



## **D8.4:Policy Report - Arts & Sports as Resolution Media**

Evidence from 5 National Settings across

D8.4

December/ 2023

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## ARTS & SPORTS AS RESOLUTION MEDIA

### Executive Summary

This report outlines the main findings from WP8 – *Arts and Sports as a resolution media*. Focusing on the key themes of collaborative arts and sports activity as avenues to challenge ideas of othering and difference in communities. It documents how creative arts and sports engagement, of varying natures, across the five country settings (2 EU members and 3 partner states), contribute to dialogue, collaboration, and everyday practices that create a framework around reconciling the grievances that can lead to radicalisation. WP8 considers spaces that arts and sports activities provide as non-political environments where people can focus on the everyday activities only. We value such environments as they tend to ease the political tension between people otherwise and give them a space to face common challenges together. The findings demonstrate the potential for sports and arts related opportunities to bring people from very different backgrounds together to make them learn about, and from each other make better and more resilient collective futures to face common challenges.

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### Radicalisation Pathway

Situated within the context of I-Gap (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation), D.Rad places feeling of exclusion at the heart of the radicalisation processes of individuals. Hence, it proposes the importance of bolstering shared spaces that offer social interaction opportunities to those that gather around a common interest. D.Rad project takes alienation as one of the components of an individual's radicalisation journey. Alienation can be seen as one of the first steps of radicalisation as it causes

isolation for the people who experience it. The phenomenon of isolation often follows feelings of injustice and grievance – the other key elements of radicalisation. Thus, for the D.Rad project, individuals that are affected by feelings of alienation, injustice and grievance become vulnerable to radical or extremist ideologies or movements. It is these radicalisation processes that we believe arts and sports initiatives can disrupt – whether the initiatives have a deradicalisation underpinning or not.

## Evidence & Analysis

### An Ethnographic Approach

The D.Rad WP8 developed an ethnographic and collaborative approach that involved researchers working closely with organisations and groups where possible. This type of approach involved several research steps. First, desk reviews were conducted to evaluate sports and arts engagement as a means of challenging social isolation and othering across the five national settings. Following this, research staff engaged with organisations and groups that had a sports or arts focus. While these groups and organisations differed across the national contexts, they all had an underpinning of sports or arts activity involving participants from diverse backgrounds with some lived experience or knowledge of social exclusion or social disadvantage. The collaborative approach meant that researchers worked *with* organisations, participants and groups to develop the best methodology for that particular group. This means that while the approach might differ slightly across the national contexts, the research underpinning remained consistent throughout.

Each research team chose at least one main group or organisation to work with and engaged with this group over a period of 3-4 months. Participant observation, informal conversations, focus groups and one-to-one interviews were conducted with group members, and with organisational staff on

#### National Contexts

**Israel:** Mamanet" (Netball league association for Mothers) , and in particular with the Netball Team '*Desert Foxes*'

**Poland:** 'Wieczny Rakow'- the football fans association of club Rakow Czestochowa.

**Serbia:** 'Boys' Day' - a weekly program run by Info Park NGO in Belgrade, Serbia,

**Slovenia:** Street Theatre and Creative Dance and Movement within the Cycle of Creative Dance and Movement Workshops

**UK:** Street Soccer Scotland -an NGO that uses football-inspired training and personal development as a

occasion. In 4 out of the 5 national contexts, art interventions were also conducted. In only one particular setting, the ethnographic approach and artistic intervention were not conducted due to participant retention difficulties. On these occasions, regular digital meetings and interviews took place. The aims of this report are to draw insight from national contexts, unveiling the impact of arts/sports in terms of social inclusion – while also referencing the impact of arts /sports in developing resilience to anti-social behaviours/violence/extremism and in relation to the D.Rad IGAP.

## **Narrative Sharing**

When people get together, they talk to one another. Whether they are meeting to play sport, or to dance or to create artworks; they talk. Storytelling is a basic human skill born of a basic social need. A good story can travel with a person through their life. Stories are the foundation for relationship building, and hearing someone's story can inspire, be a cause for change, or prompt us to imagine different ways of being together. Sharing one's life story, or even a day's event, with another person immediately creates a connection between those people. Discovering that another's story resonates with your own means meaningful interaction. At an interpersonal or group level, individuals can build on these meaningful interactions, and recognise shared identities - and ultimately create shared narratives that can lead away from social isolation toward negotiations of belonging.

Sharing life narratives together through arts and sports activity opens up space for re-considering one's perspectives and foregrounds the importance of being together in shared spaces, to help us to think differently, and to find better ways of working together to identify, investigate and find ways of being with each other.

## **Being together & Belongingness**

The idea of belonging is central to our understanding of how people give meaning to their lives. Our sense of identity is founded on social interactions that show our belonging to particular communities through shared beliefs, values, or practices, or the ways in which we invest time in something together. The connectedness we have with others helps us feel 'at home' or a part of something and is a means through which people can feel a sense of inclusion. Social connectedness has an effect on individual well-being, and feelings of belonging are connected to social relationships. Being together in spaces, whether to dance, play sport, chat or support one's local team, allow opportunity for negotiations of identity, imaginings of futures, and feelings of belonging to the communities in which we live.

Dynamics and the processes of belonging take time. Individuals need a sense of ease with themselves and their surroundings to negotiate their membership to groups; to join, leave, and perhaps return again – and to feel at ease with those around them. It

is these social interactions at the micro level (during sports or arts activity) that challenge processes of radicalisations by interfering in the isolation-alienation aspects of the radicalisation process. Our research found that many participants described their group or organisation as ‘feeling like a family’, and that this almost ‘kinship’ relationship was important to keeping them hopeful and with a sense of purpose and belonging.

### Resilience to othering

Collaborative sports and art engagement disrupt traditional notions of power within group settings to ask ‘*is my voice is valued within society?*’ Feeling ‘visible’ among others, recognising shared identities, and creating shared narratives in a safe and supportive environment can lead to the individual taking concrete action in their everyday life towards playing an active role in society. There is also something to be gained from aspects of failure involved in the ‘trial and error’ that takes place within creative engagements and sporting activities – and the overcoming of ‘failed’ attempts. This in itself builds resilience, confidence, and the creative capacity to deal with significant challenges in life. This is absolutely necessary for personal well-being, but also for the growth of healthy, diverse, and inclusive societies.

### Radical to De-radical process

Our study found a positive impact of sports in developing resilience to anti-social behaviours that can lead to gender violence and extremism. The promotion of female sporting initiatives and safe collective spaces for these initiatives not only benefited the female participants, but also promoted and boosted female sports from a male perspective. There wages a great importance in bolstering shared spaces in deradicalization as

#### EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: THE USEFULNESS OF SPORTS/ARTS IN EFFECT TO I-GAP.

*"[...] the victories and the losses cannot be blamed on one's self. We are all part of it and learn to take it as an opportunity to improve on the next game" (Desert Foxes, 2023*

*"It breaks down barriers eh, maybe you've had problems with other people in the past and it breaks down that barrier and it gets you all playing and being a team and work with people you might not have worked with and getting along."*

*"we're just a big family and you can open up and while one person might not be able to help somebody else has got that situation or a wee bit of experience"*

*"..maybe you've had problems with other people in the past and it breaks down that barrier and it gets you all playing and being a team and work with people you might not have worked with and getting along."*

*"...I'm also not a person who likes sports; I've never been there too much. The connection to the group was really "wow". They received me as all the new ones in such an excellent way that we felt like a family from the first day, and since then, we have been through many games and meet once a week, almost once a day, with most of the team. It is something entirely social."*

*"[It] kind of breaks down, like the kind of isolation that you've had like within, [and] the outside world aswell. Like you can isolate yourself and keep yourself away from the world, but coming down here it's just like coming down to visit like your wee Granny.... Everybody knows each other, there's no judgement or anything like that."*

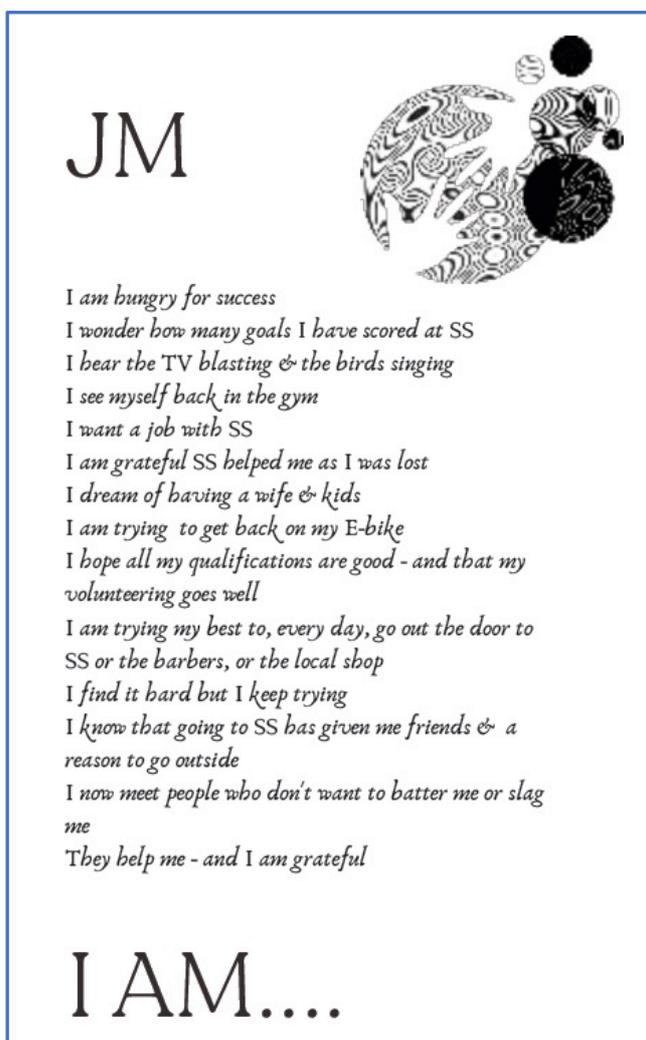
*"Unequivocally....., it's much more than training and playing; it's a social gathering that fills you up for the rest of the week"*

such spaces offer social interaction opportunities to those who gather around a common interest. However, the interest can, in time, take second place to the importance of being with others in the group or organisation. Within the context of the I-GAP spectrum, activities and social interactions that challenge and disrupt toxic narratives are those that consist of relationship-building strategies that shine a light on commonalities among people across all social borders and that explore how stories and narratives can unite or divide. In our research, the participants of the arts and sports activities that came from disadvantaged backgrounds, often indicated the importance of friendship, and ‘family-like environments’ in tackling discrimination journeys.

### Importance of arts and sports initiatives

Collaborative initiatives have a well-documented history of enhancing life skills such as interpersonal communication skills and conflict management, therefore, creating narratives through arts and sports not only allows us to see things in different ways but also to see them from different perspectives. Organisations that bring people together from diverse backgrounds, and with at least one common interest can promote the enjoyment of being with others, whom one previously would have avoided, or becoming more familiar with one’s local neighbours/communities through their engagement with the organisations and activities. What is interesting about these initiatives is often their two-way process of inclusion: The ways in which members arrive, gain entry, (and perhaps leave, and then return), negotiate roles, take on responsibilities, agree & disagree, develop new skills, reconfigure sets of relationships, and generally respond to opportunities (and threats)

as they arise in the social environment of the organisation. They offer opportunity for greater dialogue and the deconstruction of demonising tropes that continue to frame



extremist and radical ideologies. Taken together, artistic and sports initiatives recognise our differences, and commonalities, and endeavour to mobilise these in ways that can lead to deeper understandings of our very complex communities. Within the environments provided by such initiatives, people that face discrimination and/or alienation, for varying reasons, can find a place where they can build meaningful and deeper interactions with others. Nevertheless, while the activity taking place might draw someone to a group, the activity may not be the things that keeps them there – often it is the relationships with others in the group that keeps people returning. When people find like-minded others, they tend to build deeper and more meaningful relations with them. In such examples, the activity that gathers them at the beginning of their relationship loses its importance over time and leaves space for deeper friendship between members.

### **Misuse of sporting environments**

Extremists have been known to misuse the sports stages for their propaganda and recruitment, hence, the importance of sporting fanbase clubs and organisations to promote positive activities targeting other fans to be better-behaving supporters as a means to counteract hate speech and activities. The challenge for fan clubs is to direct unwanted behaviour towards developing resilience to anti-social behaviours by providing an alternative opportunity to express their identity, while also offering means to improving wider community cohesion and fostering of peaceful co-existence with other sports fans and neighbourhoods.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### **Funding & Resources**

D.Rad project discusses how a radical individual's deradicalization processes cannot begin without meaningful social interactions between themselves and the people who represent the other to them. Consequently, they require a physical space where they can gather around a shared interest. Funding should be made available for open-ended, long-term projects that make use of creative arts, sports and a multiplicity of methodologies to encourage dialectical thinking and joint initiatives where people can gather in a convivial space. This can include informal groups that engage with sports-and-art-related initiatives.

## Bottom-Up approach

Use sports as a tool in projects about positive self-development for youngsters, socially excluded, and wider communities, rather than openly using it as an anti-radicalisation tool. If we are thinking about improving social belonging, and preventing routes to radicalisation, we need to ask why people already feel isolation and aggrievement. We need to divest ourselves of the idea that people's circumstances are from choice and develop more opportunity for isolated individuals to have access to initiatives that *bring* the individual with them on a path to belonging, hope and social belonging.

Co-operating with youth professionals and encouraging greater dialogue and the deconstruction of demonising tropes that continue to frame extremist and radical ideologies can create opportunities for individuals to work on the attitudes and life skills that make them resilient to ideological exploitation and the lure of extremist violence. Community development support is essential in this respect to support sports and arts initiatives, regardless of whether or not there is an official de-radicalised programme attached. In this response, we focus in particular on the relationship between arts and sports and identity, and the ways that community-based engagement, in its varied and different forms, can be supported to challenge the barriers to belonging and social inclusion. Governments should provide funding to large and small initiatives so that communities can run projects in a productive way. These could take the form of small development grants that are 'light touch' in terms of review, and which encourage experimental development projects.

## Invisible Groups

Greater funding and attention need to be paid to those outside the 18-28 age group. There seems to be a gap in providing funding or paying attention to individuals outside this age group – especial those from socially isolated and deprived backgrounds. For example, those who have been touched by the justice system, substance abuse, homelessness, or refugee status are particularly vulnerable to isolation, social deprivation and disillusionment – and therefore can be equally at risk to radicalisation and extremist temptation

## Acknowledging the role of welcoming spaces

Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of welcoming spaces where people can congregate in safe and healthy ways. As was found in most of the initiatives, as



relationships grow and develop, the activity that brought people to gather around often takes second place. The importance of being with others in spaces that allow the, comparing, negotiating and reflecting on self and others are crucial to fostering social cohesion because they offer opportunity to deliberately go beyond what we think we know, and for imagining other, sometimes disturbing, ways of being together.

In this sense, we claim that both sports and arts contribute to the processes of living together by facilitating convivial spaces and experiences for people who have shared interests embodied in sports and arts. Governments must be encouraged to give greater attention to these spaces and to the many factors that lead to the processes of social exclusion and disillusionment. Those members of our societies who are passively or actively denied resources, platforms and legitimacy, remain on the margins in isolation and are at particular risk of processes of radicaliation.