

EUROPEAN CONCERNS - LOCAL INTERVENTIONS

CITY-BASED APPROACHES IN CHAMPIONS

Cities - the contact zones of cultures that serendipitously bring together people from different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures. With intense contact, diversity of purpose and expectations of urbanites come clashes of values, expectations and visions of the future.

Cities have always carried the weight of polarisation and extremism, due to their diverse cultural and political possibilities and promises of opportunities. In the last decade, extremist acts of violence have interrupted many European capitals' bustling city life and aggravated already existing inequalities and fault lines between members of established local communities, migrants and refugees.

Social polarisation processes occur in a distinctly spatial dimension and are visible in the changing mosaic of neighbourhoods in cities. Fostering collaboration within the community is a crucial effort in preventing radicalisation or segregation and has been at the centre of preventive projects, local actions and awareness campaigns. Polarisation between particular communities, such as old and new residents, the poor and the well off is an evident problem that concerns local authorities and members of the community.

City Actions

Poland: Tackling anti-semitic violence in Dąbrowa Górnicza/Warsaw

Hungary: Cohabitation in the Dankó street/Budapest

Germany: BUS-Berlin project for teacher training

Romania: Crime prevention in Cluj

Collaboration with **Nordic Safe Cities:** the Safe City Tour

City-based approaches in CHAMPIONS

City-based approaches go beyond the city perspective and emphasize the need for local and area policies instead. Dedicated programs respond to small scale, local and area needs by enabling labour market and educational access and by trying to tackle the socioeconomic polarisation of the bottom and top ends of the population.

In this context, the CHAMPIONS project developed viable and innovative ways of encouraging communities to find mitigation strategies that address extremism, polarisation and radicalisation in Romania, Hungary, Poland and Germany on the local level.

The CHAMPIONS local cooperation model in selected cities in Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania was implemented via **roundtables**.

The project facilitated joint actions for **first-line practitioners** (FLPs) such as teachers, social workers, youth workers, (mental) health care workers, and community police officers. FLPs are key players in addressing issues of discrimination and prejudice, as well as in early prevention of polarisation, radicalisation, and violent extremism.

By bringing different professions together in national roundtables, FLPs can jointly develop effective detection and response solutions to counter polarisation, build resilience and protect vulnerable groups in their local communities.

For the consortium, it has been important to help encourage this approach from the ground up. We have worked from “small” towards “large”, and followed the needs voiced by the local communities. We aimed to empower local FLPs to become multipliers for local cohesion.



Taylored approaches to local needs

Effective **prevention and countering of violent extremism** (PVE/CVE) needs to respond to local social and political contexts instead of inserting broad and often “bird’s-eye view” interventions. In transnational approaches, local needs are often neglected and PVE/CVE definitions and applications are not fit for local purposes.

In Germany, for example, the very concept of extremism is often controversial because it is politically loaded. Moreover, the terms radicalisation and polarisation (often used in reference to the far-right) also take on different meanings depending on the local context. In contrast, in Romania, local communities were less concerned about the context of terminology and more interested in what one can “do” with PVE tools and approaches.

Yet, despite local differences, there are also **commonalities**. As identified in the CHAMPIONS project, there were parallels regarding the influence of extremism on youth, and concerning the issues of faith-based and community-based discrimination and abuse. CHAMPIONS therefore encourages local solutions as well as cross-country collaboration and

knowledge exchange. This newsletter highlights city-based activities and tailored approaches implemented at the grass-roots level by the consortium members in Poland, Hungary, Germany and Romania. Furthermore, it looks at possible models for urban-based approaches in Central and Eastern Europe, by considering examples of partner organisations, such as Nordic Safe Cities.

POLAND

The Polish Institute for Society Safety’s (IBS) main activities in CHAMPIONS focused on Warsaw, where the local government showed interest in PVE/CVE. Police officers and NGO staff members, mass event specialists, social workers, youth workers and representatives of cultural institutions joined forces on this topic. The roundtables allowed to build the necessary **trust** at the community level and to allow community members to become aware of each other's competencies.

IBS put an emphasis on increasing the sense of support and solidarity within the group of FLPs, so that participants can work efficiently in a multi-agency group setting to tackle real-life local cases relevant to PVE/CVE.



City action in Poland: Dąbrowa Górnicza

A workshop session was dedicated to a local incident in June 2020 in Dąbrowa Górnicza linked to radicalisation and extremism:

the damaging of a former Jewish cemetery and now a monument to local Jews, killed in World War II.

The participants and the IBS team discussed the implications of the incident for the municipality, local community and **Jewish community** and the measures which the municipality and the mayor of the city have taken or could still take as a follow-up in order to mitigate the risk of further radicalisation.

As part of the workshop, FLPs met with representatives of institutions with whom IBS has established working co-operation:



The Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN, the Crisis Management Centre in Warsaw, the National Stadium in Warsaw, the expert on youth policies and youth involvement from the Polish Council of Youth Organisations (PROM) and the Warsaw Centre for Education and Social Innovations and Training (WCIES).

WCIES - Poland's leading centre for teacher training - has the courage to discuss and provide training in important but often deemed "politically controversial" issues such as human rights and diversity in society, rights of minorities (migrants and refugees, the Jewish community in Poland, LGBTQ+ community etc.), prevention of violence and bullying in schools, etc.

HUNGARY

In Hungary, roundtables focused on anti-Roma, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ and/or anti-Jewish sentiments and were attended by civil servants, politicians, teachers, students and mental health practitioners. In 2021, two events focused on school segregation, mostly affecting the local Roma population, whose chances for social mobility are generally low. Other events were focused on the cohabitation in buildings owned by the local municipality.

The Dankó street

The roundtable series focused on **housing and cohabitation** problems (mainly conflicts between apartment owners and people who rent apartments from the municipality), and conflicts between people living in the Dankó street, where hatred towards homeless people, migrants and those of Roma origin are an issue.



Dankó Street - Google Streetview

Local actions were meant to be more effective at preventing or halting the escalation of identity-based disputes. Hence, the events aimed to achieve a peaceful cohabitation of people who live in the Dankó street, to improve their everyday lives and to foster interactions within the community.

Several bilateral or small group online and offline consultations with participants of the roundtables in the summer of 2020 were aimed at increasing collaboration in the community. Facebook groups were created for members of the community to improve communication between inhabitants of the Dankó street and to organize the Fairplay Football Tournament.

A forum for inhabitants and community authorities to discuss certain daily problems was launched in which students of different schools learned about cultural diversity. The above-mentioned actions were complemented by some smaller events and constitute the main pillars of the intervention mix which had been agreed upon by the participants of the roundtables.

GERMANY

In Germany, city-based approaches are at the centre of the growing effort to improve interactions between state and non-state actors in Germany where most NGOs run on state funding. Despite these efforts, there is still room for improvement on the degree to which permanent funding is distributed to regular youth work instead of project-based interventions.

Social work independent from state authorities is crucial to guarantee the impartiality and confidentiality necessary for successful community work.

City Action in Germany: BUS-Berlin

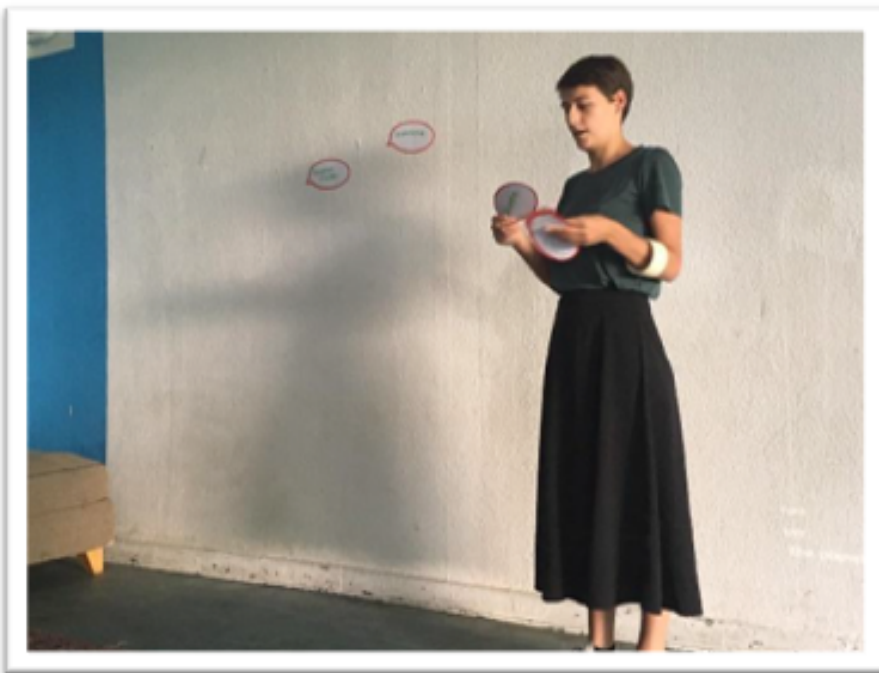
The BUS teachers project (“Besonderes Unterstützungs-System für LehrerInnen” – special support system for teachers) in Berlin-Brandenburg is an example of a best practice

solution for sustained engagement.

The BUS teachers receive special training provided by experts outside the school on democracy pedagogy and hate crime prevention.

They practice by seconding experts and finally provide some feedback to their schools and in teacher training. BUS teachers will be invited to attend the CHAMPIONS roundtables and activities in Germany.

Eventually, a BUS teacher could possibly be assigned to the “group work in schools” project in Brandenburg to support the sustainability of the activities.



ROMANIA

In Cluj, the focus of the local community veered towards the prevention of extremism, radicalization and polarization by focusing on the social inclusion of the youth and youth wellbeing in the urban and rural environment. Here, the focus was on increasing the ability of the institutional stakeholders to stop bullying, discrimination in education and social isolation triggering mental health issues. Workshops aimed at ensuring access to education and culture to prevent exclusion of youth. Inclusive education trainings focused on polarization and radicalization concepts and the main achievements on CHAMPIONS to date.

During the workshops, NGOs staff, teachers and psychologists were the most represented professions along with politicians, civil servants, political scientists, students, and police representatives.

Crime prevention in Cluj

A training on Crime Prevention and Prevention of Drug Addiction of Youth at Risk was implemented by PATRIR in Cluj. The online meeting was attended by representatives of four public institutions and of two NGOs.



As an intervention, PATRIR offered trainings for first-line practitioners who are in direct contact with teachers, police and other FLPs in the community.

The training aimed at creating a “circuit” of networks between institutions and NGOs which provide services to young offenders through rehabilitation programs.

The ultimate goal is to foster the development of a multifunctional community where young people participate in constructive activities which will in turn prevent them from getting involved in activities that harm them or others.

The Way Forward:

Cross country collaboration and synergies

The CHAMPIONS approaches have been local and specifically addressed the needs voiced by the communities. However, the consortium recognized synergies and commonalities in all countries of the project. Sources of inspiration in continuing and keeping such initiatives alive come from our close friends and collaborators, NORDIC SAFE CITIES.

The NORDIC SAFE CITIES initiative Safe City Tour is travelling to 20 cities across the five Nordic countries, and has so far visited Fredrikstad, Aalborg, Vantaa, Reykjavik, Larvik, Arendal and Helsinki across Northern Europe, creating an interesting synergy between all local initiatives.

City Action in Nordic Countries

To safeguard, support and empower local youth, the city of **Larvik** uses the All'IN approach to train Changemakers that lead the way in shaping a cool and safe city.



Fredrikstad facilitates Deep Debates and arranges annual youth workshops with civil society on hate speech, active citizenship and inclusion.

Arendal is bringing the Danish Game concept to Norway, training young Playmakers as coaches and role models in street sports and civil society.

Reykjavík proactively brings youth workers to the young people with Flotinn, the floating youth centre.

To create safe and inclusive cities for all, **Vantaa** City Council's women's network works to combat hate speech and for everyone to be able to safely engage in public debate.

Vantaa and Fredrikstad both work to prevent hate and promote tolerance by bringing people together through inter-faith peace walks.

Larvik is using the Fargespill model, which sees every young person as a resource and builds bridges through music and dance.

Helsinki implements social mixing in its housing policy to prevent segregation and build safer, more diverse urban areas.

To share knowledge and ensure ownership from all parties, **Arendal** police work closely with the business and voluntary sectors on the prevention of radicalisation and violence.

The “**With a Heart for Arendal**” network brings more than 100 organisations together in an alliance for a safer, more inclusive city.

Aalborg creates local alliances and works across sectors to tackle social issues and protect young people through the SSP model, and to create safer, more inclusive urban spaces in Karolinelund Park.

CHAMPIONS - Cooperative Harmonized Action Model to Stop Polarisation in Our Nations

The main objective of the project is to develop collaboration models for establishing working groups between first-line-practitioners. The offline approach is supported by collaborative online tools, practitioner trainings and digital services.

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