xxx 6.1 What is the significance of the "processual character", "openness" and "dynamism" of the VPN approach

Even before starting to evaluate the interviews, one of the objectives of the accompanying research on the VPN method was clear. This would be to attempt to reconstruct, in more precise terms, what the coaches mean when saying in their self-statements that they use a "process-oriented", "dynamic" and/or "relationship-based" approach. The existing documentation and evaluations of the VPN method make frequent reference to these attributes; they are even occasionally referred to as the characteristic that makes the VPN method different and as a key element in its success, differentiating it from more cognitive, behavioural methods – and from anti-aggression training, with its use of highly confrontational and provocative methods (such as the "hot seat"). And there is another reason. While the terms "process-oriented", "dynamic", "relationship-based" and "based on lifeworld experiences", occasionally even the imprecise "holistic", are all frequently used both in models for social work and psychotherapy and in practitioners' everyday discourse about their profession, it is clear, when looking at the dynamics of the interviews, that while these terms were mentioned almost as an aside, they were brought in during particularly meaningful sections of the conversations.

For this reason it was particularly important to investigate which elements of practice, which factors and methods of intervention are meant when words like "process-oriented" and "dynamic" are used. Also, to what extent are these elements really essential for the *high degree of effectiveness* of the VPN method? The interviews with participants would also be important for this issue. One central query would have to be: to what extent can we identify elements of the participants' statements that reveal that they, too, were subjectively conscious of this "process-oriented", "dynamic" methodology? The majority of participants will, after all, be unlikely to use such terminology. And which specific effects, in terms of personality development, do the individual aspects of this "processual character" denote?

It was apparent from the discussions with the coaches that the terminology of processual character, dynamics and focus on relationships was generally used when attempting to find a general term to summarize a complex series of events within the group or individual training sessions. The terminology was intended to underline that these events involved *personal* changes by the participant(s) and were linked to *inter-personal phenomena within the group.*

The terms "processual" and "dynamic" would be applied to mean that a participant, or a group, showed signs of a differentiated, gradual change, of a personal change process – more than merely an occasional, possibly even strategically-employed change of opinion.

However, the terms "processual" and "dynamic" were also used when individual delays, blockages or disturbances occurred; given that these are individual reactions, they are also important elements of the process and they imply additional potential for reflection and development. The terms "processual" and "relationship-based" were also sometimes used to mean that interactive two-way effects took place between the individual participants and their specific developmental processes, or that interferences occurred related to the participants' everyday spheres within the prison. The term "processual" was also used, in particular, to describe what happened when the topics and affects that surfaced in a training group took their own idiosyncratic course, with mutual stimulation and avoidance, and led to the group interaction taking a particular route. In this regard, respondents sometimes emphasized the "*group dynamic*" elements of the processes; these were of course always felt to be "*relationship-based*" in that they were shaped by the personalities of the coaches and the participants. The course taken by these processes, and their results, are characterised by a *fundamental openness* and *partial absence of planning*; for this reason they require the coaches to have a certain level of flexibility in their repertoire of interventions.

Even where respondents were discussing the intrinsically indeterminable factor of the *coach's personality*, this was seen (by some) as an aspect of the "processual character" of the approach. This may have been in reference to occasions when the coaches felt that characteristics of their own personality were being reflected in the group, and that, in the course of the events in the group, they themselves were undergoing a certain amount of change. This may have occurred, for example, when events in the group awoke associations from the coach's own personal life histories, through which the coaches, together with the participants, underwent an integrated process. In such cases the group developed an open-ended dynamic experience for the coaches themselves, though of course not dynamic to the same degree as it may sometimes have (and should have) been for the participants.

To cite examples from just a few interviews: one coach made reference to the "processual nature" of the method . . . xx

It would be easy to add further examples to this list.

In methodological-procedural terms, it is noteworthy that respondents frequently refer to the "processual", "dynamic" nature of the VPN method when they are describing how the content of the group session opens up of its own accord, or if the coaches deliberately open it up for a period of time, relaxing their guidance of the process. Unexpected topics are brought up and the discussion takes an unexpected turn, one that cannot be planned and is not consciously intended; and/or, in some cases, surprising effects can be noticed among the participants. The coaches' assessments of these phases of the group process (and of their own performance) differ but are positive for the most part. They often suggest that it is these elements of *openness and a relative lack of planability* that produce the positive effects that the group work has on the participants. Despite the systematically structured nature of the VPN training method, these moments, at which the structure was temporarily relaxed, were the most important, they believe. This is in spite of the fact that, or perhaps even because, they required the methodological timetable for the day to be temporarily abandoned and to concentrate on the unforeseen, in a process of personal exchange with the participants and with the group as a whole, in a way in which the events and the outcome were uncertain. These moments of *unplanned*-ness were also the moments in which the indefinable but probably very important factor of the coaches' personality became particularly important.

With their unavoidable vagueness and lack of criterial or logical precision, these assessments may sometimes give the impression of embodying a kind of *mystification* of the method, even esoteric incantations of "processual character", "openness" and "dynamism" as the overarching factors in the success of the method used. And while empirical research on the therapeutic process in group work pays considerable attention to the openness of processes (Mc Leod, Tschuschke), quasi-mystical references such as these are to be expected in the sometimes congested terrain of social therapeutic work. Given the level of polarisation in approaches to social therapy with offenders, between *behaviourist* and *process-based* approaches, this is especially problematic.

For these reasons, one finding from our empirical material is of even greater significance: despite their vagueness, the coaches' subjective assessments of the "openness of the process" and of the "dynamism" of their work, and the particular importance of these factors, were found to be correct – in a very particular psychological sense. These findings are based in

particular on the reconstructive assessments of the *individual discussions with the participants*. These produced many pieces of evidence that can be seen as thematic correspondences and confirmations of what the coaches mean by "processual character". This would enable us to develop, below, a cogent psychological explanation of *what "processual character" actually is,* why it is a central factor in the success of the VNP method, and what conclusions can be drawn and general recommendations made for work on reintegrating delinquents with an affinity for violence.

Which statements by the participants allow these confirmations to be made? In discussing the unique character of this group experience and why it was felt to be effective, various former inmates made statements such as the following:

"What I liked most about it was that it was always surprising, you never knew what would happen next, I was always curious [to see what would happen] [...] you had to wait and see whose turn it would be today, and that could change really quickly too, and then something would happen […] the coaches would take care of it." (Person A)

"It was hard at first during the first few sessions, because it was different than normal with the guys inside, and then we became a real community, different to before, because [before] you didn't know everyone in the group equally well […] you never knew what would happen next […] that didn't bother the coaches, they were cool, it was always relaxed […] so I was always happy to go over [to the group training room], that was in a different building." (Person B)

"That was a total surprise, this one time one of us [one of the group participants], we didn't know this about him at all, he said that he had nobody left at all, that everyone, his whole family had either left or were inside, and his dad was dead or had left or something [...] the stuff that had happened to him, we hadn't had a clue, and he cried then [...] so we took a break, and one of them [a coach] went outside with him and we had a cigarette break […] and then it was okay […] I looked out for him a bit after that." (Person C)

"We basically all knew each other, from the prison ... but it was different there [during the group sessions], sometimes there would suddenly be a game [a role-play], by the end everyone had kind of got it […] you did think about it [the crime] differently afterwards." (Person D)

"You could say whatever you wanted, I'd never had that before, they listened to everything, you got used to it really quickly [...] it was fun too […] they were basically interested in everything we said, and you could tell that they were taking it seriously [...] so sometimes you would tell [the group] things that you normally wouldn't mention." (Person D)

"Everyone else in here [prison staff, social workers], they plan everything for you, do this, do that, now you're getting the other [...] this is how we are going to do things with you [...] the coaches weren't like that, they were interested [...] they were from outside and we believed them." (Person E)

"They [the coaches] weren't part of the rest here [the prison staff], at some stage you noticed that you could trust them." (Person E)

"I did a programme outside [outside the prison] once, exercises and stuff [a different kind of training programme with anti-aggression exercises] [...] but you weren't able to talk at all, it was different, you didn't find anything out, I don't think it really helped at all." (Person C)

Discussing an individual session with a coach: "No, I said that during the session with him [coach], I wouldn't have said that in front of the group, I didn't know if I could trust them [...] one time someone passed something on but he himself hadn't told the group anything [i.e. the person who had broken group confidentiality had not shared anything himself], it got better later on […] but it was only really okay when you were alone with him [the coach] or if it was the small group with just three of us, we knew each other, I trust them […]" (Person F)

In these and many similar descriptions by participants of their group experience, we can identify a large number of items corresponding to what the coaches describe with the semantic field of the *openness of the process.* Based on their own statements, participants were aware of the specific openness and unplanned or un-plannable nature of the process ("surprising"; "you never knew what would happen next"; "everyone was different"; also, "you had to wait and see whose turn it would be today"; "then something would happen"; "[you could say] whatever you wanted"). In addition, the participants generally welcomed this openness and saw it as something positive ("surprising"; "I was always happy [to take part]"; "I'd never had that before […] it was fun too").

The fact that many of the participants experienced the openness of the group process as something positive, and put their trust in it, was by no means a foregone conclusion. As illustrated above, the situations of openness (as in real life events), the absence of structure, the unfamiliar and uncertainty can often have the effect of creating insecurity and seem threatening. This is particularly the case for individuals with a highly-developed system of mistrust (see the case of Baran in section xx). The interviewees with highly extremist tendencies, in particular, were characterised by something that has been frequently described in the secondary literature: important linkage points in their careers of violence took place during periods when they were required to process new environments or encounter unfamiliar people, and thus had to deal with a high level of change and complexity (see also the case of Sutterlüty, above, xx).

Partly for this reason, we can assume that tolerating, and learning to value, openness, the unexpected and uncertainty in multi-faceted group relationships represents an important educational impact factor for the VPN method. One of the major reasons why this seems to have worked so well here may have been that the coaches were able to *maintain the openness* of the group process *in a reliable way* and that the participants were aware of this ("the coaches would take care of it" "they were cool, it was always relaxed"; "you could say whatever you wanted […] they listened to everything"). This feeling of never knowing what would happen next was described as "exciting", "nice", "surprising" and "cool", *because* the coaches' attitude towards it was the same; they were open to it, even sometimes deliberately created it, and were able to deal with it.

In retrospect, many of the participants were scarcely aware that this level of openness had caused difficulties for them at first ("it was hard at first during the first few sessions"). In other groups, in which the group process ran less smoothly (usually as a result of institutional factors, see section below) participants spoke more about the *obstacles to the development of trust* within the group, which first had to be identified ("no, I said that during the session with him [coach], […] it was […] okay when you were alone with him [the coach] or if it was the small group with just three of us, we knew each other, I trust them"). With these, more difficult group processes, it was even more evident in the individual sessions how much the openness and trustworthiness of the process was valued – and were intuitively seen as related.

Participants who had already taken part in a number of other educational programmes and who were able to compare them with reference to the *openness of the process and open personal communication as a differentiating characteristic*, made comments such as the following: "I did a programme outside [outside the prison] once, exercises and stuff [...] but you weren't able to talk at all, it was different, you didn't find anything out [about the others], I don't think it really helped at all." In some cases, the participants made their own observations about gradual *processes of change* within themselves and their peers ("we basically all knew each other, from prison [...] but it was different there […] by the end everyone had kind of got it […] you did think about it [the crime] differently afterwards"). And these processes were often perceived as having resulted from the group relationship ("we became a real community, different again to before [in the shared prison environment]").

The British colleagues of the TPVR-project drew similar conclusions after interviewing grass-root NGO-practitioners in probation and rehabilitation work, saying that with the more closed educational and cognitive-behavioural teaching methods, clients vulnerable to extremism and hate crime violence merely learn to apply a "finishing line mentality":

" … you have people that are working a finishing line mentality, 'if I can get to the end of this, I'll be okay' so what happens is that they'll sit there, take part in the exercises and put across what they think needs to be put across, what happens is that only reinforces the absolutist mindset that 'we're living in the abode of war, this, what I'm taking part in is their control mechanism, I have to get through their control mechanism to get through the system" (TPVR-Research Report 3.5.3; p. 25)

It can thus be said that the coaches' assumptions about the fundamental importance of the processual character, dynamism, openness, unplanned-ness, relationship-based nature etc. are evidently confirmed by the participants' descriptions of such sequences and experiences within their groups. The participants also give us to understand that, even if they rarely describe it directly, they found the openness of the process to be interesting, fascinating and also helpful.

xxx 6.2 Why openness of the process and development of trust?

How can it be that the factor of the openness of the process in social therapeutic (group) work is so important for the changes undergone by the participants? Given the participants' narrative material quoted above, which repeatedly emphasize the personal authenticity and trustworthiness of the coaches and the flexibility and openness of their attitude – and which placed both in relation to each other – the following is apparent. There is a direct psychological link between the openness of the process and the level of trust developed by the participants. And the participants' trust in the coaches and in the group – and their belief that the coaches take them seriously, unconditionally, and genuinely want the best for them – is directly linked to the *behaviour-changing effect* of the training.

Looking at this context more closely, it is in fact self-evident. As noted, individuals prone to violence, violent offenders and individuals disposed towards extremism display a strong inclination towards mistrust and suspicion, as has been irrefutably shown in the secondary literature (see above, chapter xx). They display what is known as a *system of mistrust*, and a basic attitude that says "They can tell me what they want, I don't believe them and will just play their game", an attitude which often causes decidedly paranoid patterns of perception and reaction, with high levels of latent fear and aggression. In addition, this attitude is often well-concealed and thus even more difficult to tackle. Developing and maintaining trust in others is thus a central and often seemingly insoluble problem of their personalities. The reason for this problem is that these individuals have had a considerable under-supply of reliable trust relationships in their life experience.

But especially when dealing with young people who have a tendency towards violent or hate crimes and towards extremism, the most important task is to promote *emotional intelligence*, i.e. *psycho-affective learning* and psycho-social post-socialisation. In particular, focus is on the ability to tolerate ambivalence and personal closeness, and to deal with fear, shame and aggression. However, in these highly sensitive areas, emotional learning can only take place on the basis of *personal trust*; it requires a framework of *trustworthy relationship potentials*. Where even a basic level of trust does not exist and cannot be developed, resistance, suspicion, fear and aggressiveness will dominate; these will severely limit any kind of psycho-affective learning or make it impossible. This vicious circle reveals why many intervention approaches targeted at individuals disposed towards hate crimes eventually fail – especially conventional approaches limited by institutional factors – and why the re-offending rate is often, in many countries, estimated at about 80%. Because trust is the sine qua non of

emotional learning, the most urgent task in social therapeutic work with radicalised hate crime offenders is the enormous challenge of creating a basic level of trust in individuals with such a strong mistrust system, and supporting their ability to trust. If this succeeds, some of the main requirements for success have been created.

With this link between "trust and emotional learning" in mind, if one re-examines the factors of processual openness, dynamism, etc., it is obvious that there is nothing more effective for developing trust and preparing the ground for emotional learning than *experiencing an open process together with others*. Nothing is as convincing, in this regard, as the moments of a group event, or a one-to-one discussion, at which sudden changes to the plan are accepted and space is made for a truly *open* dynamic which is *negotiated between equals*, at which, for example, the coaches abandon their pre-determined plans for the session, open the field up to the participant(s) in an ad hoc manner and sometimes even candidly admit their own surprise and unease, but also their willingness to allow this to happen. At such moments, it becomes clear that they, the coaches, are willing to take risks for the sake of this "openness" – and for the sake of the participants – and that despite their vital facilitator function, they are refraining from exercising their power to shape events. These moments are invaluable experiences in which despite, and in addition to, the indisputable asymmetry of the coach-participants relationship, the situation becomes one of *fundamental* equality. In other words: those involved are meeting on a level playing field and can develop the maximum degree of open-minded curiosity about what the participants and coaches have to say to each other, in their common process. In other words: trust and self-awareness develop.

This underlines that it is shared moments of openness, uncertainness and ambivalence that are readily permitted, actively pursued and, in a protected sphere, borne with responsibility, that are the primary experiences on which trust is built. Each of these moments of shared processual openness represents a proof of trust that is enacted immediately, one that cannot be achieved as such in any other way. Where two individuals – especially if they are of unequal status, such as participants and coaches – experience a momentary situation *together and as equals* in which they are faced, so to speak, with the existential uncertainness and ambivalence of life itself, trustworthiness no longer has to be declared: it has proved itself in the situation itself. This forms the basis for emotional learning. This is of particular practical relevance because these moments at which trust proves itself can be sensed, immediately and instinctively, even by those who are difficult to win over with more rational and abstract

forms of trust-building. Young people with this psychosocial make-up often have a very high level of unconscious knowledge of how difficult it is to bear the uncertainty and ambivalence of open situations, and how unusual and valuable it is if this becomes possible. The more extreme the individual's paranoid tendencies, and with them, their potential for violence, the more this, and only this, way of building trust is likely to succeed. As has been pointed out, the more structured methods of informative and cognitive exercises will most likely reinforce the 'finishing line mentality' and fail to reduce radicalisation.

The complex dynamics of *trust building* in the context of social educational intervention become especially evident when looking at the relevant interview extracts. These can be used to spell out the real practical implications of the processual character of the method for the coaches. To summarise and condense these, the *coaches' fundamental attitude* and the nature of their trustworthiness can be described as follows: "You can trust me, and I want you to, even if that is not easy for you. But you can tell me everything and ask me anything. I will never refuse to answer. I will take everything you say seriously and will listen to everything you have to say, in particular things that exceeded the personal comprehension of people who have listened to you before. At the same time, I will always have my own way of seeing things, and if you wish, I will share this with you. But I will not force anything on you, will not compel anything from you and will not morally judge you as a person – nor, however, will I lay claim to you in an understanding/fraternizing way. The only thing I ask of you is that you participate to the best of your ability and as sincerely as you can, and that you respect me and the others just as I/we respect you."

This *trusting-logical formulation* of the methodology of *an open process* also makes it clear that it contains many of the other key terms and attributes to which the coaches often refer in this context. Of course, the moments at which the group process becomes an open one are those in which the method's *links to the participants' lifeworld* and its dynamic *relationship-based* nature become concrete. The frequently-invoked factor of the *coach personality* is also particularly important here. The *open process* thus describes a broad and interrelated cluster of impact factors – second-order factors – all of which are psycho-social or psycho-dynamic in nature and which should thus be researched and evaluated together.[1]

[1] It should be expressly noted that the *personality of the coach* should not be prematurely seen as the most important factor in any indistinctly-formulated idea of *personal talent* which someone either possesses or does not possess. It is sometimes treated as such; but this embodies a risk of mystifying unquestioned coach narcissisms. This is particularly the case because in general, such discussions do not put forward any really practical ways of identifying or selecting individuals with this talent. This prevents any kind of systematic

Apart from their role in trust-building and emotional learning, the openness of the process and its focus on relationships are important in other ways. In the discussion above, about the elements of the training course that have to do with education on civil society and personal-civic education, it was emphasized that the social therapeutic reintegration of hate crime offenders with extremist tendencies must focus on preparing the participants for a life of freedom, in a free, constitutional, democratic state and a liberal society – a life that is fundamentally characterised by openness, uncertainty, a need for orientation and the ability to make judgements, a multiplicity of references and ambiguity. Civil liberties and human rights are impossible if people do not have the ability to act within networks of different relationships and to deal with and resolve feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence (see above, chapter xx). For this reason alone, it appears to be of inestimable importance that the coaches do not simply run through a totally pre-designed programme, but rather demonstrate elements of a processual approach which is open to ambivalence and which welcomes uncertainty and mistakes. This approach could then be taken on by the participants – young men who for the most part have had a complete absence of any such models in their previous lives.

Thus, the "openness of the process" and "trust-building" can be seen both as indispensable structural preconditions for *emotional learning* per se and as concrete learning content and skills that are necessary for the individual to survive in liberal society. This underlines again how vital it is that the goal of accentuated '*personal*-civic education', as defined here, is pursued (see chapter xx above); this goes beyond knowledge about the democratic state and attempts to impart the corresponding psycho-affective competences (e.g. the ability to deal with ambivalence) and competences to do with personal involvement. For it is undoubtedly true, as the Final Report of the Federal Programme to Support Civil Society and Prevent Extremism and Inhumane Attitudes – cited in more detail below – states: "Cultural diversity is not learned by being told repeatedly that it is a 'good thing'; it is developed gradually during conflictual experiences". For this reason, the report goes on, "a potential over-concentration on knowledge-based and cognitive aspects within short-term interventions" should be avoided and "emotional processes [must] be taken into account" (26).

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approach in recruiting and training coaches. It seems more appropriate to view the coach's personality in a value-free (and processual) way as *a factor that can be moulded* and one which, given certain minimum requirements, can be developed using suitable training courses and through supervised practical experience (see below, section xx, and the VPN training curriculum).

xxx 6.3 Initial conclusions about processual character and group work

Overall, then, the conclusion can be drawn that intuitive perceptions and assumptions about the *openness of the process*, its *dynamism* and its *relationship-oriented nature*, and the expected high level of efficacy of these impact factors, have been confirmed. They are efficacious in particular because they promote the *development of trust* and *emotional learning* by the participants and also prepare them for life in liberal societies.

The general recommendations that can be drawn on the basis of these findings are as follows:

Any form of intervention that targets individuals with highly-developed mistrust systems and that aims to create processes of change and social and psycho-affective learning must realise a certain degree of processual openness in order to allow the participants to develop a basic level of trust. Targeted educational exercises that promote the creation of personal closeness between the participants and that promote positive attitudes towards co-operation and mutual reliance may help in this regard. However, the effectiveness of such exercises must not be over-estimated. As detailed above (xx), educational training exercises, taken alone, will not be very effective in creating trust unless they are embedded in a consistent framework of open interactive processes.

Another means used in the VPN method to promote trust is the use of *one-to-one conversations*. These take place in parallel with the group process and are used to a greater or lesser extent depending on how well the participants can cope with the group work. In one-to-one conversations, it is usually easier to create trust. However, it must be taken into account that trust *within* the group and *in* the group must be seen as the primary educational objective and the one-to-one conversations should be focused on this goal. It is no coincidence that for these individuals, the most highly-charged moments at which violence threatens are often those at which an escalating *clique group dynamic* ("Kumpelhorde" takes hold [gang] Buschboom/ Heitmann 78); for this reason, group work is generally the most appropriate method, where it is possible to use it.

In addition, it should be noted that the majority of young violent offenders were subjected to structural duality during their primary socialisation in the family, whether because they were brought up by a single parent (usually their mother) or because of the extreme dysfunctionality of at least one of their parents (through drug abuse, violence or abuse) or their emotional absence (usually the father) (Kassis in Küchenhoff et al. 189, Foster/Hagan in Heitmeyer/ Hagan 693ff.). This *structural duality* during their primary socialisation may have been reinforced by a social milieu or cultural background which was characterised by strict gender roles. This division itself contributes to the formation of *dyadic* – and *not triangulated* – attachments to the mother or symbiotic family milieus, in which high levels of psychological dependency and the absence of sufficient inter-personal boundaries are common and which, as we know, are correlated with a higher level of aggression and violent behaviour (ibid.).

For this reason alone, the methodological focus should be on *group work characterised by open processes*. It should be emphasised that one-to-one conversations – while indispensable – should never lose sight of the *group experience*. This means that the coaches must take this attitude and must direct the conversation in this regard; at the same time they must also maintain the discretionary trust framework of the one-to-one conversation. However, within one-to-one conversations the coach can make reference, at important points, to the group, the differences between one-to-one conversations and group discussions, what individuals may feel capable of saying in either situation, and what possibilities the two types of conversation present. Or they can systematically remind the participant of things that have been said by other participants during the group discussion and whether this triggers anything for the participant which they could make use of or – simply bear in mind. Keeping the *overarching group context* and its processual dynamic in mind does not have to take away from the exclusive and intimate nature of the one-to-one conversation.

xxx 6.4 General prerequisites for processual work in groups, part 1: the personal competences of the coaches

Above, numerous reasons have been given for choosing a *group*-based and group-*dynamic* intervention approach, taking into account processual character and an educational attempt to deepen experiences. It is therefore of even greater importance to describe a number of

additional observations and findings from the present study. Paying heed to these has proved to be vital if this difficult work is to be successful.

Undoubtedly, any attempt to use a dynamic group process involves particular challenges for the coaches. Their *personal ability* to initiate and lead group processes that are open in terms of their structure and their outcome require a fundamental appreciation of, and the ability to deal with, moments of uncertainty and ambivalence – exactly the skill which is to be developed in the participants. It also places high demands on the coaches' personal ability to form relationships and their ability to perceive psychological and interactive developments. Other personal competences are needed, such as the ability to create trust while simultaneously posing questions and confronting participants with different ways of seeing, and a basic attitude according to which coaches can still behave in an authentic and sincere way while fulfilling their main function: for example by admitting to surprise, revealing themselves to be sometimes uncertain or unable to cope, and on occasion even correcting themselves or apologising if misunderstandings or errors have occurred or they have behaved in an inflexible manner. They also need experience and the ability to make judgements about the setting, for example about which combinations of group participants are viable or promising (see below xx).

These, and other, skills belonging to the skill-set for social therapeutic coaches are by no means always present or self-evident – not even if staff have considerable prior experience in social work. However, it would not be useful to place too much emphasis, in this regard, on *individual talent*. Above, the danger of mythologizing the *coach personality* and a talent for coaching work was outlined (xx): mythologizing these attributes in this way often tells us less about the person in question and more about our own uncertainty about how to prepare the members of an intervention team for this highly-responsible task. It thus seems even more important not only to pay attention to these basic psycho-social skills and group facilitation competences during the recruitment process, but to promote and to develop these skills in a systematic manner. VPN has recently done this, for example, by setting up a separate *programme of further training* lasting approximately one year (as in-service training) during which future staff members are prepared, using a variety of learning methods, for this type of work. Accompanying this programme, there is a basic level of debate about educational theory and methods within VPN; members of VPN also participate in national and *international exchange on the subject*. This allows a variety of different practical experiences

and scholarly findings to be brought into VPN's practice and used to develop the practice and the staff training programme.

For institutions in which these prerequisites are not yet in place, it would seem advisable to make use of *local resources for group facilitator skills* and processual competences. (These may be available in clinical or social-work settings or possibly within group-analytic therapy traditions). For regions and countries in which these resources are underdeveloped, it would be desirable for them to be developed through a process of national or international exchange. Furthermore, it would be preferable if a start could be made on developing an individual curriculum, specific to the target group(s) and culture(s), for social therapeutic work with regional or national hate crime offender groups and contexts. Where possible, this should be done in an interdisciplinary manner linking different educational and therapeutic fields of activity.

xxx 6.5 General prerequisites, part 2: the institutional framework for group work

(2) A second important additional factor is the *institutional framework* in which group work is carried out. Open-process, (psycho-)dynamic group work, as vital and irreplaceable as it is, cannot be commenced in an *ad hoc* manner in any kind of context without considering the *prerequisites*. There are a number of pre-conditions and contextual factors that are necessary. The potential outcomes embodied in this kind of group work also involve a number of potential problems and risks which are often overlooked or underestimated. On occasion, groups can become a location for damaging and destructive event and interaction dynamics which – if not contained and worked through in a reflexive manner – can fail to promote participants' development or sometimes even prevent it. The literature on group analysis sometimes describes such situations as "anti-groups". This is particularly easy to envisage in the case of *radicalisation* and *de-radicalisation,* since hate-crime offences, as previously stated, are almost all carried out in the context of destructive clique or small group situations (see "gang" Buschboom/ Heitmann 78). These groups act to relay and reinforce anti-social and violent escalations.

Particular attention should be paid to these problems and risks if the group work is taking place *within an institution*, such that the participants are in contact outside the group, during

everyday life in the institution. This is especially so in prisons, since these are closed institutions which bring, or force, individuals together as a community. In addition, the empirical reality is that prisons are generally places of fundamental mistrust and strict informal hierarchies and power structures; group analysis, in the narrow sense, is thus possible only to a limited extent. However, this does not necessarily mean that no group-dynamic methods can ever be used there. In fact, psychosocial learning is impossible without group experiences. It must always be remembered that the group, as a human social form, is completely *unavoidable and irreplaceable*. Wherever people can be found, groups exist; even the human psyche may in many respects be conceived of as a mental network representing different interacting characters. And, of course, prisons are also made up of groups. For this reason, the use of group settings characterised by open, (psycho-)dynamic and reflexive processes is an essential element of successful prevention and intervention work.

In any case, the *institutional context* and the resulting structures, hierarchies and hindrances must always be taken into account. It is clear from many statements made in the interviews with VPN coaches that the institutional dynamics of the prison can have a far-reaching effect on social therapeutic group work, in some cases putting a considerable strain on them. If, for example, the organisation preparing the group work sets up a group including members who have not actually agreed to participate and to pursue agreed goals, and/or if the way the group is configured means that undetected powerful external hierarchies and power structures from the prison environment are at work, making the creation of trust more difficult, then the task will be particularly challenging. It will be necessary to make use of spontaneous changes of setting, including smaller groups and one-to-one conversations, and the coaches will have to expend considerable energy tackling the mistrust and the external hierarchical and power factors. This is a challenging task and one which takes up a lot of time.

Another not unusual *problem scenario* is that in which, for example, prison management and staff have an ambivalent attitude towards the external specialists. This will always be picked up on by the participants, if indirectly. This can create considerable credibility and trust problems and will necessarily have a negative effect on the sensitive learning objectives of psychosocial competence. In certain circumstances, both of the scenarios described can occur simultaneously, and the prison staff's ambivalence towards the process – along with other institutional exigencies – may even contribute to groups being set up whose composition makes the task difficult.

xxx 6.6 Case analysis of a difficult group process and its institutional contextual dynamics

For these and similar reasons, any purely intuitive attempts to create a functioning social therapeutic group within an institution are always in danger of becoming entangled in *difficult,* sometimes *almost insoluble group processes*. The resulting tensions may also remain hidden for the most part; they continue to operate in a myriad of ways under the surface and thus make the development of the group and individual progress particularly difficult. The fact that these dangers have been largely averted in VPN's work to date is probably the result of the coaches' considerable experience working in institutions – and of the fact that the work with groups of prisoners was often accompanied by training for staff and/or advisory sessions for prison management. In addition, in some instances VPN staff held larger-scale information and discussion events on the topics of "violence" and "extremism" with a broader group of prisoners and staff. The objective was to communicate to a larger audience within the prison, thus increasing acceptance of the VPN initiative and dealing with any misunderstandings, prejudices and fears. It seems safe to assume that *preparatory and accompanying events such as these* had positive effects on the group work that followed.

However, there does seem to have been at least *one empirical case* within VPN's history during which the *institutional risk factors* outlined above came into play, with far-reaching effects, and created considerable difficulty in maintaining an even halfway productive group process. This case has already been documented in an extensive evaluation report (Lukas 2008); while evaluating interviews for the present study, this report was re-opened and additions made on a number of central issues, in particular with regard to the factor of *contextual institutional dynamics*.

The evaluation report – which was based on topic-centred group discussion events with the participants and with the coaches and also made use of minutes from meetings of the VPN Group – does underline the importance of some *important contextual variables:* (1) In this group, "VPN made its first attempt" to apply a method which had been used mainly in youth prisons with participants aged between about 16 and 20 "with a different target group", namely with "young adults" (aged from their early to their late twenties) in a prison setting.

(2) In addition, a relatively large number of the participants had a "(second-generation) migration background" and were selected in a fairly arbitrary manner; (3) "it was the first time" that the two VPN staff "had led a training group together"; and (4) it was the first time that the prison was holding a VPN group training course (Lukas 19). The coaches felt that they were working "in uncharted territory", which seems understandable in a number of respects.

It is thus scarcely surprising that compared to other VPN groups, this group process was difficult to navigate and characterised by a number of blockages. The two coaches made numerous statements for the evaluation to the effect that many of the educational exercises did not work particularly well, that the participants' statements did not reach the expected level of authenticity and reliability, that civic education topics were received with limited interest and limited personal involvement – and that the participants, overall, “seemed to be less resilient" (Lukas 19) than they (the coaches) were used to, in their prior work.

For example, the participants, who were already aged in their twenties, were still "in some cases, almost unable to deal with the larger group situation" and "get involved". This, the coaches said, led "to considerable disruption on numerous occasions". This also led to "a greater sense of distance between the participants and the coaches" (Lukas 19). One of the coaches explained: "Every time you think you have someone" – in other words, a genuine process of communication has developed – "you can see that it becomes too much for them. They break the connection, exit the conversation and even exit the room." The situation was thus one of considerable *resistance to connections and exchange* and, the coaches felt, was dominated to an unusual extent by the desire not to "lose face" within the group. The quality of communication within the group suffered as a result, and – in parallel, and as both cause and result – so did the essential relationship of trust between the participants and the coaches.

What was particularly noticeable in this regard was the extent to which a number of participants in the group *differentiated* between the two coaches, i.e. the extent to which they developed completely different attitudes towards the individual coaches. Of particular note: the coaches, both very experienced and successful in their work, "were experienced by the participants in part as extremely different", which here means first and foremost that the participants did not simply accept the two coaches as two separate individuals, but regarded them with "extremely" high – and extremely asymmetrical – levels of sympathy and antipathy.

This was already evident from the participants' relatively measured comments, at the end of the training course, about the general individual characteristics of the two coaches: one was perceived as "nice" and as "friendly", the other as "patronising", "provocative" and "a teacher" [in this context negatively connotated] (31).

The extent to which these polarised views were irrational and to which they were founded at base on fundamental *ambivalence* and tensions that had *nothing to do with the coaches* themselves – ambivalence relating to the level of trust each participant had in the group training as such – are also revealed by the fact that neither of the aforementioned attributes really satisfied the participants or were able to win their trust. The core characteristic of the coach for whom liking was shown – his "friendliness" – was viewed with considerable mistrust: "A number [of the participants] were convinced that the coach's strategy was to act friendly, as this would be their only way to really reach people (Lukas 31). While this statement referred to both of the coaches and to the training course in general, the main thrust of the tension and fear dynamics in this group was targeted at *only one* of the two coaches. He alone was the focus of the whole emotional charge for the group, in the form of a high level of personal antipathy.

In principle, the group situation that thus developed could be a valuable and promising one. The psycho-dynamic forces dominating it, *tension and projection,* – in which an individual's feeling of unbearable tension and fear is translated into personal aversion and hate and projected onto an external target – is actually the core psychological factor in hate crime and extremist violence. And as the chapter on *ambivalence dissociation* made clear (see above p. xx): Nothing is excluded from mistrust and dissociation when, as with violent offenders and extremist individuals, a highly active "*mistrust system*" is at work. *Dissociational projections* that create binary opposites, either-or, self-other, and are expressed in "extremely" asymmetrical sympathies and antipathies, are the unavoidable and volatile result of mistrust and they feed extremism and latent violence, in both thoughts and feelings and in actions.

During the course of an open-process group, it often occurs, as here, that the two coaches are "separated" and polarised or – if only one coach is used – that the group itself splits, to a more or less clearly identifiable extent – into two groups acting against each other. Sometimes a scapegoat or whipping boy is defined. All the aggressiveness and potential for hate that the individuals bring with them as a result of their biographical dispositions then erupt along the

social and psychological *fault lines* thus created. Given a sufficiently favourable context, these would be the very issues on which the group work should focus. These favourable conditions obviously did not exist in this case. In any event, some of the participants in this group displayed a "blatant level of antipathy towards one of the coaches" (31) in the evaluation period (after the training course). This is a clear sign that the "separation" at group level could not be successfully dealt with.

In such circumstances, both mutual exchange with the social *external* environment (the group) and the reflexive examination of oneself, the psychological *interior,* become far more difficult. This corresponds to a well-established psychodynamic logic: for individuals with an affinity to violence, the *emotion of hate* has the function of avoiding a confrontation with the self and the perception and acceptance of the individual's own life history and experiences, often difficult to bear and even more difficult to recount (see chapter xx, p. xx). By doing this these individuals lose the opportunity of benefiting from each other in the group context or of getting anything from the different personalities and interaction styles of the other members of the group and of the coaches – either the "friendliness" and "niceness" of the one coach, or the "provocativeness" and stringency of the other, and exploiting them for their own development and their own challenges.

But this group revealed the extent to which the polarising projection dynamics of "separation" are an often unavoidable and potentially difficult, but also extremely valuable component of group-based psychosocial learning processes. However, in this particularly difficult group – which was set up under inadequate conditions – it seemed almost impossible to work on or overcome this division. For some of the participants, it became reinforced, emotionally-charged, radicalised, so to speak, over the course of the process, to an extent that the coaches felt to be unusual and almost baffling– at least compared to their experiences of how group work could resolve such conflicts.

In response to the manifold problems in this group, the coaches and the evaluation report itself invoked a number of general and specific *cause factors*, which are by no means implausible and in many respects seem accurate. However, it should be noted that taken as a whole, they tend to distract from the main problem. The coaches speculated, for example, that the participants' resistance – and the "aloof politeness" and strategic cooperation in which it was sometimes clothed – was simply the result of their age: young adults were "less willing to

take new paths or try out new things" and "less willing to question themselves" (Lukas 18). In comparison to adolescents, who were, basically, "more open", the young adults displayed a higher level of "resistance energy" to prevent themselves having to "open up to processes of change". For this reason, it was difficult "to create a functioning group"(ibid).

Although there may well be differences between the group dynamics of a group of convicted violent offenders aged 16-20 one and aged 20-28, and such differences should be taken into account, the explanations based on this factor alone seem unconvincing. Are these two age groups really so different in terms of their ability to change, their openness and ability to reflect on themselves? In another context the coaches stated that there had been "many very intensive contacts and conversations despite [the problems]", and that in the smaller groups and one-to-one conversations, many of the participants were extremely open, receptive and willing to think. Indeed the coaches sometimes found the "high level of demand for one-to-one conversations" and the fact that the young adult participants were "simply very happy to have [the coaches'] undivided attention" "surprising": it "surprised me a bit, because I would have expected it more from adolescents" (23).

It is thus worth considering whether the problems in this group were caused solely by the group make-up, which was determined in a random manner and at the *instigation of the prison itself*. The question also arises in view of the methodological consequences drawn by the coaches and by the evaluation report: "It was established that there is a need for an increased focus on cognitive work" and that where exercises and role plays are to be used, more attention should be paid to whether the participants are actually willing to participate. Of course the latter recommendation should always be borne in mind, with any target group – and indeed obtaining and creating agreement in a group or team is a major social and communicative skill and thus is of high priority as a learning objective. However, any "increased focus on cognitive work" is unlikely to lead to increased success in many psychosocial or emotional learning settings. In fact it usually leads to increased resistance.

It may thus be that the conclusion drawn in the evaluation report – that, among other considerations, "an increased focus on cognitive work" is needed – is a misunderstanding; possibly there was no actual need for *cognitive* matter in the technical sense. Instead, it may have been more appropriate to focus even more strongly on managing the group as a psychodynamic entity. This might have brought to light some of the participants' less-explored

life topics, and the group work would then have taken place at a personal, lifeworld-narrative and emotional level, and not a "more cognitive" one. Increased focus could also have been placed on participants' experiences of losing face, of being subordinated within *informal power regimes* and of fears about scheming and bullying. This would also mean bearing in mind the well-established rule for processual work: "First deal with disruptions and context-setting" and forcing acute blockages to be dealt with directly. The coaches do seem to have taken this route, for the most part. In any case it seems that despite the difference in clientele ("young adults") and the relatively difficult process, the fairly open approach taken by the VPN coaches, focusing on relationships and emotions, was favourable and should not have been replaced with a more "cognitive" approach.

In addition, the re-evaluation of the events revealed that the coaches had indeed recognised the actual causal factor behind most of the problems. The evaluation report also listed it. However, it seems that the actual import of this factor was under-estimated. The main reason for the problems can, in fact, be found in the *dynamics of the institutional context.*

This was the first time VPN had carried out a training course in this prison, and the prison had strongly indicated that it had very specific ideas about which of the prisoners should participate in the group. In other words, the *prison management* had made clear that *they wished* to determine the composition of the group (Lukas 17). Their main motivation was to reduce the relatively high level of tension in the institution by sending the "most difficult prisoners" to the VPN group. This can itself perhaps be explained by the fact that for structural reasons, there was a relatively poor level of social therapeutic measures within this prison. "They basically hoped that something would be done with these people that would help everyday life within the prison, because in contrast to the practice in youth prisons, there are no particular programmes in adult prisons" [ibid.] (Nor does this prison offer any kind of pre-release training.) As a result, the group contained a large number of participants with high levels of social disruptiveness, some of whom had come "straight from solitary confinement", had serious drug-use problems or were struggling with previously unidentified and untreated psychological problems, such as highly suicidal tendencies.

But most importantly, the unfavourable conditions in this prison had meant that the normal method of preparing a group as part of the VPN programme was overridden. It is irrelevant at this point whether VPN was unable to make it clear how its programme usually goes about

preparing for group work and making contact with participants, and why it is vital that these steps are followed correctly, or whether it was the prison management (or the state government), which always provides a considerable proportion of the funding, who ensured that its "clearly formulated interests" were followed (17). In either event, VPN did not manage to communicate that while its approach can certainly be used for the "most difficult prisoners", these cannot simply be thrown together in an arbitrary manner without reference to the composition of the group, and in particular that relationships needed to be initiated with each individual candidate on the basis of preliminary talks, where the outcome was seen as open. These individual talks can then lead, on the basis of a mutual decision, to participation that is voluntary and intrinsically motivated – can and usually does, but not always and not necessarily. The openness of the process and the outcome are a basic requirement. One major practical prerequisite of this process is that the number of potential participants is large enough that it is possible for each individual to go through the process whereby the decision is open whether he (or she) wishes to participate in the process, or not (yet).

To illustrate the problems in the group that resulted from the *institutional requirements* laid down by the prison management: in addition to the seriously problematic factors already discussed, a group was created which was made up of a mixture of native German prisoners and those with a *family migration background*. Such a group configuration can work and can even be promising. However, VPN had not, at that time, tried working with such a group, and for that reason, special precautions would need to have been taken and the other conditions need to have been favourable. This was not the case here. One obvious sign was that the two groups were not represented in equal numbers: the participants with migration background – who generally have a more lively mentality – were in the majority, and they also displayed a higher level of psychosocial and affective fragility.

An additional factor making working together more difficult was that a relatively large number of these participants knew that they might be *deported* after their release. It is impossible to over-emphasize how much this fact hampered social therapeutic work with these prisoners. They had all grown up in Germany and some did not even have the language skills to successfully integrate into the country to which they were to be deported. One of the coaches reports: "Then things come out like 'I love this country, I love this city', they really say things like that, and they mean them" (26f.). None of the participants say "I don't care, I'll get on better there than here anyway." For this reason, the immediate de-stabilisation of their national

and ethnic identity was a major topic in working with these participants. The situation was particularly highly-charged for those whose parents and families had come to Germany not as migrant workers, but as refugees from civil wars or as political asylum-seekers. Experience has shown that the latter group demonstrate considerable trans-generational potential for extreme violence (Fischer/Riedesser 1998; Hirsch 2004; Bohleber, W. 1998; Leuzinger-Bohleber, M. 2003). The group's general affect dynamic was, as a result, characterised by a high level of resistance, fear and latent aggression.

Participants with a native German family background were in a completely different situation. The topics just described, which took up much emotional space, did not initially seem relevant to them; these participants would have needed particular intervention and interconnectedness, for which there was inadequate space. As such, the *composition of the group* meant that the minority of German prisoners submitted themselves to the majority, and the fractiousness, of prisoners with a migration background. The group was truly split in two. As a result, the German participants – who, according to the coaches, had "better emotional control", seemed mainly interested in "getting through the course with as little trouble as possible". The coaches' attitude towards this was at some points characterised by an understandable level of helplessness: "I can understand it, if I was sitting opposite [name of a participant with a migration background], I, too, would be worried about whether I was looking him in the eye for too long or saying the wrong thing to him" (ibid.).

It should be emphasised that the VPN coaches reacted – despite or indeed because of the helplessness that they subjectively felt – with a high degree of flexibility and open processes. They came to the only possible methodological decision in these circumstances, in terms of choice of method and design of the setting. As far as possible, they countered the faltering or even latently destructive dynamic in the group as a whole by making use of clarification interventions and in particular, small groups and one-to-one conversations, in particular with the native German participants. They reduced the number of role play exercises in view of the lack of trust displayed (these exercises may be more suitable for use with a younger group in any case). At the same time, they retained the essential larger group environment as much as possible. Given the multifaceted, rather than dyadic, structure of groups for all individual processes, this is, as described, a vital initiating force for the educational process (see above, p. xx).

It must not be overlooked that the one-to-one conversations that took place as part of this particular course were especially fruitful and trusting precisely *because* the joint group experience, without which the one-to-one conversations would not have taken place in this form, was sometimes very difficult and demanding. More generally, the fact that the participants feel that in the one-to-one conversations they "can speak openly to the coaches without fear of negative consequences" and "can be sure of the coaches' undivided attention" always results from the fact that they "have already experienced this in the group sessions". It is in the group sessions that the coaches' openness, trustworthiness and ability to cope with pressure have been tested and shown to be resilient. The indispensable group context thus has effects during the one-to-one conversations, too. And in turn, the trust gained in the smaller groups and one-to-one situations, and the content gained, can be fed back, in suitable doses or more generalised form, to the group as a whole, and thus have an even more lasting effect.

It is impossible to overemphasise that in the circumstances, the two coaches managed this group in the *best possible* manner. Given the conditions it would have been impossible for the group process to be any more successful. Whether the group methodology, which, it is true, had previously been used mainly in youth prisons, should have been adjusted for use with adult prisoners, may still be considered an open question. Worthy of attention might also be to ask whether there may have been a latent sense of competition between the two coaches or any other negative dynamic at work – in which case it would have been easy to organise ad hoc team supervision to deal with such dynamics. But this is not the main issue. Given such a difficult initial situation, problems with the methodology or the coaches are of minor importance – but their significance is frequently over-estimated. For, any evaluation and careful adaptation of the methodology could only be done if the overall context was positive. But that was not the case here.

The reason that despite taking an appropriate approach, the coaches did not feel more *subjective satisfaction with their work* may be that the main cause of the problems was overlooked – and could not be changed in any case. It should thus be emphasised that it was the powerful, and unquestioned, *institutional preconditions and intentions* by the prison that led to procedural errors during the sensitive initiation phase of this group. These errors inevitably had a negative impact on the whole subsequent group process. (It is even more important to make this clear because engaged and innovative practitioners often tend to doubt

themselves and their methods even if the real problems are in the context within which they have to operate, often one shaped by the institution in which they are carrying out their work.)

This is clear from the perhaps most serious consequence arising from the *institutional preconditions,* themselves totally unacceptable: that the prisoners listed as potential participants "after having held preliminary discussions with the coaches […] were already regarded as participants in the training group" (Lukas 30). They thus found themselves in a situation in which they were no longer able "to decide not to participate […] without fear of sanction". Refusing to participate at this stage would have "been regarded within the prison as dropping out" of the course and they would have been afraid that a "note would be added to their file". Understandably, some of the participants described this as "blackmail" or "compulsion". It is almost impossible for a fruitful process of emotional learning to emerge from such a situation, regardless of the method chosen. The most that can be done is to try to deal with the consequences as well as possible.

Another extremely problematic factor in these groups came into play, one that seems to have been so well hidden that even the retrospective evaluation report did not appear to grasp it fully. Not merely were there trust problems within the group – which is often the case and, as stated, is generally a very important and valuable subject for social learning. In addition, there seem to have been *breaches of trust* and *the exertion of pressure* during normal prison life: individuals were confronted with things that they had said in the group, and hierarchies and power structures within the prisoner body were used to exert pressure on participants about what they were and were not allowed to say during group sessions. It hardly needs to be stated that sensitive social therapeutic work is extremely difficult, almost impossible, in such circumstances. These problems were probably also linked to the fact that informal hierarchies and power structures are highly developed amongst the inmates of this prison, because of the lack of social therapeutic measures, and were unaddressed and unchecked to an unusual degree.

At the same time, it should be clearly stated that these events should not (prematurely) be taken to mean that participants should be banned from discussing the events of the group during normal prison life (or, for example, that a group should not include more than one prisoner from the same building, wing or prison – which would be impractical in any case). In fact, if participants can learn to handle these *informal exchanges* in a trusting and confidential

manner, if the necessary level of discretion towards fellow prisoners who are not members of the group is maintained, and if the main results of these processes of exchange are fed back into the group itself, to a suitable extent, then this kind of exchange is an important resource for the group work and for social learning.

This is emphasised, indirectly, in the evaluation report. The coaches underline that the fact that all the participants were "in the same prison building", "knew each other" and thus were already members of a relatively *fixed relationship matrix* can be an advantage. The evaluation report correctly viewed it as a positive development that "[the members of the group] quite obviously continued their exchanges during normal everyday life" and that "some questions which had arisen during the group sessions [were] cleared up afterwards". However, basic levels of willingness to trust others, of security and of sincerity are essential for these processes to take place. And one vital question was not posed by the report: of what psychosocial quality were these informal "clarifications", and also whether these clarifications were brought back into the group – or whether they took place more or less under cover, were linked to power and influence factors, and were not discussed in the group setting.

The interviews held for the present study give some clear indications that the informal background communication between participants in this group often went further than "clearing things up"; in fact *social pressure* was exerted. A number of participants seem to have been given instructions, some directly, some less so, about what could be said within the group setting and how they were to behave there. Statements about religion/politics, family, honour, etc. seem to have been particularly regimented. (An accurate reconstruction was no longer possible.) This certainly meant that there was – involuntary – *regimentation* of the degree of openness with which individuals discussed their lifeworld and their family and social background, revealed their subjective point of view and delved into the scenes of their crimes, and with which they scrutinised each of these. At least one "spy" seems to have been actively communicating what had been said and what had happened in the group to the outside (prison) world and to hierarchically important inmates in the prison building who were not participants. This finding threw some light on the unusually rigid and slightly puzzling division described above, in which some of the group assigned sympathy and antipathy to the two coaches. For, this division may thus be attributed to the high degree of latent tension, fear and aggression caused by extreme distrust and suspicion between the group members.

In this context, the assessment presented in the evaluation report is not entirely adequate. It states that "the question [should] be raised of whether in similar conditions, the further participation [of] individual[s] [those mainly responsible for disruption] is at all useful, or whether it may be necessary, in the interest of the group, to […] exclude participant[s] who display such a lack of cooperativeness and willingness to change" (31). But: How can such a group continue its therapeutic work? How can such a group – which is made up of radicalised individuals with an affinity for hate crime, thus of "extremists of exclusion" – develop the *skills of inclusion, acceptance and tolerance*, if one or more participants are excluded against their will (and without obviously compelling reasons, for example proven, repeated, breaches of confidence)? The group, and the quality of its work, would be in danger of not recovering from the exclusion. For this reason, the following addition should be made to the assessment cited above: just as the participation of each individual in the group should be based on mutual agreement and on an agreed declaration of intent, together with the coaches (which did not happen in this case!), the same should apply to any exclusion – and in the latter case, not merely the coaches, but the entire group should be involved.

The only obvious exception is if a participant has been proven to have acted maliciously, on a number of occasions and for the benefit of outside interests, for example by agitating for political or religious causes and/or carrying out monitoring functions for external third parties. In this case, the *obligation of self-protection* usual in educational and civic education work applies, as do the "*domiciliary rights*" of the premises where the work is done. A lack of "willingness to change" would not usually fulfil this condition (and in any case, is too vague to be used as a criterion for assessment, and encourages exclusion affects). If individuals display personality-related blockages in their willingness to participate actively in the process, an attempt must be made – partly in the interest of the others involved – to work with this blockage (which may well be familiar to other participants). If the group as a whole suffers too much from these blockages, for example because of ongoing disruption, it is admissible to agree with the individual involved that they should leave the group for a certain length of time, perhaps returning later (see above, chapter xx). One-to-one conversations can be used to come to a new agreement on goals or under certain circumstances to a *mutual* decision that it does not currently make sense for the individual to continue with the training course. The fact that the topic of excluding individual participants from the group arose is a sign of how important the *framework of the setting* and the *institutional context* are – or rather: is a reminder that any

ambitions or stipulations coming from the institution about the composition of the group, or about other variables, must be examined closely and where necessary, rejected, explaining the reasons.

xxx 6.7 Reiteration: the importance of the institutional independence of coaches

This difficult group process makes it very clear how important it is that the facilitator of process-oriented group-based courses such as these *come from outside the institution* in question. The issue of mistrust, which is always a major dynamic factor in group work – it cannot be otherwise – represents one of the biggest challenges even for VPN staff, who are not required to provide information to the prison. The events in the group described above make this very clear. But prison staff, even those with social therapeutic roles, cannot deal with this issue effectively because of the basic contextual situation. Such employees are in a position that makes it almost impossible for them to obtain the personal trust of the inmates (see above, chapter xx). Social workers and therapists employed by the prison are accountable to it and their reports will be included in prisoners' files; they are thus involved in decisions to be made by the prison management that will have an enormous impact on the inmates' futures. This is a structural problem that cannot be overemphasised. It makes it much more difficult, if not impossible, for them to develop the necessary personal relationship with the inmates. This was precisely what led to the serious problems with the group described above: the inmates assigned to the group were no longer able "to decide not to participate […] without fear of sanction" or of a "note [being] added to their file" because it "would have been regarded within the prison as dropping out" of a program (29).

This is underlined by the fact that this group, in particular, emphasised during the evaluation meetings how important it was that the coaches were *independent of the institution*. It was welcomed "for a number of different reasons" (31); the participants in this group all stated, as participants in other groups have often done, that they "[would] not [have been] willing to work with employees of the prison (in this way)". They "wanted to be sure that nothing that happened in the training group got into their files". In addition, they said that they had "already had a lot of negative experiences" with "some of the staff", in particular with regard to trust. In addition, some of the participants felt it was important "that there was no chance of them meeting the same people in a different context", referring primarily to the coaches and the

prison staff, but also the other participants in the group. The need for discretion should be accommodated as far as possible, as is usually done in external group therapy settings, but in this case it is probably an indirect reference to the multiplicity of unrevealed and unprocessed breaches of confidence and exertions of influence by non-participants.

A clear indication of how difficult the participants found it – and, as stated, will inevitably find it – to develop their own ability to trust is contained in the statement made by one participant, who said that principally the participants "[were not able] to tell for sure whether [the coaches] actually belonged to the police" (31): "They said they weren't. But they didn't have any ID. None of us can be 100% certain that they weren't from the police. But we trusted them like one has to with people." Getting to this stage of building up human trust in someone who is initially a stranger (from another context) is extremely difficult for these offenders, in particular, but is nevertheless the most important and most effective factor in the type of social work required here (see above, chapter xx). Without it, none of the other methodological elements (biographical work, working-through of the crime scene, civic education, etc.) can have the desired long-term effect. It is thus even more vital that the context for this trust should be secured.

Given this background, the following essential factor must be borne in mind: the *personal independence and lack of institutional involvement* of the coaches are not merely a methodological means of facilitating the development of trust. They are also the subject, and the purpose, of the personal development that it is hoped the inmates will achieve. What is at stake is the vital skill of maintaining personal sovereignty in the face of established institutional and/or social systems, and in particular the skill of distancing oneself from informal pressure to act or behave in a particular way or to conform to a wider group. Such pressure is often part and parcel of everyday life, and is often just as powerful within formal or public institutions as in informal gangs. In addition, pressure to conform and to act in a particular way are particularly significant for the types of crimes these inmates have committed.

Because the inmates of a prison are part of an institution in which even their educators and therapists are all obliged to report on their work and do not have complete freedom of action towards their wards, the preconditions for the development of trust are not favourable. If it is prudent for an inmate to adopt an attitude of restraint, caution and sometimes mistrust, they

will find it difficult to develop the skill of building trust, maintaining boundaries and creating personal sovereignty. In this context, it is of interest to review the statements made by participants in this group that had to do with mistrust or "bad experiences" with the prison staff. Difficult group processes, disrupted by a number of different influences and ambitions external to the group, can always be taken as a reason to ask questions about the extent to which *prison staff* were involved, perhaps to some degree unconsciously, in disruptive dynamics originating in the prison context (an example is the case above, p. xx). As discussed above, the prison staff may have an ambivalent attitude towards external social workers, their methods and their relatively trusting and exclusive access to the inmates; there may be a latent sense of competition. To put this in positive terms: this would mean that consideration should be given to whether the employees of a prison in which a VPN group training course is about to take place may also have a need for information and discussion.

The operative impediments that occurred during the course of this group training course call to mind *two recommendations* which can also be derived from many other, more successful experiences made by the VPN coaches, and are confirmed by many interview responses given by participants in many different groups. The first is, obviously, that where the participants have been involved in non-instrumental, impulsive violent hate crimes, at least some of the social workers used should be sourced from *outside the institution* to ensure their independence. The second is an addition to the first and has to do with the institution itself. Because the use of processual and lifeworld-narrative work in a group setting requires a particularly high level of trust and always involves the direct social environment, even if indirectly (or: this environment has an influence on the group work), it seems advisable to work directly *with the institution* to some degree.

This can be done in a number of ways. For example, *information sessions* can be held about the educational approach to be used or, preferably, openly-managed *feedback and discussion sessions* can be used. In these sessions, staff and prison employees can exchange views about their perceptions of and experiences with the prisoners. Discussion spaces such as these will, first, help to increase insight into and trust in the methodological approach taken by the VPN group work. The prison staff's trust will then also be sensed by the inmates, just as they would pick up on any mistrust or any snide remarks by the staff, with the resulting negative effects on the VPN group. Second, such sessions would allow a discussion, again as open and trusting as possible, about ways in which the prison staff, within the scope of their activities,

can help support the positive development of the prisoners that fall within their area of responsibility, and about any individual difficulties that might arise. VPN has chosen to facilitate this second recommendation by offering training programmes for prison staff, which are usually taken up with interest and bring definite gains.

xxx 6.8 Open process group-dynamic work is effective – in any case

In view of the *scruples and (self-)misunderstandings* that the coaches of this problematic group felt about their methods, it should be emphasised once again that their approach was optimal and that in the circumstances, any group dynamic work was a Herculean task. It should always be remembered that group work using a determinedly open-process approach cannot always be straightforward and easy-going. Although, there is, of course, no reason not to manage group work in an easy-going, stimulating and indeed entertaining manner, a certain level of resistance and onerousness is an essential part of the process, especially at the start and while trust is being developed. The term is, after all, group *work*, and describes how experiences and events are to be *worked* through, and given that past crimes are to be re-evaluated, and the biographical experiences related to the type or pattern of crimes, this would not be easy for anyone. Experiencing and dealing with psychological resistance and inhibitions about expressing oneself are central elements of this work. Thus, the fact that a particular group process was difficult and fraught with problems does not necessarily mean that it had only a limited effect on the personal development of those involved, just as a smooth, pleasant or even entertaining process does not necessarily mean that it has been effective in social therapeutic terms.

This is thus a particularly appropriate point to show in greater detail that this group had a *relatively high level of effectiveness* for the participants despite all the problems encountered. Of course, if the blockages had not been as serious as they were, the group could have worked more intensively on individuals' attitudes and view of themselves, their history and their crimes, and it would have captured a larger number of the participants. That was not possible in this case; the "reservations and mistrust" which initially "clearly prevailed" (as is inevitable), "could not be completely eliminated for all the participants" during the course of the group work (30).

The final assessment given by one of the participants was certainly unambiguous: "To be totally honest, if I hadn't had to do the course, I wouldn't have done it, I've had it up to here with all this therapy stuff" (30). Another, similarly-minded, participant noted, "Everything I was shown in the course, I knew all that before I went in there" (40). These participants would undoubtedly have benefited from the opportunity to gradually come to an agreement on goals for the programme before it started, and from a calmer and more attentive group process in general. Such a process would have done more justice to their own personal needs and challenges. Only then would they have reached a point at which they could look back on the experience as more subjectively beneficial. But even this stance of annoyance and disappointment is more promising than an attitude of being completely unaffected, of mental absence and polite avoidance; it raises the question of what, if not the experiences actually encountered, would be helpful. For this reason, the possibility cannot be excluded that for participants like these, memories of a experience – even one with negative emotional connotations ("therapy stuff") – will recur at decisive points in his/her life after prison and may have some impact on his/her behaviour.

However, what should in particular be emphasised is that the statements made by these participants and others to the evaluators should be taken as accurate, especially where they give a *more positive account* of the group experience, in some respects in contrast to the coaches. Only a small number of the participants said the course had been "no use" to them. Others said that despite everything, the course had "gone pretty well", "it was even good fun some of the time" and that it had "helped". One participant stated that although "a few things were totally unrealistic" (for example the role plays) "it helped me, I think we learned a few things". Another said "I enjoyed it, even if there were arguments sometimes, with a lot of talking, overall I enjoyed it and it helped me a lot". Others said "I learned a lot. You have problems with violence, you have to think about what's going to happen later on." "The group was good, everyone has problems, this group has to work". "Overall I reckon okay, it helped, I think we learned a few things." "It was an opportunity" (40).

And even with this difficult group, a sense of mutual responsibility seems to have developed in a few cases in the informal contacts of everyday prison life: "If one of the members of the group got into problems in the wing he would [reportedly] get help from the other course participants" (21) – an important potential of open-process group work. For Samet (see above, xx and more elaborately below, chapter xx), who took part in a more productive group, this

worked extremely well. Samet was originally seen as an outsider but because of his participation in the group, he exerted a pacifying influence that had a widespread effect; all of the bullying dynamics usual in that wing ceased to operate, even among those prisoners not participating in the training course.

The fact that so much energy was spent wrestling with tangible blockages, that a number of overwhelmingly powerful, disrupting influences were identified but could not be properly dealt with, the fact that despite differences in roles and background ambitions, there was a common effort to ensure that the recurring differences were not ignored or denied – this alone is a significant impact factor in this method of intervention. And it can be assumed that this experience of "honest and peaceable efforts in the face of more powerful opposition" was, for most of the participants, an experience that was almost completely new.

xxx 7. Interconnecting the processual group work with the institutional framework of the prison

A good deal has been said above about how important the *institutional framework* of each VPN group is within its prison (see chapter xx). The *contextual relation* represents a very central but often overlooked impact factor of the processual "responsibility-educational" approach of VPN (“Verantwortungspädagogik” ®). As was clear in the above case history of a group process beset by numerous difficulties, this is not only a matter of interactive connections impacting from the prison onto the group, which can sometimes become so problematic as to exceed the capacities of group work. There are also effects that, conversely, impact from the group onto the prison context and that are above all of a positive, pro-social nature. Two examples will be provided of situations where the interconnections between training and prison context were unusually distinct, and that led to corresponding learning impacts for the participants. These cases are also exemplary of the fact that in processual work it is always necessary to expect various institutional framework phenomena – and that these represent a particular training potential in terms of preparing participants for life after prison.

xxx 7.1 Interconnections with co-prisoners

(I) Samet, the violent offender with Muslim background who very successfully completed a VPN training course (see chapter xx above) talked in the interview – albeit very late on, due to his personal modesty – about how the social climate in the section of the prison to which he had been assigned had undergone a fundamental change during his training. The seven other prisoners of his section had not taken part in the training at all, and only Samet himself belonged to the VPN group. According to Samet, "two or three" of the prisoners of the section/wing used to be "really pushed about" by the other four or five prisoners in the section as well as in the prison as a whole. One of those discriminated against, Ehrhart, was "pretty rightwing" and "had real problems with foreigners, because he had swastika tattoos". However after Samet had completed the training course, "at the end, after three or four months everyone sat down together to eat, the Nazi too". The "prison officer couldn't believe it, he almost fainted when he saw us all sitting at the table together."

Ehrhart, the "Nazi with the swastika tattoos", sometimes came to Samet, the Muslim, "for a chat" in his cell or in the communal area. He had "quite a few difficulties ... but he would never have done something like the group because for him that was all 'the system', that was his ideology, he would never have gone along with it". It is quite possible, then, that Samet, whose discharge was relatively soon, would have been able, had he stayed longer, to encourage even an inmate like Ehrhart, who at that point did not fulfil the minimum requirements for the VPN training and was thus very likely to re-offend, to participate in social therapeutic measures and to work on himself.

It is practically impossible to reconstruct in detail how the wing/section started to get along better as a result of Samet's influence. Samet, at any rate, was unable to remember or recall this. However it appeared that there had been an increasing number of small instances of mutual rapprochement or ones that Samet had initiated, leading others to start doing the same. These instances of rapprochement were initially occasioned by minor events, for example handing out cutlery, salt and pepper and so on, and by similarly minor interactions in the communal area. The micro-scenes then increasingly led to more profound contact being made between prisoners who previously belonged to exclusive cliques, as is commonly the case. Conversation was struck up increasingly frequently and people became less hostile towards one another. Ehrhart in particular opened up to Samet and as a result started getting on better with the others.

Here it needs to be emphasised that this process, at the end of which the prison officer "nearly fainted" because he "couldn't believe it", only began at the moment that Samet started the group training, and not when he first joined the wing almost a year before. As discussed above, before joining the VPN group training Samet was considered an outsider. This new communal feeling in the section also became a topic in the group, so that it was possible to involve the experiences of transformation that occurred in the everyday life of the prison.

It is thus possible to assume that some of the positive developments in Samet's social environment were a result of the group-dynamic, experiential and social learning in the group. All the methodological tools of the VPN training concept – the exercises, role plays and the forms of narrative self-expression – will have worked in combination.

However the communication and internalization of relatively straightforward behavioural rules – that can already be obtained at a practical, behavioural-therapeutic level – must also have played an important role. Samet mentioned that he reported "absolutely everything" that happened to do with bullying and the like, a way of behaving that directly contradicted the usual informal codex among prisoners of silence and "honour", however something that the VPN training actively discusses and exercises. That Samet by no means became the hated outsider or remained the reserved outsider that he hade been is all the more remarkable. One reason for this will have been that the training course strengthened Samet's social skills considerably. At any rate, he was clearly very adroit in the way he went about things and had a good understanding of how to represent his consistent anti-violent and anti-bullying behaviour and to communicate this to his fellow inmates in a way that gained their respect as opposed to losing it. A context requirement that should not be underestimated is that the employees of the prison service were obviously able to deal with Samet's reports in an appropriate way (something that is by no means always the case and that emphasises the necessity of relevant training).

This very positive impact process at the level of institutional embedding of a VPN training course might possibly have been supported by the fact that Samet, as a 22 year-old, was already old in comparison to his fellow prisoners. He was also at first obviously a very reserved and religiously inward inmate and thus possessed significant resources of his own as well as a relatively stable ability to distance himself from cliques. yy However, it was only the participation in the VPN training course that enabled him to develop his resources not only in contemplative self-reflection but also in interactive engagement with a group, and thus to secure them even more sustainably. This would have been practically impossible with the relatively strong reservation of his previous manner. It is therefore logical to assume that without the VPN training it would not have been possible to consolidate to the same extent the reflective abilities that Samet was able to obtain through religious contemplation and reading – and that after his discharge they might not have been available to him in quite such a stable and unshakeable form as was *de facto* the case. After all, Samet came from an extremely violent milieu, something clearly reflected in his own career of violence. Also, as already mentioned, one of his brothers had been repeatedly sentenced for extremely serious crimes, for example manslaughter, so that in the end it was impossible to prevent his expulsion from Germany (see the short biographical profile for Samet in chapter xx). Samet, on the other hand, in the end was able to distance himself safely from the cycle of violence

and loss of control and became a pillar of the family – and on top of that qualified to become a co-coach with VPN.

yy All in all, what could be observed also with many other, less exceptional examples of institutional context effects: Any processual intervention procedures have a more or less visible effect on their direct social (and institutional) environment and are thereby able to generate a re-connection to the social-therapeutic work itself. And this needs to be recognized as one of its particular educational potentials.

xxx 7.2 Procedures of peer-to-peer work and self-qualification as opportunity for a future federal model project

As mentioned, had Samet stayed longer in the prison he may have been able to motivate a person such as the "Nazi" Ehrhart to participate in a group training course and perhaps also to accompany him in this. Although Ehrhart displayed an attitude of complete rejection of anything institutional (the "system"), he was clearly open for personal contact with a fellow prisoner, a Muslim even, who under conditions outside the prison he would have considered his natural adversary, with whom fundamentally there can be no communication.

This observation indicates a particular potential for further project development which is inherent to the VPN method – as to all processual working methods – and which is currently not perceived as such by VPN: the systematic deployment of maximally independent *peer-to-peer work* and the supervised *self-qualification in preparation for professional employment* in the area of personal competence and soft skills. In the case of employment oriented abilities (e.g. skills empowerment), participants can be enabled to instruct and to implement particular functions of the VPN method themselves, namely the coaching of basic psycho-social competencies. In other words, after obtaining a certain level of personal qualification, individual and selected members of VPN groups begin themselves to work with other inmates who are not (yet) members of a group – as was the case with Samet at an informal and purely intuitive level with Ehrhart. This must nevertheless take place in clearly delineated settings and be closely accompanied by the coaches and the group. For example, it might be possible for a VPN participant to make initial contact and carry out informational conversations with a non-participant, or conduct initial explorative conversations to build up a picture of the

personal and familial life sphere of a candidate for a new VPN group, or his typical offence scenarios. The VPN participant can be coached in how to conduct such a conversation appropriately, in other words the strategies best followed when making enquiries. The conversational experience of the participant can then be discussed and reflected upon in the group, and can be supplemented, moderated and triangulated by the coaches on the basis of their interviews with the candidate that they are conducting in parallel.

This additional emphasis on *"professional qualification"* would set a fundamentally broader premise. A VPN group of this kind would no long only have the character of a social-therapeutic measure, but would also have the additional option of being a measure for professional-personal training. From the outset participants would be able to draw on the knowledge – and measure themselves according to this – that they are taking part in a *qualification course*, in which their broad-ranging experiences in the area of violent behaviour can be used to develop basic pedagogic skills and to gain practical experience in implementing these. In this way, each participant of a VPN group thus established would make as much progress as is possible for him personally within this framework, and his personal qualifications would be certified in corresponding detail.

Questions aside about how to establish this procedural element of qualification and peer-to-peer work (this would require the precise developmental and experimental work of a *specific model project*), the concept itself nevertheless matches the evaluation results presented in the *"Xenos" Federal Programme* of the Federal Ministry of Employment in 2007. The purpose of the programme was to counter "discrimination, xenophobia and rightwing extremism" using "employment market related measures ... at the interface between ... training and work." The programme operated the basic assumption that "activities against xenophobia and racism" are best conducted in direct connection with "an employment context" and that the "testing of successful and innovative approaches" towards qualification, in other words "preparation for work and ... professional training" are particularly suited to this (3) – an assumption that indeed proved crucial for the success of the programme. It was clearly shown that it is above all necessary to qualify susceptible or already manifestly extremist and/or delinquent young persons for "tolerant co-existence" and to "provide them with key qualifications for professional training" *simultaneously* and in the course of an *integrated procedural mode* (2). More broadly, it clearly emerged that the main things were "social basic competence (social

competence, conflict ability) and intercultural competence" (5) – i.e. the psycho-affective abilities that already represent the central impact dimension of the VPN method.
It would no doubt give rise to developmental impulses and qualification effects of the type aimed at by the "Xenos"-programme, if imprisoned young offenders characterized by the problems of affect control and social integration themselves try out – as best they can – aspects of the function of social worker or moderator and assume on a trial basis aspects of the role of their coaches. This would in any case be likely to significantly increase the life competence and "occupational ability" of the young men. Other, related areas and projects of social work also had success with approaches conceived as process-based qualifications (see for example the 'Fair Skills' project by 'Cultures Interactive', Weilnböck 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Noteworthy here is the observation that peer-to-peer work and supervised self-qualification in preparation for professional employment come naturally to *processual working methods*, since individual developmental process and personal qualification are interchangeably inherent.

With the introduction of a certified qualification as VPN co-coach, VPN has already made the first step in this direction. It will not be coincidental that it was Samet that has become the first though so far only VPN co-coach. In connection with the function, Samet attends selected sessions as a guest in ongoing VPN groups, talks about the course of his life and his group experiences and answers participants questions about these subjects. Perhaps the apparent stalling of the co-coach qualification process is to be traced to the fact that this concept dimension of the VPN method has not been systematically explored and had so far been limited to talking to particularly talented individuals after the conclusion of a group.

xxx 7.3 Interconnections with the prison and prison employees

(II) The second narrative evidence (of a different interview partner) that will be discussed here as another of the distinctive phenomena of the interconnection of a VPN group with the *institutional framework,* concerned a problematic that arose from a particular employee of the prison. The professional attitude of this employee was obviously impaired by the fact that he regularly gave in to the impulse to provoke and to harass the young prisoners in a well-concealed and subtle way. This often led to the young persons involved getting angry, losing control and thereby inviting massive penalties. This extended all the way to the transfer from the relative low security youth wing to normal prison conditions, which was seriously

detrimental to their prognoses for development. This employee clearly demonstrated a complex, sadistically structured behavioural pattern that led him – probably largely unconsciously – to act out unprocessed experiences of (relational) aggression in his own biography in a "projective-identificatory" mode against the young persons (Kernberg et al. 77f., 233f.).

In any integration work with violent offenders, circumstances as difficult as this will inevitably have multiple and highly disruptive consequences. (Here, the importance of training and supervision of prison employees again becomes clear.) However with an experiential-reflective, group-dynamic and processual training concept as practiced by VPN, such situations also give rise to a specific opportunity and a social-therapeutic potential (both for the group as well as for the supervision of prison employees), one that can be used systematically – especially for the purposes of preparation for discharge. The route that the group took in this not uncomplicated matter of their immediate prison context is thus all the more revealing.

Both coaches paid a great deal of attention to the reports that the group participants made concerning this employee, allowing a good deal of space for extended – narrative – description and (self-)critical discussion. In addition, the course programme was put on hold, in accordance with the acknowledged analytical group-psychotherapeutic principle that "disturbances of normal procedure and framework phenomena have priority attention" (see ch. xx processual character). In response, it was possible after a medium length of time to systematically work with the incidents, so that they could be used in optimal fashion for the group process and the participants' personal development of competence in the area of conflict ability. It is necessary to emphasise in passing that such a step cannot on the whole be opted for in predominantly non process-open, strictly curricular and modular procedural methods! This educational usage of immediate life-world surroundings demonstrates the particular opportunities inherent in a processual, contextual-situational training concept.

How did this usage then take place in detail in the group in question? Initially the expectation arose within the group, understandably enough, that the coaches would deal with the problem by reporting it to the prison authorities and advising on how it should be resolved. Had this course been taken immediately or even at all, then it would still have been possible to exploit a large part of the aforementioned social therapeutic potential of the situation; other aspects,

however, would have been forfeited. The reason for this is that it is possible, regardless of whether the matter is reported, to work with the participants' experiences of the employee's provocative behaviour. More generally, it is possible also to experience and to rehearse how to talk about such things in front of others with maximum calm, precision and consideration for the listener – and how to discuss together alternative ways to act. And so it was in this group, especially since these incidents proved very well-suited to prompting discussion about and processing earlier personal memories relating to comparable experiences of active or passive aggression and experiences of being provoked in more or less subtle forms.

A focussed group experience thereby became possible in which scenes of aggression could be dealt with in reference to the current example. Especially significant was the fact that these scenes concerned conflicts with persons of authority – and not "only" people of the same age. The aggressive loss of control towards superiors or officials – as well as avoidance or timid subordination – represented a recurrent biographical problematic among this group of persons. The participants were able to draw on a rich fund of memories of scenes of aggression and escalation, and were able to do so without having to directly appraise their own offence, a central aspect of which was, of course, aggressive loss of control. Role plays about the incidents as they were reported and about options for de-escalation were then developed. This use of the immediate experiences of individual participants should by no means be underestimated. In the group work they can contribute not only to the matter at hand being satisfactorily resolved, but also and above all to participants being able to resolve similarly complex and highly-charged situations they might experience in the future without resorting to violence or acting submissively.

yy However, had the coaches, left it at that and went ahead to just reported the behaviour of the prison officer to the management, then the participants, despite the educationally useful reflection and practice, would have had their own initiative taken out of their hands. The real challenge of the situation was, namely, that the participants themselves, albeit with the support of the coaches, independently opted for a systematic and clever course of action, which they then implemented in disciplined fashion, so as effectively to avert the danger of this complex situation.

Aside from this, it has to be seen as uncertain as to whether the problem could have been reliably solved by reporting it to the prison management. It is very possible that the

management would have failed to take the necessary action. For example, it can easily be imagined that a credibility problem might have arisen, insofar as the view might have been taken that a training group of this sort naturally tends to exaggerate and therefore any official complaints that arise from it must be treated with caution. Alternatively, a closing of ranks between prison officers and management might have occurred, something that can be observed all too frequently. If this occurs, then any measures that are taken often result in the mere deferral of the problem; either that, or it becomes more refined still, in this case the provocative behaviour of the officer concerned. In actual fact, the officer appeared in the past to have acted very subtly and intelligently, so that it was always difficult to prove any misconduct, causing the people lodging the complaint to appear unconvincing and to remain unsuccessful. These risks might have also arisen had the individual participants of the group work been advised to report incidents of this kind independently. While this option might promise a good deal of beneficial psycho-social learning experience, there is the risk of failure.

The course of action that ended up being chosen was able to overcome this risk and achieve a still wider usage of the current object of experience. It was discussed and decided in the group that the participants would initially agree not to react to the harassment of the prison officer; in other words, through shrewd abstinence, to protect themselves and to support one another both within and outside the group in carrying on with this strategy. This was not simply passive submission, because at the same time each person was compiling a precise written documentation of the incidents. With the help of the group colleagues, this report was formulated with sufficient clarity to later be presented as formally – which would then receive additional credibility through reference to the successive group interaction with the coaches. Furthermore, it was agreed that some of the more mature and emotionally stable prisoners – those sure that they would be able to extract themselves from the officer's attempts to provoke them – would attempt to present themselves as targets, and where possible do this in the presence of witnesses. This method implied various learning phases and pertained to numerous and centrally significant areas of competence for the participants, which will need to be detailed more precisely later.

The highly successful result of this action makes the question irrelevant as to how far the coaches were taking a risk with the strategy of encouraging participants to actively offer themselves as targets. It can be assumed that at all times the coaches proceeded having

precisely assessed the respective process situations and their concrete intervention options. At any rate, it did indeed result in one of the participants of the group having to face severe disciplinary measures because of a conflict with the officer in question.

As is usual in this type of prison, a group meeting was called for all prisoners and employees, including the prison psychologist, in which the offence is described and the penalty explained in detail and then enforced. Supported by the coaches, the group had made preparations, with the result that the group action could indeed be carried out more or less as anticipated.

Once everyone had assembled, the prison management and the psychologist duly described the offence of the group member and announced the punishment incurred. This was very serious: the intention was to transfer the participant to another part of the prison with stricter conditions and far less social-therapeutic provision. The accused and the plaintiff were then cross-examined, with the young man, as planned, making little attempt to argue that the officer had provoked and harassed him.

This was the moment at which – one after the other – several of the group colleagues stood up and in a calm and measured fashion talked freely, without referring to notes, about their own experiences with the officer. The impulse achieved by this round of comments was significant and alone would have sufficed for fulfilling the more narrow aim. In addition came the fact that the individual speakers were prepared to counter doubts about their credibility – and even doubts about the integrity and credibility of the group, led as it was by persons external to the prison – by describing, on the basis of their written notes, precisely how the individual incidents played out and how these were discussed, checked and assessed in the group. Had it then been necessary to provide yet further corroboration, the coaches themselves would have been able to emphatically confirm that the group discussion had indeed taken place as described, and have been able to provide their own assessment of the incidents as well as of the personality of the officer himself – and in any event have been able to draw comparisons to similar experiences in other prisons. In this case, this was not necessary, or, more precisely, did not have to be entered into in detail.

The result of this round was that the participant was able to remain on the wing without punishment and the officer transferred to a position where he no longer had any significant contact with the prisoners.

xxx 7.4 The factor of "open-narrative recounting" – and the effectiveness of lifeworld-based work

What was learned in the course of this spontaneous social experiment in terms of *personal competences* and *soft skills* as preparation for discharge from prison? To what extent does this underline the importance of the *process-openness* and *life-word orientation* of this social therapeutic procedure?

The participants gained several *essential learning experiences* that would not have been possible with anything like the same intensity via other means. (1) The participants first of all received the immediate opportunity to observe how interpersonal dynamics of projection, provocation and aggression work and what happens when persons that are driven by a high level of aggression use others – in a "projective-identificatory" manner – to be able to indirectly transfer and/or live out their aggression. (2) This (self-)observation takes place very precisely, so that it is also possible to determine yy which of one's own affects and physical reactions are reliable personal warning sign which signal projection dynamics of this sort, and how one can thus intuitively distinguish whether persons, friends, mates – and also superiors – are "beneficial" or "detrimental" to oneself. (3) More broadly, it was possible to discuss and to rehearse how best to react in these situations, and what options exist for avoiding acute involvement in the aggression dynamic. (4) An important and new experience for many here is probably the fact that one is able to talk about such experiences with others whom one trusts, and thus how one is able to draw on others for constructive help and support.

(5) Of no means negligible significance in all this is the stimulus provided for the development of the personal ability to *report and to recount something*, i.e. to narratively form, order and portray a subjectively experienced sequence of events in front of and for others – and ultimately also for oneself. It has been possible in practical work, and not only since the recent renaissance of interdisciplinary narratology (Herman 2007) as the science of human narration, to repeatedly observe the following: that the more poorly educated, socially excluded and problematic the target groups are, the lower the ability among to recount something with the necessary detail, calm and emphasis, so that the listener develops a personal interest and an adequate picture of the events described. At the same time, this

ability to narrate is an essential requirement for being able to obtain others' attention and assistance in the first place.

One of the VPN coaches summed it up as follows: "They have very few opportunities to narrate" in their personal life-sphere; "they actually have no awareness of it at all" and are barely "able" to do it. In other words, the young men are practically unable to perform "narration" as a psycho-linguistic everyday practice. "If at all, they learn to do it a bit with their girlfriends", although "with girlfriends they tend to assume the role of listener, of carer" and often do not get the chance to develop a personal ability to narrate. "The far-right violent offender especially is very closed. In the narrative interview you have to provide a great deal of personal stimulus and have to be very attentive oneself ... however that works, they open up after that, and then they are themselves surprised about how much and what they tell."

For that reason, the converse also applies: social-therapeutic interventions with this target group are all the more successful the more the *ability to narrate (trustingly and honestly)* – the central medium of the processual method – can be developed.

Narration requires everything that is important for social integration: (a) a minimum of cognitive and perceptive clarity over the events experienced and their – more or less subjective perceived – context; (b) the verbal ability to portray them linguistically and communicate them to others; (c) in psycho-affective respect, the ability to express one's own emotional reaction to the events and personal engagement in the portrayal, while at the same time maintaining the necessary calm so as to avoid speechlessness or over-emotionality; (d) more broadly, the basic confidence that one is able to reach and gain the listener for one's story, and a certain stress resistance as concerns the interconnection dynamic that might be caused by the listener; (e) the ability to anticipate the listener's reactions and questions; and (f) the basic readiness and ambition to generate and to develop the social relations that are inherent in any narration, and that represent its main motivation. Moreover, alongside its social-integrative and pacifying function, narration also has great relevance in pragmatic and formal terms, for example, as with the group above, when it is a case of presenting a defence in an official hearing. In a method like the VPN, situations of this kind can be rehearsed as the occasion demands. Moreover, with this target group (f) the act of writing a report of events represents an activity that requires a good deal of learning, however that is enthusiastically embarked upon because of the participants' sheer involvement in it. In the preparatory group

phase, (g) a mutual anticipation of future events took place, involving a sober consideration of what would happen and what one needed to be ready for, during which certain participants came to present themselves as targets to the prison officer. The group had thus embarked on a far-reaching social experiment occasioned by immediate circumstances that touched upon numerous areas of the participants' competence and behaviour, and that contained a high degree of psycho-social learning potential, both in cognitive as well as psycho-affective respects.

In methodological respect it is above all necessary to recall that alone the fact that the space and the attention existed to enable experiences like this to be treated in the group, and on the basis of this to think about how individual participants would behave in the future, can be seen as an important impact and success factor of this – processual – method. Despite and precisely because of the highly stressful circumstances that occasioned it, a calm and concentrated discussion was carried out that, by means of common strategic consideration, pursued the aim of achieving a solution that involved neither violence nor submission. This pinpointed precisely the competency that generally is underdeveloped among young violent offenders. It therefore needs to be emphasised all the more that direct and exhaustive *usage of context and framework phenomena* for the social-therapeutic group work can only take place when a process-open methodological approach underlies it – and when the period of time available for the process can be granted *ad hoc* (so that the main focuses of the group work, e.g. the appraisal of the biography and the crime, can be put on hold for the time being).

In this and less striking examples of *contextual interconnection* in VPN groups, the educational effort expended in process-open methods has proved to be thoroughly profitable. It also takes into account the general experience made in all advanced approaches to institutional and case supervision, namely that to carry out pedagogic and social-therapeutic work that does not refer to the institutional setting and that does not involve the immediate micro-social context of the participant is only able to develop a fraction of its impact potential – yy and has therefore been not very successful in producing long-term behavioural changes among participants. More generally, the two examples cited above recall the common observation – a veritable truism – above all made by experienced teachers and educators in schools: that the communication of social and moral competencies above all requires the integration of the direct social surroundings and informal spaces. A weekly lesson in ethics and social competence is hardly likely to be helpful when the direct lifeworld experience of

the participants is not thematised within the institutional space. For example, if a school class or the school as a whole has a problem with bullying, then to deal with the topic of bullying in purely theoretical terms or by means of un-contetextualised exercises will be largely ineffective.

With extremist violent offenders it is all the more the case that work will be more effective and successful the more it succeeds in actively involving the surrounding context, in other words the prison. It makes a big difference whether an educational measure is just one of the many carried out for its own sake, in a hermetic space, or whether it is able to reach a *prison public* and make a noticeable impact on it. With hate-crime offenders with political or religious extremist background, the institutional and social context dynamic is a particularly important aspect. Not only do the crimes almost always result from a contextual clique dynamic, the victims also usually make reference – more or less accurately – to an alleged consensus within a larger sector of the social mainstream. After all, the extremist acts with the – sometimes heavily distorted – consciousness that many others have the same opinion, and that only a few do what many consider to be the right thing, and what therefore has to be done. The integration and alternating transparency and delimitation of various interconnected and partly conflictual sectors of the public (the VPN group, the informal group on the prison wing / section, the prison as a whole, the surrounding society) therefore represents an especially important experience and a central impact factor in social-therapeutic work with this group of offenders.

xxx 8. Typical difficulties in the transfer of the VPN approach to other fields of work and socio-cultural areas (not yet translated)

8.1 Lines of conflict and 'Inter-agency'-dynamics between classical cognitive civic educational teaching and open-process, narrative group work (not yet translated)

8.2 The sensitive issue of getting in personal contact with vulnerable persons and perpetrators – Aspects of the setting of deradicalisation work (not yet translated)

8.3 ‚Tommi' 1: Case history of a problematic situation in a project of deradicalisation work – and its conflict causing impact on the team (not yet translated)

8.4 Institutional conditions of rivalry, internal division and possessiveness with regard to the target group – the necessity of quality management and professionalizing in deradicalisation (not yet translated)

8.5 ‚Tommi' 2: The systemic group-dynamic processes in the team (not yet translated)

8.6 A pedagogic blunder – under the veil of 'correct' civic education (not yet translated)

8.7 A case of 'mirroring' of the target group's extremism into the team – the necessity of professional consultancy and formative evaluation (not yet translated)

8.8 How the team dynamic went on – conflicts and irrationalities within liberal civil society (not yet translated)

8.9 Acting out the internal conflicts vis-a-vis the participants – worst case of a typical 'inter-agency'-conflict (not yet translated)

8.10 The pitfalls of civic education and deradicalisation work: The personal ability of empathy/ shift of perspective – understood psychologically and/or pedagogically? And danger of an anti-psychological attitude in social work
(not yet translated)

8.11 The benefits and limits of case and team supervision (not yet translated)

xxx 9. Links with societal and academic discourses in the national and international field of prevention of (rightwing) extremism and hate crime

On the basis of findings concerning the necessity for "institutional integration" in the case of a processual, relationship-based piece of work such as that of VPN (cf. p. xx), certain conclusions were already beginning to emerge. No one is unaffected by ideological or religious extremism. More than with other forms of delinquency, the problems and concerns of (de-)radicalisation always affect society as a whole and are emotionally charged affairs. They are closely connected with the history of regions and nations, and with the family biography of all their citizens. The work of de-radicalisation is therefore always subject to various external influences (which may be disruptive) and to different social, medial, party-political and academic discourses. Practitioners who work processually and are relationship-based in their approach are at the heart of these discourses. This is because – more than the more cognitive, modularised methodologies – relationship-based, processually operating practitioners are personally involved in the work and they involve social and medial discourses directly in their activities. By contrast, with those who are further removed from practical work with the target groups and their problems, the willingness to get personally involved seems to be tempered by the need for mental defence mechanisms against the emotionally stressful aspects of the subject matter. The various social and academic discourses – as well as their respective professional environments (media presentation, party political debate, ministerial decisions, administrative procedures, educational implementation) – are all the more important for the assessment of an intervention method like that of VPN.

xxx 9.1 The most recent evaluation of the Federal Government's model projects – direct "conflict management" and the factors of "life-world" and "socio-emotional development"

It is worth noting that our observations on the methodological factors of processuality, relationship work, trust building and lifeworld-narrative work – which we categorised as second order factors or so-called "soft factors" – are directly confirmed by the findings of the recently concluded evaluation of the *Federal Programmes for the Promotion of Democracy*, which included programmes for combating political/religious extremism and youth violence (“Abschlussbericht - Vielfalt”). A brief glance at the range of existing government

programmes – and especially the category of model projects in rightwing extremism prevention – will therefore underpin and complement our results to a great extent. At the same time, an overview will be given of the current state of methodological development and the situation in general, including discourses and debates in the field of open youth work in Germany. Later, the perspective will be extended to European Union projects in progress, so that experiences from the international field of hate crime and extremism prevention can be included (xx).

In the introductory summary of the final report, the publishing office of the federal ministry summarises the "key message" of the expert commentary, specifically emphasising that "against the background of experience gained from implementation (of the model projects in particular) attention [should] be given to juveniles at increased risk of 'rightwing extremist orientation'" (3). Together with strengthening the forces of civil society and registering and prosecuting offences, it recommends the further testing of carefully adapted and effective methods of establishing a pedagogical rapport not only with those "at risk of rightwing extremism" but also with young people who already have a strong "*rightwing extremist orientation*". The implication is that this task, probably the most difficult within this area of work, has been under-represented in the model projects, which could point to great methodological challenges in that area.

In addition, both the expert commentary and the appendices "strongly support" the recommendation of the report that "in future the emphasis should be placed more on the perspective of conflict transformation" with these juveniles (and local responsible persons), and that, accordingly, the title of future programmes of this federal promotion should be "C*onflict Management* in the context of Rightwing Extremism, Youth and Local Democracy". This is in line with the above recommendation. Here again, albeit indirectly, attention is drawn to the fact that many model projects of rightwing extremism prevention – and this is generally true of the majority of civil society initiatives in east and west Germany in the last decade – tend to take place away from the problem areas and more at the margins of the phenomenon of rightwing extremism, for example, "at an institutional (e.g. school) level or at an individual level (help in a single case)"; either this or they offer short-term victim support and limited "crisis intervention". Here, consultancy and instruction functions dominate, aimed at promoting understanding of democracy and general support for the civil society ethos of

the groups and local authorities concerned (Full Report of Expert Commentary [EC] in Thematic Cluster 2 [TC 2], 5, and 7.1, 68).

On the other hand, there seems to be a certain caution about direct access to the target group of "more seriously at-risk" or "*rightwing extremist oriented young persons*". This reserve may justifiably be attributed to the great – and to some degree unacknowledged – uncertainty that appears to characterise the field of youth work when the concrete question arises about the best educational approach in dealing with these juveniles. It has often been found that open youth work practitioners operating within highly problematic catchment areas are puzzled as to how they can find and implement stable and educationally effective ways of coping with widespread anti-democratic, xenophobic and right-leaning youth environments. In view of the complexity and methodological difficulty of youth work in socially sensitive areas, this uncertainty is only too understandable. This is compounded by the fact that, although the ministry recommends that, in future, a strategy of direct "conflict management" in the immediate "context of rightwing extremism" be pursued (in other words, direct work with the target group and its social environment), there are no generally available programmes of educational intervention. These programmes need first to be developed in model projects – and then, of course, mainstream them throughout the relevant institutions.

xxx 9.2 Cognitive versus emotional learning – still an unsolved issue in pedagogical practice

The ministry's final report also states that "one weakness of the federal programme [is] the tendency to *overstress the educational topic* and to under-emphasise the aspect of *subject-focus*", meaning, in particular, areas such as individual "identity formation" and "conflict" and the subjective "need for recognition". The report agrees that it was "probably right" to focus on "the idea of education" (especially, for example, in TC 3, which deals with the intercultural concerns of the immigrant society). Yet "people did not acquire the ability to deal with cultural diversity because they were told over and over again that it is a 'good thing'"; it could only be developed as a personal process "gradually, through conflictive experience". The report continues that it should be borne in mind that the dominance of the topic of "education" often went along with an "overemphasis on knowledge-oriented and *cognitive aspects*", which, moreover, were implemented "in the context of *short-term interventions*" as individual

events or teaching modules. This was less favourable from the educational point of view. It would be preferable for consideration to be also given to "*emotional processes*" which were in keeping with "a methodology oriented towards *long-term developments*".

What is stated in the above comment with regard to thematic cluster 3 ("immigrant society") applies even more to thematic cluster 2 – "youth susceptible to rightwing extremism". On this subject, the report of the expert commentary (EC) more emphatically states: The "short-term workshop activities concentrating primarily on the cognitive area [appear] rather unconvincing"; a better "criterion of the quality of preventative work" is the question as to whether the organisers "succeed in adequately addressing the *social and emotional sensitivities* of young people" – particularly when the target group is inclined to violence and extremism. For this reason "the over-emphasis on a cognitively oriented methodology should be supplemented by learning processes on the emotional level" (brief summary of EC for TC 3, 2009, 3)

As early as the interim report at the end of the first year "the EC [found it conspicuous] that at the present moment, *emotional and affective aspects* were not given sufficient consideration in the various approaches adopted by the model projects". At this point the EC confesses to considerable surprise at this deficiency, since "investigations [...] in the field of social psychology" had long since proved beyond reasonable doubt "that the *power of prejudices to exert influence* is closely linked to emotion and affect" (Annual report of EC for TC 3, 2008, 4). The implication is that this makes it all the more incomprehensible that so little emphasis is placed on this well-known core psycho-social problem area. The expert commentary is therefore keen to highlight, as a "key aspect of collaboration" with the model projects, the question of "the '*emotional motivation*' that leads [young people] to hold such 'closed world views'" – as well as the question of how this problem, together with the social-educational practice built on it, "can be taken account of in the work of the model projects" in the future.

Evidently the two reports have in mind both the realities of so-called "*modern rightwing extremism*" and the *family-related and biographical complexity* of the motives for resorting to it (about which more will be said below in the light of Köttig's biographical researches). The ministerial final report emphasises that "the expert commentary regards the interaction between modern rightwing extremism and democracy as [fundamentally] a *societal conflict*" (21) which affects the entire community. It also explicitly points out that, "in principle,

children and young people are also involved", since, firstly, "modern rightwing extremism makes [...] concrete appeals to young people in particular", where "there may be a *subjective demand* for it." Secondly, "these conflicts have an impact" at different levels "in the *life-worlds of children and young people*" – meaning that anti-democratic, anti-liberal and latently extremist attitudes are also widespread in much of normal adult society. The conflictual phenomenon of "rightwing extremism" can even be found in the "families and relationship networks of children", and the psycho-social "appraisal of the phenomenon" might actually "increase young people's vulnerability to the dangers of rightwing extremism". And this, of course, will not be any different with Jihadist social milieus.

"Subject orientation, relationship to the life-world and sensitivity to conflict", as well as consideration of aspects of the "socio-emotional" development of the individual "thus appear to be [...] key quality criteria", which are crucial for the investigation and assessment of sustainable preventative-educational approaches (21).

With regard to the institutional implementation on the ground, the report stresses that work in this complex field is particularly successful "when the project partners make a long-term commitment to the specific situation." It is important here to include the relevant local authority or appropriate institutions (e.g. the prison) over a long period and to involve them in the implementation through "*sustainable and 'open-minded' cooperative relationships*". This reflects the experience of VPN that process-open social-therapeutic work always requires close cooperation with the institutional environment (cf. above chap. xx).

Moreover, the report adds the explicit recommendation that "the linking of *group-centred* work with more individually oriented activities" is desirable (2), in particular with a view to "the strengthening of professionality and the *establishment of a system of quality management*", which would be of great benefit to this difficult work. Wisely, the report warns that "quality management [does] not [mean] administrative control", a misconception that can all too easily arise in the always tense relationship between representatives of the public services and voluntary bodies. Quite rightly, the EC stresses – in a rather inconspicuous note – that especially "concerning the local and institutional contexts", prevention work in the "interaction field of rightwing extremism" is at all times "heavily reliant on competencies in conflict management", simply because conflicts with representatives of state and local institutions are to be expected (brief summary by EC for TC 2, 2009, p. 2). "Quality

management" therefore includes not only a "group-centred" methodology, but also needs to be conscious of its systemic and institutional dimension, which requires appropriate self-reflexive methods.

xxx 9.3 The Violence Prevention Network in the light of the findings of the final report

It seems, then, that *VPN's working method* – and those of similar providers who have intuitively gone along the same route – have in many respects anticipated the results of the final report and the expert commentary. VPN decided at an early stage to go into the prisons and to approach particularly the young persons who were "more susceptible" and already firmly "right-wing extremist oriented", and who tended to be neglected by mainstream extremism prevention. Here, too, the focus is on direct "conflict management", "identity formation" and particular "recognition" problems of individuals. The work is carried out at the "psycho-affective", "subjective" level, which in the broad field of model projects and in political and civic education work is generally given too little emphasis. This despite the fact that – as has already been said – investigations in the field have long since stressed the key role played by "emotion and affect" in the growth of resentment, radicalisation and of readiness to use violence.

The VPN and similar methods have always extended the "short-term" approach of "knowledge-oriented and cognitive" measures in order to give impetus to medium-term "developments" and "emotional processes". The VPN tool for "personal-civic education" , reconstructed above, provides impressive proof of this (cf. p. xx). In this connection it is only logical that the method also systematically examines the "life-worlds" and life-stories of prisoners as "children and young people", and in doing so pays attention to the "family and network" contexts – whether through the method of "lifeworld-narrative" group discussion and biographical interview or concretely in the organization of family days in prison.

As far as methodology is concerned, it should also be noted that the VPN method is based on a deliberate linkage of "group-centred work" with "individually oriented activities", as the final report explicitly recommends. Furthermore, operating such a sophisticated and at times stressful method of intervention quite naturally prompted the provider to develop "professional standards" and "quality control" mechanisms, implemented for example via (international)

colleague exchange, self-evaluation and occasionally supervision. Here, too, reference should be made to the report, which explicitly states that "in future it [would be] desirable to structurally intensify professional exchanges" and "to improve the opportunities for supervision" (as well as "to develop the culture of recognition of paid workers and voluntary collaborators") (24).

Aspects of *professional exchange, consultancy and supervision* are all the more important to highlight because, surprisingly enough, hardly anyone makes use of *professional external (case) supervision* in model projects any longer (and even less so in normal social work activities). Unlike in the 1980s, there is therefore a largely unacknowledged lack of experience in self-critical work-centred reflection, which given the difficulty of this work can often be problematical. From the perspective of this study, the ministry report's recommendation to remedy this shortcoming is to be welcomed because it is to be feared that a close connection exists between this lack of reflection and the increased tendency in the last two decades to intervene in a more behaviourist-cognitive and short-term manner, and to attach less value to process orientation and psycho-affective developments .

VPN practice also follows the general recommendations of the report in one important organisational respect: wherever the opportunity exists, VPN aims to achieve a "sustainable and 'open-minded' *cooperative relationship*" with, for example, the individual prisons and the responsible *Länder* ministries, by providing expert advice and further training for their workers. This occurred almost automatically and for intrinsic reasons (cf. above xx / Institution), since a process-open and context-conscious method of working will always incline strongly towards such cooperative relationships and also depend on them.

What seemed decisive was the fact that the "advice" and consultancy which the final report recommended the practitioners use – i.e. the "competent and goal-directed advice and support of those responsible on the ground" (11) – was not undertaken by "short-term"-consultants who are engaged "as required". Rather, with VPN it is the educational practitioners themselves, those who have been active at practical level over a long period (even if institutionally independent), who carry out the consultation and maintain the "cooperative relationship". Hence it is possible to speak of "*common strategies* for successful preventative educational activity", as suggested in the report, which is then implemented jointly by the VPN and the respective institution and regional government. The "experiences and potentials"

of this activity can then be "transferred to other institutions and impact areas [...] and made use of" in a way that is "all the more unprejudiced" (3, 17, 27).

So it is above all the *second order impact factors*, the so-called *soft factors* of the VPN method – such as relationship work, processuality, trust building, conflict management, lifeworld-narrative work and institutional integration – that are responsible for the fact that this intervention method anticipates so comprehensively the recommendations of both the expert commentary and the federal programme.

xxx 9.4 Special challenges through societal, medial and party-political discourses

The *comments* appended to the expert commentary (contained in the CD included in the final report) emphasise many of the above findings – and also touch on additional aspects. One of these comments, which initially does not refer to the prison-based model projects at all, but to projects of regional prevention work in east German districts, admits that *ideological and cognitive* matters undoubtedly play a part in extremism prevention and that "with highly 'conflict-latent' young people whose inhumane tendencies are group-related", two clear elements of ideological orientation could be discerned": firstly, rightwing extremism, and secondly, Islamism. On the other hand, the experience of this model project provider has been that time after time there are *non-specific, mixed "behavioural profiles of 'conflictivity'"* behind empirical hate crimes, which at times are structured in an "idiosyncratic or, quite simply, delinquent" manner. In practice, this is thought to show that the "cognitive level of ideologies" is generally not as crucial as might at first appear, and that for this reason work needs to concentrate on "young people's *life-world and psycho-affective* experiences" (63), before there can be any hope of a *personal change of attitude* in the sphere of ideology (cf. chapter xx below).

As well as giving explicit support for the final report, however, the comment refers to a further matter, namely that in the final months of the period covered by the federal programme "there has often been discussion among colleagues [...] about the advantages and disadvantages of aspects of 'the long-term as opposed to the short-term' with regard to measures to be taken". This is expressed in a note which, at least indirectly, points to the dual structure of the programme, which is divided into two distinct branches of activity,

comprising on the one hand of medium-term *model projects* for the thorough development of new approaches that will be effective for a long period, and on the other hand provides for shorter-term *action plans* for consultation and intervention of limited duration, created for particular occasions.

Above all, however (although it is never mentioned in so many words), what comes into play here is the effect of *party-political discourses*, which, independently of country and cultural background, are always of great importance for projects of de-radicalisation. What actually prompts this remark regarding the debates on "long-term / short-term" is concern about the differing levels of awareness of the problem of "rightwing extremism" on the part of the major political parties. This was also clearly discernible in the interviews with VPN employees and organisers. After all, in the history of the *various federal and provincial governments* of recent decades – as also in the work carried on in local districts of differing political colour – it has been observable that commitment to the implementation of civic federal programmes can vary considerably (these programmes, as a general rule, require fifty per cent co-financing by the *Länder* and the active cooperation of local institutions).

Until recently it has been – and to some extent still is – not unusual to find that conservatives assess the dangers to society from rightwing extremism as far less serious than do leftwing and social-democratic politicians, under whose aegis the "diversity" federal programme was set up. The tendency to cut or divert funds intended for rightwing extremism prevention programmes has varied accordingly. Even today, there often seems to be a rigid conservative world view, as expressed in the "Historians' Dispute" in the 1980s, that the blame for the ideological radicalisation and the epidemic of violence afflicting the entire twentieth century lies more with "communism" and less with "fascism", and certainly not with the great social upheavals, thrusts towards modernity and inequalities of this period. But such imponderable historical and philosophical speculation, which reaches far back in the past (cf. Kansteiner), often seems to obscure any clear understanding of the risks arising from today's youth extremism and neo-extremism – as well as historically new fundamentalisms associated with migration, such as Islamism / Jihadism.

An additional factor was that the last report year of the programme, 2010, was particularly strongly affected by these party-political context variables, as it was in this year that the newly elected conservative government set up a *federal programme against leftwing*

extremism, a new departure that was immediately felt by many practitioners in the field to be a provocation and a hidden and ideologically motivated cutback in funding. Offences committed in the name of leftwing extremism could only be pointed to in a few inner-city districts and could no way, as all the experts agreed, be compared with rightwing extremism in terms of the physical danger they posed for the citizens or in their threat potential to essential constitutional goods. The so-called "autonomous acts of violence" are not normally deliberately targeted at persons, and the ideological concepts to which many of the offenders adhere cannot in general be called anti-constitutional, since any critique of capitalism as such is, evidently, in keeping with the constitution. Then there were the administrative measures by the ministry which placed an additional strain on the work (about which more will be said below; cf. p. xx).

Inferences can be drawn from this historical constellation as to how great the influence exerted by the broader party-political and societal context can be, and how this context can add a factor of *societal-discursive* and *administratively conditioned* instability to the specific methodological complexity of youth preventative work. One can well understand the personal uncertainty felt by practitioners engaged in the most difficult social-therapeutic work, if they are not unreservedly given responsibility and support by politicians and society. From this perspective one can also better understand the significance of the comment (in the appendix) that stresses the concern that at certain "political levels of decision-making" there might be an inclination to cut funding for *long-term "model projects"* for developing and testing methods of rightwing extremism prevention, while at the same time continuing to support short-term "action plans" involving purely reactive and short-term intervention and consultancy – since these could superficially appear to be "comparatively cost-effective".

It also becomes clearer why the expert commentary "unequivocally endorses" the view that "approaches that adapt to a specific situation for an extended period" and aim for "group-centred work" and "sustainable and cooperative relationships with the local authorities" "have proved to be the most convincing" (63). This is not to deny that both pillars of the programme – the long-term structure-building pillar and the short-term ad hoc variety – are meaningful and necessary. But only the model projects with a *"long-term" methodological development* perspective can indicate to practitioners that the problem is being taken sufficiently seriously by the political class – and that the political and administrative office-holders are reliable

partners. (In the case of predominantly cognitive-informational activities, "short-term workshops" and crisis interventions, this is generally regarded as doubtful.)

The significance and interference potential that can come from political, societal and administrative contexts and discourses can therefore not be overestimated. It is for these reasons that the above comment expressly emphasises "how risky it would be if social planning were to follow a trend towards *short-term orientation*" and if "misconceptions about the functions and effects of (more long-term) 'model projects' were to persist". The comment demonstrates that the experts see a definite risk of "the same mistakes being made again and considerable structural losses being incurred". This comment's author – coming from the field of community work – illustrates this by pointing to two *"widely known" examples* that show that, "in the past, in similar fields of intervention", approaches to action based on "misconceived short-term orientation" had become established, "with disastrous consequences". These examples pertain firstly to "re-integration and prevention of re-offending among young violent offenders", in particular to one specific method of "anti-aggression training", and, secondly, to "therapy for family-related social and psychological disturbance through so-called 'family constellations'".

xxx 9.4 .1 The pitfalls of behaviourist 'anti-aggression training' – the "hot seat" method

The author of the comment goes on to explain that in re-offence prevention work with young violent offenders in the past, it has "sometimes been customary to employ focal and *short-term 'anti-aggression training'"*. When the author adds that "this highly concentrated method [is] also *extremely media friendly*" and can easily be communicated to "a professional audience or the general public" and "in individual cases even [permits] sensational insights", the context aspect of the *media and public impact* and *sensationalism* comes into view. This combined with "the relative cost effectiveness" of these methodological approaches meant that they quickly – and somewhat prematurely – gained popularity in the relevant institutions. In the meantime, however, it had become "increasingly clear that there must be serious doubts about the effectiveness and sustainability of such methods (and at times also about the ethical implications, for example when the client is placed on the 'hot seat' and subjected to aggressive provocation and insults)". Many prisons and regional justice ministries,

particularly in the south of the country (the author goes on), have since discontinued the practice.

Although the accuracy of these comments cannot be verified in detail here, they nevertheless call to mind the statement made in an interview by a VPN group facilitator with professional experience of both methodological approaches – the more short-term, behavioural anti-aggression training and the medium-term, processual and relationship-based VPN group work. The group facilitator stated that his experience of the *hot seat* method had been "predominantly negative" and that he had therefore looked for methodological alternatives. The provocation exercises prescribed by this approach usually lacked the necessary foundation of memory, reflection and relationship work. With the "'hot seat' you know what's coming, you just have to hold on, hold on, hold on [...] you can prepare for it, then you can get through it." The key methodological problem with this behaviourist oriented training is basically that the young people are "strengthened in the very thing that [they] can do perfectly well anyway" – but which is not good for them: "If the lads have learnt anything in life it is: just take it and endure it until you reach breaking point". This breaking point cannot be effectively prevented by means of focal training alone.

xxx 9.4 .2 The pitfalls of de-contextualized family constellations (Bernd Hellinger)

The above quoted experts' comment continues by referring to the structurally similar problems that have affected "the 'constellation' methods employed in therapy for family-based disorders", which have enjoyed phases of great popularity in recent years. These methods has made "an even greater impression on the media and the public" than the anti-aggression training of the hot seat. This seems to be a reference to the increasingly controversial *family constellations* practised by Bernd Hellinger, which are indeed short-term and cost effective – but which, disastrously, are usually performed with a complete lack of processual memory work, reflection and relationship work, without which no such intensive therapeutic element can be responsibly and effectively employed. For instance, "considerable doubts arose about the therapeutic efficacy of this type of family constellation. Furthermore, it became increasingly obvious sometimes there could be huge risks to the mental health of the persons taking part."

None of this can be verified in detail here. What is certainly undeniable, however, is the principle of taking individual – and sensational – methodological tools *out of their therapeutic context* and using them *in isolation*. As with provocation exercises, what occurs in the case of Hellinger is that a proven and highly effective methodological element, the spatial "constellation" of family-dynamic issues (cf. chapter xx), is taken out of the therapeutic context of responsibility and used as an isolated measure – one that is sure to be widely reported in the media. In the case of both methods, then, single elements are "lifted" in a questionable manner and applied "in a focal and short-term way". It can, however, be helpful to consider the individual tools in the context of the work process and then to select those that are appropriate and use them, by agreement, in small doses (just as VPN sometimes uses provocation in reduced and modified form; cf. chapter xx).

Whenever individual elements are lifted there are indications of institutional pressure for a *short-term approach* and for *cost reduction*, and/or there is *pressure from the media* to come up with memorable and moving scenes. As a consequence, serious risks to the quality and sustainability of the psycho-therapeutic or social-therapeutic work have to be reckoned with. A closer look at the VPN method – and its transferability to other EU contexts – showed, after all, how questionable it is to isolate individual elements from the complex total process, for example to pick out particular exercises, role plays, constellation methods or civic education teaching tools. Experience has shown that it is not advisable to apply these methodological elements in a behaviourist-oriented manner and to apply them outside of the trust-based and relationship-based context of the therapeutically facilitated group (cf. chap. xx Process). It has already been shown how important it is not to carry out these modules and exercises prematurely, even where the responsible process context was guaranteed, before the framework of lifeworld-narrative work had been reliably established in the group (cf. above Eval HH). Here the danger exists that the subjects merely participate in these modules and exercises out of politeness, or sink into more or less unacknowledged apathy – and that biographical and/or narrative probing remains superficial and insubstantial.

The even greater risk inherent in a method that lacks any context of process, relationship or group is the possibility that particularly susceptible individuals end up in acute states of emotional intensity, fear and rage or even suffer a nervous breakdown, because they lack the safety net of secure group relationships and mutual trust – a context they sorely need, given their often unrecognised psychological frailty. This danger exists just as much with hot seat

methodologies as it does with sensationalist family constellations (which have apparently led to referrals to psychiatric hospital and/or suicide attempts[2]).

Overall, it is possible to observe clearly the extent to which *de-radicalisation* represents a profoundly societal factor, one which is exposed to many external disruptive influences. If party political discourses start to give rise to doubts about support from political and societal areas for essential and difficult civic interventions (and the *latent radicality* of large groups of citizens makes itself felt), and if marked preferences for sensationalist perspectives become apparent and the interest of media enterprises in sensationalist reporting grows, these contextual factors will represent an additional challenge to the work of de-radicalisation that cannot be ignored. Process-open approaches like the VPN method react to all this with a fair amount of flexibility, by including examples of reporting or other media elements directly in the work.

xxx 9.5 Supplement to the Federal Programmes: The German government's current political-educational agenda – and the contrast with European strategies for prevention of extremism and hate crime

xxx 9.5.1 Counterproductive reassignment of funds

All the more remarkable – and worrying – is the fact that the new strategic direction announced by the current *party-politically "conservative" federal government* for the funding period from 2011 onward seems to specifically contradict the findings of the expert commentary in essential points – and thus, in a curious way, to run *diametrically counter* to its own final report. Contrary to the recommendation of the final report, which essentially builds on the expert commentary, funding for "model projects" based on long-term, process-oriented methodology development and "subject orientation" has been reduced to about half the previous level. On the other hand, there has been a corresponding increase in the budget for short-term interventions based on consultancy and crisis management – which are, of course, necessary, but can only have a very indirect effect on the sustainable development of the structure and competence of regions under strain. In addition, there is the aforementioned – and highly questionable – emphasis on work to counter leftwing extremism.

[2]. Cf. Bundesverband Sekten- und Psychomarktberatung e.V. (www.agpf.de) and ‚Der Spiegel' 7/2002, p. 200f.

Furthermore, it seems that independent expert analysis, which in the interests of process-oriented "formative evaluation" and scientifically supported quality assurance had accompanied the development of each project, has been stopped, or at least more closely tied to the ministry and oriented towards quantification of results. Critics have therefore controversially accused certain parts of the government of having been prepared to scrap the entire programme against rightwing extremism – and when this proved politically unfeasible, to modify it as far as possible in a "conservative" direction.

The aforementioned concerns, which engaged social workers have expressed when faced by the lack of seriousness and reliability shown by party politics (cf. p. xx), seem by no means exaggerated or irrational. The fear does indeed seem justified that a "trend towards *short-term orientation* in social planning" could result in "the same mistakes being made again and considerable structural losses being incurred". To be precise, it is to be feared that the "subject orientation" of prevention work, of which the VPN method is an example and which the research findings prove to be so indispensable, may once more be lost sight of. What is more, it is foreseeable that "conflict management" and "identity formation", the systematic management of individual "recognition" problems on the "psycho-affective", "subject" level, the awareness of the significance of "emotion and affect" as a contributory cause of resentment and the readiness to use violence (which has been known about for a long time), that all these essentially psycho-social problem dimensions, which have recently been rediscovered and incorporated into the development of the model project and into social work, are in danger of being passed over again and forgotten.

Instead, there could be a return to a situation in which measures are taken that tend to function in the "short-term" and are "knowledge-oriented and cognitive", and in which ad hoc consultation and crisis intervention are employed. This means that there could again be a "tendential *over-emphasis of the topic of education*" in the "cognitive" and "informational" sense, together with a "relative under-emphasis of *the subject dimension*", despite the fact that the final report explicitly named this as "a weakness of the federal programme". One might be tempted to add that this change of policy has occurred despite (or precisely because of) the incapacity of short-term and knowledge-oriented measures to bring a solution to the problem closer, even if they do fulfil a social alibi function in the sense of "we're doing what we can", which satisfies the public conscience.

The further development and establishment of rediscovered methods based on "personal-civic education" or on "lifeworld-narrative" and biographical orientation will thus fade from view once more. There is a danger that the awareness may diminish that the whole of society and the local community face a challenge from extremism/fundamentalism and anti-democratic attitudes due to the existence of risk factors and affinities even in the moderate centre of the society. Even the awareness of the importance of the aforementioned "family and network" contexts of susceptible "children and young people", who for structural reasons have developed "a corresponding *subjective demand*" for what rightwing extremism has to offer, is in danger of fading. Together with the loss of this awareness is also a danger of losing the methodological know-how that enables practitioners to deal effectively with such affinities in a socio-educational manner, a know-how that – as the findings of the expert commentary have shown –needs to be developed and tested a great deal more in order to be able to offer intervention procedures of optimal efficacy.

It is also hard to imagine how the development of "sustainable and open-minded *cooperative relationships*" with those responsible "on the ground", which is regarded as so important, is to be pursued – and how what has been developed can be prevented from being lost once more. It can also be predicted that the strengthening of practitioners' "professionalism" and "quality management", which the report explicitly recommends should include "professional (case) supervision", may also not happen.

The current federal government thus seems to be treating the societal problem of rightwing extremism – especially, but not exclusively, in the severely challenged *Länder* of eastern Germany – not as being deep-rooted but as something that crops up here and there; a problem that does not need a fundamental solution but that can be dealt with on an ad hoc basis through crisis intervention teams and victim support "as and when required" and in the "short-term".

xxx 9.5.2 A contrasting approach: research-based and forward looking EU strategies

A look to the *European Union*, however, provides food for thought. For some time now, motivated by the pressing nature of the problem, serious and systematic work on *"de-*

radicalisation", extremism prevention and defence against terrorism has been underway there. These concerns are seen by the EU as broad problem areas affecting the whole of society, and are considered in a consistent and objective manner. In particular, the EU freely admits that this difficult work has little chance of success without the close involvement, on an equal footing, of non-governmental organisations and non-profit organisations (NGOs/NPOs) and their methodologically innovative and practical model project developments. In the words of the de-radicalisation strategy document of the 2009 *Stockholm Programme*, which is binding on the entire future EU policy: "Key to our success will be the degree to which non-governmental groups [...] across Europe play an active part". The foundational and practical research already undertaken by the EU concludes that "addressing this challenge is beyond the power of governments alone" (Counter Terrorism Strategy 14469/4/05). What is needed is commitment by "civil society", i.e. "communities", "regional organisations", "faith groups", "religious authorities" and "other organisations", i.e. community-based non-governmental organisations from the voluntary sector. According to the strategy document, this is the only way to deal with the phenomenon "more effectively at the grass-roots level" (Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism, 2005,8, and ISEC Call).

This confirms the finding of the ministry's final report of the federal programmes, which also stresses that neither federal and provincial administrations nor the decentralised consultancies, acting alone, are capable of achieving sustainable de-radicalisation and methodological development. Without the local authorities and without *sponsoring organisations that are independent of political parties (NGOs)*, which function as medium-term local community factors on the ground, it is scarcely possible to make a sufficient impact. Above all, governmental or purely advisory external institutions are generally incapable of mastering what the final report terms the "socio-emotional", social-psychological and relational dimensions of this difficult task. Therefore the European Commission's Stockholm Programme explicitly demands that the motivational and emotional aspect of the problem should receive attention, e.g. by considering "the motivations of terrorists" – thus continuing to keep in mind and systematically take into account the "subject level" and "identity" concerns of radicalised or at-risk young people. It was further decided to take precise note of "the increased vulnerability of some places" (ISEC Call) – i.e. of some social zones and communities – from the social-psychological point of view, and to draw appropriate methodological conclusions from this. This EU strategy is based on many national and international studies such as Precht's study in Denmark from 2007: "Local communities and

dialogue play essential roles in counter-radicalisation measures. Local communities can better than anyone else spot and maybe prevent young people from entering extremism" (81), or the German BKA study (cf. chapter xx).

The *non-governmental organisations* (and their factually-based scientific support) are indispensable because – as empirical field surveys by the EU have shown in recent years – only the specialised NGOs, which have no government connections and work in the field, are able to build *the necessary trust* among people and (ethnic) groups. This trust is now seen in EU research – as well as in this study – as vital if a lasting social-therapeutic effect in sensitive areas such as ideology, extremism of all kinds, resentment and (youth) violence is to be achieved. For this reason, the "full engagement of all populations", i.e. *voluntary bodies* and *organisations under association law* (NGOs) – by which is meant bodies positioned between state and society – was unanimously resolved as a goal (Counter Terrorism Strategy 14469/4/05). Furthermore, the EU regards it as very important that cooperation between state and society/NGOs should be based on trust and equality and on a relationship of unbreakable mutual trust. A central concern of the Stockholm Programme is the "mutual trust between authorities and services" and "open, transparent and regular dialogue [with] civil society" (EC Combating Radicalisation 14781/1/05).

In other words, "community and grass-root organisations" and "social entrepreneurs such as non-profit NGOs", which are able to operate *model project developments that are adapted to the social environment in a flexible and practical manner*, are recognized by the EU as special relay factors of "societal" de-radicalisation. At the same time it is admitted that the member states have hitherto been insufficiently attentive to or appreciative of their NGOs – and that frequently *mistrust, suspicion and rivalry* were in evidence. Thus the final report of the TPVR project stresses that in the early years of cooperation "Muslim community organisation representatives" in the UK often had cause for disappointment with their governmental reference institutions: "They were sometimes frustrated at times by a lack of trust on the part of offender managers who failed to share information with them or at times to include them in meetings (pertaining to the offender)". This lack of mutual understanding sometimes went as far as major disruption of the social-therapeutic work: "One community mentor representative described how progress made with a TACT offender (who has been convicted under the UK Terrorism Act) over many weeks could be set back by the insensitive use of risk assessment

tools and interventions by (state employed) Offender Managers" (of the national probation services).

xxx 9.5.3 Party-politically motivated behaviour of German government institutions

Regrettably, the actions of the current federal government (like those of many *Länder* governments in the past) represent a particularly negative example in comparison to the rest of Europe – and this is true not only of unintended disruptive effects like the instance cited above, but also of systematic *party-politically motivated disruption*. In the current situation, even the decision to set up a federal programme to combat leftwing extremism from 2011 has to be regarded as questionable if we compare the relative severity of the problems and administrative action being undertaken – for example, the aforementioned halving of the funding for model projects in favour of short-term consultancies and crisis interventions. Moreover, on the level of the administrative execution of the programmes in their entirety, some further measures were carried out which, as predicted at the time, have had hugely obstructive consequences.

One of these measures, which was introduced at about the same time as the setting up of the leftwing extremism programme, proved to be particularly damaging. This very soon became known, unofficially, as the "*extremism clause*" and included the provision that all organisations that were involved in the running of the federal government's model projects were obliged to sign a legal declaration. This required them to give an assurance that none of their employees had any contact with extremist organisations. What could this mean and what might its purpose be? In the past ten years of the federal programmes against rightwing extremism, no one ever hit on the curious idea of demanding such a declaration, which even from the legal and constitutional point of view is scarcely justifiable – and will predictably not be legally tenable in the end. Also, such a demand would obviously be pointless, either at that time or today, as the project proposals and the applicants are required to provide full documentation as part of the application procedure to the ministry, so there was never any chance that individual employees had any connection with extremist circles, or that they could use the project to further extremist ends under false pretences.

The inclusion of such a clause – together with the setting up of a *federal programme against leftwing extremism* – can only be satisfactorily explained if we recognise that conservative administrations and electorates harbour a profound suspicion, one that is motivated by resentment and emotion rather than facts, of citizens who are actively committed to combating rightwing extremism. This emotional reaction is comparable with the *reaction of suspicion* that was widely observable in Britain when, following the London terrorist attacks, local administrations saw the need to work more closely with Muslim community organisations (cf. above TPVR xx). In the German context, however, this reaction is incomparably more regrettable and unforgivable since, unlike the situation in Britain, such arrangements were by no means unprecedented. Whereas it must be conceded that those in responsible positions in Britain – beyond local governments – had only limited experience in close collaboration with the organisations of their Muslim immigrant groups, in Germany the socio-political party groupings of both Right and Left have long been familiar with one another – or at least ought to be. This underlines the extent to which conservative administrations harbour paradoxical and unfounded suspicions about citizens and/or activists with leanings to the left, arising from outdated negative stereotypes about 'communists', and it highlights the fondness of conservative politicians for such stereotypes, which serve principally to accommodate the specific "affective resentment needs" felt by conservative middle-class voters. None of this will be helpful in bringing about the deradicalisation of young vulnerable citizens.

In view of the burning societal problems that social and youth workers have to deal with in reality in many regions of the Republic, this can only be called irresponsible and reprehensible. To put it succinctly, it could be said that whilst conservative politicians try to accommodate the *affective resentment needs* of substantial sections of their electorate, social workers in the field are expected to calm and dissipate the analogous *hate needs* of their young people – a challenge that is almost impossible to meet! This is all the more true given that the actual reality of extremism in Germany is principally characterised by the following three aspects: (1) Rightwing extremism is an increasingly grave problem; the crimes for which it is responsible take a more and more brutal form, costing many lives and causing serious injury and great social harm. (2) Instances of "autonomous violence" by so-called leftwing extremists is almost insignificant by comparison. It only occurs – as has already been said – in a few inner-city districts; and according to unanimous expert opinion they represent, in general, a relatively low level of danger to life and limb among citizens, and only a low-

level degree of potential constitutional illegality (cf. above p. xx). The third aspect is, however, of eminent importance for our question concerning the effect of societal and party political discourses:

(3) In the many parishes and small towns, mainly in eastern Germany but some in the west of the country, in which an overwhelmingly rightwing populist popular culture predominates, and in which the prevailing adult environment is conservative, it is frequently only those *young people and adults* who have a more leftwing orientation and are involved in the youth culture who offer any resistance to rightwing extremism at ground level. The representatives of this small and often distinct group of *committed persons* are often locally well known and – in cases where the younger members have a preference for sartorial styles such as hip-hop or punk – clearly identifiable. It is not unusual for the majority of the local population, motivated by fear or resentment, to suspect them of being leftwing terrorists and treat them with hostility. Rightwing extremists in the region threaten them with physical harm.

The paradox and difficulty of this situation is evident. Local minorities of law-abiding and "constitutionally patriotic" democrats must constantly reckon with being suspected of extremism and suffering personal harm on account of their courageous efforts, whilst a latent rightwing extremist popular environment continues to exist with almost no attempt to change it. The effect is inevitably disastrous if, to cap it all, *the federal government*, from its position of authority, reinforces this suspicion – for example by demanding this administratively and legally questionable declaration that one distances oneself from (leftwing) extremist influences.[3] In addition, ever since the setting up of the leftwing extremism programme, the possibility cannot be excluded that activists in rightwing extremist organisations surreptitiously seek approval for projects by means of which they intend to work against democratically active citizens.

Then there was an additional and possibly unintended way in which the previous work against rightwing extremism was devalued. The organisers of all other model projects always had to overcome the particularly difficult task of *co-financing* the project by raising 50% of the money themselves. Only 50% of the costs were borne by the federal government; proof of other sources of finance was required, and in most cases the only ones available were the *Länder* – which had other party political priorities. Some projects – and some NGOs – have

[3] The clause reads: "We are aware that on no account must the appearance be given that support is being afforded to extremist structures by the provision of material or immaterial assistance."

failed on account of these requirements; and for those that did manage to satisfy them, raising the necessary pledges of support could be the equivalent of a full-time job. But the programme against leftwing extremism only had to contribute 10% co-financing, which was comparatively easy to achieve. It is hardly surprising that measures such as these have seriously soured the atmosphere in the entire area of educational prevention and de-radicalisation work in Germany.

The cause of such disruptive effects – and of the structural loss expected to result from it – has regularly been identified as a single factor, namely *party politics* – party-politically socialised ideological environments, resentments and the corresponding constraints of cultivating the electorate and of internal institutional self-profiling. The striking lack of serious interest and problem awareness regarding rightwing extremism, xenophobia and youth violence – a lack that often seems to signal an emotional aversion to even discussing the problem of rightwing extremism – can only be attributed to discourse dynamics determined by party politics. Given such a political agenda, the climate of opinion and the *emotional mindset of conservative voters* and the governing parties has to be borne in mind – and this touches on the sensitive fact that this electorate is itself determined to a significant degree by latent anti-democratic, extremist attitudes (cf. Brähler/Decker xx). It is therefore understandable that this electorate is likely to have a tendency to regard (rightwing) extremism among the young as a natural phase in the development of young men, who "get into fights" and "have a bit too much to drink", and to sympathise with it to a certain extent. By contrast, the "conservative" citizens especially of rural areas find leftwing, democratically committed young men – with sometimes have lurid hair colour, outrageous earrings and tattoos, as well as an unusual style of clothes – repellent and suspicious on purely aesthetic grounds, and are inclined to take the view that young men of a rightwing extremist orientation "are at least respectable".

Here is glaring evidence of the problem area discussed above, namely that of the spread *throughout the whole of society* of elements of extremism and radicalisation. These topics leave no one cold – least of all party politicians. Thus, regarding ministers and party political decision-makers, it is true to say – even more so than for anybody else – that the "conflictual phenomenon of 'rightwing extremism' is located in their 'families and relationship networks' too, and that the psycho-social 'processes of managing the phenomenon' might have the effect of increasing the young people's susceptibility to the dangers of rightwing extremism" (see

above p. xx). It is not without absurdity that the final report was thus itself affected by one of its central findings – and, so to speak, overtaken by it, because the findings of the evaluation have been simply ignored, so that the restructuring of the federal programme went in entirely different ways.

Above all, however, with regard to the government(s) in Germany and against the background of the aforementioned *European strategy decisions*, the question must be asked all the more insistently: Is not the acquisition of financial support in Brussels by German agencies and their wide-ranging participation in the EU de-radicalisation projects needlessly hindered and put at risk if those responsible at the level of the federal government and the *Länder* act in such a party-political manner? How can effective measures be taken to prevent the same thing happening in the future?

One is almost inclined to confront the relevant ministries with the recommendation in the final report, namely that "it would perhaps in future be desirable" for the representatives of the public service responsible for political decision-making and for the administrative implementation of socially sensitive programmes of this kind "to structurally intensify the exchange of experts" and "to improve opportunities *to take advantage of supervision*" (24). Citizens undeniably have the right to expect that measures undertaken by the public sector should be as objective as possible – especially where the subject matter is so serious. And it would make the already difficult work of voluntary bodies like VPN significantly easier. Because this is not realistic, however, in the light of recent experience with German government administrations, it is at least advisable to develop and implement intelligent procedures that drastically limit the *influence of party political interests* and mentalities and give every possible support to scientifically validated and field-tested approaches.

xxx 9.6 "Accepting" or "confrontational" approaches and what does this mean anyhow? Specialist discourse with little empirical basis and its implications for innovative methodological development

Aside from the various forms of politico-social discourse – and above all, far removed from the complexity of the content of the socio-therapeutic work itself – practitioners in this field also appear to be exposed to specialist discourse marked by a high degree of *polarisation and*

ideologisation, which consequently further hinders the development and testing of innovative methodological concepts (in addition to perennial funding cuts, and a shortage of facilities and further training opportunities in the area of state youth work). For convenience, the two poles can be expressed by two key terms describing work with right-leaning young people that, though conceptually vague, are highly productive of discourse: "*accepting*" and "c*onfrontational*". These terms reflect an impression created by both practical work and debate in this area that two opposing camps exist, which each – more or less explicitly – raise the objection that the methodical approach taken by the respective other party is not only ineffective, but, for basic politico-moral reasons, should not in fact exist at all.

In this regard one could refer to a great deal of social and specialist research (cf. most recently Köttig 2008) relating to the history of youth work over the past 20 years, but this must be omitted here. In any case, *the "accepting" approach* often appears to have been (mis-) understood as referring to work that focuses on the very difficult life history and precarious social situation of far-right oriented, violence-prone young persons. The "accepting" approach was developed in West Germany in work with drug addicts, and is "not a penalising or persecutory, but supportive and assistive" way of working with the target group (Köttig, 2008 5). Attention is focused "less on [participants'] membership of far-right organisations" and their "political statements and conduct", and more on "problems such as unemployment, a lack of direction, difficult family situations" and, often connected with this, "antisocial behaviour in everyday relations with others". The following assumptions form the *central hypotheses* of this approach: "a) [A participant's] readiness and ability to engage in socially-compatible behaviour increase as their opportunities for integration and self-development increase; and b) as competence in coping with life's problems increases, the significance of far-right patterns of interpretation decreases" (ibid.). Understanding, empathy and intensified social care and counselling are the key factors applied here, and this appears largely to have resulted in a situation whereby "political viewpoints were not dealt with or discussed".

Certainly, when an approach similar to this was introduced primarily in eastern Germany in the 1990s, this yielded little success in providing lasting behaviour-correcting impetus for young people with xenophobic, anti-democratic and violence-affirming orientations. Today – particularly from detailed observation of methodical approaches such as VPN – there can be no doubt that a certain degree of social support and basic acceptance of the person are always significant key elements of successful preventive and reintegration work. But sole

concentration on social support appears not infrequently to have had paradoxical consequences in practice. For example, the question has even arisen as to whether, "rather than serving to counteract rightwing extremist tendencies", the programmes did not in fact "serve to stabilise and promote the spread" of such tendencies in some cases (7).

Though a detailed appraisal is not possible here, one of Köttig's *own case analyses*, at least, certainly reveals the presence of undesirable trends of this kind. Here the "course of [the person's] biography" shows that s/he first of all considerably intensified "contact with the far-right scene" and his/her ideological commitment to far-right politics "during the very phase" in which s/he were provided with safe accommodation and education. In an indication that this was no unique case, the polemical term "*Glatzenpflege auf Staatskosten*" ("nurturing skinheads at the taxpayer's expense") came into use retrospectively in this regard, to suggest that, rather than helping to counteract extremist views, "accepting" methods instead tended to reinforce them. Today one can only agree that this was indeed the case to some extent, and regrettably, hard-pressed local authorities appear still to use a similar approach in their youth work – *nolens volens*, not so much due to educational strategy as from a shortage of effective, practicable methods. Looking at the whole of Köttig's case study will make clear, however, that a certain well-defined element of acceptance is indispensible for effective de-radicalisation.

The supposed opposite pole in this unfortunate polarisation – so-called *"confrontational" youth work* – is not quite as easy to pinpoint. However, critics of so-called "accepting" approaches are not infrequently involved in cross-regional teams offering advice and civic education, and are often academically anchored. For those directly active in educational practice, methodological approaches that emphasise a confrontation element in a very intense – and in some cases extreme – way, may have some particular significance; this would apply to e.g. anti-aggression training courses that use the so-called "hot chair" and employ extreme personal provocation (cf.xx). On the whole, however, critics of (misunderstood) "accepting" work use moderate methods of confrontation derived from, for example, traditional civic education and awareness training. Their methods sometimes involve highly experience-oriented and even playful elements, but their main focus is on an informational, cognitive approach that strives to address participants' prejudices and points of view via discussion and debate (Sander 2005). However, this approach also has clear weaknesses and risks (cf. chapter xx, Tommi).

Overall it can be said that, while the criticism of out-and-out accepting mindsets was entirely justified to some practical extent, the confrontational approach, with its emphasis on informing and debate, has never succeeded in achieving much impact with coarsely cynical, argument-resistant young people – who are also always those associated with the most risk, and who are the most prone to violence and represent the greatest multiplication potential. These young people tend to see information-based awareness training and civic education courses as opportunities for sarcastic mockery, or as an opportunity to practise cheap agitation rhetoric. Consequently, those working in the area have tended to restrict themselves to working with less challenging target groups, offering advice, helping victims and promoting the (self-)strengthening of civil society. They have generally shied away from the central problem group, and from urgent "conflict management in the context of rightwing extremism, young people and local democracy", as the evaluation in the ministry's final report today so persuasively demonstrates. Thus, whereas the term "*Glatzenpflege"* (nurturing skinheads) came into use in the 1990s, not long afterwards the opportunity arose to coin another term – "*Gutmenschenpflege"* (nurturing do-gooders). Indeed, as the final report emphatically found: "In light of experience gained in implementation [of the federal programmes], contact should be made with more severely at-risk (i.e. potentially 'far-right oriented')" young people (3), rather than focusing solely on – nonetheless important – work to strengthen civil society.

It is thus becoming clear that each approach has as many blind spots as it has potential – and that the two approaches should therefore move towards mutually complementing each other rather than remaining in an awkward, somewhat ideologised, polarised relationship. Accordingly, Köttig also considers the current situation in social work with "far-right oriented young people" from the point of view of a polarisation between "accepting" and "confrontational" approaches, and notes that both approaches "often [focus on] specific areas of the problem to the exclusion of all others", and are thus inadequate. A narrow, unidirectional approach can neither properly take account of "the complex cause-effect relationships involved in far-right orientations, relating not just to *biographical processes* and the person's *past family experiences* but also to *social framework conditions"*, "nor can it effectively counteract them" (1).

Another point that must also constantly be borne in mind: the value of polarisations of this kind in discourse and specialist debate is questionable if only because – as discussed above in

xx – they are based on the same cognitive and psychosocial *mechanism of dissociation* that is also the central structural principle of extremist thinking. Because even a polarised specialist debate must adhere to the – arguably latently extremist – rules of polarisation, ideologisation and dissociation. Thus, when the intervention method involuntarily approximates its object, it should not hesitate to identify a need for development and innovation.

Another point should also be borne in mind that is almost always the case in binary polarisations of this kind: that they involuntarily and imperceptibly share the characteristic of *excluding the possibility of a third alternative* – in this case, apparently psychology in its broadest sense. In any case, traditional civic education and state youth work are astonishingly often anti-psychological or anti-therapeutic in their approach. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that both camps often react equally sceptically and negatively when the possibility arises of incorporating and using terms, models or methodological elements from psychotherapeutic or clinical fields of knowledge (cf. anti-psych xx). This was arguably what the interim expert commentary report was referring to when it expressed – with cautious astonishment – regret at the under-emphasis of aspects of emotional and processual development. Since, according to the report, this was all the more difficult to understand because "socio-psychological […] studies" have, for a long time, utterly unmistakably shown "that the *effective power of prejudices* is closely bound to emotions and affects".[4] The above observation – that model projects and everyday social work now receive almost no external supervision, meaning that now, compared to the 1980s, there is a fundamental deficit of self-critical, work-centred reflection – can also be linked to this general anti-psychological trend. There can hardly be any doubt that, when this kind of polarisation and exclusion arises, quality must suffer throughout the entire field of work.

Interestingly, the criticism expressed against accepting methodological elements was concerned essentially with a distinction of a thoroughly *psychological nature*: the main

[4] The comprehensiveness and deep-rootedness of this anti-psychological mindset is even reflected in the federal ministry's final report. Even in a document of this kind, unequalled in sobriety, precise abstraction and institutional loftiness, issued from the very highest level, it is clearly considered necessary to include a sort of disclaimer to protect against accusations of psychologism – but which in terms of its content can only be described as nonsensical: it reads as follows: "'Subject orientation'" (an element that is quite indispensible to preventive work) "must not relate only to the psychological aspects of the problems". This makes no sense when one considers what the supposed other aspects are: aside from the "psychological aspects", there are also the questions of "how identities form" and "how problems of acceptance and the need for recognition" and "conflict potential" are dealt with – questions that can certainly only meaningfully be posed as psychological questions (26).

criticism was that the distinction "between the young person him or herself (who is accepted), on the one hand, and their far-right oriented consciousness and behaviour (which are not accepted) on the other hand". But this distinction had not been precisely psychologically defined (Köttig 6). Not for nothing was the need for this distinction seen as a fundamental "educational dilemma" at that time; in any case it was often simply ignored in practice. However, even back in the 1990s, a few people realised that "the notion of acceptance is insufficiently understood and interpreted in practice", because "accepting a person does not necessarily mean tolerating all of their behaviour" (Köttig 6, with Böhnisch, Fritz, Seifert 1997, 177). More than 10 years later, following methodological developments such as those at VPN, and on the basis of insights from colleagues abroad (see xx), it is clear that what seemed to be an "educational dilemma" can in fact be resolved entirely – especially if clinical-psychological resources are employed (which, since the eventful 1970s, have not been as far removed from social education as it sometimes appears today). The *supportive-critical* methodological approach, for example, as developed at VPN, represents a productive differentiation between the person and their behaviour (cf. chapter xx). From an international viewpoint, this method is comparable with, for instance, Bush/Harris' "supportive authority", while other approaches from the fields of forensics or individual social therapy will not be dissimilar. Thus the relevance of psychotherapeutic methodological traditions is unmistakably apparent.

xxx 9.7 Implications for the work of VPN – establishing an open but non-"fraternising" rapport

The social and specialist history of this field is only relevant to us insofar as ideologically-laden discursive polarisations today repeatedly continue to create, in knee-jerk fashion, an attitude of *suspicion* towards processual, relationship-based, life-world-narrative type work. All of this work tends to be labelled as "accepting", and hence inadequate from a moral-political viewpoint. When the clinical-psychological roots of certain elements of group or individual work become detectable, the objection is not infrequently raised that the work is "psychologistic" or "pathologistic" – a rather vague objection in terms of content and terminology, based on the fallacious suspicion that the aim of the intervention is not to help the target group, but rather to label it "as sick", to put it in a separate category, and to absolve it from responsibility. The emphatic manner in which this – not infrequently – occurs may be a

throwback to the political movement of the 1970s, in which much of what was concerned with understanding, sympathy and mental processes was viewed as unusable in a political struggle, harmful, and even "system-stabilising" (or, as it was disparagingly called in those days, *scheißliberal*, roughly: "bleeding heart liberal"). However, these commonly-held notions still have an impact today, hindering wholehearted work on effective intervention methods.

The *practitioners interviewed* in this study also consider their work to be affected by this discourse. A now-retired representative of the group of VPN coaches and organisers, with several decades of experience, summarised the situation as follows: "One of the biggest problems in our work *is those on the Left*. They have a bite reflex – they always want to fight. This makes it impossible to establish an educational relationship (with far-right young people, or those at risk of rightwing extremism). It just doesn't work. […] When they [i.e. those on the Left] realise this, they're at a loss." According to this respondent, this kind of combative, confrontational approach severed all routes of access to this already hard-to-reach target group. According to the respondent, it is necessary to realise that "rightwing ideas are an expression of something that is obviously important to the speaker". The younger the person, the more it is necessary to take "a questioning, curiously investigative approach" and avoid "all stigmatisation" that views some statements and actions as *a priori* morally unspeakable and unacceptable (cf. xx above).

Another interviewee from the group of VPN coaches and organisers confirms this: "In the prison in the town of x, we recently had the problem that y (a new coach) started talking about the Holocaust a bit like you would if you were giving a seminar," or, in other words: discussed the topic with prison inmates in a historical, rational, educational manner. "That was the end of that." In other words, the process of building trust and tapping into personal experiences as required for "personal civic education" (cf. p. xx above) was over.

Another person significantly involved in establishing VPN looked back at a comparable experience from his own career, but this particular experience, in contrast to the one above, played an important part in sparking the development of the VPN process. In his youth this person had been involved in the political struggle against rightwing extremism, and had played a strong, direct practical role in the social environment in his town. This person strikingly describes the moment in which he took to heart a piece of educational advice from a more experienced person, and consequently fundamentally changed his way of working in the field:

"He had been doing this work for a long time. At one point he took me to one side and said, look, 'fighting always creates more fighting' and violence creates violence. You won't get anywhere working like that in this neighbourhood […] you need to get a dialogue going." This apparently provided this person with the personal stimulus s/he needed to experiment with innovative and more promising methods of social-therapeutic intervention which promote dialogue and help establish a relationship with the "opponent", but which are not "accepting" in the sense of "fraternising".

Such personally unsettling moments in direct educational work with at-risk young people and young adults are thus highly valuable experiences that can lead facilitators to revise their methodological thinking. Many representatives of the widespread counterculture of civic societal "leftwing", politically involved or democratic-educationally minded people fail to reach a point where they can gain experiences of this kind, either for a lack of opportunity, or due to the above-mentioned "bite" and "fight" mentality associated with the – in itself very necessary and respectable – position of political resistance. This kind of moral discourse on the part of the "Left", with little connection to real field experience with the target group, creates considerable difficulties for practitioners of innovative de-radicalisation work: "It creates a situation where you need to constantly justify yourself, because it means that you are 'accepting'. […] Anyone who talks with them (i.e. the far-right young people, or those prone to rightwing extremism) at all is immediately "accepting" […] often there's no way round this at all." Thus those who could potentially be the closest social allies of effective de-radicalisation work, often turn out to be more a part of the problem than of the solution.

When blanket objections of this kind are also anchored in academia, this naturally further intensifies the problem – in particular because academia is always at risk of becoming somewhat removed from the field and from practice, and of succumbing to theoretical and ideological bias. For example, the individual from VPN just quoted above, when attending seminars at higher education institutions, encountered points of view that were substantially morally or ideologically-based and reacted angrily towards pedagogic strategies which get into closer contact with outspoken xenophobic and extremist juveniles: "At one point I told (a professor at a university of applied sciences) what we actually do with them (i.e. the young people prone to rightwing extremism), what is said there and exactly how everything proceeds […] and what the outcome is [...] and what works and what doesn't [...] and then I asked her what else should be done and what she would suggest. But of course she didn't have anything

to suggest either […] but that didn't bother her, and she left (the seminar) early, and will probably get just as agitated again next time." Argument reflexes of this kind – largely unhelpful, but productive of discourse – are hardly likely to have any impact on a practically engaged and research-based model project. But they can make it considerably more difficult to continue applying innovative, successful methods of de-radicalisation within mainstream social work with young persons (work that, as mentioned, is fundamentally insecure).

It is thus impossible to overestimate the significance of the conclusion unmistakably drawn, on scientific principles, by the final report of the federal programmes to the effect that "the tendential overemphasis of the topic of education" and of a "knowledge-oriented and cognitive" approach are a fundamental "weakness of the federal programme" that should be counteracted via greater "subject orientation, relation to the life-world [of participants], and conflict sensitivity", and by systematically taking account of the dynamics of personal "identity formation" and a subjective "need for recognition".