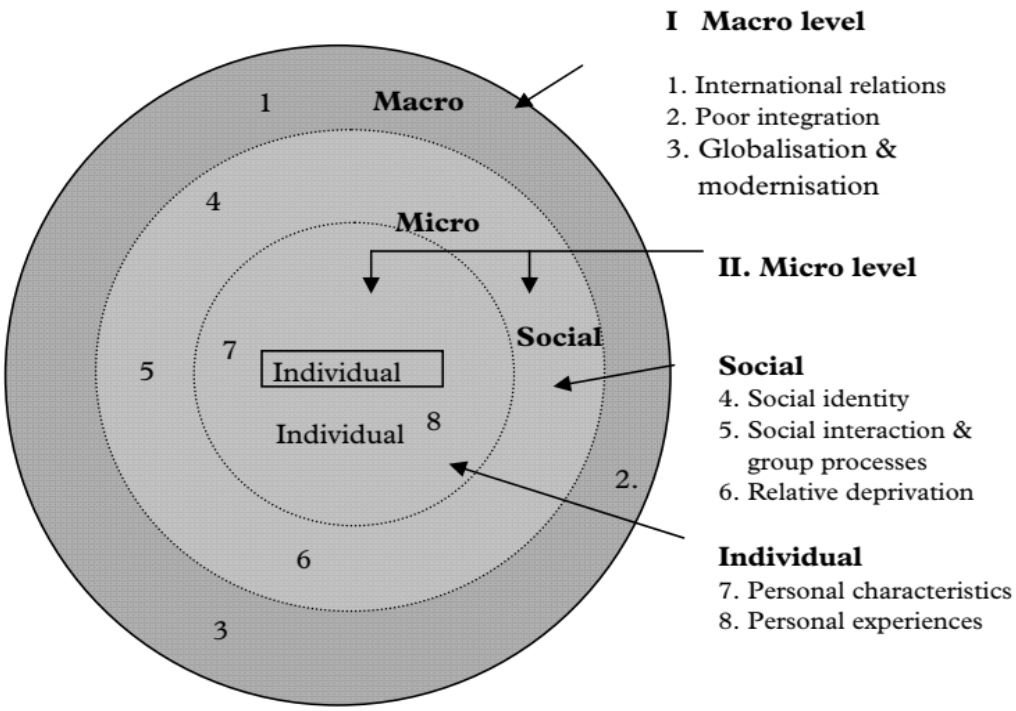
Tinka Veldhuis and Jørgen Staun (2009) elaborated and proposed their "root causes model" starting from a critique of the phase models. According to the two scholars, in fact, phase models «make essential methodological errors that cast doubts on their conclusions, [and] they also run the risk of implicitly discriminating against and stigmatising minority groups» (Veldhuis, Staun 2009, p. 2). Specifically, the two scholars argue that phase models:

«suffer from a selection bias that leads them to select only those cases of observation that have a specific value on the dependent variable – cases of successful radicalisation – and that render them incapable of distinguishing between people who radicalise for ideological reasons, and people who

radicalise as a product of social interaction dynamics. As a result, phase models run the risk of applying too general characteristics to attribute radical identities to people who are not necessarily radicalising, let alone planning terrorist attacks. In doing so, they stigmatise and discriminate against minority groups, which might lead to counter-productive effects and motivate rather than prevent people from radicalising» (Veldhuis, Staun 2009, pp. 2-3).

Their "root causes model" analyse the factors that are responsible for causing radicalisation among Muslims in the Western world. In particular, it distinguishes causal factors at the macro level and the micro level and argues that «macro-level factors are preconditions for radicalisation, but that in order to explain why some people do radicalise, and other people do not do so, a scrutiny of micro-level variables is essential» (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009, p.22). Micro-level factors are in turn subdivided into social factors, which describe the individual's position in relation to others, and individual factors, which describe personal circumstances and processes that explain how people interpret situations they are in, give meaning to them, and respond to them. After having categorised the causal factors into macro-level and micro-level factors, Veldhuis and Staun further differentiate between "causes", which set the foundation for radicalisation, and "catalysts", which accelerate the radicalisation process. All these categorisations define the dimensions of a model (Fig. 3) through which study the different dimensions and aspects of radicalisation (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009).

**Fig. 3 – Causal factors of radicalisation (Veldhuis, Staun, 2009).**




Looking at the model above, at the centre of the spectrum is the individual, whose attitudes and behaviour are gradually subjected to a variety of influences at different levels. The outermost layer represents causes at the macro level. Macro-level factors are related to social structures and include demographic changes, political, economic, and cultural alterations, educational attainment. The micro level is represented by the two inside layers of the model categorised into social and individual factors. Social factors, represented by the second or middle layer, define the individual's relation to relevant others (people with whom we interact or form a group). The third and last layer in the model represents causal factors at the individual level (psychological characteristics, personal experiences, and personal beliefs and convictions) (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009).

## 2.4 The risk factors models of radicalisation

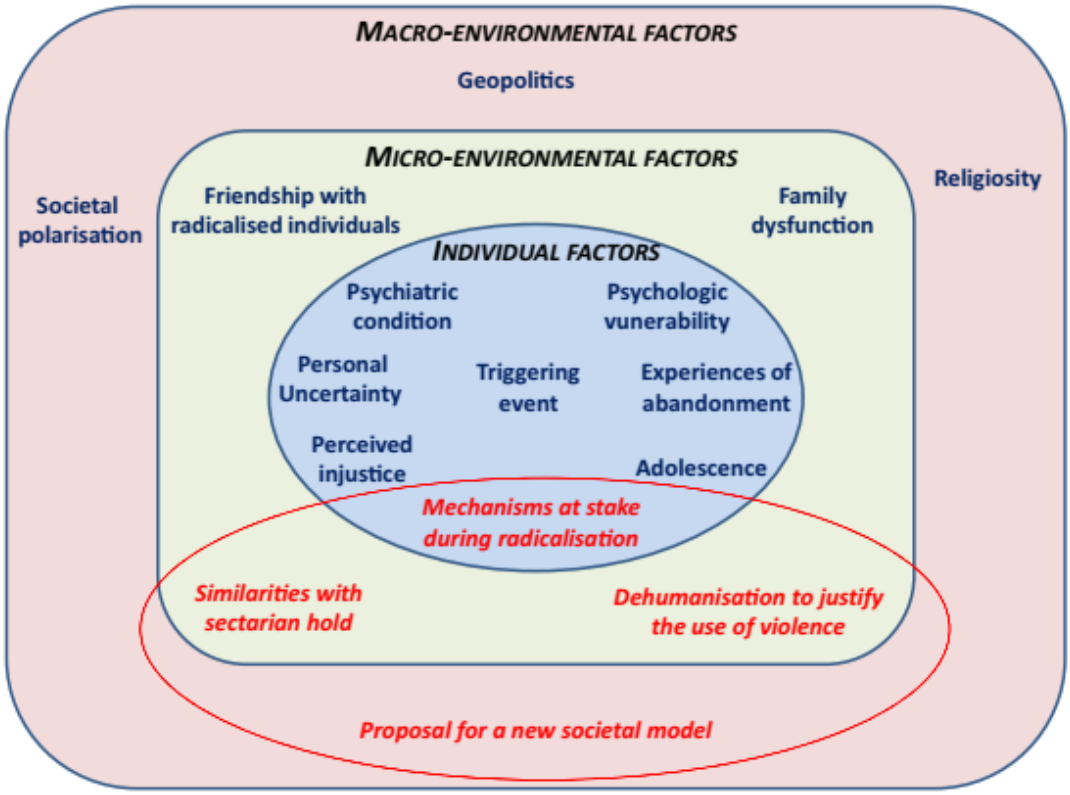
Nicolas Campelo and colleagues (2018) have developed a three-level model to explain the phenomenon of radicalisation among young Europeans since 2010. This model (Fig. 4) follows the proposal of Bertjan Doosje et all. (2016) that proposed a model of radicalization and de-radicalization according to which terrorism is the result of a radicalization process in steps that can happen to "normal" people. The radicalizing person forms the central element in this model and follows three phases during the radicalization process: 1) sensitivity phase; 2) the group membership phase; 3) the action phase. At the first level, the *micro* level, there are the factors within the person that may influence this process. In the sensitivity phase, an important driving factor at the *micro* level concerns the quest for significance. In the second phase, the individual with a "cognitive opening" joins a radical group. In this process is central the mutual commitment. The individual feels fused with the group, and the group is fused with the individual. In this final phase, people turn to using violence against other groups. According to Doosje et al., members of radical groups have a «shield of resilience», which makes them less likely to be persuaded by anti-radical messages from outside their group. In some cases, however, this shield may fall apart allowing de-radicalization to start.

As in Doosje et al.'s model, Campelo et al distinguish individual, micro-environmental and macro-environmental factors (which are named micro-, meso- and macro-levels, respectively, in Doosje).

They reviewed 22 qualitative and quantitative studies from different fields and using different methodologies. The results of this review have highlighted that psychotic disorders are rare among radicalised youths. However, they show numerous risk factors common with adolescent psychopathologies. Here are many similarities between psychopathological manifestations of adolescence and mechanisms at stake during the radicalisation process. As a consequence, and despite the rarity of psychotic disorders, these scholars argue that mental health professionals have a role to play in the treatment and understanding of radical engagement among European youth. In general, within the comprehensive three level model created by Campelo et al to explain the phenomenon of radicalisation among young Europeans we find: 1) individual risk factors that include psychological vulnerabilities such as early experiences of abandonment, perceived injustice and personal uncertainty; 2) micro-environmental risk factors that include family dysfunction and friendships with radicalised individuals; 3) societal risk factors that include geopolitical events and societal changes such as Durkheim's concept of anomie.

Moreover, also if the Campelo et al model follows the proposal of Doosje et al, it also includes some differences and the idea that some factors should be regarded as interactive factors between an individual who commits to radicalisation and a recruiter who tries to favour this process. The red circle visible on figure 4 (Fig. 4) highlights the different factors that show the interaction between the subject and the radical system regardless of the level: mechanisms active during the radicalization process at the individual level, similarities with sectarian communities and the use of dehumanization to justify the use of violence at the micro-environmental level and the proposal of a new social model at the macro-environmental level (Campelo et al 2018).

**Fig. 4 – Risk factors of radicalisation among European youth: a three-level model (Campelo et. Al 2018)**




## 2.5 The comprehensive models of radicalisation

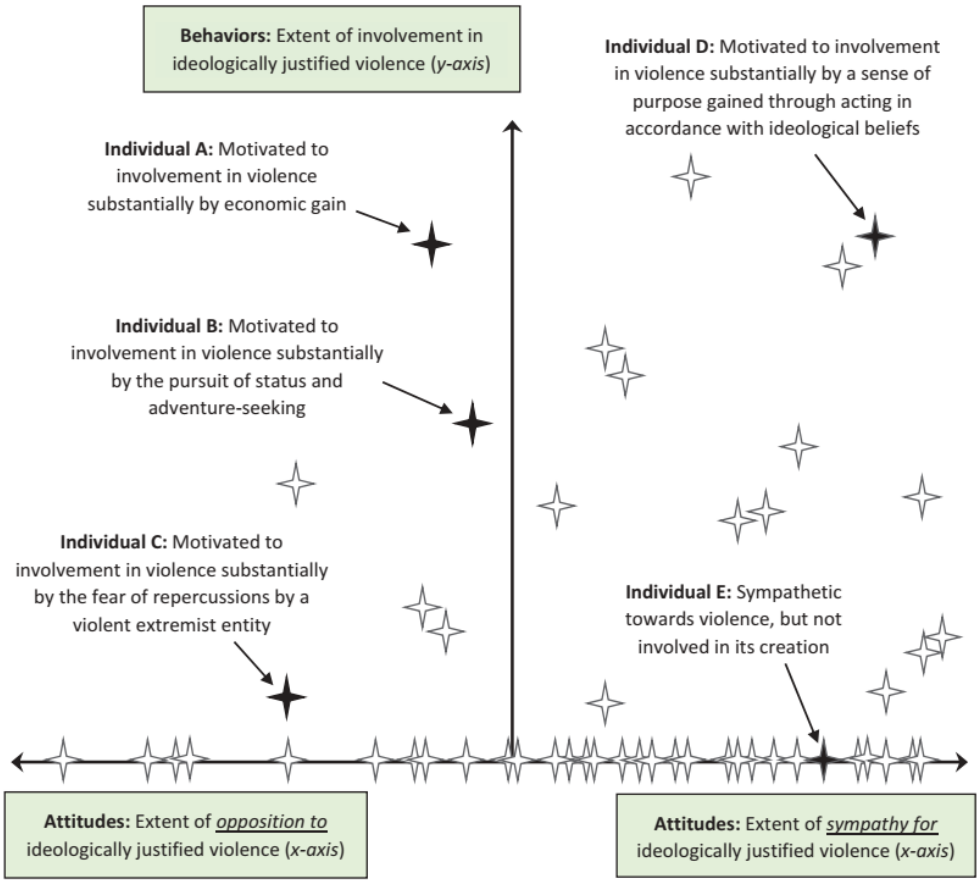
The explanatory model created by Robyn Torok (2013) can be considered, as the author himself states, «the result of hypothesis resulting from a guiding theoretical frame- work in conjunction with a literature analysis on current research, social media research and post fact terrorist cases» (Torok 2023, p.2). Torok proposes an analytical model of radicalisation born from the union between a grounded theory analysis of both terrorist cases and social media sites promoting jihad and the Foucault's analysis on psychiatric power. According to Torok and its model, the transformation of ideology and behaviour is critical for producing terrorist acts. Of most concern is the way that radical Islamic elements seek to influence and transform more moderate and disaffected individuals including those within more moderate group forums (Torok 2013).

Arie W. Kruglanski et al. (2022) – starting from the consideration that, in recent years, societies have witnessed an acute spread of fake news, conspiracy beliefs, and general suspiciousness about the causes of national and global events – discusses through lens of the "3N model" of radicalization vulnerability to conspiracy beliefs and the factors, which contribute to acting upon such beliefs. According to the 3N model, «narratives, including conspiracy theories, indicate how one's needs are to be satisfied in ways approved of by one's social networks» (Kruglanski et. All 2022, p.2). In the case of conspiracy theories, the relevant need is that for significance. This is the need to feel that one matters, merits respect and has social worth. When this need is dominant, the individual seeks a socially constructed way of satisfying it. Violence occurs when the network supported narrative justifies the use of violence as means to gain respect and self-worth. In other words, conspiracy theories alone are insufficient to push someone to commit an act of violent extremism, but when the individual's quest for significance is high, and their social network supports the use of violence as an admirable way of restoring or preventing the loss of significance, a conspiracy theory can incite that individual to violence (Kruglanski 2022).

Starting from a critical analysis of the former model about radicalisation and violent extremism, James Khalil, John Horgan and Martine Zeuthen (2022) have developed a model which they have called the ABC Model - Attitudes, Behaviors - and whose key elements are the disconnect between attitudes and behaviors (which is at the heart of the ABC model) and the classification system of drivers of violent extremism. At the heart of the Attitudes-Behaviours Corrective Model (ABC Model) we find the prominent disconnect between sympathy for terrorism and violent extremism (attitudes) and actual involvement in its creation (behaviors). On the one hand, many individuals who sympathize with this violence remain uninvolved in its production. On the other hand, certain participants in this violence are actually unsympathetic or at least indifferent to its aims, and are instead frequently driven by economic incentives, security, status, adventure, and other personal rewards.

This model is well represented by the three scholars through the figure below (Fig. 5) in which it is possible to see the attitude axis (X axis - extent of opposition to/sympathy for ideologically justified violence) and the behavior axis (y axis - extent of involvement in ideologically justified violence). In the quadrants outlined by the intersection of the axes, the different types of individuals are placed (A-B-C-D-E). As Khalil and colleagues argues the key point of this graphic representation of the ABC model is that: «many of those who sympathize with violence are not directly involved in its creation (as represented by Individual E) […]. Conversely, those who contribute to its production are not necessarily sympathetic toward its ideology and ostensible objectives, but instead are often motivated primarily by economic incentives, adventure, belonging, status, fear, and so on (as represented by Individuals A, B and C) » (Khalil et. All 2022, p. 430).

**Fig. 5 – The ABC model (Khalil, Horgan, Zeuthen 2022)**




Moreover, Khalil and colleagues also add that «the ABC model recognizes that the process of becoming involved in violent extremism can be both "bottom-up" and "top-down" in nature. In other words, it acknowledges that candidates often actively seek opportunities to join violent extremist organizations, but that these organizations themselves are also frequently proactive in the identification and recruitment of new members» (Khalil et. All 2022, p. 431). Regarding the classification system of drivers of violent extremism, they recommend a three-point system as it has «advantage of being designed specifically to align with the attitudes-behaviors disconnect» (Khalil et. All 2022, p. 433). The three points are the following:

- Structural Motivators: «Contextual factors that may be of relevance in specific locations include, for instance, state repression, political exclusion, corruption, poverty, inequality and discrimination» (Khalil et. All 2022, p. 433).
- Individual Incentives: This second category includes economic, security-based and psychosocial benefits that are dependent upon the individuals in question acting in a way that contributes to violence. These include material incentives (e.g., salaries), protection, status, a sense of adventure, belonging, vengeance, expected rewards in the afterlife, and a sense of purpose gained through acting in accordance with perceived ideological dogmas.

- Enabling Factors: This third category includes the factors that enable, facilitate or channel movements. These include «"radical" mentors, recruiters, wider social networks, and online communities, other forms of traditional and modern media, access to weaponry and other technology, territorial control maintained by violent extremist groups, and so on». (Khalil et. All 2022, p. 433).

# 3. The PARTICIPATION Project contribution: toward an ecology of extremism

The models above examined – over all the latest cantered on the plurality of radicalisation pathways – are useful because they are focused on some factors and drivers – particularly, at micro and meso level – come recursively into play in radicalisation processes (dysfunctional families, peer groups, inner circles, brotherhoods etc.). Nevertheless, they utilise to key words as "ideology" referring to radicalisation patterns that have been overtaken in the West context – in fact, it is very important to distinguish between radicalisation in Europe and USA and radicalisation in the rest of the world, particularly in the Global South, where different dynamics come into play; in addition, they use a linear methodological approaches that do not understand the complexity. Finally, those models are based on a simplistic idea of agency and social actors, represented more as a de-politicised and hyper-socialised individual than a complex subject.

On the contrary, PARTICIPATION Project have taken at the centre both the complexity and the need to develop an approach to understand and to tickle contemporary violent extremism based on a multi-level, scientifically and ethically based confrontation among different actors (experts, civil society, scholars and so on). After the 2001, the massive return of terrorism in our societies have determined, among other things, an increasingly divide between political élites and experts engage to understand and to tickle violent radicalisation, homegrown terrorism and extremism, and civil society, usually prisoner of fear and sometimes seen as part of the problem rather than the solution: the mobilisation against the violent radicalisation has been based on a top-down approach and it has not been based on a wide public discussion. The society – and sometimes the scientific community itself – has suffered such a mobilisation and it has been rarely protagonist. Particularly the social subjects hardest hit to violent extremism, as both victims and possible target for extremism propaganda. The result is a deterioration of the quality of our democracy and our scientific analysis, often fall back on the point of view of the political élites and law enforcement agencies. Both have requested – and still require – to the scientific communities to participate in the effort to prevent terrorism and violent extremism: however, this request has led a subaltern integration of the science in the mobilisation against the threats.

The ambition of PARTICIPATION Project is to contribute to overthrow this approach and this situation: complexity rather than linearity to understand violent extremism; civil and democratic participation to tickle it; scientific autonomy rather than subordination.

## 3.1. The Workpackage Two as integrated research process: main findings

On the basis of this ethical framework, we have set also the whole work package two. In a methodological perspective, this work package may be seen as an integrated research process. In the **deliverable 2.1.** desk research has identified main results of current scientific literature on violent extremism. They are:

1. **Cumulative extremism or reciprocal radicalisation**. By This expression it is generally meant a radicalisation process that starts, or is amplified, as a reaction to exposure to, or contact with, an ideologically different kind of extremism. The triggering of a positive feedback mechanism can cause individuals or groups to assume more radical attitudes or to support more radical ideological positions.
2. **Dynamics of othering**. Othering is related to both the strengthening of group identity and polarisation. This relation runs through the construction of a 'totally other' seen as an opposite, a rival, an enemy, and more generally a threat. The threat in the most extreme cases may also have an existential dimension.
3. **Emergent place of radicalisation**. By this expression we mean not only online platforms, i.e. virtual places where extremist propaganda material circulates and where contacts with mentors and radicalising agents can take place. We also mean virtual places where the quality and kind of virtual experience that has a relevance for the radicalisation process.
4. **Economy as a relational space of radicalisation.** A reading that emerges relatively frequently in the literature examined, even if not always in a fully explicit form, is that of the presence of economic factors in the wider perimeter of the perceived context. The perception of marginalisation, inequality, unequal treatment, social exclusion can be anchored to concrete and real elements of an economic nature.
5. **Hybridisation.** A rather transversal element to the four types of extremism and increasingly present in recent literature is the process of hybridisation of 'traditional' forms of extremism. This process takes place both between 'consolidated' extremisms and through the interaction with emerging phenomena such as, for instance, the proliferation of conspiracy theories, new religious movements (related to the recovery of an old tradition, such as Nordic mythology, or connected to more contemporary forms of spirituality, such as the New Age). The coronavirus pandemic has certainly provided a very fertile ground for the proliferation of some of these new forms of extremism.

Such a findings have been the basis for realising two work fields: the first one (**deliverable 2.2.**) was a survey on a large European sample made up of young people. The second one (**deliverable 2.3.**)

was a serious of focus group, involving young people too, on the relation between gender, extremism and radicalisation.

Relative to the survey, at the centre of the data analysis undertaken is the construction of a Violent Extremism Index, based on the responses to four questions that between them open out the question of violence as an instrument for social change. In our discussion of socio-demographic variables, several factors emerge:

- **Gender** is well known as a factor, with men more likely to support violent extremism than women.
- This survey also identifies the greater openness of **very young people**, aged 15-16, to support violent extremism when compared with the wider cohort who respond to this survey, and this when controlled for other variables such as indicators of social class.
- The importance of this very young group may be associated with the importance of what we have called '**subjective factors**' – where a focus on 'self-control' (suggesting an instrumental relationship to the self) is positively associated with support for violent extremism, while awareness of being 'responsible for one's actions' is associated negatively. The meanings of 'responsibility' suggest an awareness of the impact of one's actions on others.

There are a number of very strong associations between different variables and support for violence extremism. **Not having friends and family** that one can speak with about personal questions is associated with more support for violent extremism as well as watching online videos or **spending many times in internet**. In addition, **unhappiness, relative deprivation and marginalisation** are associated with support for political violence. In sum, **social disintegration** – at different levels – is a powerful factor to spread the support of violent extremism. Finally, "**conspiracy theories**" and "**rejection of gender equality**" are two cognitive frames very connected with extremism: the wider importance of digital culture to spread them emerged as central.

The importance of such a dimension rises also during the focus groups. Core themes emerge across the different focus groups: the way broad patterns of social polarisation are experienced by young people; the significance of the Internet and of social media to encounters with extremism; the association of extremism with new forms of communication such as memes; the significance of conspiracy theories as platforms for extremism; the continuing importance of gender to understand encounters with extremism; the development of radicalised forms of intolerance that mutate into hate, evident in the growth of certain cultures, in particular online, such as Incel communities, racism and religious intolerance; the importance of generation relations in framing extremism; the impact of extremism at the level of subjective experience and personal identity. So, the encounters with extremism detailed by the young people highlight important aspects that were examined in T2.1, such as the increasing importance of '**post-organisational' expressions of extremism**, the **role of social media**, as well as the ways **certain racial and social divisions** have become exacerbated in a context of **social and economic polarisation**. At the same time, the encounters with extremism described by these young people point to important expressions of agency and response, that

together offer significant insight into pathways to resilience. These pathways are at the centre of PARTICIPATION.

The findings and the conclusions of the first three deliverables have been discussed in a two-day workshop involving the authors of the above-mentioned reports as well as experts (**deliverable 2.4.**): the aim was to validate in a public discussion previous results and to synthesize them, in order to identify some methodological, theoretical and empirical fixed points about current violent extremism. At the end of workshops four points have been highlighted:

1) the need to find a new model to address radicalisation, to change mindsets in linking macro dimensions to single factors in the social scenario. The participation proposal could accomplish the impact of this solicitation with the implementation, or the model of understanding based on the micro, meso and macro level and the mixing of these levels;
2) the importance of the digital environment in radicalisation and the youth as key categories in the prevention of extremism also because they are first actors/users in the digital environments;
3) mixed methods is an action research that is particularly useful in radicalisation studies, so social labs as a participatory approach that include both can be a good approach; and
4) a new model to address and approach radicalisation is required, but also a new meaning of prevention focused on the creation of a social environment that works as an antidote for radicals, focusing on dialogical exchange on the specific role of digital communication and technology.

Last but not least, the purpose of the **deliverable 2.5.** was to identify some possible future trends in the development of violent extremism and in the scientific understanding of it: in order to achieve these goals, a research based on the Delphi method has been carried out. The analysis confirmed that **radicalisation is a complex process** and the result of a combination of drivers that is frequently different from one experience to another. The results confirmed that **constructing a specific hierarchy of drivers of radicalisation is highly complex and, in some cases, even dangerous** if thought as the starting point of PCVE measures. For this reason, attempting to build a model for pathways of radicalisation and violent extremism should take into consideration this important aspect, and consider all the potential drivers that might characterise them. However, it is worth mentioning that, when comparing the results of the question regarding the drivers of radicalisation with the other questions, it is evident that some new phenomena or events can are believed to play a significant role in contemporary processes of radicalisation. Among these, the most important are believed to be the spread of **misinformation**, especially online and within platforms with high number of young users, the **socio-economic and psychological instability** deriving from several conflicts (e.g. War in Ukraine), the **political instability** in several European countries, and, in some parts, also the **increasing polarisation within society**.

Interestingly enough, a feature which all participants agreed on was that far-right violent extremism in all its forms represents a new potential threat that should be monitored, analysed and, above all, addressed by PCVE measures. The most worrying phenomenon that respondents agreed on was that far-right extremist narratives are increasingly penetrating European mainstream politics and

are influencing public debate as well. When considering this result in comparison with the research produced so far within PARTICIPATION project, it is evident that such a conflation might act as a "super-charge" of radicalisation at societal level, as it might **legitimise an "Us VS Them" rhetoric within public discourse**.

## 3.2. From individual to subject: theoretical-methodological assumptions

Classical sociology has constructed a theory of socialisation in which socialisation is perceived as the interiorisation of systemic reasoning. In the process of modernization, interiorisation has been conceived as a mechanism more and more active, and at the same time – through determinative normative and cultural conduits – more personal. This was best demonstrated by Norbert Elias (1992), in his discussion of how restrained nature, the instinctive and spontaneous dimensions of conscious-ness, even the perception of the world as landscape, emerge from these interiorising mechanisms. As Elias argued, the norm as an external control became less and less present, yet more evident as an internal control, through the transformative conduits of Protestantism, the Catholic Counter Reform and more largely the civilising process. This representation is not without explanatory import. It affirms the identity of the actor and the system. It underlines the fact that socialisation produces individuals who are more and more autonomous and free to the extent that they interiorize universal values. It is from this point, in time and space, that they construct their action, build scenarios of resistance and are capable of criticising the systems that engage them. In short, individuals have an active interior life, underscoring an autonomous moral foundation. This approach, at the core of Parsons' and Durkheim's work as well as others', shares a distinct family resemblance to the Freudian problem of personality. Indeed, there is no rupture between socialisation and subjectivation. On the contrary, there is continuity. The modern individual is a subject that regulates behaviours in terms of universal rational values, and at the same time serves her- or himself to these values as points of reference and critical reflection, even as they are bound by the mundane and routine, by primary identification and particularism. It would be wrong to reduce all this to the caricature-like representations that we have received from the tradition of critical sociology. In the latter, the individual is the simple product of their conditioning. In this view of the world, the sentiment of autonomy is a necessary illusion for the effective interiorisation of domination.

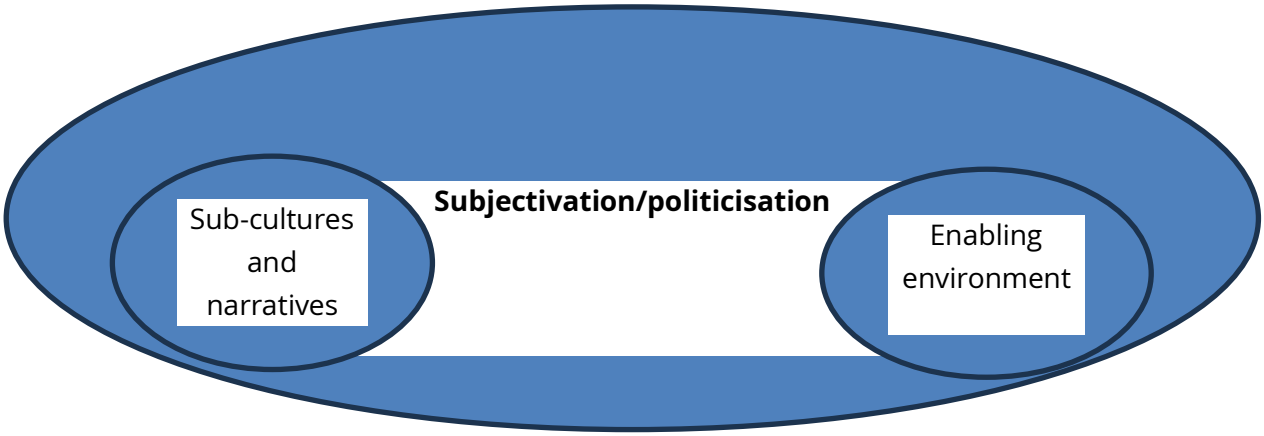
On the contrary, if we define: "what I call a subject is an individual 's capacity to reflect upon his or her own identity" (Touraine, 1995: 273), we will be able to recognise this discontinuing between subjectivation and socialisation also as the space of radicalisation – included violent radicalisation – this allows us to repose the problem of the subject as: (1) relationally constructed through and within their institutions of origin, (2) increasingly removed from these socialising forces and (3) more and more placed between institutional gaps and spaces, creating an accelerating rate of non-corresponding and bifurcated social experiences. Correspondently, radicalised subject is no longer considered simply as a deviant or a crazy; but as an actor endowed with pro-active agency facing a multi-level and variables environment. It may relate to them – and correspondently with

her\his self – as both a political subject and a social subject. To distinguish between these two elements is only an analytic distinction: in the reality they are deeply interweaved in radicalisation processes. So, to ask the question: "what kind of subjectivation are we looking at?" requests asking this other question: "what kind of politicisation are we looking at?" Particularly, as we are going to discuss beyond, in contemporary scenario.

## 3.4. A new methodology to study radicalisation and violent extremism and a set of indicators to detect them

Basing on previous considerations and findings of PARTICIPATION project, we do not propose a new rigid model to understand radicalisation and violent extremism but a **methodology to study the transformation of them in their context**. In fact, general speaking, radicalisation studies have aimed to identify the mechanisms that lead a person toward violent extremism, sometimes hypostatising and unduly generalising a particular and contingent kind of radicalisation process: at the beginning of 2000, radicalisation connected to Salafism and Al-Qaeda; then that linked to Daesh; now far-right radicalisation. This is a wrong attitude that reproduce a positivistic and scientistic bias. On the contrary, it is important to remember Weberian lesson and to focus our attention on the procedures and factors that we must utilise in order to study different kinds of radicalisation. So, the proposed methodology is based on three fundamental dimensions that every experts o scholars have to take in consideration facing a radicalisation process: 1. subjectivation/politicisation; 2. sub-cultures and narratives; 3. enabling environment.

**NEW METHODOLOGY TO STUDY RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM**




General speaking, the process of radicalisation may be seen as a process of disconnection from a set of institutionalised expectations and loyalties (general society) and a step-by-step reconnection to other anti-institutional expectations and loyalties. So, the condition of a "radicalising subject" is a stepwise pathway toward a "**double bind**" condition – to quote Gregoy Bateson (1999): while a social actor becomes more and more anti-conformist toward the general society and its establishment,

he\she becomes more and more conformist toward some kind of imaginaries, narratives, organisations, social groups (both online and offline, or a mix of both). Radicalisation and subjectivation tends to overlap. An enabling environment is an environment *meaningful for a social actor* that encourages that kind of process, but we do not conceive it as an homogeneous space: on the contrary, the **enabling environment is synchronically and diachronically stratified**. Synchronically because it takes in relation global and local dimensions, far and near events. For example, the Israel Arab conflict is for European Jewish and Arab a far event in geographically terms; but, politically, culturally, emotionally and symbolically it can be very close and it can work with other social condition – marginalisation, relative deprivation and so forth – to enable a process of radicalisation\subjectivation. Relative to the diachronic stratification, it concerns personal and social history during the time, a fundamental element of the construction of identity: for example, the past condition of being from a colonised people or the memory of a historical defeat can be a symbolic resource that, working together the synchronic process, actives a radicalisation process. Hypothetically, stronger are the pressures from the enabling environment, stronger is the degree of radicalisation, until the totalising radicalisation.

Basing on this considerations we can also identify a set of indicators to detect radicalisation:

**NEW METHODOLOGY TO STUDY RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A SET OF INDICATORS**

| ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS | PROCESSES | INDICATORS |
|---|---|---|
| **Subjectivation/politicisation** | Process of disconnection and reconnection ("double bind" condition) | experience of recognition<br><br>experience of belonging<br><br>experience of questing sense |
| **Sub-cultures and narratives** | set of expectations and loyalties | misogynistic and hyper-masculine cultures;<br><br>conspiracy narratives; |
| **Enabling environment** | circumstances meaningful for a social actor | decline social and political participation;<br><br>decline of institutional integration;<br><br>participatory cultures and remix cultures in the digital sphere applied to polarising contents. |

## 3.5. Some trends in current ecology of extremism

Based on the results of WP2 and the other WPs of the project and based on the proposed methodological framework, the main directions that characterize the current ecology of violent extremism have been identified. These emerging aspects need to be further studied and analyzed in order to better inform future prevention policies. Let us consider them below:

- *Development of "post-organizational" violent extremism:*

Extremism is no longer about 'joining an organisation' or adopting an ideology. It is an invitation **to join networked multi-author narratives** that help to make a **process of subjectivation**. More increase the strength of such an invitation, more increase the degree of totalisation of radicalisation. From the results of the research on young people (in particular, **deliverable 2.2** and **deliverable 2.3**) in their experience and perception of extremism, a total absence of reference to the "organization" has emerged, and paths to radicalization are experienced in completely different ways than being, precisely, "recruited" by an organization. Today the experience of "recognition" and "belonging" are increasingly associated with involvement in participatory remix cultures.

- *Participatory culture and multi-actor narratives:*

This kind of extremism is less a programme, more an imaginary, an atmosphere, increasingly the product of 'participative cultures' and 'remix culture'. It is increasingly gamified, storified, and aestheticised, framed by 'post-truth' – evident in the importance of conspiracy theories, structures of the quest, challenge, risk, and danger. Pathways to radicalization, as revealed by research on European youth (**deliverable 2.2** and **deliverable 2.3**), are perceived within participatory cultures, and particularly in the contemporary participatory culture of digital networks where ideas and sentiments are remixed and reused by multiple actors and spread through a "viral" dynamic.

- *Diversification, hybridization and convergence of violent extremism:*

Since the defeat of the Islamic State, there has been a diversification in the forms of violent extremism, particularly the emergence of right-wing extremism, the significant growth of hate crime, the emergence of the INCEL phenomenon based on violent misogyny, and, finally, the rise of conspiracy theories based on the construction of the "other-monster," fueling an imaginary of urgency and struggle against threatening and hidden forces. One of the most significant conspiracy theories has been the one that has taken the form of QANON since the mid-2010s and that in Europe in particular have spread and amplified with the fears and anxieties associated with the Covid pandemic. The emerging forms of violent extremism also show that they are not unrelated and independent of each other. A clear process of hybridization and convergence has emerged especially with respect to issues of masculinity and femininity and conspiracy imagery. In particular online forums of INCEL, NEETs and Islamist groups in Europe share the same model of masculinity.

As revealed by the results of the survey of European students (**deliverable 2.2**), misogyny is perceived as an important factor in contemporary violent extremist pathways. The survey data clearly show a constitutive relationship between misogyny and openness to violent extremism.

- *Pandemic emergency and its impacts:*

The prolonged lockdowns over the first 18 months of the pandemic have provoked psychological and social distress, especially among young people. On the other hand, the pandemic-related economic crisis has exacerbated the economic situations of several families across Europe. Finally, no-vax movements have had the capacity to mobilise and to spread conspiracy perspectives on society among the large audience. In other words, Pandemic emergency have contributed to socialise several people to extremism mentality, at the same time spreading the conditions.

What kinds of ecologies enable extremism? According to the results of PARTICIPATION the decline of the Society as place of institutional integration, social participation and source of morality as well as the decline of the presence of public and political well-functioning institutions among some disadvantage social groups (particularly, popular classes or lower middle classes) and\or ethnic groups (second or third generation immigrants) in certain places (e.g. banlieu), generates relative deprivation, self-victimisation, marginalisation, anomia and unhappiness: the effort to disconnect themselves from this reality lead to re-built their subjectivity via extremism. A very immersive experience readily available, in the absence of any other social, political or public alternative. An experience – also violent – that can be lived individually (absence of an organic belonging to a structured organisation), thanks to the access to the digital sphere.

In this respect, radicalised people can be seen as the people who do not resign to the "end of society" rather than pure psychotics or deviants.

Even if young men are particularly (and traditionally) exposed to all this, nowadays very interesting changes involve young women. According to our findings, the problematisation of women's empowerment and emancipation, the crisis of identities connected to these processes within young women belong to disadvantage groups, it is a very important driver of radicalisation. By providing an ordered web of gender constructs (namely, mother, sister, wife and supporter) which women can identify themselves in, Islamic State propagandistic campaigns aim at responding to identity crises among Muslim women and creating a strong feeling of female empowerment to motivate them either to attack the West, or to join the organisation. On the side of far-right extremism that women are increasingly involved in all levels of far-right movements and parties, from low-level grass-root involvement to leadership positions. They constitute a growing minority with increasing agency, although still dominated by men within a 'hyper-masculine ecosystem', in which women often have to negotiate their identity with male leaders and supporters. Gender-equality discourses have become central to far right politics and as a signifying boundary marker of one's own identity versus the immigrant and particularly Muslim other. At the same time, anti-feminist and anti-gender ideology, discourses and attitudes are still prevalent, suggesting that gender equality and gay rights are widely rhetorical and instrumental to their policies.

So, the ecology of contemporary radicalisation shows the ambivalent relationship that different kinds of extremism and, in general, extremism as whole have with modernity: on the one side instrumental modernity – weapons, web, digitalisation and so forth – are fully accepted and utilised; on the other, fundamental values of the modern constitution or project – such as personal freedom, emancipation, cultural diversities – are taken in discussion.

A new way to address and approach radicalisation is required, but also a new meaning of prevention focused on the creation of a social environment that works as an antidote for radicals, focusing on dialogical exchange on the specific role of digital communication and technology.

It is important to recognise that radicalisation is not a one-dimensional phenomenon and there is no single solution to prevent it. The root causes of radicalisation must be addressed, for example by improving access to education, employment and social opportunities for young people, by promoting cultural and religious diversity but also by combating discrimination and intolerance.

Radicalisation is not just a problem for young people in some communities or countries; it is a phenomenon that can affect all young people, regardless of their cultural, religious or geographical origin. The fight against radicalisation requires a shared global commitment to build a more inclusive and peaceful future for all.

The integration process is no longer like the one Bauman writes about in his book since not everyone wants to integrate into society but only to feel safe in it. We must ask ourselves: how can they integrate into society if we do not prove to them that we are a society? We offer a social space, which is not a relational space, we do not offer them a behaviour model. We do not offer real and concrete experiences. On the contrary, this is the ground where it is fundamental to develop an approach both understanding violent radicalisation and tickle it.

# 4. Final Remarks

In this deliverable the purpose has not been to make a new model to understand violent extremism, as we thought at the beginning of the PARTICIPATION Project. Researches and reflections that have been developed since 2020 in our project, and particularly findings of WP2 – as well as the development of the international debate – have showed the need to work more and more to open and flexible theoretical-methodological approaches rather than rigid models. Provide conceptual tools, based on a wide research process, to understand different pathways in different time and circumstances, was the main challenge faced in these pages. Another challenge that we wanted to face, it was to re-evaluate the role of macro-context without neglecting the importance of the subjective dimension. In this respect, the lesson of Farhad Khosrokhavar's studies – in particular, Khosrokhavar (2014) – and, in general, the whole tradition of Touraine's school, it was fundamental and it rise up also in other step of the activities developed during the WP2 (particularly, in deliverables 2.2., 2.3. and 2.4.).

Obviously, the deliverable 2.6. is also a first attempt to valorise the important "research assets" of PARTICIPATION Project. A challenge that we are going to face in the coming years.

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Participation

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